Lecture 12 Secunda - oil of tartar

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ok, so we have covered two of the essential proceses in the herbal work - the herbal 'simple', which describes and demonstrates the fundamental methodology in herbal spagyrics and provides the novice with a working knowledge of the basic equipment needed for the work. Also we have looked at the Primum Ens Melissa, which gives us access to a herbal preparation that starts to unfold some of the more serious and powerful methods and effects of alchemical preparations.

To show you how the ideas presented in these two processes are fundamental to an understanding of the advanced work, and how the simple methods in those processes are expanded upon in order to deal with the mineral kingdom, I will now explain my personal technique for obtaining "oil of tartar" (aka: oil obtained from potassium carbonate.)

Oil of tartar is a substance that links together the vegetable and the mineral kingdoms. It is an oil derived from a mineral salt but that salt has its origin in, and is the matrix for, the vegetable kingdom.

This process encompasses a number of very important (al)chemical secrets and it deserves a lot of analysis and contemplation, and should be referred back to often when considering how to deal with important mineral processes.

The conventional (popular) method for extracting the oil of tartar is simply to prepare the salt very pure and very dry (so it is white, powdered and dusty.) Then put it in a boiling flask, attach a very long distillation condensor to that flask and then heat the flask to extreme temperatures. When this is done a red dirty-looking 'stinking' oil will distil out of the salt and collect in the receiver. This oil then has to be further prepared in order to clean it.

There are three major problems with this popular approach. (1) the equipment is expensive. (2) The temperatures required make it dangerous to work this method (due to a possibility of exploding glassware and burning/exploding chemicals.) (3) The extreme heat tortures the salt and the oil and seriously burns and ruins the oils delicate properties.

IMO, the forced-distillation approach is not really alchemical in nature because it uses brute-force instead of the natural

(alchemical) properties of the chemicals involved and disrespects the integrity of the salt-oil relationship.

The process I will now explain is far easier, far cheaper, complete safe and produces are vastly superior product.

Anyone who has actually seen the Ens process carried out will understand clearly what is meant by the phrase "the alcohol floats on the tartar-water". The oil of tartar method stems from a working knowledge of the Ens process in that it relies on the fact that tartar and alcohol (the vegetable salt and mercury) have an antipathy for eachother.

Oil of Tartar - Per Ascendium

Fill a 1 litre glass jar with a mixture composed of 75% pure alcohol and 25% distilled water (roughly.) Add to this liquid enough pure-white tartar (potassium carbonate) that the salt will dissolve completely leaving approximately 1cm depth of undissolved tartar in the bottom of the jar.

When the salt is added it will soak up the water in the liquid like a sponge. This saturated tartar-water, being more dense than alcohol, will sink to the bottom of the jar and the alcohol will remain, separate, floating on top. When all of the water in the liquid is absorbed by the tartar you will have 1/4 of the liquid at the bottom being tartar-water and 3/4s as alcohol floating on top. In the 1/4 tartar-water you should have some undissolved tartar. This is the ideal condition to start the oil of tartar extraction. You will notice you might have to keep adding tartar over a few days or weeks until all it is all dissolved and all the water is absorbed.

This jar needs to be sealed air-tight (to stop the alcohol from evaporating, and to stop dust falling in.) Then place the jar in a warm environment, like an incubator, out of direct sunlight. After a few days or weeks (depending on conditions) you will notice that the alcohol starts to turn pale lemon-yellow. After several months (sometimes less) it will turn yellow-orange. Eventually it will be a red-brown colour. This tincture (colour) is the sulphur (oil) of tartar. That is ... it is an oil that leeches out of the liquified potassium carbonate at the bottom of the jar.

To collect the oil all you need to do is syphon-off the alcohol containing the oil then carefully (at low temp) distil the alcohol away from the oil in a retort or distillation train.

The importance of this simple process is (1) that it allows the novice to obtain and experiment with a mineral oil easily. (2) That it provides you with a substance that you can use to perform mineral-oil spagyric analysis. (3) It gives you access to 'spirit of tartar' which is a very important mineral solvent known by the early Rosicrucians.

This process, and part of the instruction which follows this post,

also allows you to understand, in detail, what happens when the Ens of Melissa is extracted using the canon Ens extraction process described earlier. By looking at this oil of tartar process, as described above, we can see, for example, that the Ens Melissa does not only contain a herbal quintessence from the herb lemon balm, but it also contains small traces (depending on how long it is left to macerate) of oil of tartar.

The idea of this oil of tartar process is that it should be carried out with enough quantity of tartar-water/alcohol (you can use greater volumes than 1 litre of course), or repeated often enough, that you can collect at least 500mls of pure oil (i.e. the oil with all its alcohol removed.) This will enable you to carry on to the next instruction productively.

Anyone who actually obtains this much oil of tartar will discover an imporant secret hidden in this process ... and that is that the oil also contains volatile salt of tartar. Tartar is a very hard salt to volatize. If youve been paying attention to these posts you will remember I gave some information, previously, on Rubellus Petrinus' technique for volatizing tartar. Like the pop' method for distilling oil of tartar Rubellus' technique requires a degree of torturing of the salt and plant-oil. In Rubellus' method the volatile salt also becomes integrated, to a greater degree, with plant oils, making it great for first level ingestible plant quintessences, but excludes that volatile tartar from being used effectively in mineral preparations.

The fact that this volatile salt of tartar ends up in the tartar-oil in the process I have revealed here also demonstrates to us that the Ens Melissa also contains traces of volatile salt of tartar. In other words the Ens of Melissa (which has frequently been argued by amatures as not being a true quintessence - because it does not contain the 3 principles in voltile form) is now proved to be a quintessence - containing a volatile essential spiritus oil (the green tincture seen in the extraction) a volatile salt and the volatile oil of tartar!

~rubaphilos