

Anonymous

Preface

TO LATIN TRANSLATION OF ROHAULT'S *PHYSICS*
(PARIS, 1674)
BY THÉOPHILE BONET (1620-1685),
A DOCTOR FROM GENEVA

This book on Physics is written according to a new method which depends on principles drawn from Descartes and hence, are quite different from those hitherto generally accepted. And I know that, as it has been through three editions in two years, it has passed through many hands and drawn the interest of many avid for truth. As the author died before he could fulfil the promise he made in his preface to translate his book into Latin, I assiduously sought somebody who would step into to author's shoes and prepared a Latin translation to satisfy the insistent demands from the many whose French was rudimentary. At last I persuaded an obliging friend who put his more serious cares and occupations on one side and read the book from cover to cover. He was so impressed with the author's teaching that he thought it wicked that the Republic of Letters should be deprived of such a necessary and useful book. For the author shines in the defence of truth and upholds and vindicates the liberty of a philosopher against those who bow needlessly under the yoke of servitude and implicitly follow the words of the ancients without deviating one whisker from their opinions. But the noble Rohault, whose ability towers over them all, is in genius comparable to our great predecessors who, "it is true to say, were intellectually able in both serious and frivolous undertakings."

Assiduously following his own bent and seeking after the truth he sought to surpass the doctrines handed on to him and imitated those outstanding men who not only undertook the task of commenting the writings of the ancients, but also weighed them in the scales of reason and experience, which necessarily constitute the tools of all discovery and knowledge, and their sole rule and norm.

What leads infallibly to the analysis of truth contains the preferable aspects of experience. Hence he gave particular importance to the bases of mathematics on which he

constructed almost the complete book. Whether he came close to his goal, it is up to the learned reader to judge.

The translator was almost discouraged by the problems of his task, especially as the author took many of his concepts from craftsmen whose trades were quite unknown to our predecessors; and, naturally they did not have in their language the correct names for the modern tools. And therefore new words have had to be coined to give an accurate description of the thing and give the mind of the author as clearly as possible. We had to face another difficulty, the recent reform of the French language by which many words, obsolete and worn out with age, were purged from the language and replaced by more modern and suitable words. And so, to ensure that his language drew richly from its own resources and was not forced to beg abroad, the author took unusual liberties so that the newness of his matter would be matched by originality in language. Hence, in putting him into Latin, where it was not possible to equal him, it was necessary to follow him with caution. Because they are so obscure, certain intricate passages can only be explained in this way. For this reason it is most adviseable for the reader to have read the author's preface before embarking on the work itself. For in it the author explains his method logically, clearly and exhaustively.
