
The Admirable Discourses of Bernard Palissy. *Translated by Aurèle La Rocque.* Univ. of Illinois Press. 1957. vi+264 pp. \$5.50.

Bernard Palissy has been well known by historians of pottery for his development of French Faience ware, and for his artistry in making notable platters, figurines, etc. His claim to fame as a scientist has been known principally to French geologists, mainly because his work in science was available only through his book *Discours Admirables*, published in 1580. The present translation by a bilingual geologist establishes Palissy as the first to see or do or think of many things. Professor LaRocque describes the book as "a didactic work which might well be called a textbook of geology, though it contains much information on other subjects as well." Palissy was a fantastically keen observer, and he thought about the things he saw. His presentation is in the form of argument between Theory and Practice, with Practice setting Theory straight about each subject in turn. He describes a method for building ponds, treating porous soil so as to seal the pond bottoms, planting trees to prevent soil erosion, how wells are recharged, how pumps work, how goitre is due to water character, why there is a lag in change of levels, why the transmutation of metals is impossible, what causes rainbows, what three forms of crystals are formed in water, how fossilization takes place, what is salt, etc., etc. Footnotes by the translator add immensely to the significance of Palissy's statements. For example, a short section is entitled "Copy of the labels," and LaRocque's footnote informs us that "Palissy's teaching methods were revolutionary for his time. Not only did he use specimens to illustrate his lectures but he expected his readers to visit his museum, book in hand, to do laboratory work, as we would call it now, to verify his statements. In this he was so much ahead of his time that nearly three centuries were to elapse before his method was generally adopted."

Palissy finished his book with a summary of the main maxims contained in the book. LaRocque adds a glossary and bibliography to his translation, thus adding usefulness for the general reader.

The Admirable Discourses, thus made available to American readers, establishes the role of Palissy as a founding father of geology, and the LaRocque translation has been a service to historians of science.

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