

HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF THE  
 WORSHIPFUL SOCIETY OF  
 APOTHECARIES.

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BY

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IN the early days of the commercial history of our country the division of trades and occupations was not nearly so minute as in after times. In the later Tudor period and that of the Stuarts, a number of the smaller industries separated themselves from the larger and more general trades with which they had been associated and obtained charters of incorporation giving them the right of control over their own art or mystery. Among these occupations was that of the Apothecaries, which obtained separate existence by a charter granted to them in 1607, the 15th year of King James I. The members of this trade were previously enrolled in the Grocers' Company. That they existed as a distinct branch of trade whilst under the governance of the Pepperers of Sopers Lane and the Spicers of Cheap, who ultimately became the great Company of Grocers, appears from a record which informs us that "on the 10th of October, 1345, Edward III settled sixpence a day for life on Coursus de Ganzeland, Apothecarius, London, for taking care of him during his illness in Scotland."

From an early period dissensions appear to have arisen between the members of the Guild who were

Apothecaries, and their brethren who traded in or possessed adulterated herbs "or such like apothecaries' wares." What weight the Apothecaries had in the government of the Grocers' Company does not appear, but in 1457 the Wardens obtained letters patent from King Henry VI granting them the exclusive right of garbling, *i.e.*, the cleansing or examining of spices and drugs and such like, to detect and prevent adulterations. In 1561 the Grocers' books record that "bags and remnantes of certain evil, naghte, pepper, syrnamed gynger, were to be burned." Again in the following year, 1562, "the Apothecaries, freemen of the Company," are ordered "not to use or exercise any drugs, simples or compounds, or any other kynde or sortes of poticarie wares but such as shall be pure and perfyt good." In 1612, Mr. Lownes, a member of the Company, who was in attendance on Prince Charles as apothecary to the Royal Household, performed a signal service to his brethren the Apothecaries. This eminent practitioner accused Michael Easen of having sold him "divers sortes of defective apothecarie wares which on trial were found to be defective, corrupt, and unwholesome for man's body." The Grocers' Company made a severe example of the offender by committing him to the Poultry Compter, but there is little doubt that this case, being brought under the immediate notice of the King, led him a few years later, *viz.*, in 1617, to constitute the Apothecaries into a separate body.

The Grocers did not part with their professional brethren without a struggle, but James I, to whom they complained, took the responsibility of their

incorporation directly upon himself. The King's answer to the complaints of the Grocers runs thus :

“I myself did devise that Corporation, and do allow it. The Grocers who complain of it are but merchants. The Mystery of these Apothecaries were belonging to the Apothecaries, wherein the Grocers are unskillful, and therefor I think it fitting they should be a corporation of themselves. They (the merchants) bring home rotten wares from the Indies, Persia, and Greece, and here, with their mixtures make waters and sell such as belong to the Apothecaries, and think no man must control them, because they are not Apothecaries.”

It is curious that this Guild should alone among the seventy-seven existing Companies of the City of London receive the style of Society. Dr. Corfe,\* to whom I am indebted for many of the following facts, says : “ The special term of ‘ Society ’ thus given by His Majesty was no doubt intended to represent a similar body instituted at Naples in 1540, and the only Society then in existence, under the title of ‘ Societa Scientifica.’ The next Society in the 17th century was our Royal body of that name, established in 1645, which received its charter in 1662.”

The objects of the Society's charter, briefly stated, are :

1. To restrain the Grocers (the former Associates of the Apothecaries) or any other City Company from keeping an apothecary's shop or exercising the “ art, faculty, or mystery of an apothecary within the City of London or a radius of seven miles.”

\* The Apothecary, ancient and modern, of the City of London. By George Corfe, M.D., London, 1897.

2. To allow no one to do so unless apprenticed to an apothecary for seven years at least, and at the expiration of such apprenticeship such apprentice be approved and allowed by the Master and Wardens and representatives of the College of Physicians, before being permitted to keep an apothecary's shop or prepare, dispense, commix, or compound medicines.

3. To give the right of search within the City of London or a radius of seven miles of the shops of apothecaries or others and "prove" the drugs, and to examine within the same radius all persons "professing, using, or exercising, the art or mystery of apothecaries." Power was also conferred to burn "before the offenders doors" any unwholesome drugs, and to summon the offenders before the magistrates. Thus a member of the Society of Apothecaries and an apothecary of the City of London or within seven miles were convertible terms.

4. To buy, sell, or make drugs. As regards the fourth object prescribed by the charter, the Society, doubtless from its want of means, has never itself, until recent years, bought, sold, or made drugs, but owing to the great difficulty of its members obtaining pure drugs it allowed them to raise money themselves and create stock or shares for that purpose, and to carry on such trade in the name of the Society for their own personal profit as a private company or partnership under various titles. Owing to such trade having ended in a loss, this private partnership was agreed to be dissolved as from 31st December, 1880, and the Society has since carried on the trade at its own risk.

The authority thus granted the Society to regulate

the admission of new practitioners and to supervise the entire faculty gradually resulted in the evolution of the apothecary as distinguished from the grocer's assistant and vendor of drugs. By apprenticeship and the subsequent system of examination was produced, as a final outcome, the medical practitioner.

It was through the joint solicitations of Dr. Mayerne and Dr. Aiken, physicians to James I, that this monarch was pleased to grant the Apothecaries a separate charter, whereby they were withdrawn from their associates the Grocers, in order to enable them to make up the physicians' prescriptions with greater nicety and accuracy. During the reign of George I they were exempted from serving on juries or in parish offices. They were and are obliged to prepare all their medicines according to the rules laid down in the Pharmacopœia of the College of Physicians. The legal right to visit the sick in their own houses or prescribe for them appears to have been acquired by the Apothecaries during the last great plague in London. Before this period the sick were mainly attended by physicians only, whose prescriptions were sent to the apothecary or grocer's shop, and there dispensed for the patients. But during this scourge a great majority of the regular physicians died, and many of the survivors fled into the country; thus the friends of the sick were forced to implore the aid of the apothecaries, who left their counter and came for the first time to the bedside of the sick.

Addison, in the "Spectator" (1711), reviewed the character of these apothecaries, and gave these physicians their just due in his delineation of "the nothingness" of their "recipes," and the hollowness

of their public services when contrasted with the surgeon-apothecaries of his time, whom he praises for their unselfish care of and kindness to the poor.

Garth, Pope, and Dryden have severally held up this Battle of the Doctors (*vide* Jeaffreson's Book about Doctors) to public ridicule :

Nigh where Fleet Ditch descends in sable streams,  
To wash the sooty Naiads in the Thames,  
There stands a structure on a rising hill,  
Where tyros take their freedom out to kill.

*Garth's Dispensary.*

Pope follows in a similar sarcasm :

So modern 'pothecaries taught the art  
By doctors' bills to play the doctor's part.  
Bold in the practice of mistaken rules,  
Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools.

An eminent member of the Society, and its greatest benefactor, was Gideon De Laune, a wealthy merchant and apothecary, and Pharmacien or Apothecary to Anne of Denmark, the wife of James I, whom he gallantly brought from over the seas to this country. He called himself Pharmacopœius, an importer and dispenser of medicines. He lived in Blackfriars, where he established Apothecaries' Hall, and died at the age of ninety-seven, in the year 1659, being buried with other members of his family in St. Ann's, Blackfriars. He is said to have died with "near as many thousand pounds as he was years, having thirty-seven children by one wife and about sixty grandchildren at his funeral."

Pepys, in his diary, under the date of 29th December, 1662, narrates a tragic event in the history of the next generation of this family: "To Westminster Hall, where I staid reading at Mrs. Mitchell's

shop, she told me what I had not heard of before, the strange burning of Mr. De Laune, a merchant's house in Loathbury, and his lady (Sir Thos. Allen's daughter) and her whole family, not one thing, dog nor cat, escaping : nor any of the neighbours almost hearing of it till the house was quite burnt down. How this should come to pass, God knows, but a most strange thing it is !” Only four years afterwards the remains of the previous generations of the De Launes were incinerated in the destruction of St. Ann's, Blackfriars, during the great fire. A Thomas De Laune, gent., perhaps one of the thirty-seven children above mentioned, published, in 1681, the well-known and quaint little volume “The present state of London.” It is worthy of mention that Paul De Laune, a brother of Gideon, who was a Cambridge graduate and a practising physician, was one of the compilers of the *Pharmacopœia Londinensis*, which first appeared in 1618.

The Society's Physic Garden at Chelsea dates back, in Dr. Corfe's opinion, to the reign of James I.

John Evelyn writes in his diary in June, 1658 : “I went to visit the medical garden at Westminster well stocked with plants under Morgan, a skilful botanist.” The garden was afterwards (in 1673) transferred to its present locality in Cheyne Walk, the ground being obtained on lease from the family of Charles Cheyne. In 1722 this garden was bequeathed to the Society of Apothecaries by Sir Hans Sloane, and has since been kept up by them at a considerable expense. A custom formerly prevailed of holding a public or general “Herborising” (*i.e.*, botanical excursion) once a year, when a dinner was provided at

the expense of at least ten stewards nominated by the Court of Assistants.

It may be well here to complete the main facts in the history and constitution of the Society. By the Apothecaries' Act of 1815, the Society extended so greatly the powers it already had under its charter as to effect not only a revolution in their own sphere of operations, but also in the medical profession, and in the relations subsisting between the latter and the general public.

This Act created a court of twelve examiners, to be appointed by the Master, Wardens, and Court of Assistants, who were to examine all candidates for the licentiateship in England and Wales as to their skill and ability in the science and practice of medicine, and five examiners to examine assistants for the compounding and dispensing of medicine. It authorized the Society to receive fees for granting the respective licences, and "saving the rights of the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons" it empowered the Society to recover penalties for practising or compounding without such licences.

By an amending Act of 1874 two important restrictions were removed, namely, (1) the obligation of the twelve examiners being members of the Society, and being of at least ten years' standing, and (2) of candidates for examination having served an apprenticeship of five years to an apothecary. Briefly stated, the effect of the Act of 1815 was to make the Society of Apothecaries one of the three great medical licensing bodies for England and Wales, and that of the Act of 1874 was to throw open the Society's examinerships, and to confer on it a freedom



in reference to future medical reform to an extent not exceeded by any other body.

The members of the Society claimed even from the date of their charter the right to practise medicine. This right, which was strongly denied by the College of Physicians, received legal sanction in 1701 by the decision of the House of Lords in the case of "*Rose v. College of Physicians.*" A carefully conducted enquiry was made several years before the Society received its Act in 1815 as to the number of individuals who were practising medicine with or without any special previous education in this science. In four districts in the North of England alone, of 266 persons so practising, only fifty-eight had received any education, the others were wholly ignorant of the rudiments of anatomy and physiology, and consequently without any real knowledge of medicine in its various branches. The Society also justly claims the credit of having insisted on a knowledge of Latin at its preliminary examination, and of thus having raised the standard of general education of candidates for a professional qualification.

It is time to turn to the inner life of the Company, and here I must regret that the very short time allowed me for the preparation of the paper has prevented me from fully availing myself of the permission kindly granted by the Master of searching the ancient records of the Society. All that I could glean during the few available hours of the present week I will lay before you, and I have no doubt that although very much more remains to be told, I shall have said sufficient for my purpose on the present occasion. The Society is fortunate in having saved its records from the

destruction caused by the great fire of London, the earliest Court minute book commencing with the origin of the Society on the 16th of December, 1617. On that day the Master, Wardens, and Assistants took their oaths at Gray's Inn before the Attorney General, Mr. Dr. Atkins, and Mr. Dr. Meyer, King's physicians, being thereunto authorized under the great seal of England. On the same day a Clerk and a Beadle were appointed, and one person duly admitted to the Freedom. At the next Court, in April, 1618, the Assistants were ordered by consent to pay £15 each towards the charges of the Company, one of them offering £30 and three others £20 each ; at the same Court all the Assistants were ordered to prepare for themselves by 1st May next, Livery gowns faced with satin and welted with velvet. To remedy some slackness in carrying out this order the Court further ordered on 21st January, 1622, that all Assistants whose gowns were not of the required pattern should cause them to be translated and made suitably to the prescription of the said order. On the 29th June, 1618, an order was passed that all the Company should have the new Dispensatorie and Troy Weights. On the 18th August the staff was apparently completed by the choice of James Grace as Cook for the Company.

The first Search under the powers of their Charter for defective and bad medicines was made on the 9th September following, and on 22nd September divers persons were brought before the Master and Wardens for this offence, among others one named Hanch, a Weaver, and one Colwell, who upon his acknowledgment that he was not able to make compositions was ordered thereafter neither to make nor

sell any more medicines. Notwithstanding the liberality of the members of the Court the balance sheet came out very badly on the 24th September, viz.:—Income £100 18s., disbursements £179 9s. 3d., due to Mr. Sheriffe £74 11s. 5d.

In the course of a dispute between a master and his apprentice, tried by the Master and Wardens on 20th October, the terms of the indentures provided that the apprentice should serve for three years and receive £6 per annum, with a singular addition of the outside of a new sute and one ould sute. On the 17th November, among other returns ordered by the Court to be prepared, was a schedule of all medicines proper to the art of an apothecary. This interesting document has unfortunately not been entered upon the minutes. The Company at this early time rigidly enforced their examination, which was doubtless of a more practical character than that which candidates have to face at the present day. On the 19th August, 1619, a delinquent was ordered to serve for a year as journeyman with some brother and then submit himself again for examination. On 7th December, Mr. E. was fined £3 6s. 8d. for dispensing his London Triacle without public view. The same individual was fined £6 13s. 4d. for selling defective Mithridate, but the charge was afterward withdrawn and the fine remitted.

A curious view of social habits is given by the order in the same month of December for the Assistants to meet on Friday next at 6 in the morning in Paules for paying their quarterage. The Company at this time had no hall, and deserves credit for their shrewdness in obtaining a place of meeting

without charge. If this practice was followed to any extent by other public bodies, Paules Walk in the old Cathedral must have been a veritable Royal Exchange. With the return of spring the sluggish hour of 6 a.m. was replaced by 5 in the morning, Paules again being the meeting place. On 12th October, 1620, the Company were consulting how to repress the abuses committed by the makers and distillers of hot waters and the makers of emplas-ters and conserves.

On 15th December a house in Foster Lane was bought and added to one adjoining already belonging to the Company for use as a Hall, each member to contribute at a fixed rate. The money for the new Hall came in slowly, and in August, 1621, Painter Stainers' Hall was hired as a place of meeting for £10 per annum. The Company of Grocers were also building a hall, and differences continued to exist between the two bodies on this and other matters, the Grocers claiming contributions from the Apothecaries. On 11th March, 1621, an order made by the Lords Commissioners appointed by the King to end the difference between the two Companies was duly enrolled.

On 19th December, 1622, Mr. Warden Harris was appointed to buy a sugar loaf, as a gift from the Company to Mr. Isack Cotton, the Registrar of the Star Chamber Office. The significance of this gift appears by an entry of the 2nd May, 1623, concerning a dispute in the Star Chamber between the Grocers and the Apothecaries, the latter complaining that the grocers sold by retail conserve of Barbary, conserve of roses, and divers other things mentioned in

the Schedule of the Apothecaries. On 27th May it was resolved that each freeman on his admission should make a gift of a spoon, a practice which prevailed in many of the other Companies. The dispute with the Grocers went to Parliament, and the Assistants were rated 40*s.* a piece towards the expenses.

My excerpts from the Society's records must conclude with an important entry relating to the severe outbreak of the Plague in 1625. On 2nd June, 1625, "It is ordered that forasmuch as there is great use of Methridatt, Theriaca Andromache, Diascordium and Theriaca Londinensis in this time of infection & that there is somethings wanting that goe into those compositions which are not yet to be had as Cassia Lignea in Methridat and Diascordium as also in Theriaca Andromache that instead of that (if that the Colledge of Phisicōns do allow it) there shallbe substituted Sinamon so that this order shall continue but for one year. And if in that time any Cassia Lignea come that is good and so much as shall make 1000<sup>m</sup> weight of Methridat pr. (powder?), then this to be voyd afterwards, for so much of that quantity shallbe supplied with Sinamon and that no brother of the C<sup>o</sup> shall make w<sup>out</sup> Cassia Lignea above 2 the w<sup>o</sup> receipte of Methridat & once the receipt of Diascordium and once the receipt of Theriaca Andromache & shall pay for a fine to the use of the Company 12<sup>d</sup>. upon a pound for so much as he makes without Cassia Lignea & that the Colledge of Phisicōns be consulted about a substitute for Semina Citri which are awanting in Theriaca Londinensis."