



The Sceptical Chymist: The Most Notable Work From The "Father of Modern Chemistry"

Robert Boyle

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Robert Boyle was the seventh son of Richard Boyle, the greatest landlord in Ireland in the early 17th century, known as the "Great Earl of Cork." The younger Boyle was an important natural philosopher, a founder and influential fellow of Britain's Royal Society who made important contributions in both physics and chemistry. (View a portrait of Boyle at the National Portrait Gallery, London.) He is probably best known today for "Boyle's law," [Boyle 1662] which relates the pressure and volume of gases. (View some of his apparatus for investigating gases at Stanford University.) His earliest publication was on the physical properties of air; he also wrote detailed accounts of chemical experiments, including several on combustion [Boyle 1672]. The Sceptical Chymist is an extensive dialogue concerning the nature and number of the elements. Boyle argues that those who believe the elements to be earth, air, fire, and water (following Aristotle and the ancients) or mercury, sulfur, and salt (following more recent alchemical doctrine) do so on an insufficient basis. The cast of characters includes Carneades (representing Boyle's opinions), Themistius (representing the four-element system of the ancients), Philoponus (representing the three-principle system of the alchemists), and Eleutherius (an interested observer).

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