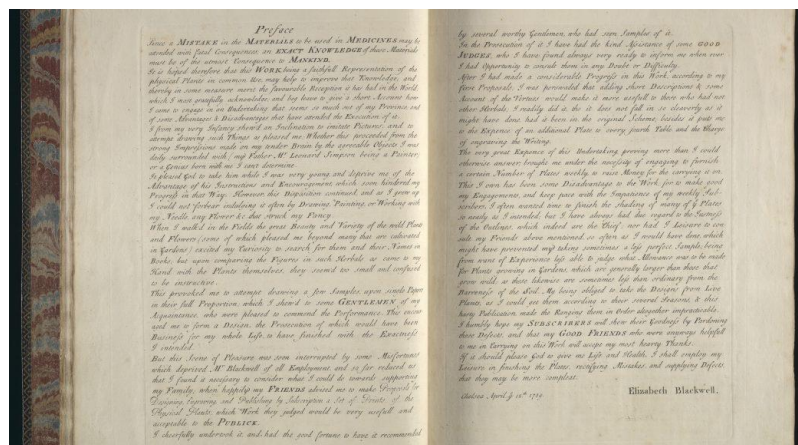


Preface, *A Curious Herbal*, by Elizabeth Blackwell (Samuel Harding, St. Martin's Lane, 1739)

<https://blogs.library.duke.edu/rubenstein/files/2022/10/blackwell-preface-1038x576.jpg>

Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.



Credit: Photo from "The Rubenstein Library's disruptive copy of *A Curious Herbal*" by Janet Tyson, *The Devil's Tale: Dispatches from the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library*. Posted November 14, 2022. Transcription by Susan Wittig Albert.

PREFACE

Since a **MISTAKE** in the **MATERIALS** to be used in **MEDICINES** may be attended with fatal Consequences an **EXACT KNOWLEDGE** of those Materials must be of the utmost Consequence to **MANKIND**.

It is hoped, therefore that this **WORK**, being a faithful Representation of the physical Plants in common Use, may help to improve that Knowledge, and thereby in some measure merit the favourable Reception it has had in the World, which I most gratefully acknowledge and beg leave to give a short Account how I came to engage in an Undertaking that seems so much out of my Province, and of some Advantages & Disadvantages that have attended the Execution of it.

I from my very Infancy shew'd an Inclination to imitate Pictures, and to attempt drawing such Things as pleased me: Whether this proceeded from the strong Impressions made on my tender Brain by the agreeable Objects I was daily surrounded with (my father, M^r. Leonard Simpson, being a Painter), or a Genius born with me I can't determine.

It pleased God to take him, while I was very young, and deprive me of the Advantage of his Instructions and Encouragement, which soon hindered my Progress in that Way. However, this Disposition continued, and as I grew up, I could not forbear indulging it often by Drawing, Painting, or Working with my Needle, any Flower &c that struck my Fancy.

When I walked in the Fields the great Beauty and Variety of the wild Plants and Flowers (some of which pleased me beyond many that are cultivated in Gardens) excited my Curiosity to search

for them and their Names in Books, but upon comparing the Figures in such Herbals as came to my Hand with the Plants themselves, they seemed too small and confused to be instructive.

This provoked me to attempt drawing a few samples, upon single Papers in their full Proportion: which I shew'd to some **GENTLEMEN** of my Acquaintance, who were pleased to commend the Performance. This encouraged me to form a Design, the Prosecution of which would have been Business for my whole Life to have finished with the Exactingness I intended.

But this Scene of Pleasure was soon interrupted by some Misfortunes which deprived M^r. Blackwell of all Employment, and so far reduced us that I found it necessary to consider what I could do towards supporting my Family, when happily, my **FRIENDS** advised me to make Proposals for Designing, Engraving, and Publishing by Subscription a set of Prints of the Physical Plants, which Work they judged would be very usefull and acceptable to the **PUBLICK**.

I cheerfully under, took it, and had the good fortune to have it recommended by several worthy Gentleman, who had seen Samples of it.

In the Prosecution of it, I have had the kind Assistance of some **GOOD JUDGES**, who I have found always very ready to inform me whenever I had Opportunity to consult them in any Doubt or Difficulty.

After I had made considerable Progress in this Work, according to my first Proposals, I was persuaded that adding short Descriptions & some Account of the Vertues would make it more usefull to those who had not other Herbals. I readily did it, tho it does not fall in so cleaverly as it might have done had it been in the original Scheme; besides it puts me to the Expense of an additional Plate to every fourth Table and the Charge of engraving the Writing.

The very great Expense of this Undertaking, proving more than I could otherwise answer, brought me under the necessity of engaging to furnish a certain Number of plates weekly to raise Money for the carrying it on. This I own has been some Disadvantage to the Work: for to make good my Engagements, and keep pace with the Impatience of my weekly Subscribers, I often wanted time to finish the shading of many of y^e Plates, and so neatly as I intended; but I have always had due regard to the Justness of the Outlines, which indeed are the Chief: nor had I leisure to consult my Friends above mentioned so often as I would have done, which might have prevented my taking, sometimes a less perfect Sample, being from want of experience less able to judge what Allowance was to be made for Plants growing in gardens, which are generally larger than those that grow wild; as these likewise are sometimes less than ordinary from the Barrenness of the Soil. My being obliged to take the Designs from live Plants, as I could get them according to their several Seasons, & this hasty Publication made the Ranging them in Order all together impracticable, I humbly hope my **SUBSCRIBERS** will show their Goodness by Pardoning these Defects, and that my **GOOD FRIENDS** who were anyways helpfull to me in Carrying on this Work will except my most hearty Thanks.

If it should please God to give me Life and Health I shall employ my Leisure in finishing the Plates, rectifying Mistakes and supplying Defects, that they may be more complete.

Chelsea, April y^e 12, 1739.

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL