

**A BOOK  
OF SIMPLES**

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A book of simples by H. W. Lewer

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**H. W. LEWER**

**A BOOK  
OF SIMPLES**



Henry William Lower

# A BOOK OF SIMPLES



*"Delirious persons here a cure may find,  
To stem the phrensy and to calm the mind."*



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## INTRODUCTION

*THE original of this little book was found in the library of a distinguished Essex antiquary: the document has unfortunately no history, but from its appearance and comprehensive character it must have been the still-room book of some manor house or homestead of standing.*

*The manuscript is a folio composed entirely of vellum, bound in green, with a conventional design in gold: the binding of this book is a reduced facsimile of the original. The writing is in the hand of several persons: the spelling and absence of punctuation are here reproduced in all their original quaintness. The book has been submitted to experts, who are of opinion that it covers a period of some fifty years, terminating about the middle of the eighteenth century.*

*The condition of many of the rural districts of England in the eighteenth century and the almost impassable state of the roads are brought home to us by a writer in "The Gentleman's Magazine" (1757), in the following description: "It took my horse up to the belly the second step he took on the road, and had I not dismounted and clambered up some bushes I had been lodged there for a season." The isolation of the country in those days is almost incon-*

ceivable; the difficulties of travel were immense, and a survival of feudal legislation tied the labourer to the soil. Thus we may look upon the manor or farmhouse, with its retainers, as a detached social unit, and, in a sparsely populated country, almost a state in itself.

It is not difficult to form a picture of the lady of the house: amid her other duties she dispensed doles and charity to the poor around her. Through her knowledge of simples she was also "simpler" of all the ills that flesh is heir to, not only in the case of man, but also of beast. The wisdom and observation of a long procession of forebears are summed up in the recipes gathered in this book.

Herbs, too, she knew, and well of each could speak,  
That in her garden sip'd the silvery dew;  
Where no vain flower disclos'd a gaudy streak;  
But herbs for use, and physic, not a few,  
Of grey renown within those borders grew;  
The tasted basil, put-provoking thyme,  
Fresh balm, and mary-gold of cheerful hue;  
The lowly gill, that never dares to climb;

\* \* \* \* \*

And lavender, whose spikes of azure bloom  
Shall be cre-white in arid bundles bound  
To lurk amidst the labours of her loom,  
And crown her kerchiefs clean, with mickle rare perfume.

In these days, when the good manager is scarce, it is perhaps difficult to realize or appreciate that domestic economy was once practised as a science, founded upon the older herbalists, housewives' tales and oral tradition, the whole administered by rule of thumb. As will be seen, the domestic pharmacopoeia had not yet emerged from the seven-



teenth century. The astrological atmosphere of Culpepper, who warns us that he "who would know the operation of the herbs must look up to the stars astrologically," and the writings of Parkinson, clearly show the influence of that period. The predominance of the healing properties of herbs is still more apparent in this book; there is not a single remedy or simple in which their virtues are not set forth.

In my lady's garden, set within its red-brick walls, grew Camomile, Basil, Cardons, Angelica, Sweet Chevril, Tansy, Saffron, Elecampane, Hyslop, Thyme, Marjoram, Purslane, Sage, Rosemary, Rue, Pennyroyal, Borage, Liquorice, Horehound and many other plants. With these herbs were cultivated Gillyflower, Pansy, Pinks, Bergamot, Southernwood, Bay, Roses, Jasmine, Lavender and divers sweet-scented plants for the making of simples, perfumes, and "sweete waters."

The housewife, before entering on her duties, must have served an apprenticeship; doubtless it formed the serious business of her life. How many women nowadays follow the example of their ancestors? The easy access of the doctor, the facilities of communication, the quack remedies obtained from the neighbouring chymist, have superseded the old-fashioned simples.

The old herb garden is a wilderness, and even the names of its occupants have almost passed away. Perchance this little book may help us to picture it at its prime, with all its old-world atmosphere, and haunting memories of much that is still precious. It may also bring back the sweet mingled scent of

the herb garden, the "murmuring of innumerable bees," the shimmering of the sun on sheltered pleasure and well-trimmed hedge of yew, creating an image delightful to recall.

Although many herbals and culinary manuscripts and books date back to a much earlier period, as may be seen in the bibliography, yet they are now scarce and difficult to obtain. This particular example is interesting because of the magic of its herb-lore and the added charm of the making of conserves and perfumes and the preserving of viands. Moreover, it has that personal touch wanting in so many books of a similar nature. One may note the words at the end of some of the simples, "Probatum," or "Probatum est." What a world of meaning and satisfaction they imply!

I am indebted to Miss I. L. Gould and Miss B. M. Gould for the long labour and perseverance they have bestowed in decyphering the faded script, and to Mr. J. Manning Watts for his researches into the virtues and properties formerly attributed to these herbs, and for his investigation into the proper spelling of their names, which appear in the manuscript according to the light of nature.

It will be observed that the items in the Index are not always in strict alphabetical order. This will not, however, seriously interfere with reference to any recipe, and it has therefore been thought better to retain them as originally compiled.

H. W. LEWER.

11th August, 1908.

## A BOOK OF SIMPLES

1. *The Wood-street Cake.*

TAKE a quarter of a peck of y<sup>e</sup> finest flower, mingle into it a little salt & some beaten Cloves Mace & Nutmegs, a pound and halfe of Currance wash'd and dry'd, & a pound of Raisins of y<sup>e</sup> Sun ston'd and shred, then straine in about a pinte of Ale yeast, and put in y<sup>e</sup> yolkes of 10 eggs beaten with Rose water, put in a pint of Cream with 3 quarters of a pound of Butter melted in it. mingle all these well together, and knead it, cover it with a clothe and let it stand about an hour before y<sup>e</sup> fire to rise, then mould it up and beat it out thinn in y<sup>e</sup> edges and thick in y<sup>e</sup> middle, then prick it or cut it w<sup>th</sup> a knife, and set it in y<sup>e</sup> oven, when it is almost bak'd take it out and ice it on y<sup>e</sup> top w<sup>th</sup> Rose water & sugar and sett it in y<sup>e</sup> oven againe 'till 'tis enough, putt some musk or Ambergreefe dissolv'd in y<sup>e</sup> Rose water.

2. *Pectorals for a Colde or Consumption.*

TAKE one pound of brown Sugar Candy, one Ounce of Juice of Lycorisse, dissolve y<sup>e</sup> lycorisse in 3 spoonfulls of Hyfop water, put to these a drachm of Orrice a drachm of Enul-campane, halfe a drachm of Gum dragon being all made into fine powder, muske a graine then take a drachm of oyle of Anni-seeds, worke it well together with your hand and make it up into pectorals of what bigness you please, lay them on a dish to dry before y<sup>e</sup> fire or in an oven after drawn bread, and keep them dry.