

# On Sage, his description, properties uses and growth,

A treatise by the hand of Pani Jadwiga Zajaczkowa, scholar of the Maunche, syndic  
and Metressa of the Guild of Herbalists and Apothecaries

Submitted on this 10<sup>th</sup> day of Marche, in the year of our Lord MDC, the year of  
the Societie XXXIX to Master Jehan du Lac and the faculty of the Universitie  
of Carolingia.

## *A Treatise on Sage*

### Dedication

To the most knowledgeable and charitable Master, Baron Jehan, patron of the University of Carolingia, who may well be called Sage of himself . . .

You may peradventure wonder, or if not yourself, many other learned gentlemen of Carolingia will, why I, being a woman, and not able to write perfectly in the Latin tongue, would be so inconsiderate as to set pen to paper, and write a treatise on the nature and uses of the herb Sage, known to the ancients as *Salvia*, and to submit it to you and your learned Doctors. But I pray you, and your learned facultie, give me leave to answer both the one and the other.

In these degenerate times, many men write, as all know, but few have knowledge. The Colleges of Physicians, and the Faculties of Medicine of many and many a University, have set about and girded the knowledge of the arts of physic and chirurgierie as they know them with many a strong wall of law and of custom, so that those who cannot enter by the gate of the rich, must lean against the enclosure, in hope of catching a crumb of knowledge through those defenses. But the Facultie of Carolingia, being wise and prudent men, seek rather to spread out than to containe that precious gift of God, knowledge. Therefore do I venture to write in the Common tongue, and for this most reverent and esteemed Foundation.

But yet I am a woman, and many a man would say, as doth the author of the *Secrettes of Women*, that we are false and foolish. Master Chaucer, in his *Canterbury Tales* writeth of the goodwife Hen who poisons her Lord Cockerell with her messes of physic, and Saint Anselm would have us sit silent always. But as the Lady *Christine of Pisa* pointeth out, the weaknesse of some of our sex doth not contaminate us all, and there are many notable Women whose voices in physic should be trusted.

Did not the Magdalen break open her pot of ointment to tend the Lord? and did not the Greek Hygeia and Panacea tend the ill in that temple of their father, Aesculapius? Among the doctors of Salerno, were there not women? And among them, the famous lady, Trotula? The Abbess *Hildegarde*, as all know, was inspired by God to write not only treatises on the nature of the world, but on physic. (Some say she did not write these treatises, called *Physica* and *Causae et Curae*, and that men came later and wrote in her name— but the name of a Woman be so weake, why should any man use it to lend credence to his worke?) I challenge any man or woman in the city if no woman, mother, sister, friend, tended them when they were sick? The charitable hospitals, such as those of Saint Bartholemew's in England and the *Hôtel-Dieu* in Paris, and the hospitallers of Spain, do they not have nurses to care for the sick, to bathe them, to feed them, to care for them, to administer what remedies the physicians prescribe, and to bury them when Christ, the great Physician, administers the final remedy? To preserve the modestie of women, the great and learned Colleges of Physicians have allowed midwives to assist women in their labor; the rolls of the guilds of surgery and of the apothecaries do list women practicioners who learned from their fathers and husbands and taught their apprentices.

For there are many men too who are quacks and fools and whose words in matters of health and physic are not to be trusted. Every man knoweth a man or woman who has come to grief from evil advice, whether that advice be from a Doctor of Medicine or a mere empiric.

But I am not vain enough to claim I know more than the Learned Doctors of this Universitie. Instead, I bring my poor treatise to them. For if there be fault in my knowledge, or in my rhetoric, let me be corrected; I will welcome the hand that corrects me as a dutiful child is grateful for the chastisements of its parents, or the saints welcome the chastisement of God. What I have learned, I have learned from much reading, and from long continuance in the tending of gardens and households and the use of herbs therein.

So, therefore, let me lay out plain and straight what I have learned of that herb Sage, which is most meete to be a mefe for these learned men, and beg Your Excellency's indulgence if I trespass the bounds of proprietic.

### Introduction

Many a scholar, both in these modern times and among the ancient sages, hath set out to write a text of the properties and uses of all herbs. I am but a weak and feeble woman, and such a task would be too large for the small gifts that I have been given. Nor am I well-travelled enough to compass descriptions of the growing of fabulous spices from the Indies and Egypt. Yet such gifts of the intellect as I have are given by God, and should not be neglected. Just as the gardener encourages

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each herb in his plot to grow their best, so doth the Lord God encourage his people to make the best use of their talents. I would not be like the servant in the parable, who given one talent buries and hides it for fear of thieves, rather than investing it so it may multiply. So, with fear and trembling, I set forth this treatise on the manner and nature of the herb Sage, called *Salvia* by the ancients.

The name of sage is our corruption of *Salvia*, which signifies its strength; the Saxons called it *Salfian*. *Dioscorides* gives it the names: *Claphoscon*, *Sphagnon*, *Cosmin*, *Phagnon*, *Becion*, *Apusi*, *Cosalon*.

The physicians of Salerno did recognize its power when they said, *Tur moriatur homo, cui salvia crescit in horto*, which is, being said, how shall a man die, if sage groweth in his garden? Though further they did admit, that no herb can be grown against death. And truthfully, there be many illnesses which *salvia* doth battle with, and brings comfort to. Furthermore, it is known that sage comforteth and strengtheneth the brain and memory. Those faculties are the most important, if those be lost, what comfort is there if life continueth? For this reason do we call a wise man, sage.

### Description and Kinds

The plant is a most noble shrub. When it is young, it is gray-green, and hath small leaves of an Oval shape, with smooth edges but much toothed on the surface, as a cow's tongue. The branches spreadeth wide and upright, dividing near to the ground. The stems are square, and light green or gray. The leaves grow abundantly and upright, on opposite sides of the stem. If it abideth a year or more, the main Trunks become hard and gray, and are like wood. In the colder parts, it dropeth its leaves in winter-tide; but in these more seasonable climes, the branches oft bear some leaves green all winter. The roots are of a moderate size, and grow perhaps a hands-length deep in the soil, reaching outward to the girth of the plant or a little more.

Its flowers are of a light blue, though I have seen some few that flowerd white, and it flowereth in the summer-time, from the feast of John the Baptist to the Assumption of the Virgen-- should the weather be untimely hot and dry, the sage flowereth early; in wet years, the sage flowereth latter. By reason of its tartness, its greyness, and that it be associated with blood and with wisdom, the learned Astronomers do say sage is associated with the planet Jupiter, which makes it powerful in sanguine causes. Howsoever because it be hot and drie, if it be overused it breedeth thickness of the blude.

The leaves only have I heard of and seen used, neither the wood nor the flower being much sought after. When the leafs are picked and dried hanging or on a screen, they are gray. Some like to grind them thus into powder, but it liketh me not. Let the sprigs be dried hanging and in a drie ayre, and then close them up in a bagge or box, and use them as occasion call. Sage both fresh and dried is used in physic and in cookery; as any huswife knoweth, the fresh plant is more powerful than the dried, but the contraction of drying doth concentrate his properties so that a lesser quantitie worketh as a greater quantitie of the fresh stuff.

Some claim to keep sage and other herbs dried in a baked coffin all winter, but if put in a jar or bottyl well stoppt, they keep well enough; and should you have neither by you, store your herbs dried in a bagge or chest, and gett newe and faire ones each year. And indeed, the physician or apothecarie should change his stock of drie herbs every yeare, lest they be infested with bugges and dust.

I have also in my garden another kinde, which some call red sage. His leafes are of a kind of reddish-purple, coming to green at the edges, and the stems are reddish also. Many who use medicine vouchsafe that the red is more powerful than the green, but for my purposes they worketh equally well.

I have latterly heard rumor that a gardiner and seed merchant in the Citie of London breedeth a kind of parti-colored sage, whose leaves are sometimes white, sometimes red, and sometimes green, or trimmed and spotted with the colors. But such things are but toys for rich men and dreamers; the red and the green suffice for honest men.

Though the Poor place sage and suchlike herbs in the worst ground in the garden, the wise gardeners of old and nowadays say that a well drest soil doeth best for Sage. I have known it to grow in shade, and in red-clay soil, but it liketh best a loose sweet soil, not often dunded, and a great Quantitie of Sunne. In the Italties it growth in the full strength of the sun, which at noonday will scorch the skin. In these parts, *Salvia* doth not often grow above two feet in height. But in a rich, fat, well dunded ground, I have seen Sage bushes that were the height of a child. It is said that the plants grow higher where the weather is both hot and dry, in Italy, Greece and France. Though it can be brought from seed, it is a paltrey business, and tis better to set slipes of the branches, which boweth out to the ground as the limbs of an aged man. Englishmen plant it in February, March, September or October. Husbandmen say Sage plants are best planted close, and together they will choke away

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the weeds, but thou must clean out dead leaves and rubbish from under the branches, lest noxious Toades and other Reptiles nest there. I have heard it said, and seen it is so, that you must set new slips from time to time, and cut the Branches back close on one side, for if the plant grow too Woodey they said it will strangle itself and lose vigor, as those long in appointment may grow careless in office. It is good to grow in gardens near the house, as it is most wholesome. I hear tell that in England every garden high and low has bushes of it.

Some say there are two kinds, male and female, wild and domestic, or greater and lesser. Some say also that there is a wild sage, whose stems hath little ears like mice. These I myself hath not seen. Some call the wild sage for physic, but the Arab *Ibn Botton*, he who wrote the *Tacuinum Sanitatis in Medicina*, saith that the garden kind is better if less heating.

### Properties and Use

Sage is both hot and dry, as all may see by bruising a leaf and placing it upon the tongue. Therefor do cooks and physicians use it in recipes to allay cold and wet ingredients and conditions. Some say it is hot in the first degree and dry in the second, some say it is both hot and dry in the second degree, and I have read one says it is hot and drie in the third, or dangerous degree. In anie case, it is of the choleric complexion, which is hot and dry, and is opposed to phlegmatic complaints, which are cold and moist. It is of more use to the elderly than to the young, as age makes man more cold and moist in complexion, and it is of more use for female complaints than male, since women are naturally colder and moister than men. By the association of opposites, it is good for the brain and the joints, which are of a phlegmatic nature. Through its association with Jupiter, who controls the sanguine humors, it cleanses and strengthens the blood. It is also directed to the complaints of age, such as palsy, for it dries the moisture and heats the cold in the joints. It is better in the winter and in the cold, forbye its heat, but it is used in the months of the spring also.

A decoction of sage, the leaves and branches boiled in water, hath many uses. Because of its heating nature, In the summer-time, it is used to bath legs and joynts when they ache with palsey or the cramp. It is said that oft bathing with it strengthens the joints and sinews. It is much used for ills and itching of the privy parts of men and women.

Sage has great power to cleanse, so that it is ofte prescribed by the physicians for wounds, itches, and for spring tonics. Englishmen say that sage in May preserves the health; they will eat it with May butter; some mingle it with the butter as we do spices and break their fast therewith. I have heard that the English countrie-folke say *He shall live for Aye, that eat Sage in Maye*. Bitter herbs, eaten in spring-tide or Lent with the greens, as leeks, spinage, piss-in-bed, violetes, sorrel, spinache, creass, cleanse the body of the phlegms of winter.

The Saxons did follow *Dioscorides* in using this herb it for itching of the privy parts, and also itching of the fundament, being boiled in water and the part washed with it, or the water smeared on. I have also heard of it being smoked under a cover, and the smoke directed to the privy parts and fundament, to bring relief. Because of its styptic nature, it slows the bloody flux, but maketh men and women to piss. To stay the flux it is best used with Wormwood.

As the learned abbess *Hildegarde* was moved by visions to write of it, that it is good to eat against noxious humours. Those who are ill with a superfluity of harmful humors should pulverize sage and eat it with bread. Wine in which sage has been cooked the abbess suggests for those with too much phlegm, and for aches and pains in the bones that cause palsy, which she calls *virgichtiget*, water in which sage has been boiled will decrease the pain and the palsy.

Because it is is powerful in cleansing and in healing, it is thus good for those conditions which come of contractions of the muscles, such as palsy. It is by this power it brings down the menses and expelleth the dead child, for those conditions come of a superfluitie of noxious humors in the womb.

*Dioscorides* sayeth that wicked women use it in a pessary to kill the child in the womb, but *Agrippa* saith it is a Holy herb for women that allows them to bear when despaired of. *Agrippa* prescribeth a course of Sage for women who cannot retain a mans seed and so do not quicken with child. *Pliny* professed that the *Hearbe* both procures Womens Courses, and stayeth the flux of them coming down too fast. In the writings of *Galien*, even the smell of the Sage stoppeth the immoderate flux of the menses. How can this be so? Wise men and gardeners say that some of the plants of the ancients have changed and been brought to better nature since the Greeks wrote; scholars and clerks tell us that a slip of the pen may make a wife a widow or a truth falsehood. Therefore, common sense shows us that the sage that groweth in our gardens is not the poisonous and ill-humored plant that *Dioscorides* writes of. It is true that sage will draw down retained menses, and women take it in water or wine for pain in the belly, but I never knew a woman who lost a living babe through too much sage-eating!

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Firstly, this is because the nature of the living child in the womb differs from that of the menses. The further concoction of the blood in the womb after the addition of the man's seed changes its nature. When a woman is conceived of a living child, her excessive food is cooked by the breasts into food for the child, which is conveyed to them by a vein that is the umbilicus. However, when the child is dead, the putrid matter of the excess food builds up in the womb indeed as would suppressed menses.

Secondly, it is because by its nature, sage is good for cold conditions of the sinews, such as palsy, and aches of the joints. It can be plainly seen by anyone who cooked or ate a pig's womb that the womb is container of muscle. If the muscle be too lax, the seed slips out. If it be too tight, the seed is rejected and the menses retained. So, do midwives tell women to drink catnip or sage cooked in water when they come near being brought to bed, so that the womb may assist the child to labor forth.

Thirdly, and lastly, this herb doth assist in cases of improperly concocted phlegm, where it be too thick or too thin. It is known to all men that women produce a sort of phlegm in their privy parts, thus to assist and make easy the entrance of the male member. But if that phlegm is too thick, the seed cannot enter; if it be too thin, the seed will be washed away. This is why, though the monks claim that a woman must enjoy the act of coition to conceive, there be cases known among women and midwives where a girl or matron taken by force, or in anger, doth conceive— for if by ill luck her phlegm be of the right condition when this outrage doth occur, the protection Nature gives them is for naught.

So a decoction of sage cleanseth the matrix and expells the dead child, but tightens the mouth of the womb to retain living embryos. Therefore this Herbe is helpful, and not poisonous, to woman and childe.

Distresses of the belly, colics, and other hardness of the belly or matrix is oft treated with sage, but if the cause be a true colic, and wind in a man's belly, I say it is better to treat it with dill, fennel, anise, coriander and such seedes that comforteth the stomach and expelleth wind. Nor is it suitable for colics or hardness of the belly in infants, for it is too dry and hot for their young natures.

Sage is often used eaten among potherbs, in sallats, and in made dishes with other hot, dry herbs, such as rosemary, thyme, and marjoram. But too much of it will bring a drye and sharp taste to the dish, just as too much learning or memory will discomfit a man and make him unfit for gentle company.

In all rheums, palsies and aches of the joints, sage water being distilled, or water in which sage is sodden in, easeth. When the ewerer doth scent the water with which to wash the hands, sage, or sage and dried orange peel if you have some by, is a goodly scent and hath been used among the lesser nobles of Paris. Water of sage, or some small drops of the oil, I have tried, but I find that merely cooking the herb in water and straining it maketh a good wash-water, which maketh the hands clean and stirreth up appetite to meate.

The green sauce with sage doth provoke the appetite to meate, as *Hildegarde* writeth. To make such a sauce, take a good handful of the leaves of parsley, five good bigge leafs of sage, a slice of drie household bread, three cloves of garlic, pepper, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, of each a spoonful, and ten or so shavings of nutmeg. You will grinde your spices first, then into the mortar put the parsely and the Sawge and grind fine. Remove it to a bowl, and grind bread in the mortar to bring the spices, then mix altogether and moisten with good clear vinegre till it be smooth and running. This sauce, or any other made likewise, may be served with mete, or meddled with a pottage of bland greens such as beets or turnip-greens.

The French like to make sauces of sage, with parsley and spices; the Germans take it with parsley in stuffed dishes and meat in a crust, the Spanish like it with foods made with cheese in the mortar. All people like egg and cheese dishes with sage. If you have fresh sage to hand, grinde it up small, and meddle it with a good number of eggs, and fry it on a griddle with some hot lard, and it will be good. I have seen sage leaves frittered, and eaten of mete-balles wrapped in leaves of sage. Every cook knows when mixing parsley and sage in a dish, to have a goodlie quantitie of parsley to sage, or the taste will be drie and bitter. Truthfully, any dish that needeth hot dry herbs may use sage, in moderation, for it is healthful, as *Platina* discourseth.

It accordeth well with pigges meat or chicken or other temperate birdes, as well as eggs, for that they are most nearly perfect in nature. *Platina* would have the cook sprynkle the roast pig with a sauce of vinegar, safron, pepper, & sprigs of sage, rosemary or bay, those also being hotte and dry herbs. In France and in England, I have heard physicians and cooks direct to serve cold chicken in a sauce of sage. The dryness of the sage counteracts the moistness of the chicken, and the heat of the herb is allayed by the chicken being cold. When a cook wants to serve a green sauce, which is somewhat cold and moist, but allayed with the heat of vinegar or wine, with a dish that is somewhat cold and moist, he may temper it further with the heat and driness of sage in the sauce. Furthermore, a sauce with sage is good to stir up the brain, and since such temperate foods are good for those who study and learn, such as scholars, so it is good to give them an appetite for their studies also.

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To make a sallet with sawge, use two great handfules of spinage, two of arugula or lettuce each green and read, a handfule of pisse-in-bed if it be very young, a half-handfule of parsley, some cresse, a bunch of garden-mint off the stems, a sprig of rosemary, twelve leaves of sage, some leaves of basell. Wash all in faire water, and tear your large greens to the size of your palm. Then chop fine the mint, rosemary, basil, and sage, and meddle it with the other leaves. Dress with fine sallet oil, oylive or nut, walnut or hazel being best. If you have any to hand, you may use sage vinegar to dress it; otherwise, use plain vinegar.

Sage vinegar is made in thus wise. Take fair vinegre or alegar, (or the aigre which cometh of cider or perry, which is best). Fill a fair, cleane, new pot with the leaves and tender branches of sage. Pour your vinegre over, and with a stick or spoon, prick down into the pot so that all the gas escapes. Then stop it loosely, put it on coles of a gentle heat for the space of an hour. When it is cooled, stop it close and put it in a dark spot for some months. This sour is good for dressing of meats and of sallets, and for cleansing of itchings and spots.

The French make a sage wine, and the Germans a mead with hops and sage. To make a sage wine, in white wine put to steep sage without its stems, cloves, laurel leaves, long pepper, ginger. To two pounds of sage have half an ounce of cloves, the same of laurel leaf, one fourth that of ginger, the same of long pepper. Or you may meddle sage water with your white wine in a goblet at table.

Brewers do sometimes place sage in the tun whilst brewing, and thus make a sage ale, which is considered most healthful, and which I find very grateful to the taste. The receipt I have heard sayeth to take Sage, Squinancywort, Spiknard, Calamus root, Fennell seede, and Betony and put it to the Ale after it hath been mashed. If you do not have all of the aforesaid herbs by you, ale made with Sage and Fennel alone is good. Sip it hot for a cough and tightness of the lungs, or a consumption, as the Saxons did do. But Sage Ale may also be made after the fashion of sage wine, with sage soaked in the ale or brewed with it. These wines and ales do comfort the stomach, especially in cases of squeamishness and winde, and combat noxious humors bred by disordered eating. If it be brewed with Squinancy, it is also good for soreness of the throat and a quinsey.

Because of its biting and cutting nature, sage juyce in water, or sage boiled in water or wine, is much recommended for the washing of wounds and for sores in the throat, and for the cough. This is also how it stoppeth the flux, and how it maketh men to piss.

Sage juyce with vinegar is drunk to keep off the plague, but such things are in the Hands of God.

The syrup of sage, or of sage and thyme, I have used in coughs and sore throats. Many apothecaries press forth the juyce of the leaves, or boil sage in water, and then boil that juyce or decoction with sugar to form a syrup. But of my own experience, I prefer to make a sirop of three parts white sugar fine ground to 1 part water, boiled on a bright, clean fire until it become somewhat thick when dropped on a plate, and when the sirop is made to put the leaves and branches of sage in it, keeping it on hearth for the time it takes to walk a field twice. Then cover the pot with a cloath or sieve lest dust or flying pests enter in, and set it aside overnight; on the morrow strain it clear and store it close-stopped in a pot or bottle closed with a stopper and wax cloth or string. You may take this syrup by the spoonful for the cough or the consumption, or suckt for the sore throat, or mixt with water after the manner of a julep.

Do you meddle your sage or the juce thereof with fine clarified honey, it will keep it from making the blood thick, which is a danger the *Arabs* warn of, and hony from beese fed on sage flowers, or in wich sawge hath been steept, is good for all the causes aforesaid.

For sore throats and sores of the mouth, water of sage or sage syrup or vinegar in water maketh a good garegel, being held in the mouth and washing the throat, tilting the head back and breathing out through the mouth. Some men mix rosemary, honeysuckle and plaintain with the sage, and boil in wine with alum and honey; this can be a gargle or a wash for great sores and itching, or a tooth-cleaner.

*Platina* doth praise Sage smeared on the teeth. It doth improve the smell of the mouth and fasten the teeth. From a certain writer, I learnt a recipe that is good to clean the teeth and keep them from yellow, that is, take sage and fine white salt, of each a like weight, and grind them together to a paste in your mortar. Then spread the paste on a plate or bord and place in an oven after the bread is removed; it will dry harde. Then take your pestle up again and grind it to a powder, and use the powder on a coarse flaxen cloth to clean the teeth, morning and evening, rinsed with cold water as *Hildegard* directeth.

Should you have no syrup of sage to make the garegel with you can mingle this tooth-powder with water and rinse the throat with that.

The branches and the leaves are also used for their sharp and grateful scent, which chaseth noxious ayres. House-

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keepers do use it among their strewing-herbs and rushes, with other plants such as tyme, tansy, rose-marie, lavender and bawlm. Some say that the scent of sage doth keep moths away from clowths stored in chests also.

The ancients and many modern hus-wives say that a fomentation of sage with wine, the boiled herb laid upon the place, be good for a Stitch; but I say the cure is in the heat of the fomentation. For many and many say a fomentation of this or that herb be good for a stitch, but a pillow of warm oat-bran, or even a cat or dogge, laid against the place, doth oftentimes ease such a cramp.

Women do use it in hair-rinses, if their hair be dark, and this is supported by Dioscorides, who writeth that it be useful to make the hair black.

All men know that Sage comforteth the Brain, and helpeth the Memory. This cometh of his combating the phlegme of the brain, which slows the mind and clogges it. Sage ale or wine, made as before, or sage Syrup or decoction drunk, heat the head and expelleth flemm, soothes coughs and sore throats, and maketh a man to think more clearly. The eating of sage doth quicken and help the brain and senses, help the memory and be good for scholars, some women make a conserve of sage flowers for this purpose. I do hold with the *Tacuinum Sanitatis* that it is good for all cold diseases of the nerves, by comforting the nerves of the brain and of the extremities. Many palsies and rheums of the limbs are disorders of the Nerves, so that Sage doth warm them and soothe them.

The making of dystylled waters hath been rehearsed by many authors, among them a certaine Hieronymus Brunschwig, who had written the *Vertuose booke of the distyllacyon* which Mr. Andrews hath translated and published. Therefore it is not meete that I rehearse it here, save that it be best distyled when it be in floure. But the water of sage is good for many causes, especially of the head—palsie, fallyng sicknesse, dazeness. Also rubbed on, for palsie and cramp. It should be dronke mornynge and evenyng, each tyme ii ounces, or less, and rubbed on sore playces and left to drye of himselfe.

All the other remedies aforesaid are good given for slowness and coldness of the brain, and for the failyng of the mind that cometh with age, and for heaviness & dullnesse of spirit.

Therefore should every man and every woman who valueth the powr of thought given to them by God the Father, they should fall on their knees and give thanks to Him that giveth us all remedies, that such a remedy for our foolishness hath been provided. The judges and prophets of olde were Sages to give us the Word of God, the phylosophers of old, though ignorant of the true way, interpreted for us the Word of Nature. Let us eat Sage so we may see the Word of the Lord prefigured in Nature, and we may long continue in the Workes appointed to us.

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