

M0006465: Translation of a prescription in John Langley: "An early prescription in English" 1495-1505

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AN EARLY PRESCRIPTION IN ENGLISH.

BY

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THE early prescription in English, of which a reproduction appears in this reprint, is taken from John Langley's MS. book *Reseyt off Rentes of Farmes in Kent, 1495-1505*. Transcribed in modern printing characters the prescription runs:

“ Probata Medicina ffor ye ffrenche Poxe.

“ Take a li[bra] & a halfe off Barrowese gresse & a quartanne off a pownd off brymston & as moche off Turpentyne and halfe an ounce off quicksilver & stampe all these yn a mortar to ye quicksilver be slayne & then a noynte the pasienet therwith all hes body & lape hym ffast in a schett & ley him in hes bedd with clothes ye nowe, that he maye swett. And serve hym thus iiij or v tymes. & lett hym swette at yche tyme iiij oures & yff he be sore yn hes mowthe yo must yeffe him melly Rosar[um] in a sawser & take a quantete off lynte & Roll it together & make ye pasienet hold it betwene his tethe that hes mouthe maye be open that ye water and ye corription maye Ryne owth.”

In modern English this is:

An Approved Medicine for the French Pox.

Take a pound and a half of Barrowese grease, a quarter of a pound of brimstone and as much of turpentine, and half an ounce of quicksilver, and stamp all these in a mortar until the quicksilver be fully amalgamated with the other ingredients and then anoint the patient with it, all his body, and wrap him closely in a sheet, and put him to bed with plenty of clothes over him, so that he may sweat. Serve him in this fashion four or five times, and let him sweat each time four hours. And if his mouth is sore you must give him honey of roses* in a saucer, and take a quantity of lint and roll it up and make the patient hold it between his teeth, so that his mouth keeps open and the water and corruption may run out.

This must be one of the earliest or perhaps the earliest prescription in English for syphilis. The book from which it is taken is one in which John Langley notes “ Reseytes of Rents ” for various manors lying in the neighbourhood of Sandwich. He apparently had to do with Staple Inn,

* “ Honey of Roses ” is in all the old prescription books; it was used as