

**The Wellcome Historical Medical Library : a brief account of its history, scope and purpose.**

**Contributors**

Wellcome Historical Medical Library.

**Publication/Creation**

London : The Library, 1954.

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/m95tg2tm>

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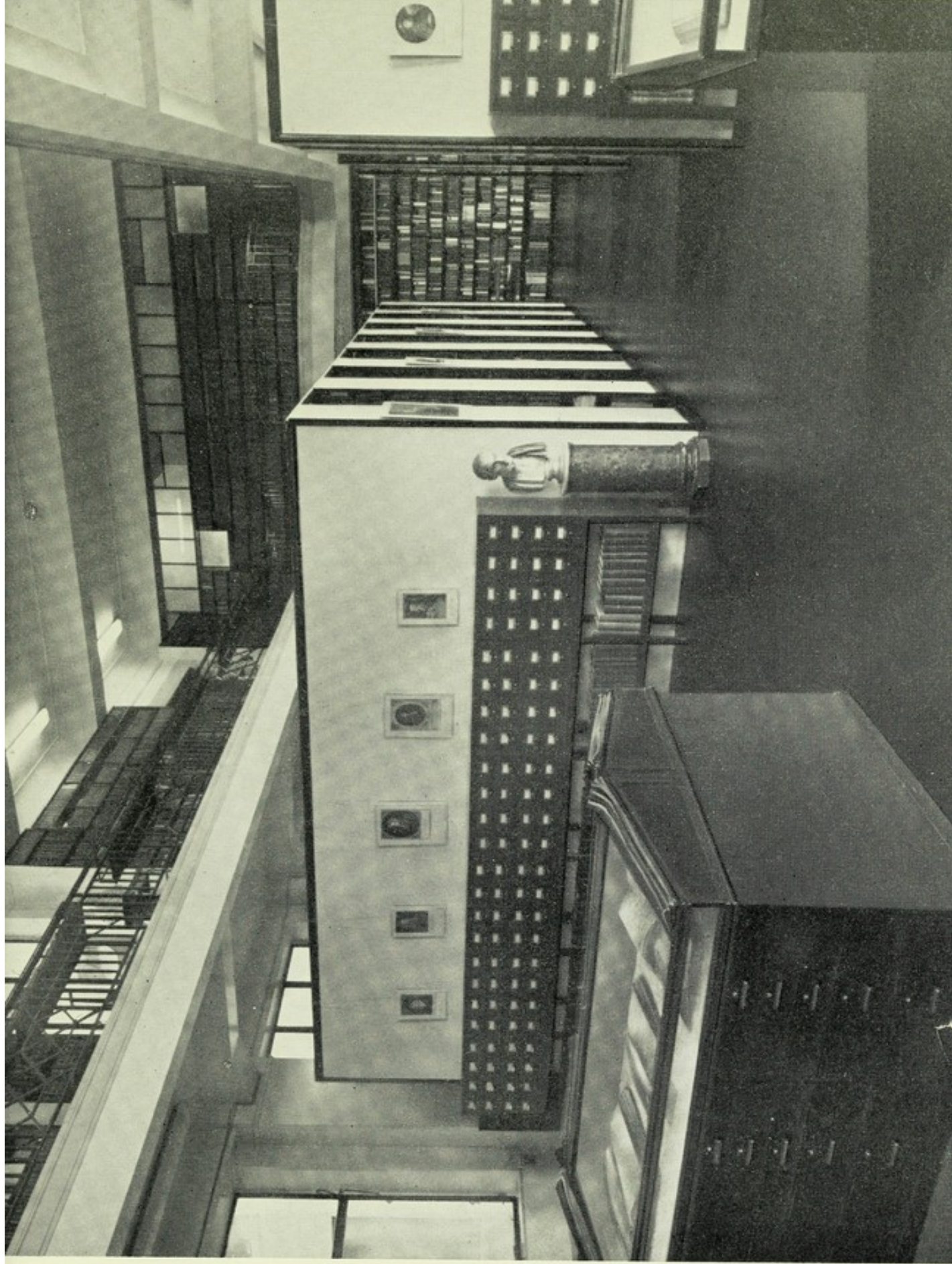
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*A general view of  
the Library*

*The symbol shown on the cover was a device much used by Renaissance medical printers, notably by Henri Estienne. It includes the serpent, the most ancient of medical symbols, and also suggests that books provide a safe anchorage in the sea of knowledge.*



THE WELLCOME  
HISTORICAL  
MEDICAL LIBRARY



*A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF  
ITS HISTORY, SCOPE  
AND PURPOSE*

183-193, EUSTON ROAD, LONDON, N.W.1

MCMLIV

Wellcome Library  
for the History  
and Understanding  
of Medicine

**WELLCOME  
COLLECTION**

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# H I S T O R Y



THE Wellcome Historical Medical Library was founded by the late Sir Henry Wellcome with the object of providing a comprehensive collection for students of the history of medicine and the allied sciences. As envisaged by Sir Henry, the Library was to be developed on a scale comparable to that of the great national collections, such as the British Museum. Within its own field this aim has been accomplished, and there is hardly a single landmark in the history of medicine and science that is not represented by original texts. The Library has been built up over the past fifty years by purchase at public and private sales throughout Europe, supplemented by gifts and bequests.

The task of cataloguing and arranging this great collection occupied the full energies of the staff for more than twenty years, and it was not possible to open the Library to readers until December, 1949. Post-war conditions made the problem of equipment and furnishing very difficult, but rather than defer indefinitely the opening of the Library, some temporary expedients were adopted which have enabled it to take its place in the world of learning as a centre of medical and historical research.



## DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTIONS

It is estimated that the Library contains approximately 200,000 printed books, pamphlets and journals; over 5000 western manuscripts and about 5000 oriental manuscripts; 100,000 autograph letters of medical and scientific interest, as well as other documents such as diplomas, certificates and proclamations.

### PRINTED BOOKS

**BEFORE  
FIFTEEN  
HUNDRED**  
(*Incunabula*)

The Library's collection of incunabula is one of the largest in Great Britain, apart from those in the great national libraries, and considering only medical libraries it is one of the largest in the world. The catalogue of its 632 items has been published by the Oxford University Press (Wellcome Historical Medical Museum Publications No. 5).

It was Sir Henry Wellcome's ambition to obtain the first, or at least a very early, printed edition of every medical work of any consequence. The measure of his success as far as classical and mediæval authors are concerned can be judged from a glance at this collection. Its nucleus was made up of accessions from three famous private libraries, those of William Morris, Dr. J. F. Payne and Kurt Wolff, together with a smaller number from that of Prince Dietrichstein. These volumes are mostly in their original bindings and include a number of interesting and important association copies. Three of them originally belonged to Hieronymus Münzer (1437-1508), town physician of Nuremberg, and bear his signature and notes: the surgical anthology which goes under the name of *Articella* (1483), the first editions of Bernard de Gordon's *Lilium Medicinæ* (1480) and of the *Aphorismi secundum doctrinam Galeni* of Maimonides (1489). There is another—Stoeffler and Pflaum's *Almanach Nova* (1499) with the signature of



Dr. Hartmann Schedel, Münzer's friend and colleague and compiler of the celebrated *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493). The latter work, one of the most splendid of early illustrated books, is represented by a magnificent copy from William Morris's library. Of more immediate interest to English physicians is the *Epistolæ* of Seneca (1492) with the signature of Thomas Linacre, the celebrated humanist and founder of the Royal College of Physicians.

In a collection of such scope it is difficult to particularise, but among the numerous bibliographical rarities the following are worthy of note: Aristotle's *Problemata* (1500), of which only one other copy is known; and his *De physico* (1500), an apparently unrecorded edition. Quiricus de Augustis: *Lumen apothecariorum* (1497), the only copy in any British library. Avicenna's *Canon* (1489-90), of which there is only one other, imperfect, copy in this country; and the Hebrew version of the same work (1491), the first medical work to be printed in Hebrew. Bagellardus: *De infantium ægritudinibus*, the second edition of 1487, which is much rarer than the first. Ferrarius de Gradibus: *Consilia* (1482), of which only one other copy is recorded. Gilinus: *De morbo gallico* (1497), the only recorded copy in Britain. Hippocrates: *De natura hominis* (1480), of which only one other copy is known. The *Dicta* of Hugo Senensis (1485), the first book to be printed on behalf of a group of doctors, the only other copy known being in the City Library of Viterbo. Leonicens: *De epidemia quam morbum gallicum vocant* (1497) with the very rare errata leaf. Petrus Hispanus: *Thesaurus pauperum* (1485), the only known perfect copy. And, finally, the *Regimen sanitatis* with Kanuti's plague tract (1494), which Klebs failed to find in any extant copy.



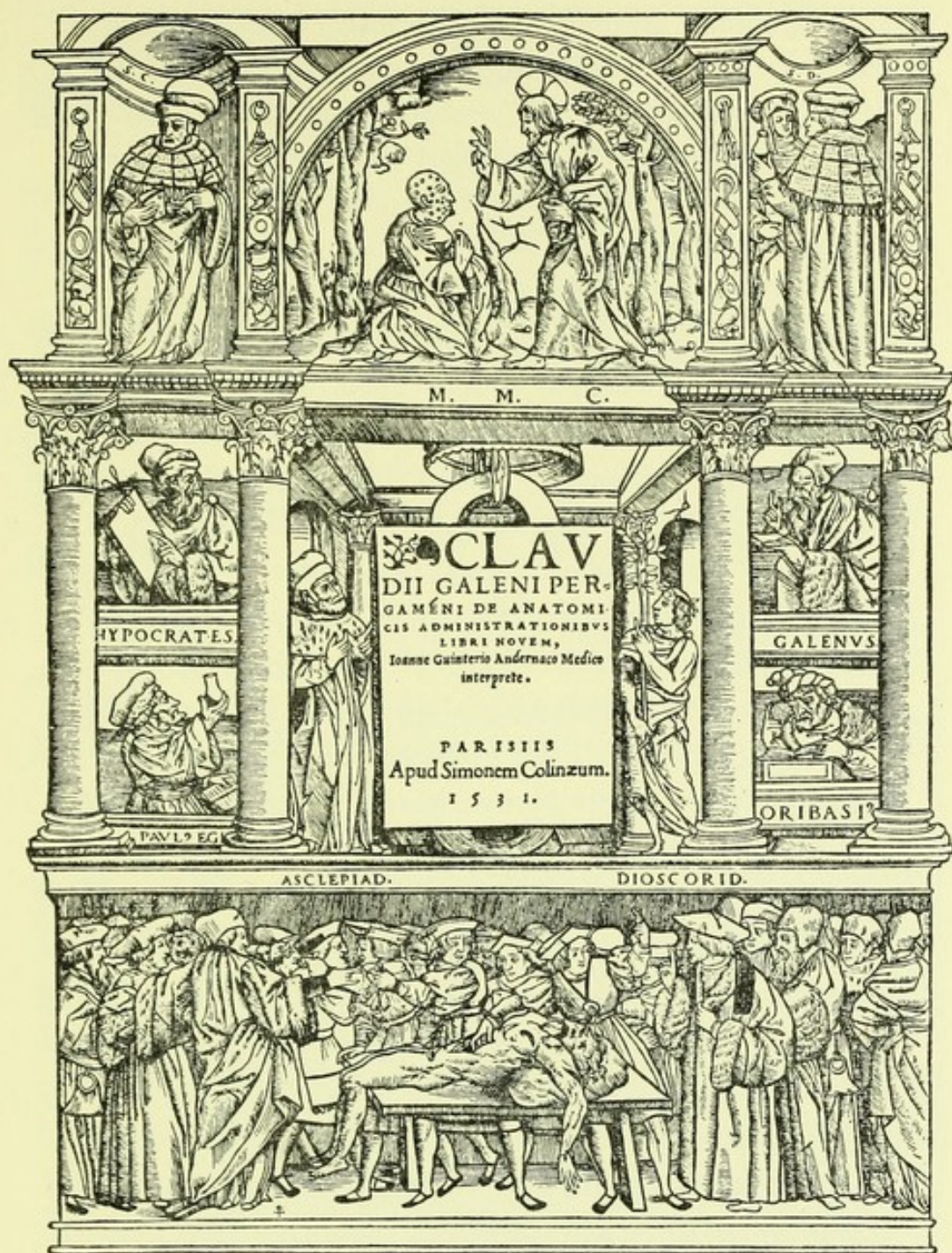
Here are riches indeed for the medical historian, but they represent but a small if important part of the wealth of medical literature which Wellcome brought together in London.

**SIXTEENTH  
CENTURY  
BOOKS**

The 4000 or more books of the sixteenth century include all the medical writings of classical antiquity as well as those of the great Arabic writers of the Middle Ages (Rhazes, Avicenna, Abulcasis, etc.), represented in fine copies of the great Renaissance editions issued by the scholar printers Aldus, Froben, the Estiennes, Junta, Oporinus, etc. Epoch-making works in anatomy include all the editions of Vesalius and his forerunners; in surgery there are the works of Jerome of Brunswick, Hans Gersdorff, Ambrose Paré, Paracelsus, Della Croce, Pierre Franco, John of Vigo, Vidus Vidius, Marianus Sanctus and other pioneers. The Library is particularly rich in books on materia medica and pharmacology, and possesses an extensive range of rare early herbals dating from Dioscorides and the well-known Mainz Herbal of 1491 through those of Fuchs, Lobel, Bock, Dodoens and Gerard to Parkinson. The introduction of medicinal plants from the New World can be studied in the contemporary writings of Nicolas Monardes (1565) and Garcia ab Orta (1576). The other specialties are served by equally outstanding works, such as the obstetrical texts of Ryff and Roesslin and the *Ophthalmodouleia* (1583), of Georg Bartisch, the first ophthalmic work to be written in any vernacular tongue.

To these treasures must be added the 700 early English books (printed before 1640); some of these are not to be found elsewhere outside the British Museum. Worthy of particular notice are Andrew Boorde's *Breviary of Helthe* (1547); Stephen Bradwell's *Helps for Suddain Accidents* (1633), the earliest book on first-aid; Timothy Bright's *Treatise of Melancholy* (1586), which some





*Galen's Works, printed by Simon Colinaeus (Paris, 1531).  
A fine example of a Renaissance title-page with medical  
scenes.*



Shakespearean scholars associate with *Hamlet*; Bullein's *Bulwarke of Defence against all Sicknesse* (1562); Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1624); Caius on the Sweating Sickness (1552), the first original description of a disease in the English language; and the same author's *De Canibus Britannicis* (1570), the first monograph on the dog; Crooke's *Microcosmographia* (1615); Elyot's *Castel of Healthe* (1539); Gale's *Chirurgerie* (1563); the Geminus version of Vesalius (1545, 1553, 1559); the first, suppressed, issue of the London Pharmacopœia (1618); Gilbert's *De Magnete* (1600); Moulton's *Mirror of Healthe* (1539 ?); Roesslin's *Byrth of Mankinde* (1540, etc.); the anonymous *Seyng of Urines* (1530, etc.); Turner's *New Herbal* (1551); Sir William Vaughan's *Approved Directions for Health* (1612); Vicary's *Englishman's Treasure* (1586); Vigo's *Surgical Works* (1586), with the signature on the title-page of William Clowes, the celebrated Elizabethan surgeon.

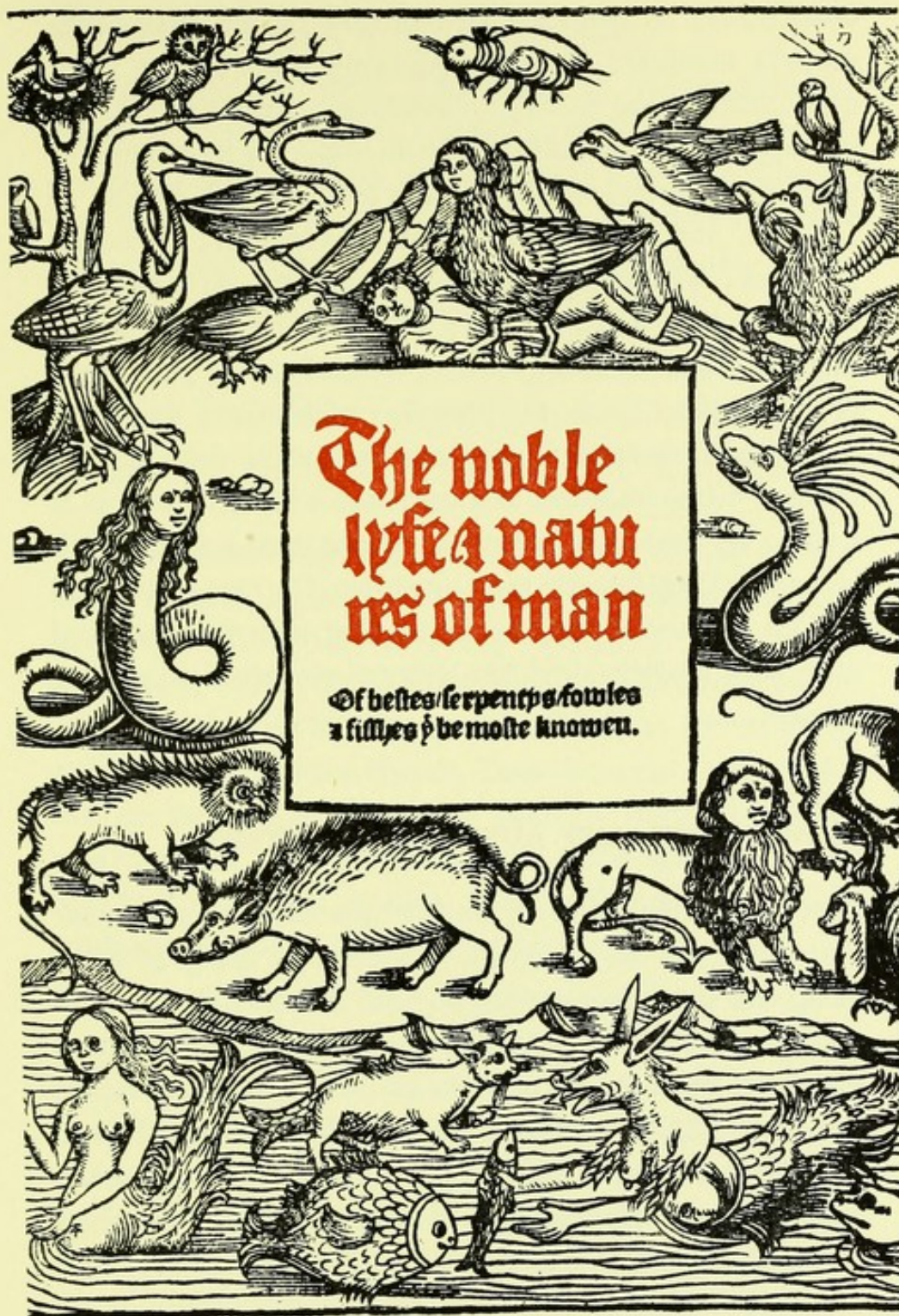
#### SEVENTEENTH CENTURY BOOKS

The Library contains more than 10,000 books printed in the seventeenth century. As well as the great medical landmarks such as Harvey's *De Motu Cordis* (1628), the foundations of modern science which were laid in that period are represented by first editions of Bacon, Galileo, Kepler, Descartes, Newton and Boyle. From the seventeenth century onwards all important advances in medicine and science are signalled by original texts. Apart from the classic works of Heberden, Hunter, Jenner, Lister, Pasteur and Roentgen, the Library has a wealth of less well-known clinical and scientific material, including a wide range of early periodicals, which awaits the notice and study of the historian.

#### SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The Library is very rich in special collections, for example: Voyages and Travels (especially those containing early





*Laurence Andrew's Noble Lyfe and Natures of Man (Antwerp, 1521). So far as is known, this is the only extant copy with the title-page.*



descriptions of tropical diseases and of the indigenous materia medica); Botany; Alchemy (one of the finest collections in the world); Occultism; Tobacco; Plague (including a fine collection of contemporary tracts, broadsides, and proclamations relating to the Great Plague of London, 1665); Smallpox and Vaccination; Venereal Diseases; Veterinary Medicine; Cookery; Archæology; Anthropology and Folklore; and a unique collection of medical literature from Mexico, formerly in the possession of Dr. Nicolas Leon, the historian of Mexican medicine. In addition, there is a very comprehensive collection of modern bibliographical and reference works, so that it is true to say that only on rare occasions need a reader look elsewhere for information on any topic. Current periodicals and all important new books dealing with the historical aspects of medicine and the sciences are acquired as they appear.

### **MANUSCRIPTS AND AUTOGRAPH LETTERS**

Among the 5000 or more manuscripts there are a number that date back to the fourteenth century, many of them being fine specimens on vellum with illuminations in gold and representing most of the well-known classical and mediæval texts. A few of these are in Middle English and some are important medical texts which have not been edited or published. Those of a later date include many original manuscripts by such important medical figures as Hunter, Jenner, Pasteur, Lister, Madame Curie and Florence Nightingale.

The autograph letters, which number more than 100,000, are still largely unexplored, but many of them are certainly of the same level of interest and importance as the manuscripts.



## **ORIENTAL BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS**

The Library has large collections of manuscripts in Sanskrit, Arabic, Chinese, Cingalese, Hebrew, Hindustani, Persian, Tamil, Tibetan, etc., including some fine illuminated specimens. Also a large number of modern printed works in the Oriental languages. There are also works inscribed on wood, on rolls, leaves, etc.

## **THE FUNCTION OF THE LIBRARY**

The Wellcome Historical Medical Library is now open at the Wellcome Research Institution, 183, Euston Road, London, N.W.1. The hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., from Monday to Friday throughout the year, with the exception of the usual Bank Holidays. The Library is for reference only and no books can be lent. There is ample accommodation for readers, and there are facilities for photographic reproduction. Prints, lantern slides and photostats can be supplied and there is also a microfilm service, with a reading machine installed in the Library.

Although the Library is primarily intended for the use of students of the history of medicine and the sciences, access is freely granted to any serious inquirer. It should be pointed out that the resources of the Library are admirably suited to post-graduate study in historical topics that are not specifically medical, and valuable information may be found touching on social history and the social sciences, religion and philosophy, literature and the arts, technology and archæology, especially Egyptian. Useful to students in every field are the unusually comprehensive biographical and bibliographical collections.

Historical and bibliographical inquiries can be dealt with

by the Library staff. These should preferably be made by letter, but in exceptional circumstances requests for information by telephone will be accepted.

A permanent exhibition of books, manuscripts and letters representative of the collection forms a useful introduction to the history of medicine. Other exhibits are arranged from time to time to commemorate historic events and special anniversaries, and in this connexion it is hoped to issue a series of illustrated descriptive pamphlets. A General Catalogue of the Library in short-title form is now being prepared for the press.

Conducted visits for special parties from medical and nursing schools, students' clubs and societies and similar bodies can be made by arrangement with the Librarian.







*A party of visitors in the Library ▲*

*An alcove in the Library ▼*









