rous liquid that had been carried here and there “by an impetuous spirit and the origin of life” as he himself said. This was certainly the heart, and that it is carried away towards the glands themselves, which he believed had not been created by nature to aid the vessels, but to purge the juice from the blood mass. In truth, as it is an ally of the blood and pervades the whole body, amongst its other uses, the main use of Van Helmont’s serous juice is to clean the latrines of the various parts, absorb the dissolved salts and then expel them via the excretory glands so that the entire blood mass is cleansed. This is why nature made sure there were numerous glands in the palate, on the tongue, and in the throat and nostrils, so that the arterious blood, which has to be taken to the brain via the carotids, is made purer for the elaboration of the juice from the nerves and animal spirits after the mucous part has been cleansed thanks to these glands, which is therefore its natural state. On the other hand, it is clear that those whose nose is clear and do not usually spit are healthy, as Bonet observed of the King of France, Francis, who was amyxodes (without mucus), and suffered from an ulcer of the ears all his life.

X. This daily secretion of mucous through the nostrils and throat is usual in those who are healthy as well. Furthermore, if there are bad juices in the body and it abounds in serous liquid, which by nature tends to form concretions, it is hardly surprising that the approach of the Boreal season, the object of this discourse, brings with it an epidemic of coughs, rheumatism and any other kind of illness that is attributed to fluxes, since the spoilt lymph is kept in the glands and, when in excess (not by providence of nature, which is doing its best to eliminate this obstruction), pushes the noxious humour towards the extremities; then, owing to a mechanical artifice of the body parts and the particular composition of the humours, depending on the various changes in the air, sediments form where there is the greatest disposition to retain the humours. And it is not at all surprising that this occurs more in our body than in a well-constructed machine, which sometimes deviates from its usual task because of changes in the air and is mocked liked mad by the ignorant riff-raff. What is admirable, however, is the divine strength the winds have to change the air. The disease in the air depends on which wind is blowing, and therefore becomes the disposition of the blood, as that is the air we inhale. Vitruvius said that when
the southerly wind was blowing in Mytilene (a magnificently constructed city in Lesbos, but on an ill-chosen site), the men would fall ill; when the north-westerly wind was blowing, they began coughing, but when the northerly wind was blowing, their health was restored. When the Roman fleet was in Corfu, Marcus Terentius also said that nearly everyone was ill, “once the north-easterly entered through new windows, and the old ones were sealed to keep the pestilence out, everyone was restored to good health”.

XI. However, someone is bound to ask what the point is in such speculations. To which I reply: to establish an adequate method of treatment, based on the valid theory of these diseases. When these illnesses strike, ones that do not descend from the head but are the result of the stasis of the humours, one immediately resorts to strong purgatives, burns, rubefaction, cupping glasses and even narcotics and a thousand other remedies to eliminate the fluids, to capture and expel them, even repressing them using cerate bandages. But by doing so, the true cause of the illness is neglected and it is on this that all one’s energy should be concentrated so that once again the fluids are able to flow through their ducts in the right manner, after administering substances to expel the materials and modify and restore the natural composition of the blood. How many errors are made using venesection? The lancet for blood-letting has as good as become a Delphic oracle for both mild and serious illnesses, and more often than not it kills innocent victims rather than annihilating serious illnesses.

XII. Once the world had learned of the circular movement of blood, the original objectives doctors had in diseases, which they believed to depend on the flux of the humours, would seem to appear irrelevant. There is certainly no more room for means of interception – for how could one intercept the material that flows through an artery to parts unless ones ties the artery itself? Indeed, according to the law of re-integration and the act of restitution, the humour can only return to where it came from in a circle. In truth, venesection has already been ousted from its throne. Or rather, it has become almost inexistent. For how is it possible that a humour that flows inside an artery can be eliminated by that very artery? For sure, if something is eliminated thanks to blood-letting, it only occurs while the vein is open – for at that moment, the blood is moving in the incised vein, and in the artery nearest to it that is sup-
plying the humour, much faster than in the other vessels. However, once it has been closed, this difference in speed ceases, as Bellini explained and proved with such brilliance. However, I cannot deny that once the abundance of blood has diminished, a smaller portion of the humour is taken to the sick part, and the increase in stagnant blood is reduced. During one of his consultations for the King of Poland, J. Casimiro, one can read Andrea Cnoffel's explanation in Bonet on just how much importance should be given to elimination by means of blood-letting and just how easily it is imposed by those who want to use it to hide their own self-importance. Casimiro, exhausted by an excessive flow of haemorrhoidal blood, was advised by renowned doctors to undergo frequent venesection to eliminate the flow of blood. He tried, however, to oppose them with all this strength and it was to him that he wrote the words I would like to repeat here, since they are of such extreme elegance and importance: “And how can we undertake a process and notify a place for the peremptory summons of the medical elimination of the blood which, being in circulation as a special privilege of vitality and returning to itself with the spirit of a guest, does not respect any laws at all, and does not recognize any place where it may stay in the entire court of law of the body?”.

XIII. This strongly-rooted belief in the power venesection has to eliminate substances should therefore be eradicated from the souls of certain people as it is really only used to remove any excess. Emilio Parisano and Primerosio may be forgiven, as they criticized Harvey for no other reason than, as Leonardo di Capua says, owing to the circulation of blood, they were the therefore forced to see the centuries-old remedy of elimination collapse almost completely; the same cannot be said of our professors today, who persist in seeing badly despite the clear light. There is no doubt that Hippocrates believed a great deal in elimination in fluxes, as is clear in many passages of his works. However, there is one particular passage in which he bestows elimination with little favour. He prescribed binds above the knees to stem excessive menstrual blood but it is also true that he said the arms should be bound at the same time. Rorarius and Fonseca tried to unravel this knot, but unsatisfactorily. However, it is not my task to do so and this one is worthy of a better defence. Nevertheless, I shall express my thoughts on the subject. No matter what can be said about the effectiveness of this remedy
and whether it actually produces this result, it would appear that Hippocrates was alluding to the perpetual movement of the blood through its ducts. Indeed, in numerous passages he mentions the stasis of the blood and the interception of the veins, which he calls *phlebon apoleipsis*. To stop the flow of menstrual blood he therefore wanted to achieve a stasis of the blood, or at least delay the humours both in the parts above and below the heart by placing binds on the arms and legs, without fearing that the binds above the knees might attract something towards the uterus. In actual fact, something suddenly stops the haemorrhages before the patient faints, which would automatically make the heart stop moving and stasis of the blood.

XIV. Thus, following the divine discovery of the circular motion of blood we all find ourselves in agreement because a single phenomenon has dispelled countless erroneous misconceptions and made us understand the true organization of the human body and that of other animals, for whom God created viscera. Indeed, the heart is both the pantry and the dispenser of the life-giving nectar that nourishes the whole body, supported by the arteries and administering the veins. The arteries draw their nourishment from the store on the left and distribute it to the whole body, even the most distant parts; the veins act as assistants and gather what remains of the nourishment with their roots, as if they were hands, taking it to the right dispenser of the heart. These veins are then assisted half way along by the addition of the lacteous veins, which supply the blood with a white humour that by some amazing means turns red in the lungs. This is how the vital structures are organized, aided considerably by the animal power, which guarantees the heart a flow rich in spirits so it can continue its movement thanks to the purer blood it carries to the brain via the nerves. Although seated in different locations and with different rules, like two confederate provinces, these two powers recompense the reciprocal benefits they have brought about. Just like in a well-governed city, as long as the laws are enforced life continues in all tranquillity, but once it has been overturned, everything is overcome by turbulence. Likewise, in the human body, if the law of the circular motion of blood is respected, good health is guaranteed, but if the law is broken, everything is overturned and an internal rebellion ensues.

XV. Harvey was the first to put this law forward, although the
foundations were laid by our Italian scholars, for example, Andrea Cesalpino and Realdo Colombo from Cremona. Although it was believed to be solid, if not sacrosanct, there were inevitably those who tried to abolish this law a short while ago under the pretext of revenging antiquity and claiming the circulation motion of blood was an invention of the moderns. This is not the right place to weigh up the reasons and foundations of the former and I shall limit myself to pointing out that his first argument, which protested against the breaching of this law (since the daily practice of doctors did not conform in the least to the newly introduced doctrine of blood circulation regarding the use of blood-letting), admonishes professors for being so negligent. This is all too true and is a source of the greatest regret since there are so many who criticize this circular movement of the blood, but then, either out of ignorance or laziness, do not bother to take the effects of such a principle into due consideration, and go on to deny the very facts they had so verbosely claimed earlier. However, since a remedy must be found for this ill, a professor I am very close to in this city is about to write a work with the following title: “A century-old medical summary, outlining the actual benefits derived from the art of medicine, regarding both theory and practice, from the most famous anatomical discoveries this century”. Merchants keep their accounts, as do diligent administrators. Princes do the same, for example Augustus (as described by Suetonius), who “was so bored during his lengthy illness that he presented the Senate with a financial account of the Empire”. It might be opportune if the medical State kept its own accounts and showed just how successful this century has been in extending the borders of the medical field while also striving for healthier treatments. He wanted to postpone the publication of this work until the end of the century, perhaps in the hope that another discovery might crown this century, since we are surrounded by so many outstanding men who have discovered such novelties, including the illustrious Malpighi who is now living in Rome and looking after the Pope’s health. I, however, keep hounding my colleague to get down to work and set pen to paper. Let us hope destiny will make sure he lives long enough to complete this work! But let us now return to our main subject.

XVI. In such illnesses, which we believe to be caused by the flux of humours, repeated blood-letting for whatever reason ravages
the body and frequently exacerbates the cause of the illness. When
enough has been done regarding the saturation of the blood ves-
sels to overcome these forces, or when sufficient blood has been
removed to calm the boiling of the humours if needs be, it would
certainly be preferable to adopt the remedies that restore the natu-
ral composition of the blood. The use of repeated blood-letting this
winter, which led to such widespread catarrh, did not prove at all
beneficial. I know all too well that many pleuritics died unexpect-
edly after undergoing blood-letting once or twice. A devout priest
who was of a robust constitution was afflicted by pleurisy and
when his blood was taken for the third time, he died that very day.
And it is not just a shameful misadventure when a patient dies after
taking his medicine, as Hippocrates said, but also when a patient
dies after his blood has been let. In such harsh weather, it was
dangerous for the elderly if their blood was let even once. A ninety-
year-old noble lady who was suffering from spurious pleuritis in-
sisted on having her blood let. When I refused to do so, she called
another doctor who agreed, and she died almost immediately.

XVII. To underline just how much caution is required in treat-
ing the elderly when they are afflicted by a rheumatic illness, es-
pecially during a boreal season, I would like to cite the story that
even Hippocrates deemed noteworthy: "A man from Halicarnassus
was living in Santippe's home, and during the winter suffered from
terrible migraines. He was around fifty years old. Following Mne-
simaco's advice, he underwent venesection, his head cut, emptied
and cooled down, but suppuration did not take place. He became
feverish and died". Hippocrates described the case in great detail
because he believed that it "contained more than appeared at first
sight". I do not know why, but it was seldom the case that Hippoc-
rates said how old the patient was. Thus, the age needed to be
taken into consideration, since he was heading towards old age, as
well as the winter. The harmful humour, which was certainly dense
and cold because of the age and weather, was causing both an ob-
struction and tension, which led to the pain. Following the advice
of someone else (and here he mentions the name of the doctor in
charge, which is also uncommon for him), the patient's blood was
let, but what was the outcome? The brain was cooled down result-
ing in the necrosis of the innate heat, and this stopped suppuration.
Indeed, as Vallés says, Hippocrates included these words for a rea-
son: “suppuration did not take place”, in reference to the harmful effects of inappropriate blood-letting and this was obstructed by the maturation of the humour. According to Vallés, the man became more lethargic than feverish since in his books Of Epidemics, Hippocrates usually called those who became delirious “feverish”.

XVIII. I have also observed that during this rheumatic season, if blood-letting is carried out upon someone suffering from fever, the illness worsens, at times ending mortally. When there is catarrh in the chest or in any other part of the body and the patient is then afflicted by fever, most professors nearly always resort to blood-letting as if it were an anchor. Does that make the ship more secure? At times, experienced sailors also use the winds against them to “reach the port safely in time”. However, fever is not such a terrifying beast that it cannot be tamed by a professional without some kind of profit. In some cases blood-letting is advisable in fevers, while in others it is not – one needs to be able to tell the difference. If the blood has become too dense and is tending towards stasis and gathering in the chest or head, and thus results in fever, very little blood should be let, if at all. Indeed, very often we deprive nature of the only tool it has to overcome the illness. If, however, the blood is too liquid and is tending towards diachysis, i.e. fluidification, as a result of boiling, this kind of fever responds well to blood-letting. Hippocrates made a noteworthy comment on the subject that is not out of place here: “Anyone who suddenly becomes dumb should have their blood let if they are without fever”. In his books Of Epidemics Hippocrates frequently uses the term apyretos (without fever). It is of considerable importance for treatment if the illness is with or without fever. Indeed, indications can be found not only from the presence, but also the absence of fever, as is the case with this phrase by Hippocrates, which should be interpreted as such, that is, when the fat humours are a burden to the natural state and there is the danger that the innate heat will be suffocated.

XIX. The climatic conditions this year should always be kept in mind. Indeed, as in the case of the extreme abundance of crops, “it is the year, not the earth that bears fruit”, as Theophrastus would say. In the same manner, at certain times it is not the particular disposition of the body, but the weather that year that is the origin of the diseases. Careful attention should therefore be paid to the consistency of the blood, whether one wants to trace the intrinsic quali-
ties or the unusual exhalations coming from the ground. Attention should also be paid to which remedies prove effective. Indeed, as Thomas Sydenham, the discerning writer of epidemic illnesses, so discerningly observed, it is possible that those who have managed to cure a certain illness using a specific method one year, make it worse the same year using the same method. The author then frankly admits that he never actually paid enough attention to the fact that those he treated first were risking their lives, until he had finally discovered the illness's true nature and was therefore able to prescribe the correct treatment. In the same way, while blood-letting had usually proved effective in the above-mentioned illnesses, this season it was of little help. This was surely because of the past cold and cloudy weather last year and the harsh winter, which meant the blood had become so dense that if more blood than necessary was removed, and if the innate heat receded, the humours would have become less apt at moving and more likely to coagulate. That this was the actual composition of the blood was clear to see in the state of the blood itself – on the surface it was full of gunge, and there were many polyps in the heart cavities and in the blood vessels of the dissected bodies of those who died of catarrh.

XX. Nowadays, if nothing else, the frequent observation of polyps in people who died suddenly is at least proof that the true cause of certain diseases becomes known, and the doctor is believed to be free of blame if it is shown that there is a horrible beast nesting in our viscera. Furthermore, this also means they do not give us different names of illnesses. For example, cardiac syncope, suffocating catarrh and some kinds of apoplexy are frequently recognized for no other reason than by the polypous concretions that have formed in the heart or the blood vessels. P. Salius dedicates an entire chapter to cardiac syncope and says it results from the blood when it becomes dense in the veins and arteries. He describes the case of a young girl who died suddenly and, when an autopsy was carried out, a clot of blood was removed from the large artery, just like a sword being removed from its sheath. De la Rivière also describes a five-year-old child who had catarrh, then suffered from fainting attacks, then suddenly died. Upon autopsy dense, compact material was found in the left auricle of the heart which, he says, was like lard, and which he did not call "polyp" since the imagination of the anatomists had not yet studied polyps
in the red microcosm. Recently, an obese sixty-year-old man from around here died suddenly and when his corpse was dissected to study the cause of his death, almost two pounds of clotted blood were removed from the pericardium. In the trunk of the large ascending artery a polyp was found that was as like a lizard in both size and length. Owing to these foreign bodies, the circulation of the blood was obstructed and the reciprocal exchange between heart and brain was interrupted as the heart was not taking blood to the brain via the arteries because of the generation of animal spirits, and the brain was not taking animal spirits to the heart to perpetuate its movement (because the heart never ceases moving). This therefore inevitably resulted in sudden death. However, it is of little importance whether such a case is a result of cardiac syncope, suffocating catarrh or apoplexy. Van Heurne claimed there are two kinds of apoplexy. One he calls “small” and says is a result of phlebon apopleipsis, that is, the lack of blood flowing to the brain; the other he calls “big”, and occurs because the efflux of animal spirits from the brain is hindered. On the basis of Hippocrates’ doctrine, Martiano claims there are three kinds of apoplexy, which all basically merge in their essence. He claims they depend on the stasis of the blood that can be induced by a polyposis inspissation. Although this does not form instantaneously, there is an additional factor that makes the blood move more quickly and, as the entire blood mass is of a poor disposition and tends to clot, it is not surprising if there is sudden stasis of the blood. When the irradiation of the vital spirits that are continuously flowing from the heart is interrupted, the brain, which is the lunar star of the microcosm, is eclipsed. In his book On Diseases, when he is dealing with this kind of apoplexy, the cause of which lies outside the brain, in several passages Hippocrates uses the following words, which I would like to quote since they are so noteworthy and give an idea of the circulation of blood: “Once the veins have attracted the phlegm, owing to the cold of the phlegm the blood naturally stops... then, since the blood does not move, it is impossible that the body is not also immobile and becomes lethargic”.

XXI. In apoplexy, especially when it degenerates into paralysis, at times I have observed that the faculty of speech is lost while the actual voice remains, at others, both are lost; I think this is important both for the prognosis and for treatment as losing the faculty.
of speech is not the same as losing one's voice. *Aude* means "faculty of speech", *phone" voice", and they are produced by two different organs. The tongue is the "author of discourse" while the larynx and trachea are the authors of the voice. The learned Willis has observed that a deep voice is formed by a lowering of the tracheal trunk while in a higher voice it is raised. He says this alternate movement comes from a branch of the recurrent nerve that pulls the cartilaginous rings downwards, while another nerve from the plexus of the same vagus raises them upwards. Thus, when the nerves in the tongue relax there is *anaudia*, while when those in the larynx and trachea relax there is *aphonia*. It is therefore possible for a person to be *anaudos* and not *aphonos*, for example the mute and newly born, who are able to make unarticulated sounds. The opposite is not possible however, so someone cannot be *aphonos* and not *anaudos*. This is why Hippocrates wrote the following in his tale of Pythion, who died after 10 days: "In the evening the situation was aggravated, he became *anaudos* and *afonos". Losing the faculty of speech is certainly a bad sign, and one that is much worse than losing one's voice, which is why Hippocrates used both terms to show just how serious Pythion's condition was. However, both *aphonia* and *anaudia* can occur as a result of either laxity or convulsions. In the case of Pythion, the aphonia was certainly of a convulsive nature as he was still afflicted by extreme pain on the sixth day. According to the learned Duret, this is the difference between them since aphonia, which is a result of tension, leads to death of the cruellest kind, while laxity removes the perception of death. Since aphonia can be caused by both tension and laxity of the vocal nerves and muscles, each time it occurs it is important to observe whether it is of the convulsive or solvent kind if one is to prescribe the appropriate remedy; indeed, *tasis* (tension) and *lysis* (laxity) are opposites. It is often the case that if a malignant fever is followed by aphonia, to protect themselves against common opinion, many claim with great impudence that the patient was afflicted by an apoplectic trauma when it was really a case of convulsive aphonia. Indeed, it is extremely rare that an acute fever is followed by apoplectic aphonia, although it has been known to occur, and I myself came across such a case recently. The man in question was of a robust constitution and after the twelfth paroxysm of tertian fever he became *anaudos kai aphonos*, with a relaxation of both his right arm and leg. He has
now recovered his voice completely, but his faculty of speech is not yet perfect. Van Foreest describes how a weaver became mute after suffering from a slight wound to the thumb on his right hand. He said he treated him as if he had been afflicted by a paralysis of the tongue, but in all due respect to this illustrious man, I believe this was actually due to a convulsion of the tongue. Indeed, Van Foreest explains that the patient had made signs and written that his tongue felt like it had been tied with string.

While on the subject of apoplexy and paralysis, I would like to mention a remarkable case that I observed during this season in a noble virgin nun of the Convent of S. Maria Maddalena in Modena. At the age of twenty-five, this consecrated virgin of the noble Fontana family, who was of a relatively good constitution although immoderate in both food and wine, began suffering from a hypochondriacal ailment that led her to abstain from all kinds of food and live off wine alone. I frequently warned her that such a diet would lead to a serious illness that would have no remedy, and this then happened in the middle of winter. While she was standing in front of the fire, she was afflicted by a serious syncope and was taken straight to bed. She seemed to be recovering but when the nuns gave her some light broth to restore her strength and spirits, she was unable to swallow it. They then gave her diluted wine but even though she wanted to, she was unable to swallow a drop. After a day had gone by without eating or drinking anything, feverless and no ailments in any other parts of her body, it was clear that the illness in question was paralysis of the oesophagus, since the latter is known as fistular muscle, as the internal membrane – according to observations made by anatomists – is made of all kinds of fibre; or rather, because the muscles that make the oesophagus move had relaxed, since the flow of the vital spirits to those parts had been hindered. Therefore, from the very moment she was afflicted by this ailment, she was unable to swallow either food or drink for sixty-six days; she lived off an enema of broth with two egg yolks given once a day at noon. Every three or four days she was given an enema of broth with half an ounce of verbena instead of the enemas to empty her bowels and expel the remaining excrements of that food. After thirty days this noble virgin was still bedridden and was so fed up with such a wretched life that she said she would rather die than live such a life, and therefore refused
these enemas as nourishment. No prayers to respect God’s wishes and prolong her life were able to sway her in her decision. In the evening she then fainted and the nuns gave her the usual enema as if it were a cordial, thanks to which the patient then opened her eyes and began to talk and agreed to the daily administration of the enema until, as mentioned earlier, on the sixty-sixth day when I was present, followed my advice and took a little spirit of wine. She managed to swallow it and within two days the oesophagus had fully recovered and she was then able to both drink and eat; however, since she was still confined to her bed because she had lost so much weight, her spirits languished and one could barely feel her pulse. This led to pains in her legs and torsion of the feet. This case became famous not only amongst doctors, some of whom were so curious they came to visit the patient, but throughout the whole city. The use of nutritional enemas is therefore not to be met with disapproval, as some tend to do. This case study is proof of their effectiveness. It is therefore to be believed that the branches of the lacteal veins are dispersed in the rectum and in the case of extreme need, they absorb the juice containing nourishment.

XXII. These ailments abounded as a result of the causes mentioned earlier, together with the combination of the terrible weather that year and the lack of or poor quality food, which alone is able to fill bodies with dense humours, and the consumption of legumes in particular, since they are so difficult to digest; the result is cacochymia; This means that in the face of such a shortage of food, in practice grand remedies should be administered with caution, to the common folk especially. According to Hippocrates, those who eat poor quality food tolerate purgatives less since, in Galen’s comment, they become weaker more easily; according to Van Heurne this is because of syncope of the stomach, to which cacochymici are susceptible when they take purgatives; in the same way, blood-letting also over-taxes their strength, as I have frequently had the chance to observe. In several towns in this area, in Castrovitro and Scandiano in particular, I have learned that the very thing that Hippocrates wrote happened in the city of Thrace because of the high cost of food also happened there – that is, that many suffered from a weakness of the legs because of eating legumes, vetch especially. In calamities of this kind the doctor should therefore be more cautious when recommending blood-letting, as was the case
at other times. The keenness of intelligence needs to pay attention to these situations and to the constitution of the year in particular, rather than recommending generic remedies from books if they do not want to be criticized for having no practical experience.

XXIII. I believe that during this constitution the city-folk were more subject to the aforementioned diseases than the country-folk because the latter live a more active life and their blood is therefore more fluid and less likely to stanch. Another explanation might be that during the rural epidemic I described in another dissertation of mine, the continuous fevers that afflicted the country-folk cured the alternation of the crisis by gradually cleansing the impurities of the blood and improving the general constitution of the entire humoral mass.

XXIV. Around equinox it became warmer and the weather suddenly changed from bitterly cold to excessively hot, so that from the equinox until the end of March it was so hot it could have been summer, and at sunset the sun appeared to be on fire as if it were August. During the month of April the heat decreased but it remained warm and dry, with clear, bright skies. Since it had not rained throughout the whole of April, everyone feared for the harvest; however, the fruit bushes and trees were covered in white flowers, promising an abundance of early fruit as consolation, which actually proved to be the case this year, when Pomona came to Ceres’ aid. In addition, the increase in heat was not proportional to the approach of the sun. Each day it therefore became drier and drier so that, throughout the winter, the earth was just as dry as when “the Dog Star sears the fields”. As the weather remained just as dry during the month of May and there was only very little rainfall, this year there was a great shortage of vegetables, it being too dry for the beans and nearly all the legumes, and there was also little hope for a good harvest of wheat.

XXV. During this spring-like weather, in early spring in particular, the same chest ailments prevailed, although not in such serious forms as in the winter. Then, towards the end of spring, just like the blades of the previous crops, the tertian fevers reared their heads once again. Never before had we seen such an outbreak of scabies in this region and nearly all the inhabitants in both the towns and countryside were afflicted by terrible scabies. This would not respond to repeated purgatives or blood-letting; the
blood that was let contained a lot of yellow serum and the urine was dark in colour. Just like the previous year, once again animals died in vast numbers, sheep in particular, and entire flocks were almost completely wiped out.

XXVI. Since no other disease is as contagious as scabies (if it is legitimate to include it in the category of diseases since Hippocrates calls it an eyesore rather than an illness and in Phleboclysis, Plato calls it a mixed ailment of pain and pleasure, hence the Greek pathos glykypikros (bitter sweet ill)), I repeat, as no other disease is as familiar to doctors and clever at escaping their cures, and as Van Helmont took the opportunity to describe common practice amongst doctors in a book entitled “The scab and the ulcers of the schools”, let us try and deface this scourge a little. It certainly has to be said that the professors of medicine deserve no praise for their treatment of scabies, and all too often it is an elderly woman who arrives on the scene unexpectedly and takes the limelight away from them with a simple ointment that achieves the very thing they were trying to do in vain with a great variety of remedies, claiming they were able to cure diseases worthy of the labours of Hercules. According to Galen, every doctor must make every effort to keep this scourge away from him by respecting all the rules of their profession. Indeed, as he himself says, since scabies deforms everything it touches, it does so even more to the doctor who, afflicted with eyesore, must then admit that Plutarch’s saying of a tragic poet was written for him: “Doctor to others, while he himself is full of ulcers”.

XXVII. According to Van Helmont, scabies should only be treated with topics and not with any internal remedies that would exhaust the body needlessly. When he observed how easily a healthy body could be infected by touching someone suffering from scabies just once, he believed it resulted from the bad ferment of the skin that contaminated its own food; he did not believe it was caused by an internal flaw of the viscera and therefore recommended the use of topics alone. However, such intervention is rightly believed to be full of danger. I therefore believe it opportune to support the opinion of Baillou, the famous practitioner who, by distinctions and on the basis of Hippocrates’ thought, explained when scabies is a disease and when it is an abscess. In other words, the right path the doctor must follow when treating scabies. I would like to quote
this passage by Hippocrates: “Tetters, leprosy, white vitiligo – for young people who have been afflicted by one of these, if there is a gradual increase over a long time, that outbreak of papules is not an abscess but a disease; but in those who suddenly break out in a vast quantity, it is an abscess”. The learned Mercurial comments on the same passage as follows: “Not everyone understands what it means if it is an abscess and not a disease, and vice versa”. Scabies and other skin afflictions should therefore be included in the category of diseases when they develop slowly. However, when they develop suddenly and are widespread, in particular after a serious illness, they should not be called a disease but *apostasis*. In the case of scabies, Ballonius therefore says that at times only topics should be administered – when there is no doubt that the scabies is only an illness of the skin. At other times purgatives and the like should be used as internal remedies, while at other times there is no point in trying to eliminate scabies by using topics alone, i.e. when scabies is the result of another illness, for example cachexia.

XXVIII. Hippocrates wrote that the nature of chronic diseases is that they “grow in the winter and in the summer usually disappear, while those that grow in the summer have to end in the winter”. Everybody now knows that this is the true nature of scabies and that in winter it flourishes and rages the most while in summer it disappears, or at least diminishes. When treating someone with scabies, one must therefore inform them that there is no set cure other than that this horrible illness disappears more easily in the summer. And this also applies with this scourge in our region (I am not talking about leprosy, the epidemic of the Egyptian, described by P. Alpino, which was due to the muddy water and salty fish that was a natural part of their diet). It can be more easily dispelled with the aid of the summer heat than with chicory. Experience has shown repeatedly that without any purgatives, blood-letting or any other kind of remedy, countrymen suffering from scabies during the winter shed the scales of scabies in the summer, just like snakes, and their “skin treated by the constant sun” shone once again, as Persius said. However, at times, this is not enough to repel defamation. As he himself wrote, Francesco Petrarch once suffered from dry scabies, and when he saw that such prolonged use of medicines was exhausting him to no avail, he began to accuse the doctors, whom he was naturally hostile to, and when they told him to wait
for the summer, he flew into a temper and sent them away with the following words: “Then I do not believe in doctors, and I hold no hope in the summer, but only in he of whom it is written ‘You created summer and spring’”. The main cure for scabies therefore depends on the summer heat, which is able to restore the blood mass to its natural composition and saturate it with spirituous particles, which is how it overcomes the exuberant acid that marks the skin. No matter how much they are requested, purgatives, repeated venesection, baths and all other kinds of medical preparations are often no comparison with the effects of the summer air. This spring I prescribed a light purgative to a close friend of mine who was suffering from scabies as I could suggest nothing better and he was urging me to do something else, and when I could not help myself but quote Juvenal’s “Resist and wait for the cicada” he turned to me and said: “And you can wait for the Greek calendar to be paid!”.

XXIX. Hippocrates described both cases and I would like to include them here: “Broad eruptions, without any great itching (such as Simon’s were in the winter), were not relieved by vomiting; but perhaps warm fomentations applied might have been of service; for he, upon being either anointed by the fire, or bathed with warm water, was relieved”. Here we have a clear example of scabies when it is a disease because despite it being winter, anointments helped. If that scabies had been an abscess and the result of another illness, not only would applying ointment at the wrong moment not have helped, but it might have caused considerable harm. Attention should be paid to the words “...not relieved by vomiting”, a clear sign that the body was healthy and the ill lay exclusively in the external parts of the body. “Healthy bodies have difficulty tolerating purgatives”, Hippocrates claims, and teaches us to observe the faeces when the throat becomes ill or lumps appear in the body. If they are similar to those of healthy people, the body may be nourished; otherwise, they should be given a purgative. Indeed, lumps often appear on the skin of a body that is healthy within.

XXX. Hippocrates gives us the other example of scabies, described as an abscess: “A man at Athens was seized with an itching all over and his skin was thick from head to foot, in appearance like that of a leper; and could not be taken up anywhere for the thickness of it. This man could receive no benefit from anybody; but, upon using the hot-baths at Melus, got rid of his itching and