

THEOPHRASTUS

ENQUIRY INTO PLANTS

AND MINOR WORKS ON ODOURS AND
WEATHER SIGNS

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II



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BOOK IX

OF THE JUICES OF PLANTS, AND OF THE MEDICINAL PROPERTIES OF HERBS.

Of the various kinds of plant-juices and the methods of collecting them.

I. ¹ Moisture belongs to plants as such and some call it the 'sap,' to give it a general name; and it plainly has ² special qualities in each plant. This moisture is attended by a taste, in some cases more, in some less, while in some it would seem to have none, so weak and watery is it. Now all plants have most moisture at the time of making growth, but it is strongest and most shows its character when the plant has ceased to grow and to bear fruit. Again in some plants the juice has a special colour; in some it is white, as in those which have a milky juice; in some blood-red, as in centaury ³ and the spinous plant which is called distaff-thistle; in some green: and in some of other colours. And these qualities are more obvious in annual ⁴ plants and those with annual stems than in trees.

Again in some plants the juice is merely thick, as in those in which it is of milky character; but in some it is of gummy character, as in silver-fir fir terebinth Aleppo pine almond *kerasos* (bird-cherry) bullace Phoenician cedar prickly cedar acacia elm.⁵ For

⁴ ἐν inserted here by W. instead of before τοῖς ἐπερείοις.

⁵ πτελέας after κέδρου P₂Ald.; transposed by Sch. after Tobias Aldinus. cf. Plin. 13. 67.

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it is only given to dogs when it is desired to purge them. And in certain other plants also such differences are mentioned.

Further we may¹ add statements made by druggists and herb-diggers, which in some cases may be to the point, but in others contain exaggeration. Thus they enjoin that in cutting some roots one should stand to windward,—for instance, in cutting *thapsia* among others, and that one should first anoint oneself with oil,² for that one's body will swell up if one stands the other way. Also that the fruit of the wild rose must be gathered standing to windward, since otherwise there is danger to the eyes. Also that some roots should be gathered at night, others by day, and some before the sun strikes on them, for instance those of the plant called honeysuckle.³

These and similar remarks may well seem to be not off the point, for the properties of these plants are hurtful; they take hold, it is said, like fire and burn; ⁴ for hellebore too soon makes the head heavy, and men cannot go on digging it up for long; wherefore they first eat garlic and take a draught of neat wine therewith. On the other hand the following ideas may be considered far-fetched and irrelevant; ⁵ for instance they say that the peony, which some call *glykyside*, should be dug up at night, for, if a man does it in the day-time and is observed by a woodpecker while he is gathering the fruit, he risks the loss of his eyesight; and, if he is cutting the root at the time, he gets *prolapsus ani*.

² Plin. 13. 124; Diosc. 4. 153.

³ *cf.* 9. 18. 6. ⁴ Plin. 25. 50.

⁵ Plin. 27. 85; 25. 29.