

A Note on the Pharmaceutical, Medical and Agricultural Books in the
Forbes Collection

by

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The Forbes collection contains three seventeenth-century pharmacopoeias, all published in London and related in varying ways to the Pharmacopoeia Londinensis of 1618, the earliest English pharmacopoeia, sponsored by the London College of Physicians, which became the first pharmacopoeia officially adopted by a nation. One of these, Pharmacopoeia Collegii Regalis Londini, (London: T. Newcomb, 1682) is a later edition of a revision of the above work carried out in 1678. Here the reader learns how to make pharmaceutical preparations and how these should be taken, but not when to take them or what to expect. In the margins, against the list of simples, are written the English translations of the Latin names of simples; the writing appears to be in Forbes' hand. These annotations perhaps suggest that the owner actually used the book, possibly in ministering to himself or more probably to his parishioners, and that he was unfamiliar with Latin plant names. Both these suspicions receive some confirmation from the other two pharmaceutical works in the collection: Pharmacopoeia Londinensis (London: Thos. Dawkes et al., 1685) and Pharmacopoeia Bateana (London: S. Smith & B. Walford, 1694), both by William Salmon, "Professor of Physick". These works are both in English and explain the uses, as well as the preparation, of mixtures; although not annotated, both books show some signs of use.

The two medical books in the collection, Scholae medicae ad candidatorum examen pro Laurea impetranda subeundum (Leyden: J. Maire, 1628) by Abraham Frambesarius and Thesaurus medicinae practicae (London: R. Boulter, 1673) are both, as the title of the first suggests, elementary books; even so, they do not appear to have been much used and are not annotated. Was the giving of pharmaceutical advice within the compass of a parish priest, while medical advice was not?

Gentlemen, even those who took little interest in farming, often had in their libraries a few works on agriculture. The two agricultural works in Forbes' library, however, are unusual in being very early and rather specialized. Hugh Platte's The Jewell House of Art and Nature...together with sundry new experiments in the Art of Husbandry, Distillation, and Moulding (London: Peter Short, 1594) contains practical advice on a wide variety of household, workshop, and farmyard problems, such as how "to make an artificial Malmesie", how "to make smooth or glistering floores or wals" and how "to hold a hot iron barre in a naked hand". ("Dip your hand in molten glew and strew the powder of horne burnt to ashes upon the glew..."). For farmers the book contained little that was novel (unlike another work of Platte's which urged the planting of grain seeds in rows and at spaced intervals, a radical departure from the usual practice of broadcasting and one which was to be adopted only later); the books however, made many ingenious suggestions and there are splendid illustrations of the gadgets and machines Platte advocated. The other agricultural work, Reynolde Scot's A Perfite Platfome of a Hoppe Garden (London: Henry Denham, 1578) is the second edition of a work first published two years earlier which is the earliest book in the English language devoted solely to the growing of hops. English ale had first been adulterated with hops in the fifteenth century, the practice having come from Flanders; but the public and officials were both at first extremely suspicious of the new brew which Andrew Boorde, for instance, considered the "natural drink for a Dutche man". Gradually,

however, beer became the more popular than ale: by 1598 a foreign visitor could write that "the general drink is beer.. excellently well tasted, but strong and what soon fuddles." The appearance of a number of books on hop growing reflects the growing demand for hops in the making of beer. One might suspect that the book came into Forbes' collection almost accidentally, but his copy is abundantly annotated in his own hand and the annotations show a wide experience of hop growing. Can Forbes have had a hop farm?

(Ed. note: In a later issue of the Bulletin Professor Watson will publish a supplement to his earlier article on agricultural manuals in the University's Library. In collaboration with Professor Roberta Styran, he is also preparing an article on our collection of pharmacopoeias).



THE FORBES COLLECTION - COLLECTING HABITS AND THE PERSONAL LIBRARY

by

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What follows is, despite its appearance, neither free association in the presence of columns of figures, nor a parody of statistics (one of the adjuncts of modern library science which is truly scientific). It is a tentative way to begin to come to grips with the building of a personal library if one is allowed the initial assumption that a man builds his library -- that it grows with him, not untended, but with his care.

It must be said straightway that my discussion needs great amplification by example in order to make any distinct claims about the collecting habits of Forbes as revealed in his existing library stock. If a full-scale study of his collection were made, that study would have to be prefaced by the generalizations and qualifications I put forth below. I must stress how well aware I am of the dangers of oversimplifying the problems at hand and of the vague nature of much of the "data". This in my defense in case bare numbers -- which seem often to convince us when words fail -- lend too definite a tone to this essay.

Personal libraries are I think built up by association. Names or genres or subjects become established early, and the collection builds outward from them. We do not expect Forbes' library to be like Wing in miniature: we expect his prejudices, even his curious lacunae. We will never know how Forbes built up his collection; about this we can make only careful generalizations. If he has a high number of first editions of contemporaries such as Baxter, we should be safe in assuming that he got hold of those texts, in the main, relatively soon by seventeenth-century book trade standards after their appearance. It will be seen from the small sampling which follows that Forbes acquired on the average one-third of the output of individual titles by those of his contemporaries in whom he seems to have been interested. This is not surprising when one considers that Forbes had a great interest in controversial literature, and it is surely indicative that Forbes' habits of acquisition were not random. Similarly, if we assume as I have done that most titles were probably acquired (this need not always be taken as meaning "purchased") relatively soon after publication,