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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

From Basket to Casket? The Basket Bearer of Belladonna for Liebig Company Processing



According to this French-language version of a trade card distributed by a company inspired by chloroform discoverer Justus von Liebig (1803 to 1873), fruits of the deadly nightshade or belladonna plant (*Atropa belladonna*) were at one time plucked in southwestern Germany by “a peasant of the Black Forest.” As long as she never sampled more than nine of the sweet berries of belladonna, the woman would arrive, perhaps disoriented but safely to the manufacturing “laboratory...[with a] delivery of belladonna fruit.” (Eating as few as ten berries could have poisoned her to death.) From the baskets she and others bore on their heads and in their hands, the Liebig Company would ferment a mash of the berries for ethanolic extraction of atropine from this poisonous member of the Solanaceae family of plants. Atropine is still used today to accelerate the rhythm of dangerously slowing hearts. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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