

# 10. Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London.

1. Forman & the College of Physicians

2. Plague & Paracelsianism

## II. Plague and the College of Physicians of London

### 1. Forman and the College of Physicians

- 1518. Group of physicians obtain charter to set up "a College in perpetuity of learned and wise men who make any practice of medicine in our City of London and suburbs and within seven miles thereof..."\*.
  - *Power of admission in hands of president and four Censors.*
  - *Empowered to impose £5 fee for every month that anyone practiced medicine without their approval.*
- 1523. College begins functioning.
  - *"...a body largely concerned to entrench a monopoly of medical practice in the hands of the few medical graduates that lived there"\*.*
- Initial concerns:
  - *Consolidate role of physician in medical practice by keeping medicine separate from surgery and apocatheries.*
  - *Address public health problems (plague since 1511, "sweat" in 1517-18).*



\*Roberts, R. S. (1962) "The Personnel and Practice of Medicine in Tudor and Stuart England", *Medical History* 8, pp. 217-234.

- 1592. Plague in London.
  - *Physicians flee.*
  - *Forman and other "irregular" practitioners remain.*
- Physicians return and begin campaign against irregulars.



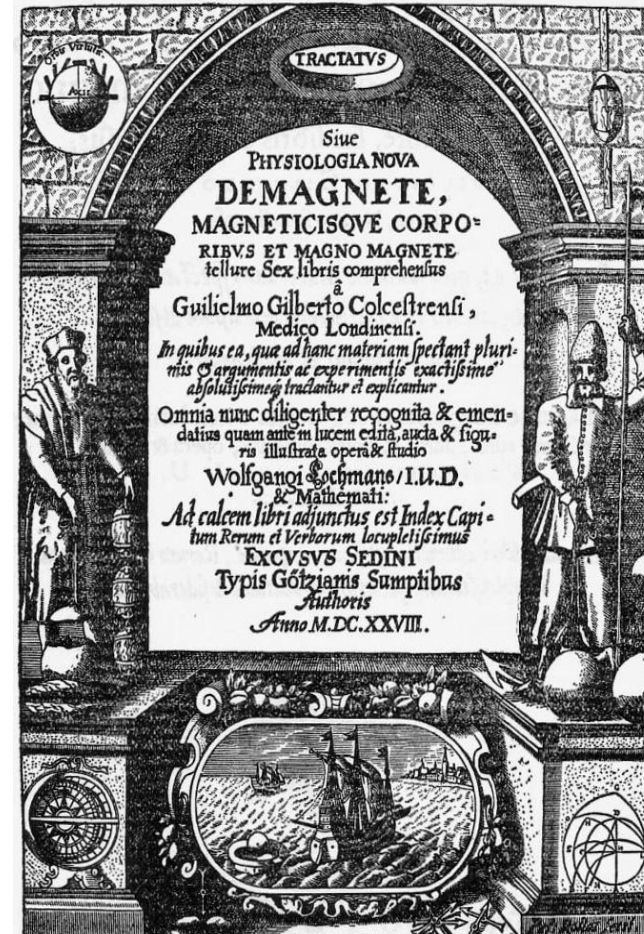
- Forman named in College Annals ten times between 1594 and 1610.
  - *History of College in late 16th cent views Forman as epitomy of quackery: the ignorant, dangerous, and opportunistic practice of medicine (Kassell pg. 75).*
- 1594. First examination of Forman by Censors. Didn't do too well:
  - *"He was forbidden to practice and for his wicked and illegal practice he was fined £5 to be paid within 16 days."*
  - *Pays fine to William Gilbert, Treasurer to the College, present at examination.*

## William Gilbert

- 1569. Graduates with MD from Cambridge.
- 1580. Elected to College of Physicians.
  - 1581-90. *Censor.*
  - 1587-94, 1597-9. *Treasurer.*
  - 1600. *President.*
  - 1601. *Royal physician.*
- 1600. *De magnete, magneticisque corporibus, et de magno magnete tellure; physiologia nova, plurimis & argumentis, & experimentis demonstrata* ("A new natural philosophy of the lodestone, magnetic bodies, and the great lodestone the earth, proved by many reasonings and experiments")
  - *De magnete*, for short...



William Gilbert  
(1544-1603)



- Critical of Aristotelian natural philosophy and Galenic medicine.

- Objects to Galen: the body as analogous to a magnet: both attract similar substances and repel or expel harmful ones.
- Objects to Aristotle: earthly matter as corrupt and informed by inactive, inert qualities of coldness and dryness.



"Aristotle's world would seem to be a monstrous creation, in which all things are perfect, vigorous and animate, while the earth alone, luckless small fraction, is imperfect, dead, inanimate and subject to decay. On the other hand, Hermes, Zoroaster, Orpheus recognise a universal soul. As for us, we deem the whole world animate, and all globes, all stars and this glorious earth, too, we hold to be from the beginning by their own destinate souls governed and from them to have the impulse of self-preservation..."

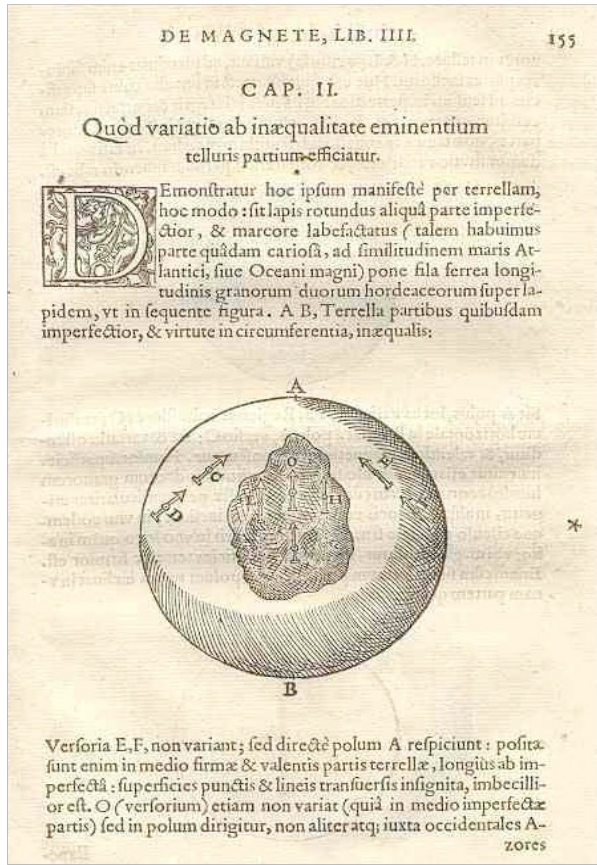
- Goal: To argue for a philosophy in which the earth is an integral part of a harmonious solar system.
- Method: Experiments employing magnets.

"[Include nothing]... that has not been investigated and again and again done and repeated under our eyes."



• Claims:

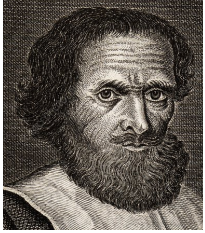
- Magnetic attraction is a pervasive property of matter distinct from other occult sympathies.
- The earth is a magnet.
- This explains the functioning of compasses.
- Magnetism is an immaterial action-at-a-distance force governed by fixed laws.
- Lawlike, immaterial nature of magnetism entails it emanates from a magnetic soul possessed by the earth.
- Magnetism is cosmic force that moves earth.





- Claim: Forman's manner, not his methods, determined his conflicts with the College.

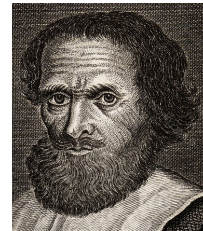
"The Censors expected the people that they interviewed to answer with deference and humility, and would accordingly respond leniently." (Kassell pg. 78, 86)



"To this I answered them again  
I lerned it not of them  
Nor in great scolles, as they had done  
Nor yet amonge leud men  
Nor of those Empricke which doe write  
Their bockes of fained lies  
As Gallin did: of paltrie pisse  
And pulse which they dyvise"

- A low opinion of the physicians' methods:

"toyes of an ape  
and physicks arte disgrace."



### Case of Thomas Hood (Mathematical Lecturer of City of London)

- 1595. Examined by Censors and found lacking in knowledge of Galen.
- But: Behavior "favourable and unassuming" thus not forbidden to practice.
- 1596. Second examination. Still hasn't read Galen. Forbidden to practice.
- 6 months later: Examined again and is finally granted license.

- 1595. Forman's second examination by Censors.
  - Fined £10 and imprisoned. Released after 3 weeks.
- 1596. Forman's third examination by Censors ("that bold imposter").
  - Imprisoned again; released after 9 days; imprisoned again 6 days later for 2 weeks; secures release by entering into a bond for £40 "not to meddle again in London after mai day next".
- 1597-98. Legal battles between College and Forman over bond.
  - Moves to Lambeth, outside jurisdiction of College.
  - 1600. College summons Forman; refuses to appear.
- 1603. Forman obtains license to practice physic from Cambridge.
  - Plague in London and physicians flee. Forman returns to administer to victims.

## 2. Plague and Paracelsianism

- 165-180 "Antonine plague".
- Galen on the plague (*Of the Differences in Fevers*):
  - *An infected, corrupted, and putrefied air.*
  - *Evil and superfluous humours gathered in the body through corrupt diet.*
- 1348-1350. Black Death pandemic in Europe. 30%-60% of population dies.
- Medieval plague tracts: Commonly cited causes:
  - *God's wrath.*
  - *Evil constellations, especially Saturn and Mars.*
  - *Corrupt air (evil vapours, dead bodies, stinking lakes, open caves, etc.) of a hot, moist quality.*
  - *Foul humours accumulated through bad diet and large pores.*

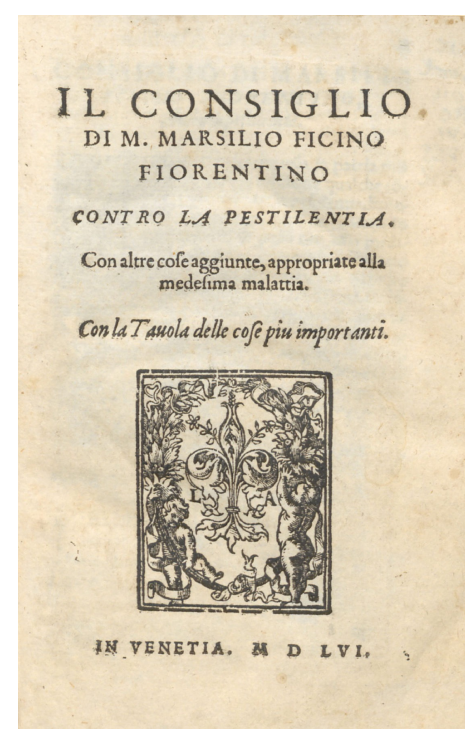




• Ficino's *Consilio contro la Pestilentia* (1481).\*

- *Plague due to poisonous vapour that infects the vital spirit.*
- *Specific properties (substantial form) of the vapour are contrary to the vital spirit.*
- *Vapour is continually produced in the earth; escapes into air.*
- *Sustained by adverse astral constellations (Mars, Saturn).*
- *Vapour has corrosive effects on humours, like arsenic in mines.*
- *Communicated by contact between similar individuals:*

"You who would attend to the sick must know that the more closely you are related to them by blood, or the more you resemble them in complexion or constellation, the greater will be the risk of infection, because qualities move easily between subjects that are similar one to another, as from fire to air, air to water, water to earth..."



\* Katinis, T. (2010) "A Humanist Confronts the Plague: Ficino's *Consilio contro la Pestilentia*", *MLN* 125.

Pagel, W. (1983) *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, Karger.

- Paracelsus on the plague (~1530s).\*
  - *Plague originates in sin: infects heavens, arouses wrath of God.*
  - *Lust, desires are cultivated in corresponding heavenly objects as dormant seeds.*
  - *Seeds strike down like arrows at three principle spirits of body (ears, axillae (armpits), groin).*
  - *Takes form of arsenical air trapped in deposits in the body: Arsenic then combusts causing swelling, abscesses.*



- Elizabethan plague tracts focus less on astrological causes:
  - *1578. Thomas Brasbridge (Poor mans jewel): Astronomers who seek cause in heavens "...do seem to favor or foster the idolatrie of the heathen."*
  - *1583. Johannes Ewich (Of the duetie of the faithful and wise magistrates): Astrologers falsely ascribe plague to a single cause.*
  - *1584. Thomas Cogan (The haven of health): While astronomers locate cause in the heavens, physicians seek it on earth.*
  - *1603. Thomas Lodge (A treatise of the plague): The stars are perfect and therefore cannot cause plague.*

A  
TREATISE  
of the Plague:

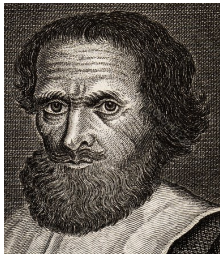
Containing the nature, signes, and accidents of the same, with the certaine and absolute cure of the Feuers, Botches and Carbuncles that raigne in these times: And aboue all things most singular Experiments and preferatiues in the same, gathered by the obseruation of diuers worthy Trauailers, and selected out of the writings of the best learned Phisitians in this age:

By Thomas Lodge, Doctor in Physicke.



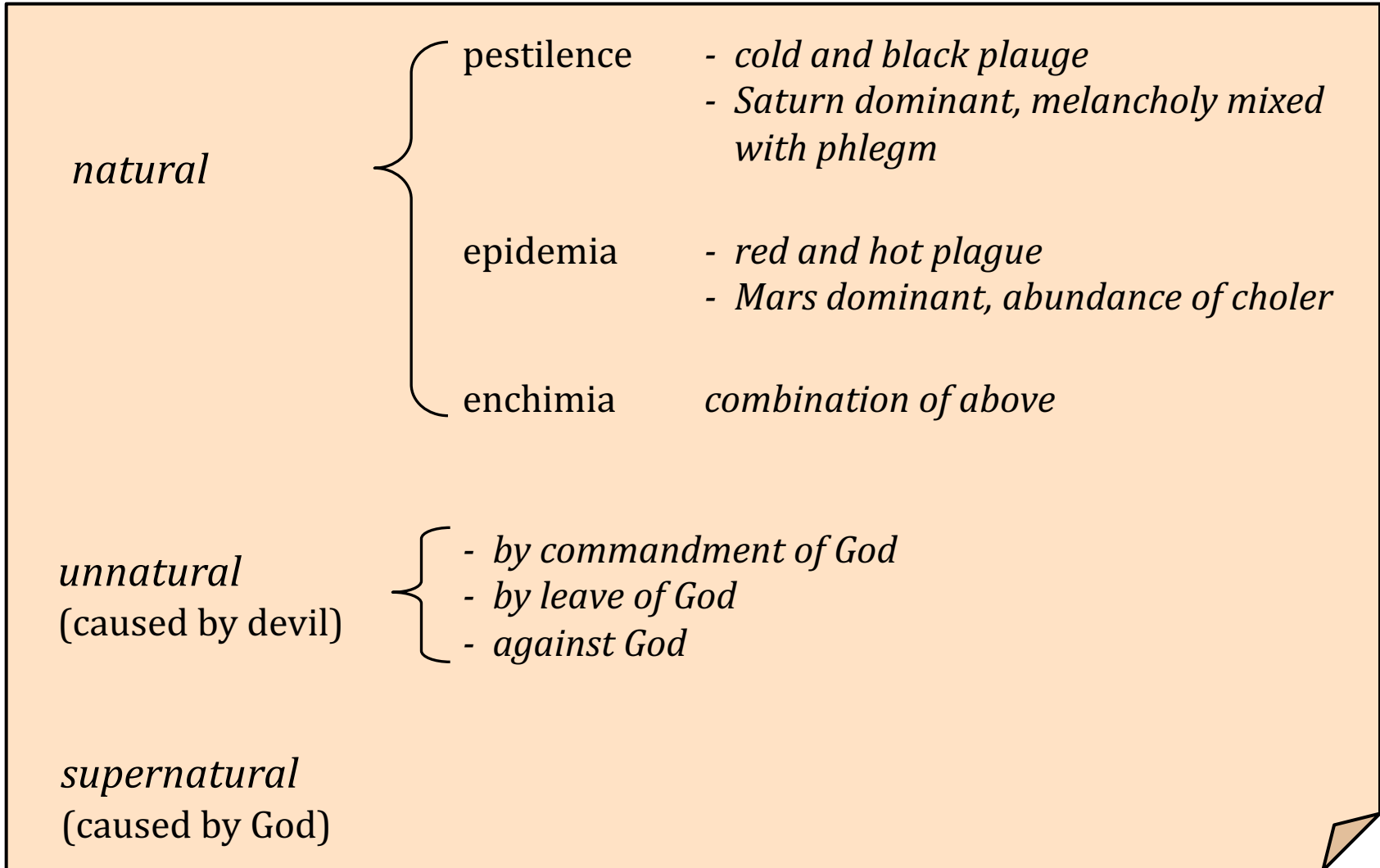
LONDON  
Printed for Edward White and N. L.  
1603.

\* Pagel, W. (1982) *Paracelsus: An Intro to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, Karger.



## Forman's (1593) "A discourse on the plague"

- 1603-07. Two revised versions.
- Forman's plague typography (Kassell, pg. 110):



## Characteristics

- (a) Forman's plague tracts are astrological texts.
- "Astrologically judgements": *refers to plague tracts in explanation of how to judge whether a disease is natural or supernatural.*
  - "Grounds of arte": *distinction between natural, unnatural, and supernatural diseases.*
- (b) Combine Galenic and Paracelsian concepts:
- Galenic influences:
    - Correlations between four humours, effects of Saturn and Mars, and three types of plague.
  - Paracelsian influences:
    - Air as breath of God, source of blood and life, vitalizer of the soul.
    - Corrupt air infects blood and disrupts three principle spirits of man.
    - Urine inspection as ineffective; only way to determine if a disease is natural, unnatural, or supernatural is to consult the stars.