

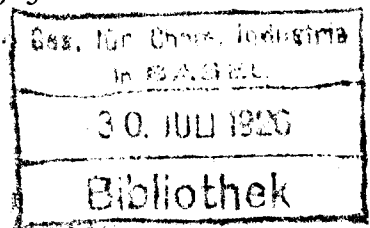
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A WEEKLY JOURNAL OF PHARMACY
AND OF THE
CHEMICAL AND DRUG TRADES



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A Siberian University

BY PROFESSOR DR. A. VRGOČ, DIRECTOR OF THE PHARMACOGNOSTIC INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB.

PRIOR to the war Siberia possessed only one University, in Tomsk, but under the Bolsheviki régime many Russian scientific institutes sought refuge in that vast country, and out of these Admiral Koltschak formed two new Universities, in Irkutsk and in Vladivostok, both of which, however, were very inadequately provided with apparatus, books and other indispensable teaching adjuncts. The University of Tomsk is housed in ten three-storied buildings situated in a park on the outskirts of the town. The pharmaceutical institute comprises twelve rooms, of which five were completely destroyed during the revolution in 1917. During the winter term of 1919-1920 I acted as auxiliary assistant for pharmaceutical chemistry and pharmacognosy in this institute [the writer was at that time a prisoner of war in the hands of the Bolsheviki.—EDITOR]. The director, Professor Alexandroff, treated me with every courtesy, even to the extent of entrusting me with the keys of the building. A thorough search failed to bring to light a

single microscope, and on inquiry I was informed that two microscopes had been lent to the professor of pathological anatomy, while Professor Alexandroff assured me that his own instrument was useless and would have to be sent to Germany to be repaired. Very reluctantly he agreed to let me have it, when I discovered that dirt and rust were alone responsible for its condition, and all it needed was a thorough cleansing. The materia medica collection was kept in the professor's study, and included about 1,000 drugs, among which were many rare

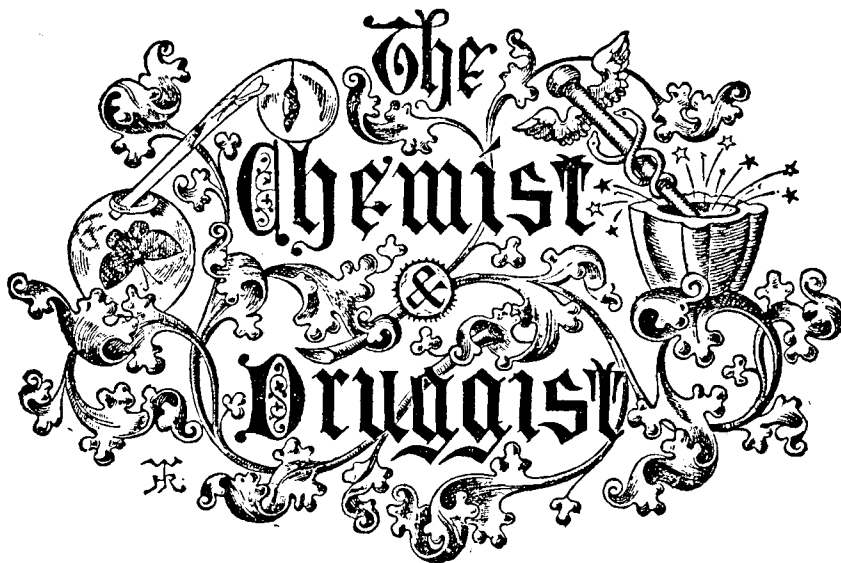


PROFESSOR DR. A. VRGOČ

specimens from Tibet, Turkestan and Mongolia, *inter alia*, two specimens of *Agaricus albus* from the Arctic Ocean each of one metre diameter. In the same room there was a piano—doubtless the only pharmaceutical institute in the world to boast of one. Professor Alexandroff is a talented musician, and in addition to holding the chairs of pharmaceutical, organic and inorganic chemistry, pharmacognosy, and Sanskrit, he also gives lectures in the University on the theory and history of music. Owing to the extreme cold, the thermometer registered between -30° and -45° C. (-22° to -49° F.), I usually remained until late, about 10 p.m., in the institute. One day I was requested by Professor Alexandroff to leave on Tuesdays and Fridays at 6 p.m., and for long I was unable to ascertain the reason for my exclusion, until the porter informed me that on these days musical entertainments, with singing and dancing, were held in the pharmaceutical institute. The tastes of the director were reflected in the library, two-thirds of the books bore no relation to science; there were no English, French or German scientific journals, no modern pharmaceutical or pharmacognostic works. During the winter term, which lasted from the middle of October to the middle of January, three hours a week were devoted to lectures on materia medica, and two hours to practical work in pharmacognosy, in addition to three hours of pharmaceutical chemistry. Practical work in chemistry was done in the laboratory from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and again from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. During this term Professor Alexandroff described in outline some thirty drugs, dwelling particularly on their chemical constituents; for instance, when lecturing on cinchona or opium, he would fill the blackboard with complicated structural formulas of their alkaloids—he is the author of a small text-book on pharmacognosy, one-third of which is devoted to structural formulas—

which to the majority of his 500 students were totally incomprehensible. As regards practical exercises, each student had an opportunity every second week of viewing in a very casual manner under the microscope slide preparations of thirteen drugs, but no instruction was given in the methods of examining drugs. One day the professor came to me and said: "Anton Petrovich Vergotch. I have a request to make, kindly prepare a few slides of drugs which we require, and for which an order cannot now be placed in Germany." He watched me the whole time I was engaged on this work, talking incessantly to the youthful assistant, exhorting him to learn from me how to make these slides. The fact was that this assistant teacher of materia medica did not know how to prepare specimens for microscopic examination; indeed, I was quite ignorant regarding his attainments; nevertheless, he was a member of a commission for exploring the mineral ores of Lake Baikal. Professor Alexandroff was very pleased with my first slide preparation—fol. cannab. ind.—and on the following day began his lecture with "Our last lecture dealt with *Cannabis Indica*, and you have seen a slide which Anton Petrovich Vergotch has prepared just as good as the best that are made in Germany." The students arrived about 10 a.m., the assistants about 11 a.m., and the professor at 11.30, half-an-hour before giving his lecture. Nobody paid the slightest attention to the students, who were left to their own devices, and were quite incapable of putting together the simplest chemical apparatus. The students of pharmacy did not receive any scientific training, no attempt was made to explain basic phenomena; they simply acquired a certain degree of knowledge quite mechanically, without grasping or understanding the underlying principles. They were required to carry out a few quite simple experiments, such as the liberation of carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide, and to be able to describe these in detail. The examinations, too, were conducted on novel lines; instead of appearing before a board, the professor alone acts as examiner. For each subject all the questions, about 500, are set forth in a printed form, a copy of which is handed to each student on matriculating. The following are some of the questions:—What are pills and how are they prepared? What are alcohols, acids, esters? What is cinchona? When holding an examination for the pharmaceutical qualification, Professor Alexandroff would ask the candidate, "What is *Cortex Frangulae*?" If the latter failed to answer this question, he read out the next one, "What are alcohols?" And if the candidate was unable also to answer the third question then he had failed in the examination, but could present himself again in eight days' time, and after two or three attempts on these lines he would assuredly succeed in passing the examination. The educational standard of the medical practitioners holding the position of professors in the University of Tomsk may be gauged from the fact that in prescriptions they write "*natrium bichloratum*" to designate sodium chloride. And yet Tomsk is the cultural centre of Central Asia, the meeting point of Western, Eastern, Chinese and Central Asiatic medicine. It would be an easy task to obtain many medicinal plants from Mongolia, Tibet and Northern China in current use and highly prized for their virtues by these peoples, for the purpose of establishing their botanical origin and chemical constituents. Valuable new therapeutic agents might be discovered in Mongolian, Chinese and Tibetan pharmacies, but so long as scientific instruction is imparted in this slipshod manner, and future pharmacists are given no practical training in the different branches of knowledge pertaining to their profession, the University of Tomsk cannot be expected to afford opportunities for systematic study, or to contribute to the advancement of chemistry, pharmacy or pharmacognosy.

NEW GERMAN CUSTOMS TARIFF.—The draft of the new German customs tariff is now complete, and its essential features were discussed at a meeting of the German Cabinet on May 11. It remains to be seen whether it will be submitted to the Reichsrat for its approval; after examination by that body it will be presented to the Reichstag.



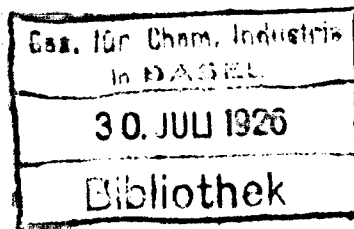
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A Chamber of Pharmacists

By PROFESSOR DR. A. VRGOC

In those Continental countries where the exercise of pharmacy is strictly controlled by a government department, there has been a growing movement of late years among members of the profession in favour of securing some measure of self-government. It is contended that it is only fair that pharmacists as a body should, through their chosen representatives, be able to express an opinion on matters vitally affecting their interests, and given an opportunity to participate in the drafting of regulations which they are called upon to carry out. In the kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes a recent order, providing for the creation of a chamber of pharmacists, fulfils these aspirations to a certain extent, while the measure presents many interesting features, inasmuch as it marks a break with the traditional policy, in countries where pharmacy is a monopoly, of absolute government control. The new chamber of pharmacists for the Yugo-Slav kingdom is described as an institution entrusted with the duty of promoting and safeguarding the interests of pharmacists, defending the dignity, honour and rights of the profession and of maintaining discipline among its members. The chamber consists of two sections: A includes the proprietors of pharmacies, and B the qualified and unqualified assistants. There are three categories of members: (1) Honorary members, elected by the chamber in recognition of services rendered to the profession; (2) ordinary members: all owners, lessees and managers of pharmacies automatically become ordinary members of section A, while all qualified assistants are included in section B, membership in both cases being compulsory. University professors, editors of pharmaceutical journals, civilian and army pharmacists in government employ have the right to become ordinary members of either section A or B. Qualified pharmacists engaged in occupations directly or indirectly connected with pharmacy, e.g., those employed in chemical or pharmaceutical establishments, may become extraordinary members of section A or B, except in the case of those who own or are employed in drug stores who forfeit the right of participation.

POWERS VESTED IN THE COUNCIL

The chamber elects a council consisting of a president, two vice-presidents and twelve members. The president, vice-presidents and nine members are nominated by section A, while section B elects three members to sit on the council; at the same time a substitute is elected to take the place of a member on the council in the event of his absence. The president, one vice-president and four members of the council representing section A must be owners of pharmacies in Belgrad, also two or the three members of the council appointed by section B must be residents of the capital. The members of the council fulfil their duties without receiving any remuneration. The chamber proposes, and the Ministry of Public Health appoints the secretary. The president of the chamber has to see that its resolutions are duly carried out, he represents it on all occasions, and controls the income and expenditure. In addition, he has to act as arbitrator in any controversies arising between members of the chamber, or between the two sections, and also in all disputes between owners and assistants. On the death of a proprietor of a pharmacy, or of an assistant, it is his duty to assist the family of the deceased with his advice, and he is empowered to pay out of the available funds a grant not exceeding 500 dinars to members in need of financial assistance. If a member neglects his professional duties, or by his behaviour prejudices the dignity and status of the profession, or commits a breach of the pharmacy laws, it is the president's duty either to warn him, or to summons him to appear before the disciplinary court. The duties, and obligations, of the council are many and varied. In the first place, it is required to keep a complete record of all the laws and regulations affecting the exercise of pharmacy, and a list of all owners of pharmacies, qualified and unqualified assistants and apprentices, with full particulars concerning each indi-

vidual. Further, it has to collect information regarding the conduct of every owner of a pharmacy, especially as to how he observes his professional and business obligations, and also in respect of every wholesale and manufacturing establishment in which medicinal preparations and drugs are sold or produced. It also keeps a record of licensed pharmaceutical specialities, and of those the sale of which is prohibited. Of particular interest is the fact that the council is empowered to decide whether and where a new pharmacy is to be opened, in which case it proposes three candidates to the government for the concession, the final selection of the holder resting with the Ministry of Public Health. It may make a grant of 500 to 1,000 dinars to assist necessitous pharmacists, their widows or orphans. Further, the council may delegate one or more of its members to attend the examinations of apprentices, and the University examinations. It will be called upon to advise the government on the conclusion of treaties with other countries when matters affecting the pharmaceutical profession are in question, and also to give its opinion regarding the effects on pharmacy of any proposed direct or indirect taxes. The order requires the council to elaborate the statutes for the creation of a pension fund for pharmacists, as well as statutes for a pharmaceutical disciplinary board. The council must meet at least once every month. The chamber of pharmacists derives its revenue from contri-



MICROSCOPE ROOM IN THE PHARMACOGNOSTIC INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB

butions on a fixed scale; thus owners of pharmacies are called upon to pay an entrance fee of 500 to 1,000 dinars, and an annual subscription of 300 to 600 dinars, based on the importance of the place where the business is established; qualified assistants pay an annual subscription of 30 to 60 dinars, while apprentices pay an entrance fee of 250 dinars, and after passing the assistants' examination, 50 dinars. To safeguard local interests, special arrangements are to be made and statutes elaborated in collaboration with the various professional associations. The Ministry of Public Health controls the activities of the chamber of pharmacists through a delegate, who is entitled to be present at all meetings of the chamber and of its council, and is empowered to suspend the enforcement of any resolution taken by either body, if in his opinion it is illegal or prejudicial, pending a resolution of the Minister. The creation of this chamber of pharmacists is welcomed as constituting a real achievement, inasmuch as it is a recognised semi-official body, while an important point is the admission of qualified assistants, as hitherto in countries where pharmacy is a monopoly they have been to all intents systematically excluded from any participation in shaping the destinies of the profession. Nevertheless, the promulgation of the order—it is not a law—has not met with unanimous approval. In the first place, the objection is raised that only one chamber is to be created, and not two as had been strenuously advocated by all pharmacists in order to meet the special requirements of the tripartite kingdom, and that in consequence of the composition of the council the owners of pharmacies in Belgrad, the capital, secure a dominating influence over the whole profession, a fact which is particularly resented outside Old Serbia. Further, it is pointed out that the order does not deal with the relations between pharmacists and medical practitioners, and the bases of the official drug tariff.