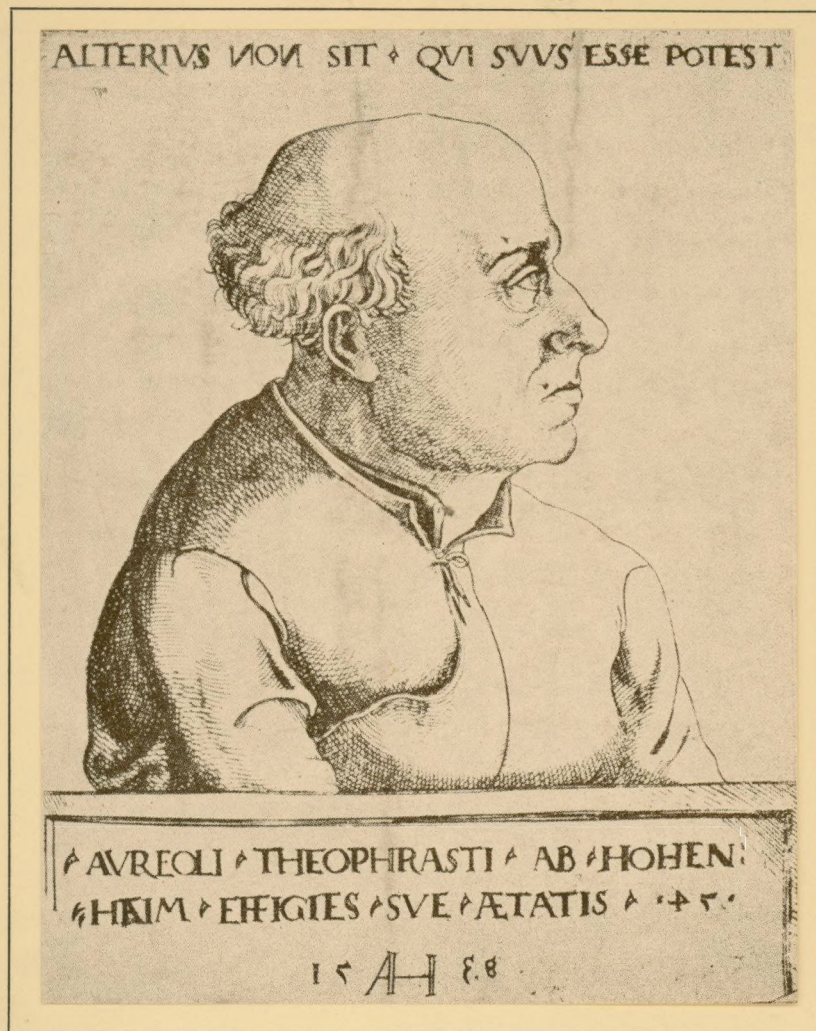




IN COMMEMORATION OF THE FOUR-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DEATH OF

PARACELSVS

1493 - 1541

THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

T WAS with Paracelsus that the northern world appeared upon the stage of medicine. Its entry was fierce, impetuous, characterised by a Faustian urge towards completion. Paracelsus broached the basic problems of the healing art, those which will for all time be part of the essentials of physicianship. He did not found a school. It was hard for his discoveries to secure incorporation into the general body of medical doctrine. Yet his work, originating at one of the turning-points of western medicine, is still very much alive today.

Born in 1493, one year after the discovery of America, Paracelsus, christened Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, spent his early youth in Einsiedeln, Switzerland. As soon as he was old enough to toddle along, Paracelsus went the rounds with his father, a physician, visiting the sick and learning by observation the treatment of disease. The forests of Einsiedeln taught young Paracelsus to love and respect nature, and instilled in him a rugged and fearless spirit. At the age of ten, father and son, the mother having died, removed from Einsiedeln to Villach. Here Paracelsus was initiated into the mysteries of the earth's bowels, for at Villach were located the mineral mines and the smelting works of Count Fuger. What Paracelsus saw and learned at Villach had a profound and lasting effect upon his spirit and mentality.

When of age, Paracelsus undertook the systematic study of medicine. He went to Ferrara, Italy, and became the pupil of Leonicino, a great humanist and eminent physician. In due time, Paracelsus took his doctor's degree and set forth to practice medicine. But there was a something in him which revolted against a career of peaceful pursuits. Paracelsus had grown up in touch with nature, had learned how to observe, had from earliest childhood been in contact with the sick. A ferment was stirring in the young physician. Away from the stuffy atmosphere of the class-room! Into the free air, back to nature! He took a pilgrim's staff into his hand, realising that no one could become a geographical discoverer who remained seated beside the fire. "If a man wishes to become acquainted with many diseases, he must set forth on his travels. If he travels far, he will gather much experience, and will win much knowledge." On his travels, the young man learned, not only about illnesses, but also about remedies. Peasants, old wives, handicraftsmen, the barbers and the barber-surgeons—

such people often had knowledge well worth acquiring, although the professors at the universities knew nothing of it.

Paracelsus set forth on his voyage of discovery through the world, upon a journey which, with trifling interruptions, was to last until death, and led him through all the lands of western Europe. He visited the mining districts, studied the healing springs, made long series of chemical experiments. He continued to practise as a physician, to help, to heal, where he could. He had thrown away his doctoral biretta and wore an ordinary slouch hat. Disciples joined their fortunes to his, apprentices of low degree often enough. Thus it was a motley company that moved from place to place.

As he travelled, it grew more and more plain to him that the traditional art of healing was on a false road. Its theories were false and its therapeutic methods were false. He began to keep a record of his own observations and ideas. He wrote, as he thought, in his mother-tongue. He had not yet become fluent in its use, and often found it difficult to express himself clearly. Many concepts were still lacking to his verbal treasury. Many terms were hard to find. But he coined them, and by degrees fluency came.

By the time he was thirty, Paracelsus was already a mature man. He had seen and learned much. But, he was weary of journeying, and longed for some fixed establishment, where, while practising his profession, he could continue his studies and elaborate his experiences; where he would have a laboratory and assistants, and where he could get his books printed. For by now he had written many books.

In 1527, Paracelsus accepted the office of town physician in Basle, Switzerland, but his tenure was short, for by his outspoken criticism and arrogant rejection of the ancient medical authorities, he antagonized the medical faculty, and by a foolish quarrel over a fee, he alienated the town council. In February, 1528, Paracelsus resumed his migratory existence. Having no university wherein to expound his ideas, Paracelsus sought to publish his works. But no one would print his books. It seemed to him that there must be a conspiracy against him. Then in Nuremberg he found a town council whose members were more liberal-minded than those in other cities, and were prepared to publish his works. In 1529 appeared two books on

syphilis; but thereupon the medical faculty of Leipzig entered a protest, and he could get nothing more printed in Nuremberg.

Hirschvogel's portrait (frontispiece) made in the year 1538, represents Paracelsus at the age of forty-five, but we are looking at an old man who has suffered greatly. Still, we note the tough Alemannic skull, made for butting against thick walls; we note the hard-bitten features of a man ready to defy the world.

Paracelsus was in Carinthia when Prince Ernest of Bavaria, a patron of the natural sciences, summoned him to Salzburg. He followed the call, but died, prematurely worn out, on December 24, 1541.

Based on "*Paracelsus*", from *The Great Doctors* by Henry E. Sigerist
Published by W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., New York City



SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON PARACELSUS IN ENGLISH

Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim—Called Paracelsus: his personality and influence as physician, chemist, and reformer,

by John M. Stillman, Open Court Publishing Co., Chicago and London, 1920.

•

The Life of Paracelsus,

by Anna M. Stoddart, Philadelphia, 1916.

•

Occult Causes of Disease, being a Compendium of the teachings laid down in his volume "*Volumen Paramirum*" by Bombastus von Hohenheim, better known as Paracelsus,

by E. Wolfram, London, 1930.



The New York Academy of Medicine is an educational institution devoted to the service of all of the people of the City of New York.