in its emphasis on static rather than dynamic problems and on rigorously mathematical demonstration rather than qualitative reasoning. The third comprised the Alexandrian works bearing on theoretical mechanics and was associated with the name of Hero. The fourth, the technological tradition, embraced Alexandrian works on practical mechanics and treatises such as those of Vitruvius on architecture. The two medieval traditions were the eclectic body of works, usually referred to as the medieval science of weights, dealing principally with problems of equilibrium, and the large number of commentaries on 'The Physics of Aristotle.' Professor Drake discusses the chronological order of appearance of these ancient and medieval traditions in the sixteenth century, and he draws attention to the different interpretations given in the northern and in the central Italian schools.

The usefulness of this book is enhanced by a good index and an extensive bibliography compiled by Miriam Drabkin. As an introduction to the history of the physical sciences in the sixteenth century, it cannot be too highly commended.

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Jean Plattard. *The Life of François Rabelais*. Trans. Louis P. Roche. New York: Humanities Press, 1968. Pp. xi, 308. \$10

Since its appearance more than forty years ago, this biography of Rabelais by one of France's foremost Renaissance scholars has been considered authoritative. There seems little reason today for modifying this judgment. The problem facing any biographer of Rabelais is the dearth of primary source material concerning his life. The few letters of Rabelais which have been preserved reveal him at his most formal, paying homage to Erasmus or discussing Roman politics. Consequently, we are left without any real sense of the man's personality; and it is perhaps inevitable that *any* biography of the author of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* can do no more than send us back to explore these works themselves, whose rich ambiguities can only be hinted at.

Plattard, therefore, chose a factual, descriptive presentation. The treatment of the historical background is adequate but terse – one would be grateful for longer digressions on some of Rabelais' fascinating contemporaries. Rabelais himself emerges as a reasonably straightforward humanist, maintaining fairly easy relations with his liberal but orthodox protectors, Geoffroy d'Estissac and Guillaume Du Bellay. The problem of Rabelais' religious convictions has become less burning with the years; but Plattard, influenced by Gilson, anticipated the now widely accepted views of Lucien Febvre, V. L. Saulnier and M. A. Screech on this subject. His Rabelais is a practical man, sympathetic to Evangelism in the beginning because it 'satisfied fully his need of complete liberty of religious thought.' Later, when the Evangelist position became politically untenable, Plattard sees Rabelais as having 'very good reason to feel more at ease in the traditional Church,' given the unattractiveness of the Calvinist alternative. This rather undramatic view still seems the most reasonable.

Although Louis Roche's translation (published shortly after the original) is a very faithful one, it is often stiff and lifeless, lacking even the academic elegance of Plattard's prose. However, this reissue makes a reliable and scholarly biography of Rabelais again available to English speakers.

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