

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE PROGRESS OF

PHARMACY IN GREAT BRITAIN.

At the period at which our history commences, Pharmacy was in the hands of the Physicians, who professed the healing art in all its branches, and prepared their medicines themselves, or superintended the preparation of them. The science of medicine was so little understood, and so imperfectly cultivated, that it was in general practised empirically, and was often confounded with sorcery and witchcraft. The Greek word, *φαρμακείω*, signifies either to practise witchcraft or to use medicine, and this acceptation of the term was acted upon in our own country as late as the 16th century. There were, therefore, persons of various classes, both men and women, who professed to cure disease, some by incantations; others, who considered that by their genius they were “cut out and configured for it;” and others, again, who had obtained a kind of traditional education from recognised Physicians, and who therefore constituted the medical profession.

But no laws existed for the protection of the public from ignorant practitioners. Indeed, it was difficult to discriminate between the different degrees of ignorance which prevailed: so much so, that it was not uncommon for patients to be placed in public thoroughfares, in the hope that some of the persons who happened to pass might be able to recommend a remedy from the result of their own experience, when afflicted with similar symptoms. The first Act of Parliament relating to the medical profession was passed in the year 1511, and is entitled “*An ACT for the appointing of PHYSICIANS and SURGEONS.*”

The preamble is worded thus:—

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

* “Forasmuch as the science and cunning of Physick and Surgery (to the perfect knowledge of which be requisite both great learning and ripe experience) is daily within this realm exercised by a great multitude of ignorant persons, of whom the greater part have no manner of insight in the same, nor in any other kind of learning; some also can read no letters on the book, so far forth that common artificers, as smiths, weavers, and women, boldly and accustomably take upon them great cures, and things of great difficulty, in the which they partly use sorcery and witchcraft, partly apply such medicines unto the disease as be very noxious, and nothing meet therefore, to the high displeasure of God, great infamy to the faculty, and the grievous hurt, damage, and destruction of many of the king’s liege people; most especially of them that cannot discern the uncunning from the cunning. Be it therefore (to the surety and comfort of all manner of people) by the authority of this present Parliament enacted:—That no person within the city of London, nor within seven miles of the same, take upon him to exercise and occupy as a Physician or Surgeon, except he be first examined, approved, and admitted by the Bishop of London, or by the Dean of St. Paul’s, for the time being, calling to him or them four Doctors of Physic, and for Surgery, other expert persons in that faculty: and for the first examination such as they shall think convenient, and afterward alway four of them that have been so approved. . . .

“That no person out of the said city and precinct of seven miles of the same, except he have been (as is aforesaid) approved in the same, take upon him to exercise and occupy as a Physician or Surgeon, in any diocese within this realm, but if he be first examined and approved by the Bishop of the same diocese, or, he being out of the diocese, by his vicar-general: either of them calling to them such expert persons in the said faculties, as their discretion shall think convenient.† . . .”

By this Act the faculty of medicine was vested in one body of practitioners, who practised Medicine, Surgery, and Pharmacy. The Physicians’ assistants were styled Apothecaries,

* 3 Henry VIII., c. 9.

† Dr. Goodall’s “History of the College of Physicians.”

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS. THE SURGEONS. 3

and they, gradually acquiring information respecting the properties of drugs, began to transact business on their own account.

In the year 1518, Thomas Linacre, the Physician of Henry the Eighth, proposed the establishment of a College of Physicians, which was accomplished on the 23rd of September of that year. The powers of this body were extended in the year 1540: the Physicians were exonerated from the necessity of attendance on juries and parochial offices,* and were empowered to enter the houses of Apothecaries in London, "to search, view, and see the Apothecary-wares, drugs, and stuffs," and to destroy such as they found corrupt or unfit for use. In the same year the Barbers and Surgeons were united into one company, but the Surgeons were prohibited from shaving, and the Barbers were restricted from performing any surgical operations, except drawing teeth. The Physicians, however, were allowed to practise surgery.

The Surgeons having abused their privileges, an Act was passed, in the year 1542, of which the following is the substance :—

Whereas in the Parliament holden at Westminster, in the third year of the King's Most Gracious Reign, amongst other things, for the avoiding of sorceries, witchcrafts, and other inconveniences, it was enacted, That no person within the City of London, nor within seven miles of the same, should take upon him to exercise and occupy as Physician and Surgeon, except he be first examined, admitted, and approved by the Bishop of London, etc. . . . : Sithence the making of which said Act, the Company and Fellowship of Surgeons of London, minding onely their owne lucres, and nothing the profit or ease of the diseased or patient, have sued, troubled, and vexed divers honest persons, as well men as women, whom God hath endued with the knowledge of the nature, kind, and operation of certain herbs, roots, and waters, and the using and ministering of them, to such as have been pained with customable diseases, as women's breasts being sore, a pin and the web in the eye, uncomes of the hands, scaldings, burnings, sore mouths, the stone, strangury,

* The Surgeons had been exonerated from these duties in the year 1513.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

saucelin, and morphew, and such other like diseases. . . . And yet the said persons have not taken anything for their pains or cunning. . . . In consideration whereof, and for the ease, comfort, succour, help, relief, and health of the King's poor subjects, inhabitants of this his realm, now pained or diseased, or that hereafter shall be pained or diseased, Be it ordained, etc., that at all time from henceforth it shall be lawful to every person being the King's subject, having knowledge and experience of the nature of herbs, roots, and waters, etc., to use and minister . . . according to their cunning, experience, and knowledge . . . the aforesaid statute . . . or any other Act notwithstanding."

This Act is understood to apply to the practice of medicine without remuneration, and accordingly it was not uncommon for empirics to evade the law by pretending to practise gratuitously. This, however, was not always successful; and Dr. Goodall's *History of the PROCEEDINGS against EMPIRICS* (published in 1684) contains an account of numerous prosecutions, in which the law was put in force in a summary manner.

In the year 1552, *Grig*, a poulterer, in Surrey, "taken among the people for a prophet, in curing divers diseases by words and prayers, and saying he would take no money," was set on a scaffold in the town of Croydon, with a paper on his breast, declaring him to be an impostor. He was afterwards set on a pillory in Southwark.

In the reign of Queen Mary, a great number of empirical impostors were prosecuted and punished, not only in London but in other parts of the country; and during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, these prosecutions continued, the delinquents being fined various sums from £5 to £20, and in many cases being imprisoned. Some of these quacks were patronised by persons of rank, who wrote to the President of the College on their behalf. Sir Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State, interceded on behalf of "*Margaret Kennie*, an outlandish ignorant sorry woman," but the College refused to remit the sentence (1581).

John Booffeat (1583) was liberated from prison on the intercession of a person of quality, upon condition that he would submit to any penalty the College might inflict, if he ever practised again.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Paul Fairfax (1588) was prosecuted for cheating the people by puffing the pretended virtues of a water which he called *Aqua Coelestis*. He was fined £5 and imprisoned. The Lord Chamberlain addressed the College on his behalf, but to no purpose.

Paul Buck (1593), having been imprisoned for illegal practice, obtained letters of recommendation from Sir Francis Walsingham, the Lord High Admiral Howard, and Lord Essex.

John Lumkin, a surgeon (1593), being convicted of *mala praxis* on several patients, and being committed to prison, *propter malam praxin, et immodestos mores*, obtained letters from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Dean of Rochester, and was released on bail.

In the year 1552 the question was argued before the Lord Mayor, whether Surgeons might give inward medicines, and the President of the College of Physicians was summoned to give his opinion, in accordance with which, the Lord Mayor decided that it was illegal for Surgeons to practise medicine. The College of Physicians issued a letter in 1595, prohibiting their interference with medical practice.

The question was again tried in the cases of *Reed* and *Jenkins*, in 1595, when the Chief Justice decided,

“That no Surgeon, as a Surgeon, might practise physic for any disease;” and that “no man, though never so learned a Physician or Doctour, might practise in London, or within seven miles, without the college licence.”

In the year 1553, the College of Physicians obtained a new Act,* in which their former powers † were confirmed and enlarged, and in which it is stated that “the four censors, or any three of them, shall have authority to examine, survey, govern, correct, and punish all and singular Physicians and practisers in the faculty of physic, Apothecaries, Druggists, Distillers, and sellers of waters and oils, and preparers of chemical medicines,” “according as the nature of his or their offences may seem to require.”

In 1602, *Francis Anthony* was fined several times and imprisoned, for persisting in the administration of his *Aurum Potabile*, with which he occasioned the death of many patients.

* 1 Mary, c. 9.

† 32 Henry VIII., c. 40 (1540).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Dr. Alexander Leighton (1627) was interdicted from practice, being found unqualified, on examination by the president and censors; he persisted in practice, was arrested, and censured in the Star Chamber and lost his ears. *Ellin Rie* undertook to cure a boy of consumption in fourteen days for £3. "She gave him purging drinks once a day for seven days together, and twice a day for 14 days more." The boy died a fortnight after. She was fined £5 and imprisoned 14 days.

Mr. Briscoe, an apothecary (1634), appeared before the president and censors, being accused of "falsifying a bill," having administered 2 drachms of *troch. alkakengi cum opio* instead of *troch. gordonii*, as prescribed by Dr. Johnson, without asking the Doctor's opinion, for which offence he was fined 5 marques and expelled the company.

It is uncertain at what period the Physicians gave up the practice of preparing their own medicines; we are informed, in a work entitled "*Short Answers to Tentamen Medicinale*" (1704):

"'Tis very well known there was no such thing as a Company of Apothecaries in the beginning of King James the First's reign, but what drugs and medicines were then in use, were sold in common by the grocers; and as for the preparing and compounding of them, that the Physicians principally took care of themselves. But this growing too servile and laborious a business, and no other means being likely to be found out for easing themselves of it, but by lopping off a considerable number of grocers who had mostly been brought up that way, and constituting them a company by themselves, wholly to be employed in the business of pharmacy, in selling of drugs and preparing and compounding of medicines, according to the Physicians' orders and directions; in order to this they obtained a charter for them to the number of a hundred and fourteen."

This number coincides with the number of Physicians who were then in practice in London.

The Apothecaries (who had been incorporated with the Grocers into one company in the year 1606) were separated, and obtained the charter above mentioned in 1617. It was enacted at the same time that no grocer should keep an Apothecary's shop, and that no Surgeon should sell medicines. The power of searching the shops of Apothecaries within

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE LONDON PHARMACOPŒIA PUBLISHED.

7

seven miles of London, and examining their drugs, was also vested in the chartered body.

Soon after the Apothecaries were formed into a Society, they took into their serious consideration the frauds and artifices practised by the Grocers and Druggists from whom they obtained their drugs; and in order to remedy this evil, they established a dispensary in the year 1623, for the purpose of making some of the most important preparations for the use of their own members. This institution was placed under the inspection and superintendence of a Committee of Apothecaries, and was conducted, in the first instance, on a small scale, being confined to the manufacture of a limited number of preparations.

The first Pharmacopœia was published by the College of Physicians in the year 1618. This was the first step towards reducing the processes of Pharmacy to a regular standard for the guidance of dispensers of medicine. It was, however, a very imperfect production. Subsequent editions have been published by the College in 1621, 1632, 1639, 1650, 1677, 1721, 1746, 1788, 1809, 1815, 1824, and 1836.

The medicinal compounds formerly employed were chiefly empirical nostrums, or heterogeneous mixtures of substances, some of which neutralized others, and which were selected without any reference to scientific principles. One of the most striking instances of this practice is to be found in the Mithridate, which was a compound of seventy-two ingredients; and in looking over the ancient works on Pharmacy, a great variety of ridiculous formulæ present the same peculiarity. The science of Chemistry was so little advanced, that the real composition of ordinary remedies was seldom understood, and in many cases different virtues were attributed to the same substance, according to the source from whence it was obtained. Thus crab's eyes, prepared pearls, oystershells, and burnt hartshorn, were severally recommended as specifics in certain cases, the qualities of these remedies being supposed to be essentially different. Snails, vipers, the urine of men and animals, calculous concretions, various portions of criminals, as the thigh bone of a hanged man, and many other equally absurd remedies, were extolled as specifics for a variety of disorders.

Culpeper, in his translation of the Pharmacopœia (1653),

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ridicules the catalogue of remedies derived from the animal kingdom, which were at that time enumerated in the Pharmacopœia of the college. The following is a portion of a list which will serve as a specimen, with Culpeper's remarks in parentheses :

"The fat, grease, or suet of a duck, goose, eel, bore, heron, thymallos (if you know where to get it), dog, capon, bever, wild cat, stork, hedgehog, hen, man, lyon, hare, kite, or jack (if they have any fat, I am persuaded 'tis worth twelve-pence the grain), wolf, mouse of the mountains (if you can catch them), pardal, hog, serpent, badger, bear, fox, vultur (if you can catch them), album Græcum, east and west benzoar, stone taken out of a man's bladder, viper's flesh, the brain of hares and sparrows, the rennet of a lamb, kid, hare, and a calf and a horse too (quoth the colledg.) [They should have put the rennet of an ass to make medicine for their addle brains.] The excrement of a goose, of a dog, of a goat, of pidgeons, of a stone horse, of swallows, of men, of women, of mice, of peacocks," &c. &c.

Although Culpeper abuses the college for inserting this absurd catalogue of remedies in their Pharmacopœia, he is not free from superstition himself, as he tells us, that "bees being burnt to ashes, and a ly made with the ashes, trimly decks a bald head, being washed with it." He also extols snails, as a cure for consumption, but blames the college for directing the slime to be separated from them with salt or bran before they are used, and supports his opinion by saying, that "Man being made of the slime of the earth, the slimy substance recovers him when he is wasted."

In describing *verbena* he says, "It is hot and dry, a great opener, cleanser, and healer, it helps the yellow jaundice, defects in the reins and bladder, and pains in the head, if it be but bruised and hung about the neck."

Of scammony, he says, "*Scammony, or diagridium*, call it by which name you please, is a desperate purge, hurtful to the body by reason of its heat, windiness, corroding or gnawing, and violence of working. I should advise my country to let it alone; 'twill gnaw their bodies as fast as doctors gnaw their purses."

Culpeper says, that "the head of a cole-black cat being burnt to ashes in a new pot, and some of the ashes blown into the eye every day, helps such as have a skin growing over

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

their sight. If there happen any inflammation, moisten an oak leaf in water and lay it over the eye."

The compound waters, syrups, electuaries, and other preparations used at that time contain a vast number of herbs, flowers, juices, roots, etc., which are now obsolete, being found to be quite inert, and the properties ascribed to these remedies had reference, in many instances, to superstitious notions which belonged to the age. Culpeper, in the title-page of his *Pharmacopœia*, styles himself "*Nich. Culpeper, Gent., Student in Physick and Astrology,*" and in reading the work it is difficult to determine which science preponderates.

Notwithstanding the superstitious prejudices which prevail in the work, we see nevertheless in many passages an evidence of a close observance of nature, and just reasoning; for instance, in the translator's preface, we are told that "the time to gather all roots is before the herbs run up to seed." "Herbs are to be gathered when they are fullest of juice, which is before they run up to seed: and if you gather them in a hot sunshine day, they will not be so subject to putrifie. The best way to dry them is in the sun, according to Dr. REASON, though not according to Dr. TRADITION. Let flowers be gathered when they are in their prime, in a sunshine day, and dried in the sun. Let the seeds be perfectly ripe before they are gathered."

"In boyling syrups," Culpeper says, "have a great care of their just consistence, for if you boyl them too much they will candy, if too little, they will sour."

The *Materia Medica* was divided into two classes, Chymicals and Galenicals. The "Chymical Medicins" were of mineral origin, and prepared by fire; the Galenicals comprised the herbs, roots, and other vegetable or animal substances. The trade in these articles was also distinct, and Chymists are alluded to in works of the date now under consideration, as being a class of men who prepared these mineral compounds for the use of the Apothecaries.

THE TRIUMPHANT CHARIOT OF ANTIMONY, by Basil Valentine, a work published in 1678, contains a curious account of that metal, with a great variety of processes for reducing it into a proper state for medicinal use. "This unlocking and preparing of mineral antimony," the author observes, "is performed by divers methods and ways, by the disposure and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07002-7 - Historical Sketch of the Progress of Pharmacy in Great Britain

Jacob Bell Theophilus Redwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

governance of the fire, with manifold labour of the hands, whence proceeds the operation, virtue, power, and colour of the medicine itself."

Antimony had hitherto been considered a poison, destitute of any utility, and was generally denounced by the profession; but Basil Valentine undertook to prove that it is "more than any one simple of nature able to subdue and expel infinite diseases." He says, "The life of no one man is sufficient for him to learn all the mysteries thereof;" and that "when it is rightly prepared, its medicinal virtue consumes all noxious humours, purifies the blood in the highest degree, and performs all that may be effected by *aurum potabile*."

In tracing the origin of customs which are involved in the mist of antiquity, we are sometimes enabled to draw inferences, in cases where there is no very definite record of facts. In this respect, the following extracts from a pamphlet, published in the year 1671, entitled "*The Wisdom of the Nation is Foolishness*," serve to throw some light upon the subject:—

"Dr. Merret, a collegiate physician of London, and a practitioner thirty years with Apothecaries, gives this account of them in his book lately put forth (page 8): They use medicines quite contrary to the prescriptions—myrtle leaves for senna, &c. . . They falsify the grand compositions of the London Dispensatory . . . (page 9). 'Tis very common for them to load medicines with honey, and other cheaper ingredients, and to leave out in whole or in part those of greater value . . . Such CHYMISTS which sell preparations honestly made, complain that few Apothecaries will go to the price of them . . . All the drugs imported into England sooner or later are sold or made into medicines, although they have lain by years, with the MERCHANT, DRUGGIST, and APOTHECARY, before they are used."

Chemists are alluded to in a quaint poem, published in the year 1680, of which one stanza will serve as a specimen:

"'Mongst all professions in the town,
Held most in renown,
From th' sword to the gown,
The upstart Chymist rules the roast;
For he with his pill,
Does ev'n what he will,