

PARACELSUS

(An excerpt from "THE KELTIC KNOT" a work in progress by alexis dolgorukii)

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PARACELSUS:

Aurelius Philippus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493 - 1541 C.E.)

Paracelsus is one of the great "heroes" and "icons" of the "popular Occultists", but let's look at his life and works.

It is interesting to start our look at "Paracelsus" by taking note of the fact that his chosen "alias" was what it was. "Paracelsus" means "Beyond Celsus". This is very interestingly evidentiary because of the kind of statement made by this identification. Identifying one's self with Celsus was a very courageous act in the 16th century and it probably cost Herr von Hohenheim dearly. So, before we look at Paracelsus, let's look at Celsus.

CELSUS: Celsus lived (approximately) around the year 178 of the common era. We know almost nothing at all of him because Christianity tried very diligently, and with all its enormous power, to eradicate the memory of this man, but all they managed to accomplish was to (if you'll pardon the expression) "occult" him. He was an eclectic Platonist of the Middle-Platonism of the period pre-Plotinus and "Neo-Platonism". He was the most important representative of the Pre-Christian Philosophical Community's reaction against Christianity. He is known to us ONLY from the work of ORIGEN: (Origenes Admantius c. 185-254 C.E.) who was the most influential theologian of the early Greek Church. Origen preserved fragments of Celsus' only known work ALETHES LOGOS (or "True Word") in Origen's attempted refutation of Celsus in his "CONTRA CELSUM" or "Against Celsus".

Identifying with one of Christianity's two most significant antagonists (the other was probably the more important of the two, he was PORPHYRY and he lived from 234 to 305 C.E.) surely was not a "way to make friends and influence people" in the 16th century, but it sends us an unmistakable signal as to von Hohenheim's real interests which were philosophical and clearly not "Magic". I think it also important to point out that for all we know the name Paracelsus is part of the myth and not part of the man. We have absolutely no indication or proof that Herr von Hohenheim ever referred to himself as "Paracelsus" or if it is an appellation that attached itself to him after his death. If this is so, though, it too is evidentiary for Celsus was known only for the one thing. It certainly had nothing at all to do with his medical or scientific skills. In point of fact, we only know about Celsus at all from Origen's quotations of his work. We don't really

know anything else about him except that he wrote "Alethes Logos" around 178 C.E. We have no idea where he lived (it's believed to be either Rome itself, or Alexandria) and other than it being obvious that he was a Platonist and probably a philosopher by profession, we know absolutely nothing.

Now as to PARACELSUS himself, what is unfortunate is that this is one of the people central to the myth of "magic", "alchemy" and "popular occultism". This was not done by him, but to him.

Theophrastus von Hohenheim was a Swiss of uncertain antecedents, though his mythology claims his father was the illegitimate son of a "Prince". One thing is clear though, given the laws and customs of the period his unchallenged use of the "von" in his name means he was legally of the nobility. But that's all we really know. We do know that he was a physician and scientist who established the role of chemistry in medicine.

The "Paracelsus Myth" of course, calls him an "alchemist" but in truth in those days all chemists were called "alchemists", it's all they knew to do. This man was no "magician" or "occultist" but a major philosopher and a really important "Father of Science".

What did he really do?

Well, after being born (in or near EINSIEDELN in Canton Schwyz - Switzerland) he grew up in what appears to be a perfectly normal fashion, and was probably introduced to medicine by his father who was also a physician. He eventually matriculated at the University of Basel and then studied at the Monastery of Sponheim under the sponsorship and tutoring of it's abbot, Johannes Trithemius. He remained there a short time (it's not known how long) and left to go to the mines in the Tirol, where this polymath became absorbed in the mechanical aspects and difficulties involved in mining, in the nature of the minerals themselves, and as a physician in the diseases and injuries of the men working in those mines.

He returned to Basel in 1526, and became a lecturer in medicine on the faculty of the University of Basel. One extremely iconoclastic thing he did was to lecture in German rather than in Latin, which was unheard of at the time, and may be seen to be quite a revolutionary action. Another thing that Theophrastus von Hohenheim did, and this was far more radical and most dangerous to his personal safety, was that before his series of lectures, the books of the following two writers were formally and with great fanfare, burnt.

GALEN (C. 130 - 200 C.E.) Greek physician from Pergamum, founder of experimental physiology, and after Hippocrates was considered the most distinguished physician in antiquity. He too, was a polymath, and among his voluminous works, were works on Philosophy (he was an Aristotelian), he also

wrote on many diverse subjects ranging from the theater to history and government.

In the matter of religion, Galen himself was a monotheist, and stood as a kind of mediator between the Stoics and the Christians in his beliefs. For this reason, and for his personal closeness to the Imperial Family. He was made to be the canon of Christian Medicine and to criticize his works was considered heresy.)

AVICENNA (Al Sheik Al Reyes Abu Ali Al-Hossein ben Abdallah ben Sina, 980-1038 CE) was another polymath who, in 1021 wrote his famous treatise "BOOK ON THE CANON OF MEDICINE". He was primarily a mathematician and philosopher who took up medicine as a hobby and became the most famous physician of his time. He was, like so many people of his geographic area, strongly influenced by the Gnostics, Manicheans, and the legends and mythology of the Chaldean Mazdazdian Magi. He is one of the primary sources on the so-called "Philosopher's Stone" and an important inspirer of what became "Popular Occultism".

The books of these two writers were "The Canon of Christian Medicine", and they were the ONLY treatises truly approved of by the Inquisition. Obviously this was a bold statement, and probably a very foolhardy thing to do. But risks like this have to be taken if human knowledge and comprehension is to go forward.

Theophrastus von Hohenheim's lectures discredited past and contemporary medicine and promoted his own theories (largely Platonic based) and treatments of disease. In 1529 he was driven out of the University of Basel and wandered Europe, which is a period of his life which we have no credible records of. In 1541 The Archbishop of Salzburg invited him to come there and live and work "under his protection". Then, on September 24th 1541 Theophrastus von Hohenheim was flung down a very steep embankment or cliff by "unknown assailants" and died of his injuries. I believe the "assailants" to have been agents of the Church, probably monks from the nearby monastery. He thusly paid for his efforts on behalf of humanity.

In his works, Theophrastus von Hohenheim shows a truly sincere desire to promote the progress of medicine, but it is really questionable that he introduced a single truly new truth, though it is possible that his innovations were original to him. The inter-communications available to scholars and scientists which are so easily available in our times were undreamed of in his. Much of what others were doing, and discovering was unknown to von Hohenheim, even as what he was doing was unknown to other students. One of the most important factors is that the work of all scholars and scientists in that period had to be kept rigidly secret, especially if the work related to real innovations due to the ubiquitous Inquisition. Not all scholars and scientists of the time were as courageous as Theophrastus von Hohenheim.

Fundamentally his system was based on a visionary Neo-Platonic philosophy in which the Human Condition is regarded as inseparable from that of the Cosmos. I am personally inclined to believe that much of what is presented as "Paracelsian" is actually later revisionism and forged additions. But of course the man was prey to much of the ignorance that so marked the age in which he lived. We may also assume, and I believe correctly, that much of what he actually did write was written in a kind of "code", familiar to others in his field, but to avoid the attentions of the Inquisitors. The Muslim Sufis too, did this. Most if not all of their so-called "Love Poetry" is actually highly disguised metaphysical philosophical exposition.

I think we can be quite sure about one thing regarding "Paracelsus"; he was a physician and a chemist, and NOT an "alchemist". He spent his time and energy for the betterment of humanity and NOT in fruitless attempts to "transmute 'base lead' into 'gold'", even if we view that through later revisionist eyes in the rationalization of "alchemy" into the "great work" of transmuting the "base lead" of physical existence into the "noble gold" of spirituality.