

## Book Reviews

THOMAS PALMER, *The admirable secrets of physick and chyrurgery*, edited by Thomas Rogers Forbes, New Haven, Conn., and London, Yale University Press, 1984, 8vo, pp. x, 221, £25.00.

One of the earliest documents of medical practice in the North American colonies is published here for the first time. This is a notebook, containing medical remedies, compiled in 1696 by Thomas Palmer (c. 1666–1743), a Massachusetts minister and medical practitioner. Although they have received less attention than the products of more formal academic medicine, remedy collections were always a fundamental resource in medical practice. They provided the content of the practitioner's *vade mecum*, and laymen, too, compiled collections for domestic use. The text edited here is a useful addition to the literature, presenting to the reader the information which a young American practitioner thought most important to his daily work.

Most of the content was transcribed by Palmer from other sources, and at times the editor appears incautious in attributing to Palmer autobiographical statements and opinions which may not have been his own. Sadly, too, a less than admirable secret concerns the whereabouts of the original of Palmer's notebook. T.R. Forbes could not trace it, and worked from one of several known photocopies. This is not altogether satisfactory. Can we, for instance, be entirely certain that the pages missing from the photocopy were really missing or blank in the original? These caveats apart, historians will be grateful to T.R. Forbes for making available a valuable text, for coping successfully with Palmer's lapses into shorthand, and for providing a useful glossary.

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GRAHAM REES and CHRISTOPHER UPTON, *Francis Bacon's Natural philosophy: a new source. A transcription of Manuscript Hardwick 72A with translation and commentary*, Chalfont St Giles, Bucks, British Society for the History of Science, 1984, 8vo, pp. v, 197, illus., £7.90 (paperback), BHSS members £5.60.

The discovery by Peter Beal at Chatsworth House of the manuscript of a hitherto unknown work by Francis Bacon was an important event for philosophers, and in this particular case of more than passing interest to historians of medicine and biology. Graham Rees has now given us an edition of the text with translation and lengthy introduction.

The thirty folio pages of Bacon's early ideas on the ways of death and on postponing old age (*De viis mortis* . . .) are, as Rees writes, a "horrible tangle" of drafts and revisions. Nevertheless, in them one can watch Bacon trying to arrive at a new theory of how natural death, as opposed to death from disease, occurs. Bacon rejected the standard medical theory of radical moisture and heat, where life was likened to a light using up the oil (radical moisture) in a lamp, with the ages of man being a progress from the wetness of youth to the dryness of old age.

Bacon partly reformulated the problem. He argued that we have to discover not only why living organisms die naturally but also why inanimate matter can die (be worn down, decrease, change shape, etc.). To account for death and its opposite, conservation, Bacon produced a complex theory based upon different types of spirits, both inanimate and vital, inhabiting matter, and in some instances spirit as well, and escaping from, conflicting with or being bound into containing matter and spirits. The unity of the worlds of inanimate and living matter and the language of spirits clearly shows the influence of Paracelsian and Neo-platonic philosophy, and in his introduction Graham Rees has carefully set out the structure and origins of Bacon's thinking.

The *De viis mortis* is a significant document for Rees' general thesis, proposed in previous articles, that Bacon was concerned not only with the methods of science but also with developing a speculative philosophy which encompassed all of nature – a philosophy that since the seventeenth century has been forgotten. In *De viis mortis* Bacon is indeed more of a theoretician, applying pneumatic concepts to a set of phenomena, than a philosopher