

C. A. Bashan Babin
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CORNELIUS AGRIPPA.

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THE LIFE

OF

HENRY CORNELIUS AGRIPPA
VON NETTESHEIM,

DOCTOR AND KNIGHT,

Commonly known as a Magician.

BY HENRY MORLEY,

AUTHOR OF "PALISSY THE POTTER," "JEROME CARDAN," &c.



IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MDCCCLVI.

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P R E F A C E.

THIS narrative completes a design, upon the execution of which many hours of recreation have been occupied. It was not intended to produce an indefinite series of the Lives of Scholars of the Sixteenth Century, but it was thought possible, by help of the free speech about themselves, common to men of genius in that age, for the lives of three men to be written, in whose histories there might be shown, with a minuteness perhaps not unimportant to the student or uninteresting to the miscellaneous reader, what the life of a scholar was in the time of the revival of learning and the reformation of the Church. These biographies it never was proposed to unite under a common title; each, it was felt, must make or miss its own way in the world. They are, no doubt, the issue of a single purpose, but they are not necessary to each other, and there is no reason why the possessor of one should possess all, or incur the penalty of owning a book marked as a fragment on the title-page or cover.

It may be convenient, however, to some readers, and will be certainly a satisfaction to the writer, briefly to indicate what the intention was that has been carried out as well as power served in the writing of the trilogy of lives now brought to a conclusion. It was desired that of the three lives each should be in itself worth telling, and in itself an addition of some new and well-authenticated matter to the available stores of minute information that give colour and life to history. It was desired that they should treat not of political heroes, but of scholars, living in the same age of the world, although no two of the same country. It was desired, too, that they should be not only representatives of separate nations of Europe, but also of separate and absolutely different careers of study. Palissy was a Frenchman, with the vivacity, taste, and inventive power commonly held to be characteristic of his nation; Cardan was an Italian, with Italian passions; but Agrippa was a contemplative German. According even to the vulgar notion, therefore, they were characteristic men. Palissy was by birth a peasant; Cardan belonged to the middle class; Agrippa was the son of noble parents, born to live a courtier's life. All became scholars. Palissy learnt of God and nature; and however men despised his knowledge, his advance was marvellous upon the unknown paths of truth; he was the first man of his age as a true scholar, though he had heaven and earth only for his books. No heed was paid to the scholarship of Bernard Palissy, but the civilised world rang with the fame of the great Italian physician, who had read and written upon almost every-

thing, Jerome Cardan. Hampered by a misleading scholarship, possessed by the superstitions of his time, bound down by the Church, Cardan, with a natural wit as acute as that of Palissy, became the glory of his day, but of no day succeeding it. The two men are direct opposites, as to their methods and results of study. In a strange place of his own between them stands Agrippa, who began his life by mastering nearly the whole circle of the sciences and arts as far as books described it, and who ended by declaring the Uncertainty and Vanity of Arts and Sciences. The doctrine at which he arrived was that, in brief, fruitful must be the life of a Palissy, barren the life of a Cardan;—since for the world's progress it is needful that men shake off slavery to all scholastic forms, and travel forward with a simple faith in God, inquiring the way freely.

More might be said to show, but it is enough to have suggested, what has been the purpose of these books. A time has come when it is out of the question to suppose that any reasonable student, not directed by some special purpose, can, or ought to, trouble himself with the careful reading of such extinct literature as the works of Cardan or Agrippa. It remains, therefore, that these men, and others like them influential in their time, types of a most important age in the world's history, should as men, though not as names, be forgotten altogether, or remembered only by the aid of any one who will do what is attempted in the book now offered to the reader.

I believe that there is here told for the first time the

exact story of Cornelius Agrippa's life, by the right knowledge of which only it is possible to understand his character. His works include a large pile of old Latin letters, written by him and to him, in every year of his life between the twentieth and almost the last. Under these his pulse still beats; from these, by help of his other works and a sufficient knowledge of the day when they were written, it is possible to gather the whole story of his aspiration, toil, and sorrow. I have endeavoured in this book not only to narrate his life, but also to give a view of the true purport and spirit of his writings. I hope there is no sentence in the narrative for which authority cannot be shown. I know that there is no discoverable incident that has been kept back or altered in significance to suit a theory as to the character portrayed. Before his death, Cornelius Agrippa was the victim of the calumnies of priests, because he denounced their misdoing. They made good use of the fact that he had in his youth written a volume upon Magic; and to this day he has come down to us defiled by their aspersions. In subsequent literature, when he has been mentioned, it has been almost always with contempt or ridicule. He was scarcely in his grave when Rabelais reviled him as Herr Trippa. Butler jests over him in *Hudibras*, and uses the Church legend of his demon dog:

"Agrippa kept a Stygian pug,
I' th' garb and habit of a dog,
That was his tutor, and the cur
Read to th' occult philosopher,
And taught him subtly to maintain
All other sciences are vain."

While in our own day Southey writes a ballad on another of the monkish tales against him. It is that about the youth who was torn to pieces by the fiends when conjuring in Agrippa's study with one of his books:

"The letters were written with blood therein,
And the leaves were made of dead men's skin."

I wish to show how the man really lived, what the man really wrote, of whom these stories have so long been current.

The woodcut portrait on the title-page to this volume is copied from that issued by Cornelius himself with the first complete edition of his *Magic*. The inscription round it appears in his collected works. The emblem on the title-page of the second volume is from a contemporary book, the "*Margarita Philosophica*."

London, October, 1856.