

incidents. Professor Douglas contributes an introduction which is entirely admirable to a book without which no library, however modest its pretensions, can face the future.

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THE LIFE AND SOUL OF PARACELSUS. By John Hargrave. (Gollancz; 16s.)

Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombast Paracelsus—superb name for an alchemist. This will surely be a fascinating account of dabblings in black magic. One starts to read eagerly. The writer's style is unusual, brisk, breezy, possibly deliberately bombastic and very outspoken, especially on the subject of the critics, throughout four centuries, of the astonishing Paracelsus. Even in these days, it seems, a defender of Paracelsus is liable to be 'smirked at, if not insulted'.

Somewhat daunted, the reader, prepared to repress even the slightest smirk, forges ahead, misgivings increasing as the style that at first seems breezy becomes distressingly vulgar. A sick Canon's room, for instance, is described as having about it 'the whispering ghost-words of the solemn ordinances of the Church: the gibble-gabble of Latin prayers, chants, masses, liturgies rattled off *holus-bolus Corpus Christi—isn't it time for supper yet?*' [Author's italics.]

An angry but dignified letter from Paracelsus to the Town Council of Basle is described 'as though he "blew a raspberry" through the keyhole of the Council Chamber, and shouted: Now then, you boobs—I'm telling' you!—I'll stand no more of it—so you'd better get crackin', see?'

Language like the above is possibly meant to be cleverly satiric. Its progressive accumulation clouds and obscures the life and soul of Paracelsus; one wearies of Mr Hargrave. How refreshing to turn to Browning's dramatic poem on the great alchemist, though Mr Hargrave disapproves of it as 'unreal and utterly misleading'. He may be right, of course, for Mr Hargrave has spent many years of research on the subject. There may be many who will prefer Mr Hargrave's bibulous, cantankerous Paracelsus to Browning's noble and dignified philosopher. And how different they are. The dying Paracelsus in Browning's poem says:

... I press God's lamp
Close to my breast—its splendour, soon or late
Will pierce the gloom. I shall emerge one day.

Mr Hargrave's concluding words are:

'Immortal Paracelsus—"always drunk, always lucid!"
Drunk on the Dewdrink of the Stars.'

The book is dedicated, no doubt significantly, 'To Those Who Know'.

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