FOREWORD

The difficulties of translating a mediaeval scientific treatise into the modern English idiom are well illustrated by the present text. Not only are there the basic difficulties in such a work of choosing the correct words to convey the author's intended meaning, but also there is the added dilemma of how to express, in the exactness of modern scientific terminology, mediaeval terms which to us appear vague and general in character. It is therefore a happy circumstance that has led Sister Virginia Heines, a trained chemist, with a sympathetic interest in mediaeval science, to turn her attention to the translation of the "*Semita recta*" or *Libellus de Alchimia*, so consistently attributed to Albertus Magnus.

This treatise, to a considerable extent, bears signs of Albert's peculiarly didactic style, and provides an excellent introduction to the alchemical art of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The author, whether Albert, or one of his admirers, is vitally concerned with making known to his confrere or confreres, the aims, accoutrements, and processes of alchemists and the alchemical art. The detailed and even repetitious character of his instructions, together with the frequent cautions and admonitions, are largely practical in nature. Yet true to the professed author's ecclesiastical calling, the work opens with the Biblical phrase: "All wisdom is from the Lord God."

In translating this treatise, Sister Virginia Heines may be credited with fulfilling in the twentieth century the intention of the mediaeval author for his time. For she has, like him, opened to a wider audience, in this case to those not

versed in Latin, yet interested, as was that earlier public, in alchemy, a mediaeval text that served the author's contemporaries and those who followed him as a manual on the subject, and that may well serve this purpose today.

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