Lecture 03 Prima – first stage – the short way

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rubaphilos@yahoo.co.nz

Note: This post in the series is somewhat of an aside to the previous one. It cuts across the process to consider an alternative to the fermentation. We will continue the consideration of what to do with the complete fermentation after this post.)

So we looked at the long and proper version of beginning the herbal process by fermenting the herb and thereby reducing it to its chaos, as the old alchemists recommended.

While this process, and the concepts it teaches, are important, philosophically speaking, most students of alchemy know that there is a shorter and more convenient way to complete the first stage.

The short process simply requires that the student buy his alcohol in a form where it has already been fermented. This means either buying straight ethanol (alcohol) or a beverage spirit that contains alcohol that can be separated by distillation.

The idea here is that alcohol, which is the Mercury of the vegetable kingdom, is, roughly speaking, the same no matter from what source you take it. While this is generally true, it is arguable that alcohols produced from the fermentation of different substances (grapes, hops, rice, grains, etc) vary in 'quality' (i.e. purity of vibration), and that the ideal calls for alcohol produced from the plant worked on, or, if that is not practical, then the highest vibratory alcohol (vegetable mercury) we can get our hands on is our next best choice. Convention insists that alcohol from fermented grapes is the best. This means distillation of either wine (preferably red) or brandy (which is, ideally, but not always in fact, distilled grape wine.)

(Note: Personally, I believec alcohol produced with the best brewers yeast over straight fructose, in the way used by home-spirit brewers, is the absolute best alcohol to use, as it is already "undetermnined" and extremely 'clean'.)

So for practical purposes we are saying, the usual (common) method for beginning the work is to take some fermented (wine), or distilled (spirit) beverage, and distil-off its spirit, to use in the next step of the short method of the first stage of the work.

This, ideally, requires that the beverage distillate be distilled "7" times. Such a repeatative distillation assures, as much as we can, that the end product is as pure (dry) as we can get it, without the use of chemicals. It also (tradition insists) removes the 'determination' from the alcohiol. In other words, it removes the (al)chemical markers that stamp the alcohol with the nature of the plant it was removed from - producing an undetermined vegetable mercury.

Practicing distillation is of the utmost importance to the study of alchemy. After all it is not referred to as "the art of distillation" for nothing. Nevertheless there is a third option to the obtaining of the vegetable mercurial spirit, that does not require either fermentation (by the operator) or distillation. We will quickly look at that now.

If any plant matter is burned, in the way people, for example, burn leaves in autumn, you will end up with a pile of ash. The major component of that ash is a chemical called potassium carbonate (tartar or potash). This salt is the salt principal of the plant kingdom. As the diametric opposite to the mercury of the plant kingdom, if you take pure potassium carbonate (pot-carb) and put it in a jar with alcohol the two will not mix. But because pot-carb is hydroscopic (it absorbs moisture readily) any water that is mixed with the alcohol will be sucked up by the pot-carb like a sponge. So if you put a solution of 90% ethanol (alcohol) and 10% water, and about a handful of pot-carb - in a jar together, the pot-carb will drink up the water and create a saturated solution of water and potassium carbonate (tartar-water) and the alcohol will float on top. This is the chemical way of purifying alcohol.

To give a more gross and practical example of this technique - if you mixed pot-carb and a bottle of vodkah the pot-carb would suck all the water out of the vodkah and the alcohol will float on the top - effectively purifying the alcohol for use.

You can then separate the alcohol simply by syphoning it off the top.

But I will repeat - you will not do yourself any favours if you use this method solely, without practicing and becoming efficient with distillation. Nevertheless, it is common practice (with students of

alchemy) to distil spiritus beverages 1 or 2 times and then use pot-carb to 'finish-off' the purification, and assure that the end result is absolute-pure-alcohol. (When such is required.)

(Note: potassium carbonate is a very common and unrestricted chemical that can be brought very cheaply by the sack-load.)

Now, to bring us up to the same level as the fermentation process, that is, to the end of the first stage of the work, we need to produce, by distillation, about 2 litres of pure alcohol to continue.

Once you have your 2 litres of pure alcohol you have two choices as to how you might continue. First, you use the alcohol as-is. Second, you add 2 litres of distilled water to that alcohol. These are your choices of solvent - or vegetable mercury - for the work. This solvent will next be added to the fresh herb you have chosen.

Consideration as to which way to go, pure alcohol or water+alcohol will be based on practical considerations. 2 litres of pure alcohol will not cover as much plant matter (in the extraction) as 4 litres of alcohol+water. The more herb you extract the greater the amount of your end product. This is very important, as will become evident if you actually carry out this process. also water+alcohol extracts water soluable compnents out of the herb which alcohol alone will not. It is arguable as to whether or not there is any value in including these water soluable components at this stage.

So you have your solvent (Mercury) and you have your plant. You want to put the plant in a large glass jar so that not more than 2/3rds of the jar is filled. Then add your solvent so that 1/4 of the volume of the jar is left empty.

These are all rough guidelnes as far as volumes and weights go. The weights of herb and volume of solvent I have given are an absolute bare minimum for this process. Just enough to actually be able to complete the work with the bare minimum of managable quantities of products.

It would be far, far, better if you used as larger amounts of herb and solvent as you can possibly manage. Nevertheless if you follow the recommendations for the minimum, here, then by the end you should understand perfectly what better quantities will be required should you try this work again.

So once you have put your solvent onto your herb in

'sealed' jars, and they are sat in a warm place for a week or more, ideally, as far as our work is concerned, you now have the same conditions as exist at the end of the completed fermentation. The primary difference being that in the more artificial (short) approach you are going to have much, much, more alcohol in your vegetable chaos, and possibly less water.

(end of the first stage)

~rubaphilos