

Robert Boyle jako powątpiewający alchemik

Robert Boyle as a sceptical alchemist

SUMMARY

The article contains ample fragments of Robert Boyle's dissertation, *The Sceptical Chymist*, which have been translated into Polish for the first time. Boyle adopts the position of a sceptic in order to criticize, or even in fact to reject, the view of the followers of Aristotle and Paracelsus on the nature and number of elements of which all substances were to be composed of. He lists in detail the conditions that must be met by a substance for it to be recognized as a chemical element, but he gives no concrete example of a substance which would meet such conditions. It is for that reason that Aristotelian conception of four elements lingered on in chemistry for another one hundred years.

Unlike most other naturalists of his times, Boyle adhered to the corpuscular view of the texture of matter and it was from such a perspective that he criticized the Aristotelian view of fire as a purifying factor, i.e. a factor that linked similar things and separated dissimilar ones. In Boyle's view, fire – or strictly speaking elevated temperature – fragmented a substance into small corpuscles, which might then combine in many ways, recreating the original substance, or forming a new one. Also espousing a corpuscular approach, Boyle argued that as a result of crystallization and distillation of liquid mixtures, the original components of a mixture could be isolated or a new substance might be formed. In such cases Boyle used the term "compound", but he did so in a general sense, for in the 18th century the meaning of the term was not determined to the extent that it is nowadays.