

The Library

SOME RECENT ADDITIONS

BROWNE J: *Charles Darwin: Voyaging* Jonathan Cape, 1995; 605pp

Attempting to write a biography of a figure of Darwin's magnitude is an unquestionably daunting undertaking. Readers of *Charles Darwin: Voyaging* will not be disappointed. Janet Browne writes a superb account of the pivotal nineteenth-century figure that is concise, lucid and gripping. The book swiftly immerses the reader in the ideas and atmosphere of the Victorian era, and charts the course of Darwin's fascinating life. Neither fawning nor deferential, the work sketches the influences and events of Darwin's life in impartial yet grasping prose and does indeed reveal how fate and circumstance created this towering figure of biology, sociology, and philosophy. The first in a biographical series of three, this volume concentrates on Darwin's years on the *Beagle* and sets in motion the complex inter-relating confrontations that wrought both the man and his era. Perhaps the only disappointment the reader will go away with is the fact that the second volume has yet to be published. Of interest to the College itself, Darwin's less famous grandfather, Erasmus, was a student of William Cullen and Charles himself studied Medicine in Edinburgh; the College Library holds a first edition of *The Origin of Species*.

HUNTER L, HUTTON S (eds): *Women, Science, and Medicine 1500-1700* Sutton Publishing, 1997; 292pp

Women, Science, and Medicine 1500-1700 is a fascinating collection of essays that sheds new insight into women's contribution to science. More than mere anecdotes, the selections make the reader reassess the nature of science: 'these biographies remind us both of the continuity of empirically based model of nature from the pre-modern to the beginnings of modernity, but also the process of the

separation of this knowledge from its embeddedness in everyday domestic life to a production system of knowledge set culturally apart'. Although many branches of science are described, perhaps a chapter of particular interest is the 'Lady Experimenters' of domestic medicine, 1570-1620. This is a well balanced collection of perceptive, challenging, and even humorous essays which will be welcomed by any reader with an interest in the history of science.

KING H: *Hippocrates' Women: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* Routledge, 1998; 322pp

The healers of ancient Greece interpreted women's health through a 'reading' of their bodies that was then interpreted and substantiated through their culture's mythology and ceremony. This book draws upon an extensive variety of material to weave ancient mythology together with medicine. It covers gynaecology's origins in Pandora's myth, a study of pain, an examination of the diagnosis of 'hysteria', and the perception of healers within mythology. King also reveals how Greek mythology has been employed to give credence to certain medical practices over the centuries.

WORTH ESTES J: *Naval Surgeon: Life and Death at Sea in the Age of Sail* Science History Publications, 1998; 266pp

Worth Estes' book details the remarkable medical log of Peter St. Medard, a naval surgeon on the US frigate *New-York* from 1802-03. The medical log, along with Dr Medard and his fellow officers' own journals and letters, provide a detailed wealth of information about naval medical conditions and the practices of the period. The combination of the quality of writing and the detail of description help transport the reader to an engaging place in history and medicine.

BOOK FROM THE COLLECTION

Robert Turner (1654-1665). *The Brittish Physician: or the Nature and Vertues of English Plants*
London, 1664.

Robert Turner, who was the author of various astrological, medical, and botanical books including *The Brittish Physician*, was educated at Cambridge University. *The Brittish Physician* is a work chiefly devoted to the medicinal properties of herbs.

Turner was a proponent of the 'Doctrine of Signatures'. The 'Doctrine of Signatures' was a theory of botany (first promoted by Paracelsus) which attracted a considerable following in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to the theory, plants and herbs give a physical indication of their medicinal qualities. Turner explained that 'God hath imprinted upon the plants, herbs, and flowers, as it were in hieroglyphicks, the very signature their vertues'. For example, herbs with yellow sap would cure jaundice, those with rough surfaces would cure diseases of the skin and those with flowers shaped like butterflies could be used to treat insect bites.

Sadly for Turner the theory was regarded by the most eminent botanists of the time as 'absolutely unworthy of acceptance' (Dodoens). The author of Turner's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* speculates that Turner, who worked in London, may have perished in the great plague.



FIGURE 1
Frontispiece of *The Brittish Physician*, showing the author.

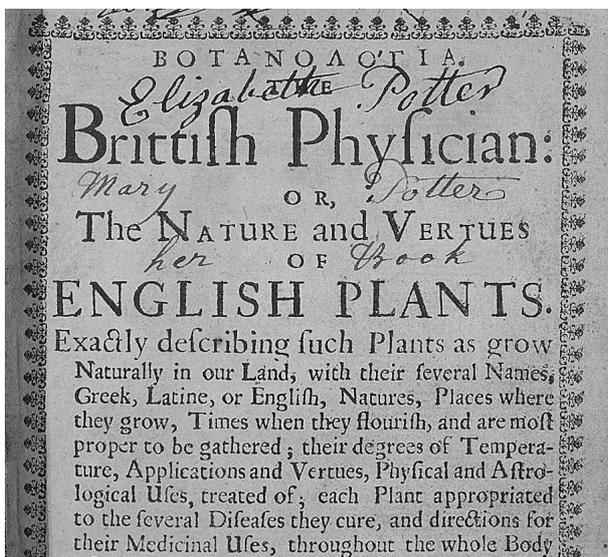


FIGURE 2
Titlepage of *The Brittish Physician*.



FIGURE 3
An illustration from *The Brittish Physician*.