

11 George Motherby (1731–1793)

George Motherby's medical dictionary is apparently best remembered for quite incidental matters such as being the first to list the word placebo,¹⁷⁴ and for being an illustrated dictionary; circumstances which are not at all unusual in the subsequent records of such works. It has generally been neglected, but there is a much fuller and more recent account of Motherby's lexicographical work in a recent work by Elisabetta Lonati (2017). Little is known of Motherby's life, but he is usually mentioned as living in Highgate, visited Königsberg in about 1770 where he practised variolation, and his death occurred in Beverley in 1793 (Duncan 1794: 480–481).

A *new medical dictionary* was first printed by J. Johnson and others in 1775. A second edition of the work appeared in 1785, and a third in 1791, this time expanded by "George Wallis, M. D. S. M. S. Lecturer on the Theory and Practice of Physic, London", the work now incorporating six additional copperplate engravings. Wallis identified himself as the reviser of Motherby on the title-page of his own *The art of preventing diseases*, which appeared in 1793. A fourth edition appeared in 1795, once again corrected by Wallis. His own work, retitled as *The complete family physician* was issued in the same year, with Wallis's description appropriately updated to identify him as the editor of the "last" version of Motherby. The fifth edition of Motherby appeared in 1801.

The author's intentions are set out in the preface, which claims that this volume will end each article by citing a selection of references to "the most eminent writers on the subject" ([iii]), a means of facilitating the reader's access to information. While arguing that "systematic productions" are most illuminating in the learning process, alphabetical order is best suited to rapid reference and refreshing the practitioner's memory ([iii]). He then embarks upon a lengthy account of the virtues of both the ancient writers and the "Arabians", while acknowledging the great strides made by the moderns, including Vesalius, Harvey, and Boyle. The preface concludes with an account of the content of the entries, which stresses convenience in searching as well as concision and clarity, and rejects "wanton variety" in naming. Motherby commits himself to using "that name which is most in use" (vi), apparently irrespective of its etymology or derivation and cutting through the familiar question of whether a term was 'barbarous' or not, as well as the linguistic probity of the form used. Motherby is thus at pains to assist the busy practitioner in the pressing demands on his time rather than stressing his learning and comprehensiveness.

Motherby's dictionary seems to have established itself quite quickly and to have shared the market in the last quarter of the eighteenth century with the revamped Quincy in the form which it took with the appearance of its ninth and tenth editions.

174 See Shapiro./Shapiro (1997).