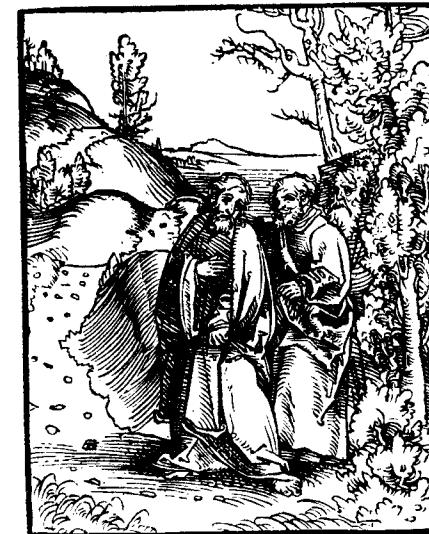


to adopt for specific circumstances. Similarly, I have used terms like chemistry sparingly, and only when such usage seems more appropriate than the older terms such as alchemy. The latter suggests engagement with problems such as transmutation that was not interpreted in the traditional manner where Paracelsus was concerned.

Over the years I have benefited from contact with many Paracelsus scholars, the earliest being Walter Pagel, who was kind enough to encourage my first studies in this area. Despite some notable differences of outlook between us, Pagel's prolific output has been a continuing source of reference and gain. More recently this aspect of my work has been generously assisted and encouraged from time to time by many others, including Udo Benzenhöfer, Stefano Carotti, Pietro Corsi, Andrew Cunningham, Antonio Clericuzio, Dane Thor Daniel, Thomas Earle, Ute Gause, Ole Peter Grell, Carlos Gilly, Yosef Kaplan, Peter Mario Kreuter, Michela Pereira, Hartmut Rudolph, the late Robert Scribner, Joachim Telle and Siegfried Wollgast. Disappointingly, owing to the special points of concentration of this study, I have not been able to do justice to the work of many colleagues, including Erik Midelfort, William Newman, Owsei Temkin and Gerhild Scholz Williams, who have in recent years written with great insight about some important and specific interventions of Paracelsus. I must also thank many librarians in various parts of Europe, and especially the staff of the Bodleian Upper Reading Room and the Taylorian Institution, for their patience and general helpfulness during the periodically interrupted work on this project.

As already indicated, my interest in Paracelsus is of long duration. My main regret is that, until recently, the weight of other obligations has prevented more than sporadic attention to this aspect of my work. I must thank my many immediate colleagues, especially in Oxford, for having periodically provided platforms allowing me to discuss my ideas and sometimes to contribute short written presentations. My final thanks are directed to my family for their cheerful encouragement, but especially to Carol for her continuing support, patience and forbearance, without which this book would never have been completed.



CHAPTER I LIFE AND LABOUR

Worum seind sie mir so gehafß? darumb muß ich ein Luther heißen und ich bin Theophrastus, nit Lutherus: Lutherus verantwort das sein; ich wird das mein auch beston.¹

In light of the relentless experience of humiliation and disappointment that he endured during his lifetime, Paracelsus would have taken comfort from the subsequent course of events. In the short term, owing to the commitment of his earliest followers, his unpublished manuscripts were retrieved and an ambitious publishing programme was initiated. The immediate and profound impact of his writings, as well as enduring curiosity about his ideas, demonstrated beyond doubt that his hardships and self-sacrifice had not been in vain.

As later generations became acquainted with the massive corpus of his writings, he emerged as a more substantial, original, multifaceted and inspirational figure than could have been anticipated from the evidence available during his lifetime. Certainly, his audacious confrontation with the entrenched establishment of his profession, his demand for root and branch reform, the wide range and originality of his thinking and the fertility of his influence are sufficient to establish his credentials as a pioneer, indeed one of the main instigators of the great scientific movement that is a defining characteristic of the early modern age. In particular his contribution to the understanding of health and disease, as well as his broader humanitarian concern, led to his inclusion in the ranks of the 'Great Doctors' and there he has obstinately remained, notwithstanding the cavils of generations of detractors.²

This sense of the grandeur of his enterprise is not the invention of modern analysts. Within a few decades of his death Paracelsus was being ranked alongside Dürer and Luther in estimates of his importance. Even his earliest editors confidently branded him as 'Paracelsus the Great'. During his lifetime, our reformer was well aware that he was being called the Luther of medicine, an epithet originally intended to parody, but also indicative of intuitive fear of his capacities as a rival and innovator. He scornfully rejected the Luther analogy. Recognizing that he was being lured towards a poisoned chalice, he denied that he was any kind of heretic ringleader, appreciating that identification with heterodoxy was likely to expose him to the charge of sedition and thereby the risk of the severest penalties.³

Paracelsus proved well able to exercise prudence when this was required for his survival, but he made no attempt to disguise the radical nature of his mission. Self-evidently, the programme that he laid down for his *secta theophrasta* not only was designed to change the culture of medicine but also possessed implications for the entirety of spiritual and social existence. Fuller exploration of the medicine of Paracelsus within this wider context is one of the main purposes of this study.

Modern Times

The life and work of Theophrastus von Hohenheim (from late 1529 also known as Paracelsus) might well have been pervaded by good fortune.⁴ After all, he was born into an age and land of opportunity. His medical contemporaries, as well as others among the learned classes, were conspicuous for their prestige, prosperity and even opulence. The lifetime of Theophrastus, between 1493 and 1541, coincided with dynamic developments in the economy and culture of the German-speaking regions of Europe. For the beneficiaries of this expansion, modern times generated a greater level of affluence than had ever before been witnessed in this part of Europe. The incessant travels of Paracelsus gave him a broad familiarity with the Upper Rhine, south-western Germany, Austria and parts of the Swiss Confederation. Thereby he achieved sound first-hand experience in the heartland of economic growth and he witnessed its full social effects. As a chemist he drew on the latest knowledge of old industries like mining and metal-working that were currently undergoing revolutionary expansion and experiencing the full benefits of technical innovation. Among the offshoots of the metallurgical trades was the new printing and publishing industry which, for any active writer and propagandist like Paracelsus, represented an indispensable point

of focus. As a medical practitioner by vocation, he was assessed on his ability to exploit the growing range of drugs, now drawn from the New World and Asia as much as from Europe, and he was dependent for his livelihood on the patronage of families who drew their wealth from the new economic order.

Cities associated with the career of Paracelsus, like Augsburg, Basel, Nuremberg and Strasbourg, exploited traditional manufactures and developed regional and international industry and trade. These cities employed the skills of the learned professions, fostered the arts, crafts and new trades, and thereby emerged as cosmopolitan cultural centres and homes to a characteristic northern Renaissance. Such towns were proudly independent, competitive and affluent. Their prosperous classes supervised the embellishment of churches, instigated other ambitious building projects, commissioned important works of art, even arranged for the paving of streets. Indeed, they exhibited all the miscellaneous signs of consciousness of belonging to cities of European importance. Patricians and their newly enriched neighbours cultivated an affluent lifestyle, but also gave high priority to the display of traditional piety. In both their lay and religious capacities, their surplus wealth was directed to the patronage of the arts and architecture on an impressive scale. This philanthropic effort was reinforced by the patronage exercised by collective groups such as fraternities and guilds.

The projects of this age were ambitious and expensive, often taking decades to complete, which resulted in the strange paradox that the acceleration in the embellishment of churches and monasteries, and the multiplication of religious charities, continued without interruption right up to the moment of the Reformation, when in areas affected by regime change most of these investments were brought to a sudden end. Splendour was by no means limited to the big cities. As indicated by the magnificent altarpieces at Issenheim, Sankt Wolfgang and Kalkar, the period before the Reformation was a time for ostentatious refurbishment of all manner of parish churches and old-established rural shrines.⁵ Such remarkable productions enhanced the attractions of such sites as places of pilgrimage and healing. Thereby the Church reinforced its profile in the medical market-place and reminded secular healers of the limitations of their role.⁶

The early sixteenth century was a busy time for the workshops of craftsmen throughout the Empire. In Nuremberg there was by this date a veritable army of goldsmiths, silversmiths, bronze and medal casters, armourers, glass workers, jewellers, instrument makers, painters, sculptors and printmakers.⁷ Many of the craft families embraced a good

number of these arts. Artisans emerged as a numerous and assertive class. Among medical practitioners Paracelsus was unusual in the extent of his involvement with these groups and in his high estimation of their intellectual gifts and technical capacities. It seemed to him that physicians had much to learn from artists and even humble artisans. Without a more equal partnership, he warned that the elite of his own profession was likely to be left behind in a sterile cul-de-sac.

In practice, such mutual respect and equal partnership was already beginning to yield a substantial dividend, as indicated for instance by the relationship of Conrad Celtis and Albrecht Dürer.⁸ The latter not only epitomized the creative genius, inventiveness and diverse skills of the artist and craftsman, but also provided an avenue of contact with the academic humanist. Besides their artistic merit, Dürer's own works were demonstrations of great technical virtuosity, as was the case with other artistic undertakings, which were often the inspired result of partnerships requiring the input of various skills as well as involving complex arrangements for financial backing.⁹

From the outset, the new printed book industry enhanced the value of its products by utilizing the most advanced skills of artists. Apart from the Gutenberg Bible, the most ambitious publication before 1500 was the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, a massive compendium of world history compiled by Hartmann Schedel, a Nuremberg physician and humanist.¹⁰ Schedel's input is not without its interest, but the overwhelming significance of this project relates to its place in the history of graphic design and the art of the woodcut. Further valuable collaboration between humanist physicians and artists emerged in the scientific field, as witnessed in the period 1530–58 by the magnificent herbals associated with Otto Brunfels and Leonhart Fuchs, or illustrated anatomies, the most important deriving from Andreas Vesalius; slightly later examples included the first three volumes of the natural histories complied by Konrad Gessner, and the encyclopaedic survey of mining and mineralogy undertaken by Georgius Agricola. In their different ways, all of the aforementioned publishing ventures illustrated the fruitfulness of the partnership between the scholar and the artisan.

The above projects indicated the vitality of the work of medical humanists and their associates, and they constituted proof of their capacity to contribute to the prestige of their local communities and trades. On account of this broad cultural contribution, as well as their professional work, these doctors were recognized as assets and they became valued as citizens of importance. The success of physicians in achieving upward mobility is indicated by the ability of total outsiders,

in a short time, to establish a strong foothold, secure entry into the best circles, marry into rich and influential families and establish dynasties that often supplied doctors for many generations in unbroken succession. Augsburg provides plenty of examples to illustrate this phenomenon, one of the best known being the Occo family, where Adolph Occo I, II and III were the dominant humanistic medical presence in the city for the best part of a century.¹¹ In their locality, humanist physicians were likely to be an integral part of the civic bureaucracy and members of the social elite. Fiercely protective of their image, they accepted newcomers only on condition of strict respectability and an impeccable regard for propriety.

By the time of Paracelsus, both medicine and the professions in general constituted an attractive career opportunity in Germany, meriting investment in a prolonged period of study and training, usually including time spent in various universities, some of them abroad, especially in Italy. Apart from private patronage, upon which they relied, there were also plenty of other professional niches such as association with the courts of secular or ecclesiastical rulers, appointments as municipal physicians, or posts made available through the endowment of university medical faculties or attached to various municipal or charitable institutions for the sick.

Notwithstanding the auspicious circumstances, the path to security and prestige was not without pitfalls. Of the above-mentioned physician humanists, Brunfels had the hardest career. As a former priest and latecomer to medicine, he did not obtain his doctorate until 1530 at the advanced age of forty, shortly after which he was appointed as town physician to Bern, but he died within a couple of years of taking up office. Others experienced a much more secure career progression. After a shaky start at Ingolstadt University, under the patronage of the newly restored Duke Ulrich of Württemberg, Fuchs was appointed to a chair of medicine at Tübingen, where he remained for the rest of his career. Vesalius first taught at the University of Padua and then became physician to Charles V and Philip II. After various teaching posts at Lausanne University, Gessner became the town physician of Zürich. Agricola was town physician in St Joachimsthal; then he was promoted to Chemnitz, where under the patronage of Moritz of Saxony he served three times as Bürgermeister. Joachim von Watt (Vadian) at St Gallen, or Heinrich Stromer in Leipzig, provide other examples of the rise of doctors into positions of influence, office holding and, in their cases, a key role in the politics of religious reformation in their areas.

The preceding profiles give some indication of typical career prospects available to the contemporaries of Paracelsus. For many doctors the

expectations were much less. Even those appointed as municipal doctors might receive a miserable salary and only be ranked for tax purposes among middling handworkers. Nevertheless, even humbly qualified medical practitioners could aspire to a viable and stable subsistence. For instance Wilhelm Bombast von Hohenheim, the father of Theophrastus, was a mere licentiate in medicine, but he settled into a minor medical appointment at Villach in Carinthia, where he remained until his death, thirty-two years later. An alternative route was taken by Lorenz Fries, erstwhile friend to Theophrastus, who made his reputation in publishing, but was also a medical practitioner in the various places where he settled; however, he was equally well-known as an exponent of the mathematical arts.¹² As indicated by the example of Erhard Etzlaub, the illustrious mathematical practitioner, career diversification often operated in the direction of medicine.¹³ At this date medicine was by no means a watertight profession.

There was in fact ample work for every class of entrant into medical work. Academically qualified medical practitioners spent a great deal of their time counselling the affluent about symptoms associated with their way of life. At the same time they had ample opportunity to demonstrate their professional competence and ethical standing by meeting the manifold challenges posed by diseases associated with poverty or by public health vagaries such as industrial diseases, periodic and severe outbreaks of epidemic diseases such as plague or sweating sickness, or the menace of syphilis, the major new disease of the day, which was exercising a terrifying effect during the lifetime of Paracelsus. With tolerable luck the doctors might satisfy their clients, enhance the status of their profession and grow rich in the process.

During the Renaissance, academically qualified physicians asserted themselves as top dogs, and they were determined to stay in this position. But the downside of their existence was difficult relations with other occupations involved in health care, many of which were in direct competition with the physicians. In practice, physicians experienced the greatest difficulty in imposing their hegemony, either over their long-standing professional partners, the apothecaries and surgeons, or over a host of inferior categories such as itinerant general medical practitioners and specialists, barbers, bathhouse keepers, veterinary experts and purveyors of local medical wisdom. All of these types appreciated that medicine was the means to a good living and upward social mobility. They knew that there was plenty of work to go round and were determined that physicians should not enjoy an unchallenged monopoly of this opportunity.¹⁴

The Bleak Age

The previous section gives some insight into the positive aspect of the socio-economic picture in the first part of the sixteenth century. The successful physician and his family were well placed to enjoy the full benefits of the system and insulate themselves from the disabilities affecting their less fortunate neighbours. Guided by their humanistic ideology, physicians had good reason to believe that they were witnessing the realization of a utopian social order, and they were not short of practical ideas for the further enhancement of their status. Of course, in the prevalent market situation, their aspirations to harmony and order in the practice of medicine were never more than imperfectly fulfilled, even with the help of collegiate organizations set up for the purpose of consolidating their political influence. Physicians were nevertheless able to maintain a reasonable degree of solidarity and keep their humanistic ideology alive from one generation to the next. Humanists in general were successful in furthering their aims, but in the field of medicine the figure of Paracelsus emerged as a powerful obstacle to their progress.

In the short term, our reformer was just another irritant rather than the catastrophic threat he was to pose in the course of time. As Paracelsus himself often bitterly reflected, modern times were hard times for those who experienced the downside of the system. Despite all of his earnest efforts as a medical practitioner, at every stage of his mature career patronage proved elusive; expectations of security failed to materialize. Frequently victim of the machinations of envious competitors, he was subjected to humiliation and was ultimately virtually turned into a vagrant among his peers, drifting from place to place in the vain hope that better prospects, or at least an adequate subsistence, might materialize in some other, usually distant, location. As a writer he fared only marginally better. He generated a mountainous body of writings, in draft form, surveying the whole field of medicine and many aspects of the natural sciences. Similar in amount, and of equal importance to him personally, were the dozens of drafts of theological and ethical writings which confirmed his engagement with many of the most topical secular and spiritual issues of the day. Paracelsus possessed abiding confidence that he was making a decisive contribution to the reform of the medical sciences, social amelioration and spiritual regeneration. From his immense body of writings he succeeded in securing the publication of very little, apart from a series of popular astrological pamphlets. Lack of a publishing outlet naturally prevented him from reaching the wide audience for which his writings

were designed, which was a source of deep frustration and added to his sense of injustice and anger. His own bleak experiences served to reinforce his conviction that, despite all of the cultural pretensions of the modern age, both church and state were fundamentally flawed, as a consequence of which they were heading for a catastrophe.

Such a pessimistic conclusion seemed to Theophrastus the only legitimate reading of the recent course of events. Professional experience brought first-hand knowledge of the accumulating litany of uncontrolled and seemingly uncontrollable diseases that were afflicting western Europe. To this crisis was added the impact of periodic famines. Often exceeding natural disasters in their effects were political and religious discord and social unrest, all of which undermined internal stability and weakened the capacity to respond to destructive external threats, not the least of which was the Ottoman Empire. In Germany, many of these problems came to a head in the 1520s, thus heightening the atmosphere of crisis and instability during the early maturity of Theophrastus. As outlined at various points in this study, the year 1525, which marks the first known point in the career of Paracelsus, was a notoriously bad year for civil unrest. Salzburg, the place of his first known domicile, discovered that its renaissance opulence melted away, and for a time the city was on the brink of anarchy. The siege mentality prevalent among old and new regimes was likely to spark off suppression of basic liberties and even campaigns of merciless persecution. At the worst, civil society almost anywhere showed itself capable of relapsing into a bloodbath.

In the aftermath of the German Peasants' War of 1525, the atmosphere was particularly hostile to nonconformists. Catholic regimes reasserted their authority with as much severity as was allowed by the political realities of the situation. Where the Reformation held sway, hostility was shown to those failing to conform to the dictates of the religious party that assumed control. The atmosphere of crisis and intolerance was not universal, but few places completely escaped the adverse consequences. Collectively, the adversity and ill omens invited representation as a pattern demanding the most pessimistic conclusion. As a consequence, premonitions about the end of time and imminence of the ordeal of divine judgement were taken as well-founded hypotheses. Pessimistic views of this kind seemed to have intellectual credibility and they were as rife within the mainstream, both Catholic and Protestant, as among the radicals. Apocalyptic deliberations by Paracelsus were accordingly not indications that he was subject to the delusions of an isolated crank. Although not identifying with any kind of mainstream, he was certainly not a lone visionary. Rather, he belonged to a substantial and responsible

segment of opinion that was sceptical about the chances of reform within the old order, but had no grounds for optimism about the reformation that was taking effect under its feet.

The thinking of Paracelsus must be set against the bleak and oppressive age about which he lamented in all classes of his writings. The sense of living at the end of time was one of his responses. In some circles the doom-laden scenario generated pessimism, fatalism and an obsession with martyrdom. In the case of Paracelsus, the response was altogether more constructive. Displaying total self-confidence, demonic energy and a strong sense of purpose, he mounted his own audacious campaign of reform, determined, in the short time allocated at the dawn of the apocalyptic age, to produce a blueprint for scientific and medical reform as well as social transformation.

Against the Tide

At this stage it is helpful to provide a summary of the career of Paracelsus, with a view to arriving at a better understanding of the seemingly relentless succession of his adverse experiences as he habitually found himself swimming against the prevailing tide.¹⁵ It is also necessary to counteract parts of the elaborate mythology that surrounds Paracelsus and constitutes the staple of popular biographies, even infiltrating more serious studies. Why Theophrastus von Hohenheim elected to call himself Paracelsus also deserves fuller consideration, which is provided in later chapters. Since his father, Wilhelm, was an illegitimate child and also because his mother seems to have belonged to a family in the service of the Benedictine order at Einsiedeln, Theophrastus was himself in a position of minor but distinct social disadvantage. Although Einsiedeln, in the Canton of Schwyz, the location of Theophrastus's birth and early childhood, was a thriving community, Wilhelm may well have found it difficult to practise medicine in competition with the miraculous works associated with the local cult of the Virgin Mary. This may account for the distaste for the pilgrimage practices at Einsiedeln that Paracelsus recorded in later life.¹⁶

Perhaps it made good professional sense, after the premature death of his wife, for Wilhelm to abandon Einsiedeln to take up the modest medical post in Villach. Thereafter he made no attempt to follow the example of figures like Georg Agricola and compete for more prestigious posts in more prosperous mining towns. Such humdrum existence may have been unglamorous, but it conferred some big advantages on the young Theophrastus, who gained from the professional experiences of

Wilhelm and derived invaluable insight into the mining and metallurgical industries in one of the main hubs of their operations.

Virtually no reliable evidence is preserved concerning the formal education and early career of Theophrastus. Understanding of events in his formative years is not helped by some loose comments in his own writings. In particular, the popular notion that he received direct tuition from high-ranking clerics, including the famous Johannes Tritheimius, abbot of Sponheim, must be treated with scepticism.¹⁷ On the face of it, Theophrastus pursued a normal course of professional studies, ending with a medical doctorate at an Italian university, which was a common pattern for German physicians of his generation. On taking up his citizenship in Strasbourg in 1526, it was recorded that he was an *Artzney Doctor*,¹⁸ in the following year in Basel in a legal document he testified that this doctorate was derived from the *hohen schul zu Ferraria*,¹⁹ while on many other occasions he was identified as 'doctor' in a variety of styles.²⁰ There is in fact no decisive evidence to support his presence at any university and nothing to confirm the Ferrara doctorate. It is also striking that almost every reference in his writings to universities, medical faculties and to those possessing doctorates is negative or often abusive. It is quite possible that he possessed no university degree of any kind. As with many others lacking formal qualifications, it is likely that he was honoured by the title of doctor in both internal medicine and surgery for the understandable reason that his clientele recognized his competence in both directions.

The activities of the young Theophrastus in the period before his arrival in Salzburg in 1525 are a matter of speculation. His own testimony speaks of widespread travels, perhaps extending to the fringes of Europe in all directions.²¹ Such journeys in search of relevant professional experience were by no means uncommon. The sources of his subsistence during these travels are uncertain, but it is likely that he worked as a military surgeon and also at some stage in a medical capacity in the metallurgical industries.²² His detailed knowledge and ability to draw upon unusual terms of art in these areas suggests more than a casual acquaintanceship. In the course of these activities he picked up a wide competence, including knowledge of the healing powers of mineral waters and springs.

There is some evidence that his difficulty with professional competitors began at this early stage. Writing in about 1528, he pointed out that he had been driven out of Lithuania, Prussia, Poland and the Netherlands. He ascribed his troubles to the jealousy of local physicians, whom he seems to have treated as incompetent cheats. In return they were

unappreciative of his abilities. He took consolation from the effectiveness of his treatments and the support of his patients.²³

Tiring of his wandering existence, understandably he opted to try again on home soil. Salzburg made sense, since it was a major administrative centre for the wealthy archdiocese and was close to the thriving salt and mining industries. There was potentially ample work for the incomer, although in this conservative stronghold he was likely to suffer from legal disadvantages. Nor was he helped by the poor development of autonomous civic structures, which had been inhibited by the ecclesiastic powers. On this account Salzburg had no chance of becoming a pluralistic centre for publishing or commercial development. Given such constraints, it seems that Theophrastus found a niche for himself living and working in the best-known bathhouse community in the town. Nothing is known about his medical work, but there is firm evidence that at this stage he was actively producing theological tracts, among them the inflammatory *De septem punctis idolatriae cristianae*, from which it is evident that he was known at this date as a lay preacher. In this capacity he entered into dispute with two theologians who accused him of picking up his ideas from peasants. In his indignant response, Theophrastus insisted that he knew all about the universities and listed a handful that he had visited, but he denied that they were any use to an aspiring theologian. He decided to follow the example of the apostles and rely on the teachings of Christ.²⁴

At exactly this moment, when Theophrastus was establishing himself as a vitriolic critic of the Roman church, peasant unrest boiled over into a full-scale insurrection. Salzburg emerged as one of the principal targets of protest and it was among the few locations where the peasant movement was not subjected to military humiliation. No doubt on account of his vulnerable social and legal status, acting perhaps out of prudence more than any other instinct, at the start of hostilities he precipitously abandoned the career that he had just started and conspicuously distanced himself from Salzburg, its archdiocese, and the whole of Habsburg Austria. He must have realized that he had made himself vulnerable to the accusation of implication in the peasant movement. Given the prolonged regime of recrimination that followed the uprising, he can be judged to have acted wisely and no doubt knew that his precipitous departure was likely to turn into prolonged exile.

An unfortunate episode during his early exile indicated a vulnerability to exploitation that must have been a common experience among peripatetic medical practitioners. It seems that in the late summer of 1526, on account of the lack of success of Markgraf Philipp I of Baden's

own physicians in treating a gastrointestinal disorder, Theophrastus was called to attend to the problem. He completed the treatment to the Markgraf's satisfaction, but was then cheated of the promised fee, trouble that he blamed on rival practitioners at the court.²⁵

Perhaps influenced by this experience, Theophrastus decided to avoid dependence on the princely courts, no doubt a wise decision, although in the longer term such dependence on rich patrons was impossible to avoid. In the short term his fortunes showed signs of distinct improvement. Indeed, Strasbourg seemed like an ideal choice for a new start on an urban medical career. Strasbourg was a major imperial city in which the old church was on the wane and the conservative ecclesiastical hierarchy was being supplanted by a new and independent-minded clerical elite. In Strasbourg Theophrastus would have encountered such a tolerant and vibrant cosmopolitan culture that exile from Salzburg would have seemed like a blessing in disguise.

By the date of his arrival, probably in the autumn of 1526, Strasbourg had developed into a major publishing centre. The city was also attractive to religious nonconformists, many of them exiles from less tolerant places to the south, precisely the environment from which Theophrastus himself had emanated. In this vibrant community, incomers with talents to offer were welcome. Without impediment, Theophrastus was able to assume citizenship, join a relevant guild without delay and embark again on his medical career. By contrast to his experience in Salzburg, he seems to have avoided drawing attention to his lay theological activism, and there is no sign that he publicized any unorthodox medical ideas that had been developed by this stage. The diary of the influential Nicolaus Gerbel gives insight into the social and professional calendar of Theophrastus.²⁶ Neither this source nor others give an indication of anything except exemplary conduct and a conventional approach to his medical duties.

On account of such impeccable behaviour, it is likely that Gerbel recommended Theophrastus to the great humanist publisher, Johann Froben of Basel, who had been written off by his own doctors, supposedly on account of a gangrenous foot. A six-week visit from Theophrastus early in 1527 produced tangible relief, as a consequence of which the young doctor was generously rewarded and invited to become town physician of Basel, a post that provided a link with the university medical faculty. Naturally, the backing of Froben gave Theophrastus access to such great names as Erasmus, Oecolampadius and the boasters Bonifacius and Basilius Amerbach. With respect to his career, Theophrastus had in one stroke caught up any lost ground and landed a prestigious post in one of the great centres of commerce and the arts.

On this occasion the professional opportunity was less attractive than it seemed. Basel had emerged as a major publishing centre, and was almost as welcoming to outsiders as Strasbourg. But its distinctive contribution lay in the humanistic field, whereas Theophrastus had firmly moved in the opposite direction. Basel was in a state of turmoil over the direction to assume in reforming the church. The various interests were finely balanced and the radical forces less assertive than in Strasbourg. In addition, Theophrastus faced professional jealousy from local doctors and members of the medical faculty. The local medical establishment was uninviting. Despite his protests they effectively prevented him from gaining access to medical faculty premises to deliver the lectures for which he had a statutory responsibility. After Froben died in October 1527, their latent jealousy turned to open hostility.

Up to this point, notwithstanding the unfriendly climate, Theophrastus seems to have pressed on with his duties. There is ample evidence to show that he was active in both teaching and writing. In the context of this growing self-confidence, he decided to mount a trial of strength with the local medical establishment, which was a grave miscalculation on his part. He threw down the gauntlet in the form of a manifesto or *Intimatio*, declaring his intention to pursue an entirely independent approach to medicine.²⁷ He openly rejected reliance on the standard ancient authorities, instead calling for a fresh spirit of enquiry. From the lampoons of his critics it is evident that he had the audacity to suggest that his own speculative ideas were a superior option for the future of medicine. Furthermore, to give his heretical notions even more currency, he delivered his lectures in German.

The actions of Theophrastus inevitably inflamed the situation, with the result that he rapidly squandered his credit and became an embarrassment to his erstwhile supporters. Denunciation of the medicine of antiquity, and, by implication, the whole humanistic endeavour, was not likely to recommend him to the humanist publishers and their clientele. Prominent among these was Hieronymus Froben, the son of Johann, who had no reason to extend the patronage offered by his late father. In these circles some notoriety was occasioned by the reformer's provocative act of burning a medical textbook on a bonfire marking the eve of the feast of St John the Baptist (23 June 1527).²⁸ News of this act of defiance travelled far afield. It was for instance one of the few things about the background of Theophrastus reported by Sebastian Franck.²⁹

Two specific moves by his enemies made the situation of Theophrastus in Basel untenable. First, in the winter months of 1527–28 some scurrilous verses against him, supposedly emanating from the ghost of Galen, were

nailed at the entrances to important public buildings, an important episode that is further considered in the next chapter. Secondly, at about this time, a prominent member of the cathedral chapter refused to pay the medical fee due to Theophrastus, who turned to the magistrates for support but, as on previous occasions, his complaints were rejected.

Publicly humiliated in Basel, Theophrastus promptly vacated his post and went in search of a means of retrieving his reputation. Especially important was finding avenues for disseminating his ideas about the reform of medicine to which he was now irrevocably committed. Even though he lacked stable employment, a career as writer was a viable secondary possibility, especially since medical publishing was a boom industry.

For this purpose he soon adopted the name Paracelsus. He immediately discovered that a freelance career was no easier than his disastrous assignment in Basel. His first instinct was to move back towards Strasbourg. For a short time he settled in Colmar, where he seems to have again been successful as a general medical practitioner and was regarded as a congenial social companion. For a time he accepted the hospitality of Lorenz Fries, who was already an established writer. It soon emerged that Fries and Theophrastus were at odds in their outlook. Given the established position of Fries in the Strasbourg book trade, it was natural that his ambitious younger rival should try to locate himself in an alternative publishing centre.

It was entirely sensible that Theophrastus should head for Nuremberg. Sebastian Franck, who lived in Nuremberg at this time, is a reliable and reasonably sympathetic witness to this next round of controversy. The new arrival struck Franck as being strange, indeed remarkable, indicating a striking tendency to forthright rejection of nearly all the practitioners and nearly everything written in medicine and astrology.³⁰

Theophrastus decided to prove his worth with a series of writings on syphilis, an apparently sound decision on account of the high level of anxiety about this disease and the obvious room for some new thinking. One short pamphlet and one longer tract on syphilis were successfully launched; in parallel he interested the same publisher in his capacities as an astrological commentator. At this date he was actively drafting further works on both fronts. This was a good start, but his general iconoclasm and self-evident lack of respect for his medical rivals was calculated to stir up trouble.³¹ His apprehensions were promptly realized. With the help of the rich and well-connected doctor, Heinrich Stromer von Auerbach of Leipzig, the Nuremberg medical establishment was able to prevent publication of a further and more ambitious work on syphilis.³²

Although the author complained to the authorities, he was not received sympathetically. In fact this episode had wider ramifications since Stromer's network helped to inspire a more extensive embargo on the publication of medical writings by our reformer, which remained largely in force until after his death.

Even before he had come to terms with his humiliation in Basel, Theophrastus was again wounded by his treatment in Nuremberg. His frustrations were expressed in emotional terms in draft introductions to his *Paragranum*. He knew that he was accused of knowing nothing about syphilis and of being unworthy of the title of doctor. Undaunted by these taunts, he promised that he would write authoritatively, not only on syphilis, but about all the diseases known to his profession. He now attacked his rivals mercilessly, making even clearer his lack of confidence in their treatment of syphilis. He called them *holz-* or *schmier-doktoren*, the epithets usually used for mountebanks peddling guaiacum or mercury cures. Despite their pretensions, doctors emanating from the medical faculties were no more competent than the mountebanks. He warned them to be prepared for further humiliations when the wider range of his writings reached publication.³³

At this point of reassertion, for literary purposes, Theophrastus von Hohenheim evidently decided to style himself 'Theophrastus Paracelsus', a rebranding that was tried out in late 1529 on the title-page of a short astrological pamphlet.³⁴ Indicative of the growing familiarity of this name, in a further short tract on the Comet of 1531, his name was for the first time given simply as 'Paracelsus'.³⁵

Notwithstanding his audacity, Paracelsus faced frustration on all fronts. He was effectively blocked from further work as a town and court physician, or as a freelance writer. Consequently, he risked a future starved of patronage, patients and publishers. There was no choice but to revert to the market-place of private patronage. This search for work took him at the beginning of 1531 to St Gallen, where the rich, retiring Bürgermeister, Christian Studer, became his patient. Studer was seventy-three years old and fatally sick. The St Gallen assignment lasted for the best part of a year, in fact until the death of the patient, but Paracelsus seems to have remained in the area at least until 1533, which represented one of his longest stays in any locality. However, there is no evidence for any real upturn in his fortunes. In 1533 he complained that he was being oppressed by his critics among the old and new churches. He managed to maintain something of a subterranean dialogue with a few independent-minded local clerics. Deterioration in his health was given as the reason for setting off again on his travels.³⁶ As always, he remained active as

a writer, but his mood hardened and he became more resentful. His grumbles also indicated that he was leading a hand-to-mouth existence, which again placed him at the mercy of exploitative patrons.

St Gallen was unusual in that its dominant citizen was a physician, Joachim Vadian, who was firmly entrenched as town physician; also he served periodically as Bürgermeister. Paracelsus had every reason to fear the disapproval of Vadian. The latter was a famous humanist scholar; he was a robust champion of religious reform, but also conservative in his values. Our reformer knew that Vadian's medical outlook was humanistic and that he was no friend of Studer. The presence of Vadian and the upstart Paracelsus in the same small town had the makings of an explosive situation.

In this case Paracelsus reverted to his Strasbourg mode of behaviour. He seems to have shown every restraint, and thereby attracted little attention. Various pieces of direct evidence about his activities show that he expressed some firm and unconventional views, but there was nothing to suggest that he made any public display of his instincts as a medical innovator or religious radical. In a significant conciliatory gesture, he dedicated his important and actively reworked *Opus Paramirum* to Vadian, who was made the subject of a graceful prefatory tribute. On his side, Vadian showed little awareness of the presence of the reformer. Vadian's only known response was a query addressed to Christoph Klauser, the town physician of Zürich, seeking an opinion about a tract on a recent comet published by Paracelsus. Vadian and his friends had observed the same comet. Klauser's reply is not recorded, but he is known to have adopted an unfriendly attitude towards Paracelsus and possibly he prevented publication of the latter's medical works in Zürich.

Given the absence of security, Paracelsus embarked on some further abortive career moves, which took him back into the Habsburg lands of Austria and the Tyrol, the province of influence of the fatal partnership of Prince Ferdinand and Archbishop Lang. Even with the passage of a decade, the spirit of unrest had not finally been extinguished; on their side, the authorities were vigilant in rooting out the agents of discontent. Predictably, the short visit of Paracelsus to Innsbruck, the Habsburg administrative centre, produced a negative reception. He then headed for Sterzing, the chief town of the south Tyrol and the seat of a bishop, but also remembered as a former peasant stronghold. To help with an ongoing plague problem, Paracelsus drafted a short tract, quite conventional and strictly utilitarian in its design, but to no avail, since here also his services were spurned. He retreated to nearby Meran, another former peasant stronghold, where at least he was well received; this allowed him the

opportunity to spend the winter months of 1534–35 in companionship and safety.

Paracelsus now headed north, partly in search of further patients, partly to find a publishing outlet. Some details of his prescribing habits at this date are known from treatment given to the reform-minded Benedictine, Fürstabt Johann Jakob Russinger, at Bad Pfäfers and Adam Reißner at Mindelheim.³⁷ Both furnish confirmation of the relatively simple and conservative character of his prescribing. Paracelsus also dedicated to Russinger his little tract on the local mineral waters, suggesting that the two enjoyed friendly relations. A short stay in Augsburg contributes further evidence concerning his prescribing habits, but this visit was mainly important for the triumph of achieving publication of his *Grosse Wundarznei*. This was the only substantial medical work by Paracelsus published during his lifetime. The publisher, the experienced Heinrich Steiner, evidently identified the commercial opportunity presented by this book and without delay published a fine edition, which was immediately successful and continued to be in vogue for the next century.³⁸ The *Grosse Wundarznei* is recognized as a successful addition to the already formidable tradition of vernacular surgeries produced by German authors. The *Grosse Wundarznei* episode was a much-needed boost to the morale of Paracelsus; furthermore, it was recorded in one of the main homes of the humanistic medical establishment. Even on this occasion, success was not achieved without controversy. The author had to contend with a rival and incompetent edition produced by Hans Varnier in Ulm. The Augsburg edition opened with the author's denunciation of the Ulm edition, followed by an exchange of letters with Wolfgang Thalhauser, an Augsburg town physician and a known patron of avant-garde thinkers. His congratulatory letter was an embellishment to the edition but it infuriated Thalhauser's colleagues, who issued a censure and successfully petitioned for the offending letter to be removed from the 1537 Steiner edition.³⁹

A further coup was achieved in Augsburg when Steiner also took on the publication of the most ambitious of the prognostications that Paracelsus had yet produced. This expensive, illustrated work counted as another rare publishing success for our author. At last, in Steiner, Paracelsus seemed to have located an ideal business partner and apparently a successful publisher. Steiner had a long track record of liberal publishing, including associations with Haug Marschalck, Utz Rychsner and Sebastian Franck; among his productions was the latter's pacifist-inclined *Kriegbüchlein* (1539), which was partly derived from the *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* of Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim. Steiner's tendency to

brush with the Augsburg authorities and his habit of overreaching himself at a time of economic recession soon led to a spectacular bankruptcy, the complete end of his business career in 1545 and death in 1548.⁴⁰ Accordingly, the seemingly auspicious partnership with Paracelsus may well in practice have contributed to deepening the difficulties of both of them.

After the Augsburg interlude, Paracelsus fell back on his peripatetic way of life, in Austria and Moravia moving from one aristocratic patient to another, pressing on with his writing as the occasion permitted. He passed through Vienna, perhaps with the hope of bringing further publications to fruition, but continuing opposition of the medical establishment frustrated his efforts. Carinthia provided the next place of shelter, where he spent a couple of years, at one time living in Villach, the home of his father, who had died as recently as 1534. In Carinthia he made substantial progress on his ambitious *Astronomia magna* and drew together a collection of writings, the so-called *Kärntner Schriften*, which were prepared and accepted for publication by the local grandes. Perhaps in connection with this project, an obscure master, known only by his monogram AH, produced an engraved profile portrait. This sombre and minimalist study is thought to be the only authentic representation of Paracelsus among the many hideous and fictitious efforts that are regularly reproduced in the literature.⁴¹

At last, in Carinthia, Paracelsus seems to have been well received, but this reward came too late; he remained in a state of restlessness and his health was deteriorating. It seems that he felt no relief from the oppression that had been the dominant circumstance of his life. Just occasionally, his frustrations surfaced: he then tended to complain about being in bondage or about his lack of freedom, perhaps reflecting residual resentment about the inferiority of his social status that derived from the conditions of his birth in Einsiedeln. Whatever literary and professional fame he achieved, he remained a bondsman to his native Benedictine cloister. To this were added the indignities of a life of servitude to individual patrons and victimization by jealous competitors among the medical faculties and the local medical establishments in most places where he tried to settle. It comes as no surprise that periodically, even in the harmonious circumstances of Carinthia, he complained that he had never enjoyed freedom, was destined always to carry a cross, and was continually harassed by his critics.⁴²

In view of this abiding sense of frustration, the inveterate reformer was constantly tempted to hazard his chances in new pastures, and when all of these had been exhausted, he reverted to his old haunts.

Particularly tempting was the chance to return to Salzburg, where his meagre possessions were still in storage after his precipitous retreat in 1525. The death of Matthäus Lang at last made it safe to return. On 15 April 1541, at Strobl near St Gilgen on the Wolfgangsee, he dispensed his last known medical advice to a local patient. Shortly afterwards he must have made the short journey back to Salzburg. Nothing is known of his last days, except for the details contained in his final testament, which is dated 21 September 1541. He died three days later, having reached the age of forty-eight. According to his wishes he was buried in the churchyard of St Sebastian, where his remains are still preserved. In his manuscript annotation to the terse biographical notice by Konrad Gessner, Basilius Amerbach provided a date for the death of Paracelsus and noted with satisfaction that his epitaph suitably immortalized the fame of deceased.⁴³

Demonization

As indicated by the preceding biographical summary, apart from the brief period in Basel, Paracelsus led a shadowy existence. Given the absence of firm evidence, his subsequent reputation was determined mainly on the basis of rumour. After his death, fierce competition ensued to determine what characterization would be handed down to posterity. While his advocates concentrated on retrieving and editing his writings, his detractors applied themselves to the demonization of his personality. The latter campaign established a deeply rooted tradition that attributes the misfortunes of Paracelsus to fundamental flaws in his character.

The basis for a negative verdict was provided by the compelling and colourful testimony of Johannes Oporinus, the famous Basel humanist and printer, who for a short period during his youth had worked as an assistant to Paracelsus. Reflecting his experiences around the date of the notorious Basel episode, Oporinus produced a character sketch of Paracelsus written for the benefit of Johann Weyer (best known for his writings on witchcraft) and other humanist doctors in Cologne, who were in controversy with a troublesome early Paracelsian.⁴⁴ The Oporinus testimony was similar in spirit to a much shorter statement by Heinrich Bullinger, the Zürich reformer, stemming from the briefest of contacts with Paracelsus in 1527, which were reported in a letter to Thomas Erastus.⁴⁵ Both sources were based on first-hand experience, but they related to a short phase in the life of Paracelsus and they were not spontaneous expressions. Rather they were intended, more than thirty years after the events they describe, as contributions to the

campaign against Paracelsus and his earliest disciples waged by his humanist opponents. The background involvement of Thomas Erastus and Johannes Weyer with these testimonies is suggestive of a link with this defensive initiative. Both were prominent critics of Paracelsus and defenders of Galenic medicine. Accordingly, the letters they instigated were not spontaneous and independent opinions but responses inspired by committed activists and tailored to the known expectations of a clique of embattled humanist doctors. It is necessary to consider whether any serious points are raised by these products of the humanist propaganda campaign. Certainly, Bullinger and Oporinus are weighty authorities, and the characterization they promote has been widely used over the centuries to trivialize, marginalize and generally evade treating Paracelsus with the seriousness merited by the content of his writings.

Oporinus's perspective concentrated on erratic behaviour, the blame for which was laid at the door of drink, to which, he stated with confidence, Paracelsus was only introduced at the age of twenty-five.⁴⁶ Bullinger too accused Paracelsus of drinking too much wine, while his convivial habits were also recorded in another source dating from the same period.⁴⁷ Both Oporinus and Bullinger hinted at impropriety in other spheres of his behaviour. At the same time Oporinus frankly admitted that, to his amazement, his master possessed remarkable accomplishments as a medical practitioner, displayed sound knowledge of the pharmacopoeia across a broad front, and he had no doubt that Paracelsus's bizarre antics in the laboratory reflected genuine competence in the chemical arts. Many specific points of detail were provided to back up these positive conclusions about the technical abilities of his former master.

The drink problem was so endemic in Germany that it aroused active social concern. Drink, especially the taste for expensive foreign wine, was highlighted by Hutten and it was the subject of the first original work published by Sebastian Franck.⁴⁸ The peripatetic existence of Paracelsus necessitated reliance on inns, and these places were likely to have been a main location for his activities as a hedge preacher and for general banter about issues of the moment. Such habits reflected attitudes prevalent in all social classes, where alcoholic drinks of one kind or another featured among the staple beverages. Theophrastus himself had responded with righteous indication when his clerical critics complained about his habit of mixing preaching and drink during his time in Salzburg.⁴⁹ Applying a standard weapon from the armoury of the anticlerical campaign, Theophrastus had attacked his critics for their over-indulgence in food and drink; thereafter the same accusations were regularly applied to discredit both the clergy and the prosperous classes in general.⁵⁰ He never

tired of elaborating on the contrast between the debauchery of the rich and the chaste existence of the poor. His writings left no doubt where his own sympathies lay. It is evident that he regarded his own social behaviour as moderate and unexceptionable. Even if he failed completely to meet his own ascetic aspirations, there is no evidence that his social habits impeded his professional work or literary productivity. He was consistently prolific on both fronts.

Indicative of their difficulty in finding evidence of serious fault, in desperation, the critics highlighted the failure of Paracelsus to observe the expected code of dress for physicians. This criticism was offered by both Bullinger and Oporinus. The latter observed that his master was not in the habit of changing his clothes, so that his outer garments were quickly ruined by their all-purpose use, a problem which was addressed by the regular purchase of new overcoats. In his dress and manner, Paracelsus reminded Bullinger more of a drayman than a physician. Paracelsus reflected bitterly on his humiliation at the hands of medical colleagues in Innsbruck who would not accept his presence on account of his failure to dress according to the conventions of their profession. Urban statutes tended to lay down rigid rules for the costume of all classes. Physicians were protective of their image, which they believed reflected on the dignity of their profession and on their capacity, on which they depended, to exercise dominion over inferior practitioners. By ignoring these conventions Paracelsus broke rank with his professional counterparts, allied with inferior practitioners, and indeed with the artisan class. That he remained unrepentant on the issue of dress is indicated by the revealing copper-engraved portrait produced by Master AH in 1538.⁵¹ This modest portrayal was probably intended to grace a major medical publication, but it showed Paracelsus in the dress of an artisan. Such a mode of representation was alien to the contemporary physician, for whom ostentatious portrait frontispieces or portrait medallions represented the rule and indicated a degree of competition over the complexities and costliness of dress.⁵²

The threadbare nature of the adverse sides of the characterizations by Bullinger and Oporinus shows that they limited themselves to the commonplaces of conventional social criticism. All controversial figures were likely to attract such caricature, and often this was publicized in the form of defamatory illustrations included in broadsheets and pamphlets. As in the case of Paracelsus, the character of Luther was subjected to grotesque caricature, including of course the accusation of addiction to drink.⁵³

Probably since his exile from Salzburg and certainly after his

catastrophic experiences in Basel, Paracelsus knew that his critics were on the look-out for opportunities to undermine his credibility. Klauser's passing remark about Theophrastus's bias towards alchemy was no doubt intended to be disparaging. Fries urged that Theophrastus's astronomy was a cover for *teuffelische Necromantia*.⁵⁴ Such slurs reinforced the image established by his detractors in Basel. As he moved into his Paracelsus mode, the young innovator must have realized that his declared bias towards natural magic opened him to the accusation of involvement in the dark and insidious sides of demonic magic. In the 1560s the humanist doctors cultivated such adverse rumours to build up the impression that Paracelsus was implicated in heresy and black magic. Gessner was particularly committed to this construction and he claimed to have obtained supportive evidence from Oporinus, although the latter noticeably failed to include any references to consorting with demons in his 1565 character sketch. Attempts by Erastus to extend this argument in order to raise doubts about the religious orthodoxy of Paracelsus might have been more damaging, but in practice Erastus made incompetent use of the documentation, as a consequence of which his accusations of heresy, although protracted, must have seemed lacking in substance and therefore unconvincing to any informed readership.⁵⁵ As the objective evidence concerning the outlook of Paracelsus unfolded in the course of the 1560s, his audience would have discovered the truth for themselves. It then became apparent that Paracelsus's worldview embraced both natural and demonic magic, but he strongly denied participation in any of the magical arts possessing sinister associations and frequently condemned the more dubious types of practitioner. Although the published writings contained many hints of his religious radicalism, he disclaimed any susceptibility to anti-Trinitarianism or pantheism, two of the most commonly asserted heresies associated with Neoplatonism.⁵⁶ Since the much fuller body of evidence on this front was buried from sight in the private manuscript collections of the guardians of his non-scientific writings, it was impossible for his enemies to make headway with their criticisms. It was only later generations of Paracelsians who were able to absorb the full flavour of his religious unorthodoxy and promote these ideas in their conventicles.⁵⁷

The historical Paracelsus comes as a disappointment to those expecting evidence of his involvement in occultist cells or other bizarre encounters. With the notable exception of the episode in Basel, the evidence of his mature years as a whole suggests that his personal behaviour attracted little comment in most of the places where he settled. Generally, he seems to have led a private existence and for the most part avoided

involvement in the controversies that surrounded him. Given that he generally gravitated to tough professional assignments, relating to patients who were terminally ill, his professional services seem to have given satisfaction. The information concerning his prescribing habits, which is detailed and not inconsiderable in amount, suggests that he was remarkably cautious, mainly conventional, and certainly not prone to wild clinical experimentation. His abilities as a doctor were reluctantly conceded by his critics. Oporinus acknowledged that Theophrastus had affected some remarkable cures, while in Alsace his late master had been feted by the nobility and peasantry alike as a second Aesculapius.⁵⁸ Marstaller even conceded that Konrad Gessner credited Paracelsus with the cure of many intractable diseases.⁵⁹

Paracelsus was certainly a colourful personality but, had it not been for the Basel incident, there would be little grounds for considering his manner of expression to be unacceptable according to contemporary norms. There is no doubt that his inflammatory behaviour in Basel had a permanently damaging effect which was precisely what was intended by his critics who, from the moment of their first confrontations, drew every ounce of benefit to themselves from any scrap of information adverse to the reputation of the young reformer. In Basel Paracelsus undoubtedly over-reacted, but in retrospect it is possible to have some sympathy for his situation and an understanding of the frustrations that he must have experienced in attempting to perform his duties in an overwhelmingly hostile environment.

It is striking that early critics of Paracelsus passed little comment on his tendency to argumentativeness. His habit of robust expression was taken for granted. What was evidently the norm in the sixteenth century is more troubling to some recent commentators. Dietlinde Goltz complains that interpreters of Paracelsus are apt to gloss over his 'paranoid tendencies and an argumentative character', while Weeks scolds the mainstream of modern scholarship for failing to confront this dimension of Paracelsus, suggesting that scholars are in a state of denial about the 'outrageous boasts and bouts of rage' that Weeks regards as the hallmark of the writings of our reformer.⁶⁰

When viewed in context, the vigorous style of expression of Paracelsus is not itself indicative of any lack of equanimity. Expressions of extreme tendentiousness are for the most part confined to particular and appropriate locations in his work. The long stretches of his writing devoted to technical exposition are relieved by only occasional deviations from the main subject-matter. Since he advocated an innovative programme, it was inevitable that he should criticize all the various opposing sides

as effectively as possible and present his own alternatives in the most favourable light. This exercise was accomplished using the accepted rhetorical tools of the day. As something of a pioneer in the popular and vernacular exposition of medicine, he was exploring new ground, but his readership would have regarded his presentations as entirely appropriate for their purpose.

The main cause for concern of recent analysts seems to be the intemperate tone sometimes employed by Paracelsus in his expressions of disapproval. This again is understandable given the situation in which he found himself. His approach was very similar to that of other minority figures who confronted powerful vested interests. His writing may seem unconventional or even rebarbative from the modern standpoint, but it was not out of place among advocates of the Radical Reformation. Finally, by comparison with other relevant contemporary authors, Paracelsus was not exceptional in the robustness of his expression.⁶¹ Before jumping to conclusions, it would be helpful to look more closely at the multiplicity of heated debates that enlivened the reformation landscape. Pamphilus Gengenbach devoted one of his celebrated satires to scorning 'Doktor' Lorenz Fries, whom he called, among other things, a pox-ridden horsefly (*ölschenklige hundsmück*).⁶² Fries was also the target of merciless attack from humanist physicians headed by the celebrated Leonhard Fuchs. In return Fries, erstwhile friend and something of a literary model for Paracelsus, defended his corner in the same vitriolic spirit. A glance at the scornful attacks by Luther and Zwingli on their competitors,⁶³ many of whom were their former allies and friends, also suggests that Paracelsus was not out of line with expectations among his contemporaries about the zealous defence of principle, which is precisely what our reformer believed was the object of his literary efforts.

In the event, the storm of disapprobation that Theophrastus von Hohenheim brought down on himself in Basel proved to be self-perpetuating, and has indeed echoed down to the present day. At no stage, notwithstanding all the disincentives, was there any indication of collapse in his determination to pursue his programme for comprehensive and radical change. This enormous and constructive task imposed a demanding regime and required the highest motivation, far beyond the usual expectations of even the most assiduous practising doctors or humanist scholars.⁶⁴ In their demonization of Paracelsus, his critics overlooked his capacity for productive labour and consistent resolve, intellectual attributes that are only intelligible in the light of his wider religious aspirations.

Jammertal

While the disrupted pattern of existence of Paracelsus was unusual when compared with the predominantly settled careers of his professional counterparts, his unsettled way of life was extremely common among the growing tide of religious nonconformists. The Harder pen portrait drawing attention to similarities between Conrad Grebel and Ulrich von Hutten is also to some extent relevant to Theophrastus von Hohenheim. Harder points out that Grebel and Hutten came from a noble background, experienced separation from their parents, were 'sojourners in foreign lands, living dissolute lives, suffering from similar symptoms of ill-health, attracted by the new liberating humanism, achieving self-identify as poets rather than scholars, debunkers of society, disillusioned by the fence-straddling of humanist-oriented Reformers, fugitives from arrest and persecution, yet sharp and witty in their writings, and finally experiencing premature deaths as fugitives'.⁶⁵ All three in their early maturity were converted to revolutionary objectives to which they became irrevocably committed, occasioning great personal inconvenience and sacrifice. At their deaths they seemed to be completely thwarted and humiliated, but all exercised immense longer-term influence, Grebel through his sectarian associations, Hutten through his writings, and Paracelsus both through his writings and his Paracelsian 'sect', in both its medical and spiritual guises.

Ulrich von Hutten was a literary prodigy, in many respects the natural leader of a class of knights with similar aspirations. In Strasbourg, Eckhart zum Drübel and Mathias Wurm von Geudertheim produced effective and vituperative pamphlets echoing Hutten's distaste for racketeers and the commercialization of religion.⁶⁶ Coming from a similar background to Theophrastus von Hohenheim, this group shared many of the same ideas about honour and the decline of values. As a working professional, Theophrastus was more in touch with commercial realities and in sympathy with the ethos and aspirations of the rising artisan classes than were the disenchanted knights, who often generated their social criticism from the isolation of their rural retreats, a luxury not available to Theophrastus.

Also reminiscent of the situation of Paracelsus was that of a broader segment of youthful religious reformers. By coincidence, this type was particularly strongly represented in the locations associated with Paracelsus. As already mentioned, Strasbourg at the date of his stay was a main haven for nonconformists. Basel was also a temporary home to many radicals, although those identified as Anabaptist leaders were

periodically expelled. Conrad Grebel both studied in Basel and worked there as a proof-reader. Grebel mounted one of his most successful missions in the St Gallen area, which was home to Joachim Vadian, his powerful brother-in-law. Grebel then retreated to Graubünden, where he was imprisoned, escaped, but then died of plague in August 1526 at the age of twenty-eight. A few years later Paracelsus also sought refuge at St Gallen. Hans Denck found safety in Basel under the protection of Oecolampadius in 1522 and he died there from plague on 15 November 1527 at the age of thirty-two. Nuremberg, Augsburg and Strasbourg bore the marks of the influence of Denck. His main collaborator was Ludwig Hätzer, who became the victim of hostile authorities at Constance, where he was peremptorily imprisoned, tried on spurious charges and executed in 1528 at the age of twenty-nine. Felix Manz left Basel shortly before the arrival of Paracelsus and found his way to Zürich where he was imprisoned, tortured and then executed in January 1527, having not yet reached the age of thirty. In 1525 Michael Gaismair abandoned his career as an episcopal bureaucrat and discovered a vocation as peasant leader and architect of constitutional reform. For a short time after Paracelsus's flight from Salzburg, Gaismair dominated events in that vicinity. With the collapse of the peasant movement he retired to the safety of the Venetian Republic, where he was assassinated in April 1532, at about the age of forty-two.

The cruel fate and early deaths of these religious dissidents constituted an important object lesson for Theophrastus. He fearlessly pursued his confrontation with the medical humanists, in the course of which he was forced to reckon with their disparagement of the magical aspects of his beliefs and practice. This side of his reform endeavour incurred unpopularity, but it offered no threat to his safety. Operating to his advantage, influential figures everywhere favoured maintaining the open market in medical ideas, not least because they themselves were often philosophically curious about magic and alert to its potential benefits to them personally.⁶⁷ Granted, magic, kabbalah, astrology, prophecy and commentary on magical figures, all of which were promoted with gusto by Paracelsus, represented a grey area and a source of his vulnerability to criticism on various fronts. He also courted the charge of philo-Judaism, and even risked accusations of having participated in rites of sorcery or witchcraft. However, by artful presentation it was possible to avoid the impression of dangerous thinking. In these spheres, Paracelsus also had the advantage of a rising tide of sentiment in favour of Neoplatonism among the intellectual elite. Accordingly, such areas of speculation were proving to be more secure as a means of packaging radical thoughts.

Indeed, innovators like Paracelsus turned the tables on their traditionalist critics by claiming to occupy the moral high ground and insisting on their greater philosophical consistency with the new evangelical movement.

The situation was entirely different when it came to religion and social activism. No doubt guided by his experiences in Salzburg, appreciating that he was susceptible to the charges of heresy and sedition, Paracelsus observed a high degree of caution and a conspicuous capacity for sanguine judgement. In the prevailing atmosphere of intolerance and suspicion, of which he was only too aware, it was evident that straying outside the boundaries of his profession was likely to invite exactly the same fate as that of the figures listed above, many of whom were labelled as Anabaptists and thereby made specific targets for persecution. On this account Paracelsus concentrated his public energies on issues relating to medicine, reserving his social, ethical and religious programme for his more private deliberations.⁶⁸

In public, Paracelsus balanced the demands of reforming zeal and necessary circumspection with reasonable success. Behind the scenes his writing regime continued on all fronts. There is no sign that fear of retribution caused any interruption in the flow of his social, ethical and religious writings. He remained cautious about drawing attention to this side of his work. As a consequence, his religious writings were so little known that they risked being completely lost from sight. Only in recent times have they received the attention they merit. Had they been more widely disseminated, the non-scientific writings would undoubtedly have been used to damaging effect by his critics, adding further to the hostility of the environment in which he operated.

Although Paracelsus displayed a shrewd instinct for self-preservation, in basic outlook he had much in common with other committed dissidents, including many who were exposed to active persecution. Such nonconformist activists were often young men and women drawn from the same age group as Paracelsus. Once converted to their new beliefs they displayed remarkable determination in pursuing their goals of self-improvement and furthering their message. They were well organized and energetic in their capacities, both as wandering preachers and as writers. This commitment was maintained regardless of adversity. The prison cell was often the source of their most inspiring writings.

Paradoxically, one of the mainsprings of radical activism was the early campaigning material of the Lutheran movement. Luther himself called for a decisive break with the past and he employed artists to embellish his message. The *Passional* woodcut sequence produced by Cranach was

an early and effective example of the use of art for this propagandistic purpose.⁶⁹ The followers of Christ were instructed to reject the degenerate culture of the Roman church, which was luridly portrayed in some dozen scenes as the work of Antichrist.⁷⁰ In the evangelical alternative, Christ was represented as being decisively on the side of the common people. As indicated by Illustration 1, on the basis of the final verses of Matthew 16, especially verse 24, the followers of Christ were instructed to forsake everything belonging to the world, to take up their cross and choose the hard path to Jerusalem.⁷¹ At this point the texts cited by Cranach underlined Christ's assurances concerning the guaranteed compensation of 'living water' and 'everlasting life'.⁷² Cranach's woodcut depicts a disciple heeding Christ's message, accompanied by a group of common people, a man, woman and child, indicating the universality of the invitation to follow the evangelical path.

Enlarging on the imagery of Cranach, in his reflections on the birth of Jesus, Luther extolled, as representing the highest class of discipleship, the pious wise men who relinquished their country, home and possessions in order to set out on the arduous journey to locate the infant Christ.⁷³ Consistent with this view, in his depiction of the 'New Man' of the reformed faith, Valentin Krautwald outlined four main characteristics, one of these specifying that each aspirant should become a 'wanderer in this world'.⁷⁴ Such a model had venerable precedents, for instance the medieval mystic view that the attainment of true peace of the spirit and inner life was accessible only through extreme poverty, inward and outward, which implied a wandering existence without possessions, even the forsaking of marriage or parting from wife and children: sacrifices that signified surrender to Christ and commitment to tread in his footsteps. The philosophical and religious quest thereby became tied up with a decisive break with the established norms of life and a reversion to some kind of perpetual pilgrimage. Over the centuries this idea took hold among many types of reformers and it still retained its currency in the seventeenth century.⁷⁵

At the time of Paracelsus radicals grasped the discipleship principle with great alacrity, and it was immediately applied for purposes well beyond the limits of tolerance of the Lutherans. In his famous letter to Müntzer, on the authority of the living Word of God invoked in John 6, Conrad Grebel demanded a more decisive break with the past than was being conceded by the Lutherans.⁷⁶ Consistent with the scriptural texts used as the basis for Cranach's *Passional*, in his exposition of the Schleitheim Articles, Michael Sattler cited Matthew 16: 24 to support the Anabaptist demand for total renunciation of civic office and powers

of coercion.⁷⁷ Hans Schlaffer invoked the Matthew 16: 24–26 texts to demand the complete surrender of possessions as a prelude to wandering the world, preaching the gospel and baptizing all new adherents.⁷⁸ This preaching commission rested on further texts from the gospels of Matthew and Mark, which were taken as providing a definitive authority for all believers to adopt a high-profile role and preach the gospel, without regard to limitations such as holy orders.⁷⁹ The radicals derived a further boost to their confidence from associated verses describing the wider commission which referred to preaching the gospel to every creature, the baptism of believers, speaking with tongues, the casting out of devils and the healing of the sick.⁸⁰ Regardless of questions of interpretation raised by these verses, this wider framework must have struck a special chord with the young Theophrastus, since it added to the sense of the unity of the apostolic, magical and medical dimensions of the evangelical commission.

Naturally, the gospel commission galvanized lay preachers into action and contributed to their sense of broad purpose, including the understanding that they were contributing to the completion of the divine eschatological plan.⁸¹ Characteristically, Jakob Hutter, addressing a patron and patient of Paracelsus, admitted that those who had achieved the status of true discipleship were few in number, but that they should try to grant every person the opportunity to know the true faith, so that there would be a chance that all war and all unrighteousness would come to an end.⁸² As Sebastian Lotzer proclaimed, in these last times God would see to it that the common man would shake himself free of his clerical persecutors and the Word of God would then flourish without hindrance.⁸³

In one of his early contributions on Paracelsus, Kurt Goldammer drew attention to the importance of the mission ideal of Paracelsus, using the as yet unpublished biblical commentaries to support this view. His long citations from Paracelsus's commentary on the Psalms indicate the importance attached to the mission injunction of Matthew and Mark.⁸⁴ This commission was invoked in many different contexts and was frequently reiterated. These same quotations not only justified some kind of mission role but almost imposed it on members of the laity in conformity with the apostolic example. Paracelsus obviously gave careful thought to the possibility of exclusive concentration on spreading the Word. He appreciated the attractions of the 'School of Pentecost' and the gift of the fiery tongue; also, he fully recognized the absolute primacy of the Light of the Holy Spirit in his own endeavours. However, he concluded that the gospels looked favourably on all useful vocations,

since these involved commitment to the Light of Nature, which was a lesser, but still vitally important gift of the Father. On this basis, he was satisfied that a career as a natural philosopher and medical practitioner deserved to be valued as a worthy undertaking. Although vocational activities absorbed much of his energies, Paracelsus never lost sight of his broader commitment to furthering the gospel. This aspect of his mission assumed all the greater importance owing to the shortcomings of the clergy, whom he challenged to get out of their comfortable livings and recognize their responsibility to spread the Word in the real world.⁸⁵ Since in his eyes neither the old nor the new church fulfilled this mission, this weighty task devolved to lay persons such as himself.

As was consistent with his plan for the future blissful existence, prominence was accorded to the preaching commission. Preaching and teaching were proclaimed the leading priorities of the new order of society that he was unveiling.⁸⁶ The preaching commission was also cited in other locations to support his wider vision. For instance, with respect to his critique of the veneration of the saints,⁸⁷ he attacked the persistent obsession with dead saints. He insisted that the only legitimate source of relief for the needy was the living community of the saints. The latter were identified by their commitment to carry out the injunction to preach the Word; such persons would be richly rewarded, and even granted the power to purify the leper and awaken the dead.⁸⁸ This idea was similarly expressed in *De genealogia Christi*, where it was promised that those who followed the injunction and in Christ's name wandered the earth would be permitted to achieve as much as Christ himself or even more. If Christ served as their model, they too would be known by their fruits and works, which represented fulfilment of the Father's promised gift of works and miracles.⁸⁹ The potential rewards flowing from compliance with the evangelical commission and the workings of the spirit were therefore very considerable and not limited to the religious sphere.

The gospel commission possessed various points of relevance to the programme of Paracelsus. As far as he was concerned, the circumstances of the times imposed on him a solemn obligation to pursue his calling and spread the message of reform, regardless of adverse circumstances. Such a mission would inevitably involve self-sacrifice, but there was no choice but to press ahead rather than retreat to the option of the soft life to which the learned professions seemed to be irrevocably addicted. In view of his commitment to the apostolic ideal, it was inevitable that he should accept a transformation in the pattern of his life. His thinking closely followed the Anabaptist model with respect to personal and communal life. Paracelsus came to regard civic office, academic or court

positions,⁹⁰ or even a settled career and marriage responsibilities, as encumbrances standing in the way of fulfilment of his mission.⁹¹

The unremitting criticism of the professions and universities that forms such a striking feature of the writings of Paracelsus was entirely consistent with his sense of mission. His mission values also suggest that he came to look on his brief tenure of an official appointment in Basel as a bad mistake that was instantly regretted. He much preferred the wandering existence which he extolled as a positive asset to both his spiritual and professional calling. His position as an outcast was therefore not entirely a matter of regret. As with fellow radical missionaries, it should perhaps be concluded that Paracelsus ended up with precisely the way of life he believed to be conducive to furthering his basic aspirations. Sacrifices were inevitable but he was confident that the relentless pursuit of his mission objectives would not only generate spiritual satisfaction but also yield benefits such as the enhancement of intellectual faculties and an extended capacity to exert power over nature. The apostolic path promised a new approach to natural magic and medicine, free from all the accretions of deficiency that undermined the credibility of existing systems. The arts and sciences were therefore likely to benefit as much as religion from the new freedoms issuing from the apostolic spirit.

The hardships to which Paracelsus became exposed, while not welcome and sometimes much regretted, were taken as necessary consequences of the way of life he had adopted, and were tolerated because of the tangible intellectual and utilitarian benefits that were in store. Notwithstanding all of his discomforts, his avoidance of sectarian associations and concentration on literary activity protected him from the cruel fate suffered by the Anabaptists. He nevertheless shared the sense of anguish of these radicals about the spiralling crisis in spiritual and secular affairs. Like the radicals or their medieval sources of inspiration such as Johannes Tauler, he often used terms such as *elend*, or *jammer* (indicating profound affliction and distress) in describing the current state of crisis. This language linked directly with *jammertal* (valley of tears, Ps. 84: 6–7) where the Psalmist gave the assurance that experience of extreme hardship carried assurance of reaching the pure springs and a life resplendent with blessings.

Jammertal was an image greatly favoured by leading opinion formers such as Sebastian Brant, Geiler von Kaysersberg and Martin Luther, but it was used with special feeling by the radicals. Schwenckfeld opened *Vom christlichen streit* with a long list of vilifications and persecutions that would be faced by believers as they passed through their valley of tears.⁹² The community of saints would be exposed to the experience

of anxiety, destitution and suffering. Patient acceptance of suffering in a spirit of humility was viewed by radicals as the expectation, test and common experience of the body of saints constituting the inner core of the regenerate church.

Although acutely aware of his exposed and vulnerable position, even in his earliest writings Paracelsus displayed unmitigated confidence that his persecutors would be confounded. *Septem punctis idolatriae cristianae* opened with an aggressive attack on his critics among the learned clergy, who were characterized as a den of thieves or pernicious weeds in the cornfield. The sterility of their religion was contrasted with the faith of the elect that was true to the spirit of the martyrs.⁹³ In his foreword to the four evangelists, he described his current experience in terms of *armut, hunger, elend* and *jammer*, which he stated had been the universal experience of those committed to the service of God.⁹⁴ In *De martyrio Christi*, in attacking both the Roman church and its reformist adversaries, he presented a lurid portrait of the mast swine who had infiltrated all parts of the church and insisted on reversion to the example of suffering laid down by Christ, in which case they should live in simplicity, fear and tribulation.⁹⁵ In *De genealogia Christi* he adverted to their current existence as a *jammertal*, but assured his reader that this was a transitory experience. The old, imperfect and mortal world, which to God was nothing more than foolishness or a child's game, was destined to melt away. By contrast, the regenerate were on the verge of the reward of a new birth, a new creation, a New Jerusalem, in which all things would be made perfect, and true wisdom would replace foolishness. In that new world everything would revert to its proper order. Enlightenment and peace would replace their present blindness and misery.⁹⁶

With respect to his own vocational perspective, *jammertal* was depicted as a short time of trial. Those willing to make a complete break with the prevailing hegemony would be granted real understanding of the whole of creation; they would gain insight into the marvels (*magnalia*) of nature and hence become expert in all arts and crafts. This select group would exercise in their generation an effect equivalent to that of comets.⁹⁷ Since comets made their appearance at exactly the right and appointed moment, Paracelsus cautioned the elect to be patient. They would be unwise to act prematurely. Those who made haste risked falling into the hands of wild and dangerous spirits; they would sacrifice wisdom to supposition. With some prescience, he warned that aspiring authors should not worry about a delay of sixty or even seventy years in the production of their books.

As was consistent with his view that every being in nature was allocated its goal and time of fulfilment,⁹⁸ it was necessary to wait until

their fruit was perfectly ripe. Recognition that fulfilment of his own literary ambitions required a lengthy period of gestation perhaps helps to explain why he avoided courses of action that would expose him to retribution from the civil and religious establishments. On this account he was fiercely critical of impatient religious zealots who courted martyrdom and thereby failed to honour their obligation to live out their particular calling. It was essential that everyone should await patiently until it was God's will that their suffering and labours were concluded.⁹⁹ In his case, he was sure that his patience was about to be rewarded and the time for recognition had arrived. The efforts of his learned rivals would be discredited, whereas his own work, informed by the highest of lights, would be revealed as appropriate to the spirit of the age. Accordingly, the long winter of his sufferings was over and he was sure that his generation was about to witness an enduring summer of fruitfulness.¹⁰⁰ Buoyed up by such optimistic projections, the seemingly thankless labours of Paracelsus were in practice conducted in the spirit of confidence that he was contributing to the shaping of an entirely new epoch, which he believed would witness the rebirth of knowledge, prepare the ground for widespread social amelioration and ultimately sweep away the burden of misery that was an all too prevalent feature of contemporary existence.