PARACELSUS

WALTER PAGEL

PARACELSUS

An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine
in the Era of the Renaissance

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Who does not know Doctor Paracelsus, renowned reformer of medicine, chemist and naturalist, philosopher and theologian, lay preacher and protagonist of social justice, believer in natural magic and effusive diviner?

Indeed, something is known everywhere of each of these aspects offered by what appears to us as an erratic block in a period of renascent progress. Little, however, if anything is known of the link which must have forged such disparate trends into the mould of a savant at once unified and unique in himself. To-day their unification in a single personality does not easily make sense - at a time of transition they were not incompatible. Their very synthesis had a share in the development of modern naturalism, science and medicine in the 16th and 17th centuries. In Paracelsus it was a consistent philosophia naturalis based on a medical view of man and world, in many ways archaic and in others surprisingly modern. Understanding
it requires an effort to make oneself contemporary with him, an
arduous task which of necessity will remain short of completion and full
satisfaction. An attempt at achieving it as far as possible is the burden of
the present book.
It was first published a quarter of a century ago. It met with unexpectedly
wide approval and, unobtainable as it has been for some time,
with persistent demand. No further monograph comparable in style and
scope has come to light in the meantime, but a large number of new facts
and views have. The author's own continued research concerned Paracelsus' debt to occult tradition from neo-Platonic and Gnostic sources as perpetuated
in mediaeval literature. Preliminary results are found in 'Das medizinische
Weltbild des Paracelsus, seine Zusammenhänge mit Neuplatonis-mus
und Gnosis' (Wiesbaden 1962); it opened as volume 1 the new series
'Kosmosophie', edited by Kurt Goldammer. This was followed by a
number of papers in 'Ambix', various historical-medical journals and
more recently in the 'Salzburger Beiträge zur Paracelsusforschung', edited
by Sepp Domandl. Little if any doubt remains about the great significance
of the neo-Platonic and Gnostic pieces studied - they are organic components
of genuine Paracelsian texts and doctrines; they are not merely
quotations adduced from outside to embellish them or to show off his
XII Preface
erudition. Other students of Paracelsus have contributed importantly in
correcting traditionally repeated unrealistic data and views concerning
uncharted areas in Paracelsus' life, the dating of his treatises, his journeys
and religious ideologies, as revealed in first editions of his religious and
social-political writings from manuscripts under the aegis of K. Goldammer.
All this justifies re-publication of the book with correction of errors and
amplification of contents bringing it up to the present standard of our
knowledge and understanding of Paracelsus. This has now been provided
in the form of a comprehensive appendix of 'Addenda and Errata' referring
to their appropriate places in the original text which thereby could be
preserved in its entirety. It also offers a collation of all loci quoted from
Huser with the standard edition of Sudhoff.
The author remains indebted to the Wellcome Trust - ever since,
under the auspices of the late Sir Henry Dale, O.M. F.R.S., it has supported
his publications in various ways up to the present day. He gratefully
remembers the help in all problems scientific and personal extended to him
by the late Dr. F.N.L. Poynter, F.L.A., librarian, founder and director
of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine. He also provided
most of the illustrations of the present book. Of his staff and his successor's,
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