

AN INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN OF THE LITERATURE OF PERFUMERY*

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THE BIBLIOPHILE who delights in seeking out books that were produced in the first years of printing, or in fingering a binding that has survived the ravages of wars and the passing of centuries, can surely find no lore more fascinating, no art more elusive, than that described in the literature centered around the subject of perfumery.

For it is a fact that every artistic and scientific pursuit inspires a literature, which gives evidence of its origins, chronicles its historical development, reflects its achievements, records its technical progress.

Unfortunately, our efforts to trace the origins of the literature of perfumery are hindered because many of the important books are not to be found in the United States, so that we must rely upon catalogue entries and on previous bibliographical research. Still greater difficulties are caused by references to early books, that cite nothing but title, sometimes author, and per-

haps a date of publication, but no copy of the book seems to exist in any library in the world. The search becomes further confused by wrong dates, doubtful and sometimes incorrect data, important omissions, that are found in otherwise reliable sources.

In its origins and early development, the written record of perfumery consisted of brief remarks, generally of secondary importance, in works relating to botany, medicine, pharmacy, and other sciences, and at a much later date, to cosmetics and beauty culture. Thus, of the early writings that have come down to us from ancient Egypt, of the richer literature of the great Greek civilization, and of the literary heritage of the Roman Empire, there is extant only one work that belongs exclusively to the literature of perfumery. Written by the Greek botanist, Theophrastus, who lived from about 370 to 285 B.C., this work, entitled "Concerning Odors," which has been frequently reprinted in libraries of the classics, briefly summarizes problems in the classification of odor, vehicles for

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perfumes, the odor of animals, odor and taste, and other aspects of the subject that are of interest to this day.

Aside from the essay of Theophrastus, few and quite incidental references to perfumes are found in the Greek literature, particularly in the works of Hippocrates and Dioscorides, who were concerned with the therapeutic value of aromatics. This early link to medicine in the literature of perfumery should not be overlooked.

In the Roman era, when perfumes were used with such abandon by the wealthier classes, and trading in essential oils was an important aspect of commerce, one finds the subject treated only in passing references in such works as the historical writings of Herodotus, the Satires of Horace, and as part of the subject of cosmetics and adornment in the passionate poetry of Ovid; and in greater detail in Pliny's "Natural History," where there are abundant descriptions of the flowers utilized in perfumery and the processes for the extraction of the oils.

With the decline of the Roman empire, the center of learning for many years was the world of the Arabs, whose influence extended from the Iberian peninsula to Asia Minor. The medical literature of this Arabic civilization frequently advises the use of perfumes as therapeutic agents. This classic medical, or to be more exact, pharmacopœial literature, contained sections on the methods of

extracting essential oils, and gave instructions for blending. Among the illustrious authors of this period, we may mention Geber and Mesuë.

However, there seems to be but one book extant, said to come from this period of civilization, which had as its sole aim the study of human embellishment. The work is attributed to Abdeker, alleged to have been the personal physician to Mohammed II, who lived in the mid-fifteenth century; it was later incorporated into a book, published at approximately the same time in England and France, and known in English as "The Art of Preserving Beauty" (London, 1754); this book symbolizes the essential unity of the fields of cosmetics and medicine, a unity that was not to be severed until the later years of the Renaissance. In placing Abdeker at this point in our chronology, we would not like this to be interpreted as an endorsement of the story that the book was translated from a fifteenth century Arabic manuscript, for there is some evidence that it was actually created in the eighteenth century. Incidentally, Abdeker's beauty advice is told in the form of a love story, and at the end the hero and heroine are married, and note how the author tells us that they lived happily ever after: "...their Marriage was solemnized, and... they enjoy'd all the Satisfaction and Pleasure which Beauty and Virtue join'd with Wit and Good-nature could afford."

The great landmark in the history

of any literature is frequently the invention of movable type by Gutenberg in the mid-years of the fifteenth century, which led to the revival of learning and the large-scale development of writing and publishing. It was during these years that the forerunners of the first perfumery books were written.



Figure 1.—Title page of book divulging secrets of the perfumer's art, published in Venice in 1560. (Collection, U. S. Army Medical Library.)

Some of this sixteenth century literature which we shall cite is concerned more with cosmetics than with perfumery; others divulged many noble and valuable secrets, of medicine, cosmetics, perfumery, and alchemy.

The earliest printed book related exclusively to perfumery which we have located was dated 1560, an anonymous publication bearing the title: "Notandissimi Secreti de l'Arte Profumatoria." A copy, probably the only one in America, is to be found in the Army Medical Library in Washington. Bibliographers mention another work, likewise anonymous, which bears the almost identical title, "Secreti dell'Arte Profumatoria," and dated the following year. Were these two different editions of the same book? At this stage of our investigation, we do not know, as we have been unable to locate the second book. At any rate, the book, important as a landmark of the independence of perfumery from related arts, appeared during a period that was rich in the early literature of cosmetics.

Among these early books, one of the best known is "The Secrets of the Signora Isabella Cortese" (I Secreti de la Signora Isabella Cortese, etc.), which deserves special attention because it is one of the few of the so-called books of secrets about everything under the sun that specifically lists perfumery on the title page. This work first appeared in 1561; was frequently copied, emulated, quoted, and cited as authoritative for years to come. The earliest copy we have been able to locate in the United States is dated 1565. The title page shown here is from the 1574 edition, in the private collection of Miss Florence E. Wall, who believes the Cortese

work to be the earliest printed book by a woman author.

Another sixteenth century book that divulged the secrets of blending odoriferous substances was penned by the world-famous Nostradamus, and bore the title: "Excellent et Moulte Utile Opusculé, à Tous Necessaire Qui Desirent Avoir

work carried the word "parfums" in the title.

One of the most widely read works of the sixteenth century, and to this day a collector's item, was "The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont" (*De' Secreti del Reverendo Donno Alessio Piemontese*) attributed to Girolamo Ruscelli; it was first published in Italian in 1555, in French in 1557, and in English (but translated from the French) as early as 1558.

In 1562, there appeared "Gli Ornamenti delle Donne," by Giovanni Marinelli, a physician of repute, who sought to preserve the field of cosmetics as a branch of medicine.

From this period, we cite the several books of Jean Liébaut, likewise a physician, who wrote in Latin, but whose writings are better known in their French translations. His work, "Trois Livres de l'Embellissement et Ornement du Corps Humain," published in Paris in 1582, may have been largely inspired by the writings of Marinelli.

Of the sixteenth century French literature on cosmetics, few books achieved the success of the work of André Le Fournier, and few works of comparable success were so completely overlooked by later writers. Dated 1530, his book bore the title, "La Décoration d'Humaine Nature et Adornement des Dames," and a copy, perhaps the only one in the United States, is in the Army Medical Library.

There were several other minor sixteenth century books which we should like to mention briefly; each



Figure 2.—Title page of the famous sixteenth-century book of "Secrets" that contained "much on the art of perfumery." (Collection, F. E. Wall.)

Cognoissance de Plusieurs Exquises Receptes . . ." published in Lyon (1555). How astonishing it is that the historians of perfumery have overlooked the contribution of a man of the stature of Nostradamus. Incidentally, a later edition of this

is a work of secrets and recipes:

"Sensuit les Fleurs et Secrets de Medicine," by Raoul du Montvert, appeared in Paris in 1531, and was reprinted on many occasions, one printing dated as late as 1609.

"Bastiment des Receptes," an anonymous work, was first published in Poitiers in 1544, inspired at least one Italian book, and went through several printings, one as late as 1597.

"Opera Nova Piacevole laquale Insegna di far Varie Compositione Odorifere per Adorner Ciascuna Donna," an anonymous work, appeared in Venice in 1525, a rare book whose title emphasizes the odoriferous nature of the compositions to be used for adornment.

An Italian book, "Opera Nuova Intitolata Disicio di Ricette, etc.," likewise mentions odor as part of a lengthy title. This anonymous work is not dated, but from typography and other evidence, it can undoubtedly be placed in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Many other minor works appeared, but for about a century few writers on cosmetics and perfumes had the success of Ruscelli, Cortese, Marinelli, Le Fournier, Liébaut, and several of their contemporaries. Perhaps the many translations and the new editions, the wide circle of readers obtained for these writers, met the demands for information. But it was likewise during this period that medical men dissociated themselves from cosmetics, and that the manufacture of products for adornment and fragrance was rel-

egated to the apothecary, and to the aristocratic and wealthy ladies who found in perfume blending a fascinating hobby.

At any rate, there is no record of another book devoted exclusively to perfumery until 1678, when there appeared, in Venice, "Secreti Nobilissimi dell'Arte Profumatoria," by Giovanni Ventura Roseto, a copy of which is in the Rare Book Room of the New York Public Library. Roseto's book has been little quoted, seldom reprinted, is hardly known among these early writings, but we find that it is a landmark in the effort to create a literature devoted solely to perfumery; it is a sign of the revival of a literature that was moribund; and it is further significant that as late as 1678, when France was already dominant in the perfume world, the only work on perfumery from this period should appear in Italian, rather than French. But above all, Roseto's work is indicative of a gradual yet incomplete divorce of the art of perfumery from that of the medical practitioner, and the beginnings of a separation from the literature of cosmetics. From Roseto on, perfumery was to be worthy of a separate literature, and only in rare instances are major contributions to the subject found in works on cosmetics.

The first major activity in the art of perfumery in France, after the early sixteenth-century works, is reflected in "Le Parfumeur François," by Simon Barbe, the first edition of which probably appeared

in 1693. The work of Barbe offered instructions in blending, described the raw materials of perfumery, and devoted considerable attention to the perfuming of snuff.

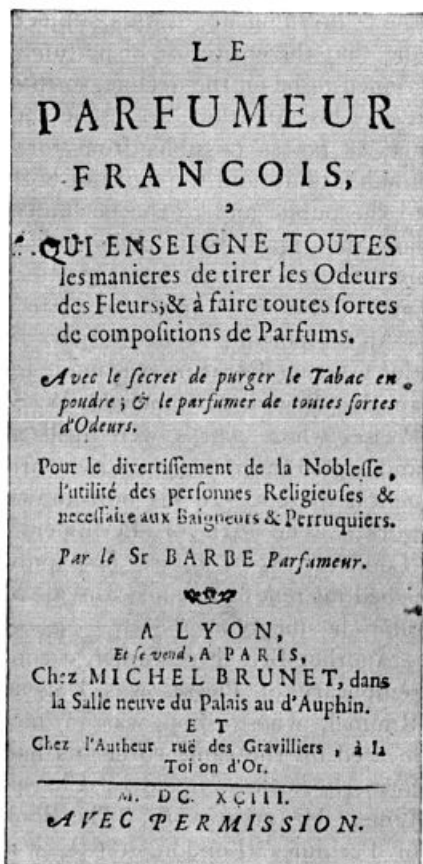


Figure 3.—One of the very rare perfume books, containing considerable material on scenting of snuff. (Collection, E. Sagarin.)

The 1693 edition of "Le Parfumeur François" is one of the really rare books on perfumery. A check with authorities discloses that the only copy in any American library or public institution is owned by

Harvard University, and my own copy would seem to be the only other in America. A second edition, published in 1696, is owned by the Bibliothèque Nationale, and in 1699 substantially the same book was published under the title "Le Parfumeur Royal." References to editions earlier than 1693 are found in some bibliographies, but there is every indication that such references were written in error. Likewise confusing is a reference to a book entitled "The French Perfumer," dated 1696; we believe that this refers to "Le Parfumeur François," and that later authors translated the title.

In examining the works of Corsete, Roseto, Barbe, and those who followed, one finds interesting examples of the formulas then in use, and one can follow the evolution of man's techniques and of his knowledge in any given aspect of the art.

The earliest references to perfumery and odors in the English language are found in a scientific treatise by Robert Boyle, "Experiments and Observations about the Mechanical Production of Odours" (1675), and in the early dispensaries and pharmacopœias. In this last-named category, two well-known works that contain abundant references to aromatics are "Bazilica Chymica. . . or Royal and Practical Chemistry," by Oswald Crolius (London, 1670), and "The Compleat Chymical Dispensatory in Five Books," by Dr. John Schroeder (London, 1669). But even earlier, the women of England had

turned toward the blending of perfumes and flavors, and the manufacture of cosmetics. For this purpose, the latter sixteenth-century English lady of the wealthier classes had her own still-room, sought literature on products of adornment, and did not retire from the practice of home manufacture until the eighteenth century, when this work was relegated to her maid.

From this period date many curious and charming old books. Many of the earliest cook books contained sections on perfumes. Among the cosmetic works that were addressed to the ladies and that have survived—and those we have found are all post-Elizabethan—are John Shirley's "The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities" (3rd ed., 1691); "The Accomplished Housewife, A Gentlewoman's Companion" (anon., 1748); and "Several Letters Between Two Ladies; wherein the Lawfulness and Unlawfulness of Artificial Beauty in Point of Conscience, Are Nicely Debated," signed by C. G. and dated 1701, but of which a first edition probably appeared in 1662.

When one considers that perfume blending was being practiced in the home, it becomes clear that any work by a professional perfumer which divulged his secrets would be considered a threat to the perfume industry. It is from this point of view that we can understand why a book called "The British Perfumer," written by Charles Lillie in the 1730's, remained in manuscript form, not to be pub-

lished until 1822. When finally printed, it must have sold out very quickly, for a second edition, with some changes in the title page, appeared the same year. The author mentioned that relatively few people knew anything about this subject, and that the entire use of perfumes seemed to be on the decline, so that it was his intention "to rescue this art, as far as possible, from total annihilation; and to point out both to the public and to the perfumer, how they may obtain every article used in this business in its greatest purity, and most approved state."

An important contribution to this growing literature was made by another British perfumer, G. W. S. Piesse, whose works were utilized and copied for many years by continental writers. In his best-known work, "The Art of Perfumery" (London, 1855), Piesse first published his renowned musical scale of odor classification.

Another British perfumer, a contemporary of Piesse, was Eugene Rimmel, whose shop was in fact located on the same corner as had formerly been occupied by Charles Lillie. His great work, "The Book of Perfumes" (London, 1865), was a magnificent piece of historical research, an original study that has lightened the burden of every perfume historian that followed him. However, even Rimmel made bibliographical errors of omission and commission, indicating a lesser acquaintance with the Italian literature than with the French. These errors were evidently called to

Rimmel's attention, for they were corrected by him in the French translation, "Le Livre des Parfums" (Paris 1870). Rimmel himself rendered the book into French, seeking to avoid any difference of opinion between author and translator.

The first American literature was not to make its appearance for several years after the earliest British books, a reflection of the lesser interest America was displaying toward perfumery and toward cosmetics in general. In 1847, there appeared Campbell Morfit's work, "Perfumery: Its Manufacture and Use," largely based on continental works, particularly on a popular French writer of the period, Mme. Celnart. In 1864, a translation was published of a contemporary French book on perfumery, "A Complete Treatise on Perfumery," by P. Pradal. Arnold J. Cooley's "The Toilet in Ancient and Modern Times" (1873) was largely devoted to perfumery; it was reprinted on several occasions, with changes on the title page and changes of the binder's title. A few years later (1877) R. S. Cristiani, a contributor to the trade papers already in existence, published "Perfumery and Kindred Arts," also entitled "A Comprehensive Treatise on Perfumery." That same year there appeared "A Treatise on the Manufacture of Perfumes and Kindred Toilet Articles," by John H. Snively, a professor of chemistry. These several books, no one of which was of lasting importance, comprised the

American contribution to the literature; by the end of the nineteenth century, the small American industry also had available translations of several popular German books on the subject.

Departing for a moment from the record of books, it would be appropriate at this time to mention a delightful brochure, published as a catalogue, with copious illustrations and an historical introduction. Entitled, "Perfumery: Its History, Character, and Use," this pamphlet appeared in 1853 in Philadelphia, published and evidently written by Apollon W. Harrison, a perfumer of that city doing business at No. 10 South Seventh Street. One of the earliest extant American writings in the field, the descriptions in this pamphlet can a century later be considered models of exquisite writing for the catalogue compilers of today.

Thus far, we have seen that the literature of perfumery, so far as formula and instruction books were concerned, had its origin and early development in Italy and France, was linked to the books on cosmetics, and was influenced by—was even a part of—the literature of medicine. This, however, is but one aspect of the writings; when we turn to the literature devoted to the science of essential oils and other perfume materials, we find a genealogy leading in another direction.

The early writings on essential oils are a part—a very small and inconsiderable part—of the writ-

ings on distillation, and hence are linked to the literature of alcohol and of the liquor industry. Indeed, one may think, this is a strange alliance; to our minds, today, the early association of the writings of perfumery and cosmetics is easier to comprehend than a common source of writings on perfumery and on alcoholic beverages.

Early in the sixteenth century, Hieronymus von Brunschwig published the first of several treatises on distillation, and although the science of distillation was already many centuries old, this work of Brunschwig is frequently referred to as the earliest printed book on any aspect of chemistry. This work, as Gildemeister points out in the introductory material to "The Volatile Oils," contains references to but three essential oils, and in general ignores the field of perfumes. But the sixteenth century was to see an elaboration and development of the writings on distillation, and later works of the period included considerable material on essential oils. An important work in this developing literature was written by Jacques Besson, "L'Art et Moyen Parfait de Tirer Huyles et Eaux de Tous Médicaments Oléagineux" (1571), whose title would indicate that the study of essential oil production was linked not only to distillation but to medicine and therapy.

The need for a literature on distillation as applied to perfumery became greater with the passage of time. In 1753, under the pseu-

donym of Déjean, Antoine Hornot published his "Traité Raisonné de la Distillation," in which he gave specific instructions for obtaining oils from flowers, and even offered perfume formulas. He further developed his researches in another work, also dated 1753, entitled "Traité des Odeurs."

France also supplied a major contribution to the chemical literature in a work, published anonymously but attributed to Abbé Polycarpe Poncelet, entitled "Chimie du Goût et de l'Odorat." This book was first published in 1755, and was reprinted, with additions and changes, for more than half a century. Interestingly enough, Poncelet linked the two senses which are today brought together in so much of our literature and throughout our industry, the senses which crave satisfaction from savory flavors and from pleasant odors.

The equipment utilized for distillation of essential oils, and the specific processes and instructions, were outlined in detail by Jacques François Demachy, in a beautiful large volume, "L'Art du Distillateur d'Eaux Fortes, etc." (1773).

The works of Poncelet, Demachy, and Hornot did not appear in English. However, in the early years of the nineteenth century, distillation was the subject of a study by Augustin Pierre Dubrunfaut, whose work was translated by John Sheridan and published under the title, "A Complete Treatise on the Art of Distillation," a notable development in the continued linking of the

literatures of perfumes and liquors.

Another book of this period was Ambrose Cooper's "The Complete Distiller," of which the second edition was dated 1760, and a later one 1810. It was not Cooper's intention to differentiate between the distiller and the perfumer; he therefore combined in one book the methods "of drawing spirits from malt, raisins, molasses, sugar, etc." with the methods for the manufacture of rose water, orange flower water, cinnamon water, and similar products, and finally included a section on formulas and instructions for making "all the compound waters and rich cordials so largely imported from France and Italy; as, likewise, all those now made in Great Britain."

As the art of perfumery progressed, it had to dissociate itself from the liquor industry. The studies of essential oils, based on botanical classifications and advanced chemical knowledge, had gone forward, and there began to appear the first books devoted to the subject, alphabetical descriptions, handbooks, botanical arrangements, several of which have remained famous to this day. It was this literature of the nineteenth century that led to the first appearance of the monumental work of Gildemeister and Hoffmann, known in English as "The Volatile Oils," and to the contributions of Semmler, Charabot and his colleagues, and Sawyer, among others. Concurrent with the development of this important and permanent

new literature on essential oils, there grew a need for works devoted to the new synthetic organic chemicals that were being utilized in perfumery. The last half of the nineteenth century saw the successful synthesis of coumarin by William Henry Perkin; the synthesis of vanillin by Tiemann; the creation of ionone and synthetic musks—in short, the birth of a new industry which revolutionized the art of perfumery, and which had to be reflected in its literature.

The earliest work devoted to synthetic aromatic materials seems to be "Les Parfums Artificiels" (1900) by Eugène Charabot. When we consider that aromatic chemistry was in its infancy, it is amazing to chronicle the large number of significant aromatics that were described by Charabot. In addition to those mentioned previously, this book included descriptions of linalool and its esters, citronellol, geraniol, menthol, methyl salicylate, eugenol, isoeugenol, citral, benzaldehyde, yara yara, neroline, cinnamic aldehyde, heliotropin, aubepine, and many another substance utilized in large quantities to this day.

We have come to the introduction of synthetics to the literature, and this would be a natural stopping-point for our discussion, as we have sought to confine ourselves to the origins and the highlights of the development of this literature, rather than to bring it up to date. However, there are three other works which we should like to mention.

The first is the curious and delightful little essay by Benjamin Franklin, entitled—it really had no title, but it has been given one by various publishers—“On Perfumes” or “A Letter to the Royal Academy of Brussels.” Here is a work as clever as it is ribald, written with the inimitable humor of the great Franklin.

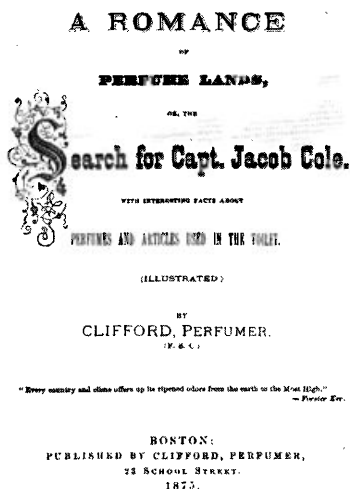


Figure 4.—A curious book in perfume literature is this nineteenth-century novel, “A Romance of Perfume Lands.” (Collection, Library of the Society of Cosmetic Chemists.)

The second is the strange story of adventure, “A Romance of Perfume Lands, or, the Search for Capt. Jacob Cole, with Interesting Facts about Perfumes and Articles Used in the Toilet,” by Frank S. Clifford (Boston, 1875), a story of a world-wide search that takes the hero and

his party to every land where perfume-oil bearing plants are grown. Dull as it is, this is a unique contribution to the literature.

Finally, there is “The Romance of Perfumes,” a small volume by Richard Le Gallienne, not an original historical document, but as precious and exquisite a piece of writing as the gentle art of perfumery has ever inspired.

In summarizing, I should like to emphasize the following points:

1. There is considerable confusion and error in many histories and bibliographies concerning authors, dates, places of publication, and language of origin. Previous bibliographical references should therefore be checked at original sources, in order to avoid perpetuation of the errors.

2. There is a great deal of unknown and forgotten literature, which can fill an important gap in the history of perfumes and of cosmetics.

3. It is difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between the early literature of perfumery and that of kindred arts, but we find that the first literature of perfume blending was linked with that of medical therapy and of bodily adornment.

4. A large part of the extant early writings on perfumery originated in Italy, and there has been a disproportionate emphasis placed by historians on the French contribution, at the expense of the Italian.

5. The first English language books pertinent to perfumery were the pharmacopœias as well as the

popular books addressed to the English ladies, instructing them in the home manufacture of perfumes, flavors, and beauty preparations.

6. The early literature of essential oils and of the chemistry of perfume materials had its forerunner in the literature of distillation, and was therefore linked with works on intoxicating beverages.

Acknowledgment: The writer is indebted to Miss Florence E. Wall for her personal aid in the preparation of this paper; to Richard S. Wormser, dealer in rare books, who obtained many of the books mentioned herein, and obtained information on others; to several previous writers, and trade and scientific journals whose bibliographical data have proved helpful.

CHICAGO SOCIETY OF COSMETIC CHEMISTS

The Chicago Society of Cosmetic Chemists has elected the following officers for 1949:

President: S. D. Gershon, Ph.D.
(Pepsodent Division, Lever Brothers Co.)

Vice-President: E. L. Rose, B.S.
(Kathryn Inc.)

Secretary: S. Kramer, Ph.D.
(Marcelle Cosmetics Inc.)

Treasurer: H. J. White, B.A.
(Swift & Co., Research Laboratories)

(Company affiliation stated for identification purposes only.)

The first regular dinner meeting of the Chicago Society of Cosmetic Chemists in the year 1949 will be held on

Tuesday, January 11, 6:30 p.m., at the
Electric Club in the Civic Opera Bldg.

Mr. Wm. E. Lieb, M.S., Chemist, Allen B. Wrisley Company, will give a Report on the Papers presented at the December meetings in New York of the Society of Cosmetic Chemists and of the Scientific Section of the Toilet Goods Association.

This report will offer an unprecedented opportunity to obtain up-to-date information to the many cosmetic chemists of the Chicago region who are unable to attend all of the New York meetings. The Chicago Society of Cosmetic Chemists is proud to initiate this valuable service to its members.

The *Chicago* Society of Cosmetic Chemists was formed with the intention of becoming a Section of the Society of Cosmetic Chemists. Final plans are now being arranged.—*Ed.*