

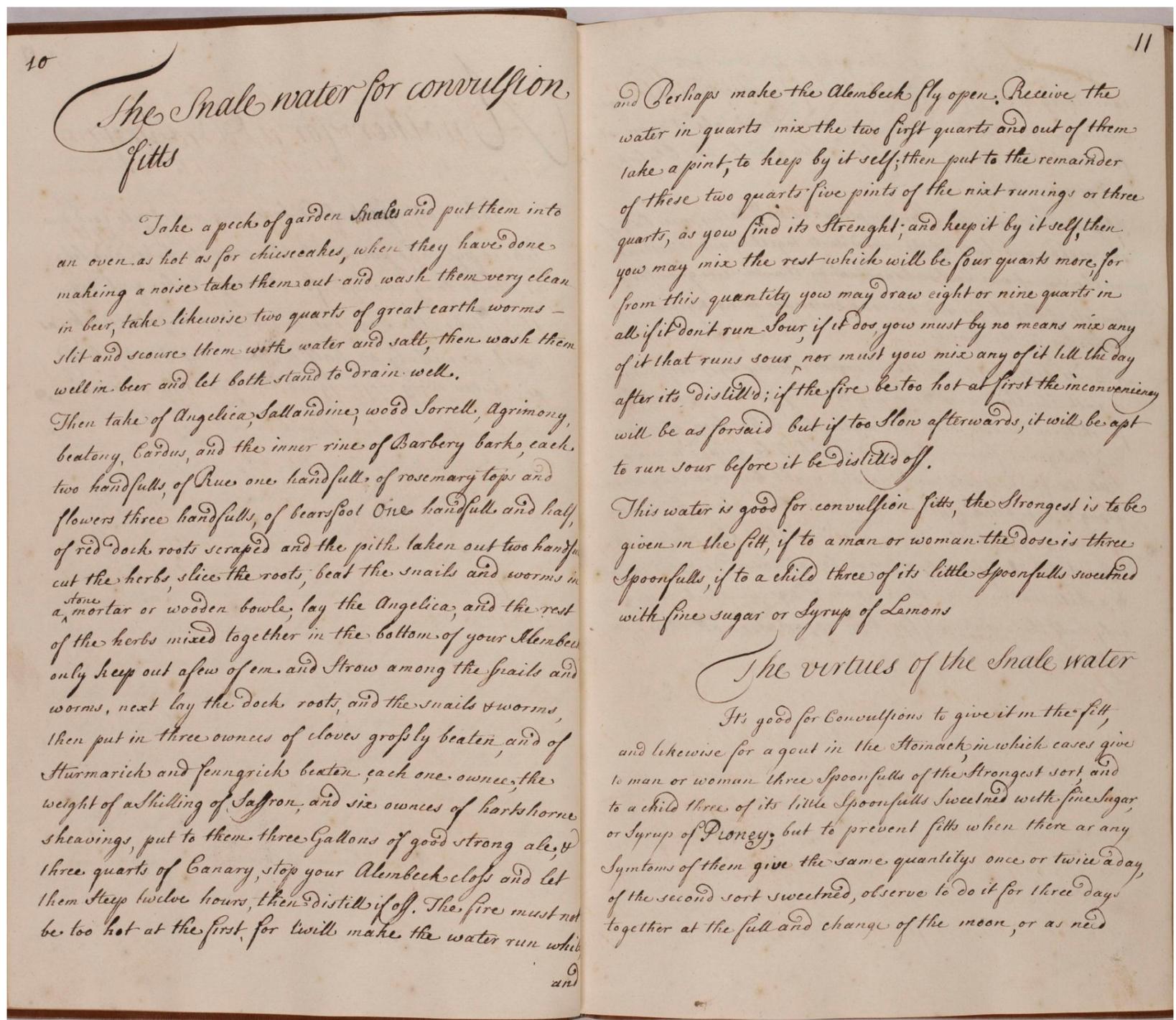
Snail Water

A recipe for 'snail water' is contained in a sumptuous home remedy book which was clearly compiled for a wealthy household which had access not only to a wide range and large quantities of ingredients, but also to specialised equipment.

The title page of the volume is inscribed "A Collection of Receipts [recipes] by Mrs Villiers", although it has not yet been established exactly who this lady was. The volume does not contain a date, but the handwriting suggests that it was compiled in the late 17th century, and Mrs Villiers refers to one of her recipes for ointment which she used during the Civil War:

"This green salve is extraordinary good for any green wound [a fresh wound] and prevents it from gangring [gangrene]. In the civil wars when there were cart loads of wounded soldiers of the king's party, I made a great deal of it & sent them; the surgeons approved of it mightily, above many other salves that were sent by charitable people."

One of the more unusual recipes in Mrs Villiers' book is for Snail Water, which was a medical concoction used as a remedy for convulsions and fits.



"Take a peck of garden snails and put them into an oven, as hot as for chiesecakes; when they have done making a noise take them out and wash them very clean in beer; take likewise two quarts of great earth worms, slit and scoure them with water and salt, then wash them well in beer and let both stand to drain well."

The recipe then includes various herbs, bark and roots, measured in handfuls, into which the snails and worms have to be beaten, before the mixture is added to three gallons of good strong ale and three quarts of canary wine in a distilling vessel called an alembic. The mixture is then left to stand for 12 hours before adding heat to distil the final product.

The two final paragraphs detail the quantities of the Snail Water to be administered – three spoonfuls for a man or a woman, three little spoonfuls for a child, sweetened with fine sugar or syrup of lemons or syrup of peony.

The other recipes in this volume include distilled liquid medicines of various sorts, for instance Strong Rue Water, Treacle Water, and Cinnamon Water. There are also recipes for ointments, syrups, purges for the digestion, and plasters to draw out infections.

Some of the remedies are treatments for specific illnesses, for instance *"An approved dyet drink for The King's Evil"*, which was an infection of the lymph nodes, *"An excellent water for sore mouths or throats"*, *"A gentle purge for children that have worms"* and a particularly thorough series of entries on smallpox.

A number of the recipes are headed with the name of the person from whom Mrs Villiers obtained them. Some of these are well-known physicians of the period and others are wealthy and titled women whom she knew.

Mrs Villiers' relief at an effective remedy for oral thrush in babies is evident on the page headed *"Mrs Fletcher's syrup for a thrush, of which I have had much experience"*.

The syrup is made of crab apple juice, red sage and sugar and is administered to the child as follows:

"Anoint the mouth with a feather five or six times in twenty four hours, or oftener; never rub it, nor endeavour to take off the white specks (it torments the child and does no manner of good but harm). Give the child to swallow down half, or little more than half of its own little spoonfull of the syrup, twice or thrice in twenty four hours, to heal inwardly."

Document reference: Worsley 20