Gifts to the Academy

A little Medicine Case

Miss Mildred Sawyer has very kindly given the Academy a small case for medicines. The box is of oak, veneered with mahogany (?), is bound and ornamented with wrought ironwork and has a small iron handle on top. It is a cube measuring six and five-eighths inches along each edge, except that the top shows a slight convexity from front to back. When the cover is lifted back, sixteen receptacles for bottles, four to a row, are seen, and only three of these are empty now. With the exception of a large drawer at the bottom which projects out almost to the front, the box is divided from side to side into two, the fore part being again divided from before backwards. Both quarters with space for four bottles, are hinged to the side of the box so that they can be made to swing out about a vertical axis like doors. Each quarter has below its group of bottles a tiny drawer which is concealed when the quarters are closed. The front of the large drawer, spoken of above, is also hidden when the case is closed; while the top of the drawer forms a little shelf on which to mix powders. When the case is open, two other shallow drawers are found in the back section. The lower one extends under the very back row of bottles (which are, comparatively speaking, large) and the upper one merely under the little cylindrical pewter pots which are found in the second last row. The cover is lined with paper decorated with a coat-of-arms in gold, red and black. The remains of a crown and shield supported by the remains of two eagles can be dimly seen. It might be the coat-of-arms of Austria, but the shield does not seem to be the same.

The little bottles have screw tops of pewter and show the punty (or pontil) mark on their bottoms where they were broken off from the glass-blower's iron rod. Only one of these bears a chemist's label, and this reads "Fougeron Pharmacien, Rue Bannier. N° 48 à Orléans." The bottle once contained oil of sweet almonds and were there any

left now we should probably anoint our leather bindings with it.

The names of some of the remedies sound strangely in our ears, "Eau Vulnéraire" was obtained by distilling the flowers of sixteen plants. Those who are interested can find the method of preparation in Littré and Robin's *Dictionnaire de Médecine* (Paris, 1865). "Essence De Grerofle," probably a mistake for "Essence de Gérofle," is nothing less or more than the (essential) oil of cloves. "Laudanum Liquide" of another bottle sometimes is qualified by the phrase "de Sydenham." Osler used to say: "Look what Sydenham owed to opium." We can add: "Look what France owed to Sydenham." "Eau de Fleur D'Oranges Double" has a generous sound. "Poudre Capitale" is still found in the cylindrical pewter receptacle. This was the same as "Pulvis Cephalicus" and in English was called a "Cephalic Powder." It contained the leaves of Asarabacca (hazelwort), Betony and Marjoram in equal parts and sometimes an equal amount of Muguet (mugget or lily-of-the-valley). The old English pharmacopoeias call it a "sternutatory"—please sneeze it as pronounced. We might refer to it as a snuff. The French also used the synonym, "Tabac Céphalique." The powder still retains a rather pleasant odour. Perhaps we should treat colds with it. In another little pewter pot with a screw top is some "Confection de Hyacinth."

"Theriaque," a still sticky, gummy mess of spicy odour, contained in another pewter pot, is, of course, theriac, one of the most famous remedies of all time. It is from the Greek word, theriaca, meaning wild or venomous beast, as it cured those who were bitten. The formula used for centuries was that found in the writings of Galen, and even Galen had it from the Greek verse of Nero's physician, Andromachus, or his son. So that particular form was known as Theriaca Andromachi or Venice Treacle, and was used for about 1800 years. One of the most notable theriacs contained one hundred and twenty-seven ingredients, while *T. diatessaron* or "Theriaque des Pauvres" had only five! Pliny took it that in devising such a complicated

compound, his contemporary Andromachus was simply trying to "show off." Old medical books used to speak of the "Four Officinal Capitals" which included Mithridatium (after King Mithridates VI of Pontus), its "improved" form Venice Treacle, Philonium, and Diascordium.

"Vinaigre des 4 Voleurs" is on the label of another bottle with pewter stopper. The vinegar of the four thieves has now dried up. It derived its name from the fact that this "vinaigre antiseptique" rendered four thieves immune to the disease when they robbed the bodies of victims of the plague at Marseilles in 1720-21. It was one of the liquids in the vinaigrette heads of canes which doctors carried and sniffed so vigorously when they entered the sick-room. Such canes were called pomander sticks.

In one of the small drawers is a piece of blue paper which is glued to the back edge of the drawer so that it forms a lining. In the centre of this lining is pasted a white paper label with printed ornamental borders and the words, "Orillard Apothicaire, A pithiviers." Pithiviers is a town north-east of Orleans. Printed by hand on the label are the words "Thé Hayswain." The second word makes one think of an Anglo-Saxon, perhaps of a doctor, and certainly of one who did not have a town practice. But evidently that is a guess in the dark, for Littré's medical dictionary describes a kind of green tea, which was highly thought of, called "thé heyswen" or "hyswen," but not to be found in the "Oxford English Dictionary." *A Medical Dictionary* by Robert James, London, 1743, 3 vols. (in which, by the way, Dr. Johnson had a hand) gives the name "Heysham" to the particular tea, and the idea of a surname bobs up again. This idea was further strengthened by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 3rd ed. Edinburgh, 1797, which records the name as "Hyson," so called from the name of the merchant who first imported it. Then Robert John Thornton, in his *New Family Herbal,* London, 1810 (with illustrations engraved on wood by Thomas Bewick—think of that!) as the second variety of green teas, gives the names "Hy-tian, hikiong, hayssuen or hee-

chun—known to us by the name of hyson tea, named from an Indian merchant, who first sold tea to an European, his tea being asked for ever after." More than ever this seemed to pin the name down to a definite person, for does not the *Herbal* tell us that he was an "Indian merchant?" Alas! to look in the "Oxford English Dictionary" suggested itself again, and we were robbed of the romantic picture which had been called up—only to substitute for it a finer fantasy. The word comes from the "Chinese *hsi-ch'un,* in Cantonese hei-ch'un, 'bright spring,' the name of coarse green tea." So, for a time at least, the mystery of this word is solved.

Miss Sawyer wrote that she had been told that the little medicine case had belonged to a "Russian doctor named Alix who was Victor Hugo's (1802-1885) physician . . . was sold at auction after the death of the doctor along with the remainder of his possessions and bought by an antique dealer in the Blv'd Raspail from whom I bought it." Victor Hugo may have had a doctor called Alix, and there are a number of Frenchmen of that name dating from 1738 on in the dictionaries of biography. It is an interesting coincidence that just after the arrival of this gift, a catalogue of old medical instruments issued by Taeuber and Weil of Munich came to the Academy. In it is listed and illustrated exactly the same kind of a medicine case as ours, described as of German origin "about 1700" Pietro Capparoni of Rome wrote a paper on seventeenth and eighteenth century "portable pharmacies" (*Rivista di Storia delle Scienze Mediche e Naturali,* Siena, 1924, 3rd series, XV, No. 1-2, p. 29) and a similar case appears again! It had belonged to Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany (1642-1723). Finally, in his recent book, *Medicine in Virginia in the Seventeenth Century,* Richmond, 1930, Dr. Wyndham B. Blanton has two illustrations of a "seventeenth century medicine chest" exactly the same as ours except that the key has a different handle and along the back row, instead of bottles, there are four rectangular receptacles of block tin with rectangular metal tops. This case is in the Library of the Richmond Academy of Medi-

cine, Miller Collection. Dr. Blanton kindly writes that it was purchased from Taeuber and Weil, Munich, and it was thought to date from the latter half of the seventeenth century. "It is of Austrian make, having formerly belonged to a physician in ordinary to one of the Austrian emperors whose arms are in the embossed leather lining of the lid."

If the evidence is summed up, it might be fairly concluded that our case dates from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, and that two similar other ones we know of came from Germany or Austria. Ours is a very interesting specimen.

ARCHIBALD MALLOCH.

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