

# HERMETIC ALCHEMY

**What is Alchemy?**

**The Hermetic Arcanum**

**Alchemy and Hermetic Philosophy: An Overview**

**The Hermetic Writings Of Paracelsus**

**The Stone Of The Philosophers**

**The Golden Tractate of Hermes Trismegistus**

**The Pictorial Symbols Of Alchemy**

## WHAT IS ALCHEMY?

By Arthur E. Waite

The Introductory Notes are taken from "Hermetic Papers of A.E. Waite", edited by R.A Gilbert (Aquarian Press,1987). The text of "What is Alchemy?" reproduced here is scanned from the periodical "The Unknown World", and formatted and corrected by hand. [Adepti.com] Introductory Notes: [First printed in the monthly journal *The Unknown World* from August to December 1894 and in April, 1895. It was reprinted in *The Alchemical Papers of Arthur Edward Waite*, ed. J. Ray Shute, Monroe, N.C., 1939, a privately printed collection limited to seventy copies.] In his earlier writings on alchemy Waite maintained that the spiritual interpretation of alchemy was first systematically presented by Mrs. Atwood in her *Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery* -a point of view that he was later to reject completely, to the extent of saying that the book 'is not, however, final or satisfactory as a critical study, indeed, in some respects it is a morass rather than a pathway' (*The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry*, 1911, Vol.2, p. 414). For this he was taken to task, in the pages of the *Occult Review*, by Isabelle de Steiger; but he justified himself by stating that 'What I said of the *Suggestive Enquiry* in 1888 and 1893 was in the light of my knowledge at those dates; that which I have recorded since has been under a fuller and clearer light' (*Occult Review*, Vol. 15, No.1. January 1912, p. 50). Nonetheless, his early essays on alchemy retain their value for the obscure

information they contain and for their critical comments on Madame Blavatsky's dubious manipulation of her source material on alchemy.

[FIRST PAPER.] THERE are certain writers at the present day, and there are certain students of the subject, perhaps too wise to write, who would readily, and do, affirm that any answer to the question which heads this paper will involve, if adequate, an answer to those other and seemingly harder problems- What is Mysticism? What is the Transcendental Philosophy? What is Magic? What Occult Science? What the Hermetic Wisdom? For they would affirm that Alchemy includes all these, and so far at least as the world which lies west of Alexandria is concerned, it is the head and crown of all. Now in this statement the central canon of a whole body of esoteric criticism is contained in the proverbial nut-shell, and this criticism is in itself so important, and embodies so astounding an interpretation of a literature which is so mysterious, that in any consideration of Hermetic literature it must be reckoned with from the beginning; otherwise the mystic student will at a later period be forced to go over his ground step by step for a second time, and that even from the starting point. It is proposed in the following papers to answer definitely by the help of the evidence which is to be found in the writings of the Alchemists the question as to what Alchemy actually was and is. As in other subjects, so also in this, *The Unknown World* proposes to itself an investigation which has not been attempted hitherto along similar lines, since at the present day, even among the students of the occult, there are few persons sufficiently instructed for an inquiry which is not only most laborious in itself but is rendered additionally difficult from the necessity of expressing its result in a manner at once readable and intelligible to the reader who is not a specialist. In a word, it is required to popularise the conclusions arrived at by a singularly abstruse erudition. This is difficult- as will be admitted- but it can be done, and it is guaranteed to the readers of these papers that they need know nothing of the matter beforehand. After the little course has been completed it is believed that they will have acquired much, in fact, nothing short of a solution of the whole problem. In the first place, let any unversed person cast about within himself, or within the miscellaneous circle of his non-mystical acquaintance, and decide what he and they do actually at the present moment understand by Alchemy. It is quite certain that the answer will be fairly representative of all general opinion, and in effect it will be somewhat as follows: "Alchemy is a

pretended science or art by which the metals ignorantly called base, such as lead and iron were supposed to be, but were never really, transmuted into the other metals as ignorantly called perfect, namely, gold and silver. The *ignis fatuus* of Alchemy was pursued by many persons- indeed, by thousands- in the past, and though they did not succeed in making gold or silver, they yet chanced in their investigations upon so many useful facts that they actually laid the foundations of chemistry as it is. For this reason it would perhaps be unjust to dishonour them; no doubt many of them were rank imposters, but not all; some were the chemists of their period." It follows from this answer that this guesswork and these gropings of the past can have nothing but a historical interest in the present advanced state of chemical knowledge. It is, of course, absurd to have recourse to an exploded scientific literature for reliable information of any kind. Goldsmith and Pinnock in history, Joyce and Mangnall in general elementary science, would be preferable to the Alchemists in chemistry. If Alchemy be really included as a branch of occult wisdom, then so much the worse for the wisdom- *ex uno disce omnia*. The question what is Alchemy is then easily answered from this standpoint- it is the dry bones of chemistry, as the Occult Sciences in general are the debris of of [sic: this is the first of several typos existing in the original journal article. We will, from this point, simply correct these errors without comment. Adepti.com] ancient knowledge, and the dust from the ancient sanctuaries of long vanished religions- at which point these papers and *The Unknown World* itself; would perforce come to a conclusion. There is, however, another point of view, and that is the standpoint of the occultist. It will be pardonable perhaps to state it in an occult magazine. Now, what does the student of the Occult Sciences understand by Alchemy? Of two things, one, and let the second be reserved for the moment in the interests of that simplicity which the Alchemists themselves say is the seal of Nature and art- *sigillum Natura et artis simplicitas*. He understands the law of evolution applied by science to the development from a latent into an active condition of the essential properties of metallic and other substances. He does not understand that lead as lead or that iron as iron can be transmuted into gold or silver. He affirms that there is a common basis of all the metals, that they are not really elements, and that they are resolvable. In this case, once their component parts are known the metals will be capable of manufacture,

though whether by a prohibitively expensive process is another issue. Now, beyond contradiction this is a tolerable standpoint from the standpoint of modern science itself. Chemistry is still occasionally discovering new elements, and it is occasionally resolving old and so-called elements, and indeed, a common basis of all the elements is a thing that has been talked of by, men whom no one would suspect of being Mystics, either in matters of physics or philosophy.

There is, however, one obviously vulnerable point about this defensive explanation of Alchemy. It is open to the test question: Can the occultist who propounds it resolve the metallic elements, and can he make gold? If not, he is talking hypothesis alone, tolerable perhaps in the bare field of speculation, but to little real purpose until it can be proved by the event. Now, *The Unknown World* has not been established to descant upon mere speculations or to expound dreams to its readers. It will not ignore speculation, but its chief object is to impart solid knowledge. Above all it desires to deal candidly on every subject. There are occultists at the present day who claim to have made gold. There are other occultists who claim to be in communication with those who possess the secret. About neither class it is necessary to say anything at present; claims which it is impossible to verify may be none the less good claims, but they are necessarily outside evidence. So far as can be known the occultist does not manufacture gold. At the same time his defence of Alchemy is not founded on merely hypothetical considerations. It rests on a solid basis, and that is alchemical literature and history. Here his position, whether unassailable or not, cannot be impugned by his opponents, and this for the plain reason that, so far as it is possible to gather, few of them know anything of the history and all are ignorant of the literature. He has therefore that right to speak which is given only by knowledge, and he has the further presumption in his favour that as regards archaic documents those who can give the sense can most likely explain the meaning. To put the matter as briefly as possible, the occultist finds in the great text-books of Alchemy an instruction which is virtually as old as Alchemy, namely, that the metals are composite substances. This instruction is accompanied by a claim which is, in effect, that the Alchemists had through their investigations become acquainted with a process which demonstrated by their resolution the alleged fact that metals are not of a simple nature. Furthermore, the claim itself is found side by side with a process which pretends to be practical, which is given

furthermore in a detailed manner, for accomplishing the disintegration in question. Thus it would seem that in a supposed twilight of chemical science, in an apparently inchoate condition of physics, there were men in possession of a power with which the most advanced applied knowledge of this nineteenth century is not as yet equipped. This is the first point in the defence of Alchemy which will be raised by the informed occultist. But, in the second place, there is another instruction to be found in these old text-books, and that is the instruction of development- the absolute recognition that in all natural substances there exist potentialities which can be developed by the art of a skilled physicist, and the method of this education is pretended to be imparted by the textbooks, so that here again we find a doctrine, and connected with that doctrine a formal practice, which is not only in advance of the supposed science of the period but is actually a governing doctrine and a palmary source of illumination at the present day. Thirdly, the testimony of Alchemical literature to these two instructions, and to the processes which applied them, is not a casual, isolated, or conflicting testimony, nor again is it read into the literature by a specious method of interpretation; it is upon the face of the whole literature; amidst an extraordinary variety of formal difference, and amidst protean disguises of terminology, there is found the same radical teaching everywhere. In whatsoever age or country, the adepts on all ultimate matters never disagree- a point upon which they themselves frequently insist, regarding their singular unanimity as a proof of the truth of their art. So much as regards the literature of Alchemy, and from this the occultist would appeal to the history of the secret sciences for convincing evidence that, if evidence be anything, transmutations have taken place. He would appeal to the case of Glauber, to the case of Van Helmont, to the case of Lascaris and his disciples, to that also of Michael Sendivogius, and if his instances were limited to these it is not from a paucity of further testimony, but because the earlier examples, such as Raymond Lully, Nicholas Flamel, Bernard Trevisan, and Denis Zachaire, will be regarded as of less force and value in view of their more remote epoch. Having established these points, the occultist will proceed to affirm that they afford a sufficient warrant for the serious investigation of Alchemical literature with the object of discovering the actual process followed by the old adepts for the attainment of their singular purpose. He will frankly confess that this process still remains to

be understood, because it has been veiled by its professors, wrapped up in strange symbols, and disguised by a terminology which offers peculiar difficulties. Why it has been thus wilfully entangled, why it was considered advisable to make it *caviare* to the multitude, and what purpose was served by the writing of an interminable series of books seemingly beyond comprehension, are points which must be held over for consideration in their proper place later on. Those who, for what reason so ever, have determined to study occultism, must be content to take its branches as they are, namely, as sciences that have always been kept secret. It follows from what has been advanced that the occultist should not be asked, as a test question, whether he can make gold, but whether he is warranted in taking the Alchemical claim seriously, in other words, whether the literature of Alchemy, amidst all its mystery, does offer some hope for its unravelment, and if on the authority of his acquaintance therewith he can, as he does, assuredly answer yes, then he is entitled to a hearing. Now, the issue which has been dealt with hitherto in respect of Alchemy is one that is exceedingly simple. Assuming there is strong presumptive evidence that the adepts could and did manufacture the precious metals, and that they enclosed the secret of their method in a symbolic literature, it is a mere question of getting to understand the symbolism, about which it will be well to remember the axiom of Edgar Allan Poe, himself a literary Mystic, that no cryptogram invented by human ingenuity is incapable of solution by the application of human ingenuity. But there is another issue which is not by any means so simple, the existence of which was hinted at in the beginning of the present paper, and this is indeed the subject of the present inquiry. To put it in a manner so elementary as to be almost crude in presentation, there is another school of occult students who believe themselves to have discovered in Alchemy a philosophical experiment which far transcends any physical achievement. At least in its later stages and developments this school by no means denies the fact that the manufacture of material gold and silver was an object with many Alchemists, or that such a work is possible and has taken place. But they affirm that the process in metals is subordinate, and, in a sense, almost accidental, that essentially the Hermetic experiment was a spiritual experiment, and the achievement a spiritual achievement. For the evidence of this interpretation they tax the entire literature, and their citations carry with them not infrequently an extraordinary, and sometimes an irresistible,

force. The exaltation of the base nature in man, by the development of his latent powers; the purification, conversion, and transmutation of man; the achievement of a hypostatic union of man with God; in a word, the accomplishment of what has been elsewhere in this magazine explained to be the true end of universal Mysticism; not only was all this the concealed aim of Alchemy, but the process by which this union was effected, veiled under the symbolism of chemistry, is the process with which the literature is concerned, which process also is alone described by all veritable adepts. The man who by proper study and contemplation, united to an appropriate interior attitude, with a corresponding conduct on the part of the exterior personality, attains a correct interpretation of Hermetic symbolism, will, in doing so, be put in possession of the secret of divine reunion, and will, so far as the requisite knowledge is concerned, be in a position to encompass the great work of the Mystics. From the standpoint of this criticism the power which operates in the transmutation of metals alchemically is, in the main, a psychic power. That is to say, a man who has passed a certain point in his spiritual development, after the mode of the Mystics, has a knowledge and control of physical forces which are not in the possession of ordinary humanity. As to this last point there is nothing inherently unreasonable in the conception that an advancing evolution, whether in the individual or the race, will give a far larger familiarity with the mysteries and the laws of the universe. On the other hand, the grand central doctrine and the supreme hope of Mysticism, that it is possible for "the divine in man" to be borne back consciously to "the divine in the universe," which was the last aspiration of Plotinus, does not need insistence in this place. There is no other object, as there is no other hope, in the whole of Transcendental Philosophy, while the development of this principle and the ministration to this desire are the chief purpose of *The Unknown World*. It is obvious that Alchemy, understood in this larger sense, is mystically of far higher import than a mere secret science of the manufacture of precious metals. And this being incontestable, it becomes a matter for serious inquiry which of these occult methods of interpretation is to be regarded as true. A first step towards the settlement of this problem will be a concise history of the spiritual theory. Despite his colossal doctrine of Hermetic development, nothing to the present purpose, or nothing that is sufficiently demonstrable to be of real moment, is found in the works of Paracelsus. The first traces are supposed to be imbedded in

the writings of Jacob Bohme and about the same time Louis Claude de Saint Martin, the French illumine, is discovered occasionally describing spiritual truths in the language of physical chemistry. These, however, are at best but traces, very meagre and very indefinite. It was not till the year 1850, and in England, that the interpretation was definitely promulgated. In that year there appeared a work entitled *A Suggestive Inquiry Into The Hermetic Mystery And Alchemy, Being An Attempt To Discover The Ancient Experiment Of Nature*. This was a large octavo of considerable bulk; it was the production of an anonymous writer, who is now known to be a woman, whose name also is now well known, at least in certain circles, though it would be bad taste to mention it. [Mary Ann South, later Mary Ann Atwood. Isabelle de Steiger saw to it that the book was republished, with attribution (Watkins, 1918). Reproductions are available from the Yogi Publication Society, among others. Adepti.com] For the peculiar character of its research, for the quaint individuality of its style, for the extraordinary wealth of suggestion which more than justifies its title, independently of the new departure which it makes in the interpretation of Hermetic symbolism, truly, this book was remarkable. Scanned from the periodical "The Unknown World", No. 1, Vol. 1; Aug. 15, 1894.

[SECOND PAPER.] ELIPHAS LEVI affirms that all religions have issued from the Kabbalah and return into it; and if the term be intended to include the whole body of esoteric knowledge, no advanced occultist will be likely to dispute the statement. So far as books are concerned, it may, in like manner, be affirmed that all modern mystical literature is referable ultimately to two chief sources: on the one hand, to the wonderful books on Magic which were written by Eliphas Levi himself, and of which but a faint conception is given in the sole existing translation; and, on the other, to the "Suggestive Inquiry Concerning the Hermetic Mystery," that singular work to which reference was made last month as containing the first promulgation of the spiritual theory of Alchemy. This seems at first sight an extreme statement, and it is scarcely designed to maintain, that, for example, the Oriental doctrine of Karma is traceable in the writings of the French initiate who adopted the Jewish pseudonym of Eliphas Levi Zahed, nor that the "recovered Gnosis" of the "New Gospel of Interpretation" is borrowed from the <I>Suggestive Inquiry</I>. But these are the two chief sources of inspiration, in the sense that they have prompted research, and that it is not necessary to go outside them to understand how it is that we

have come later on to have Theosophy, Christo-Theosophy, the New Kabbalism of Dr. Wynn Westcott, and the illuminations of Mrs. Kingsford. Everywhere in *Isis Unveiled* the influence of Eliphas Levi is distinctly traceable; everywhere in the Recovered Gnosis there is the suggestion of the *Inquiry*. Even the Rosicrucianism of the late Mr. Hargrave Jennings, so far as it is anything but confusion, is referable to the last mentioned work. It is doubtful if Eliphas Levi did not himself owe something to its potent influence, for his course of transcendental philosophy post dates the treatise on the Hermetic Mystery by something like ten years, and he is supposed to have accomplished wide reading in occult literature, and would seem to have known English. As it is to the magical hypotheses of the Frenchman that we are indebted for the doctrines of the astral light and for the explanations of spiritualistic phenomena which are current in theosophical circles, to name only two typical instances, so it is of the English lady that we have derived the transcendental views of alchemy, also every where now current, and not among Theosophists only. At the same time, it is theosophical literature chiefly which has multiplied the knowledge concerning it, though it does not always indicate familiarity with the source of the views. It is also to Theosophy that we owe the attempt to effect a compromise between the two schools of alchemical criticism mentioned last month, by the supposition that there were several planes of operation in alchemy, of which the metallic region was one. Later speculations have, however, for the most part, added little to the theory as it originally stood, and the *Suggestive Inquiry* is in this respect still thoroughly representative. To understand what is advanced in this work is to understand the whole theory, but to an unprepared student its terminology would perhaps offer certain difficulties, and therefore in attempting a brief synopsis, it will be well to present it in the simplest possible manner. The sole connection, according to the *Suggestive Inquiry*, which subsists between Alchemy and the modern art of Chemistry is one of terms only. Alchemy is not an art of metals, but it is the Art of Life; the chemical phraseology is a veil only, and a veil which was made use of not with any arbitrary and insufficient desire to conceal for the sake of concealment, or even to ensure safety during ages of intolerance, but because the alchemical experiment is attended with great danger to man in his normal state. What, however the adepts in their writings have most strenuously sought to conceal is the nature of the Hermetic Vessel, which

they admit to be a divine secret, and yet no one can intelligently study these writings without being convinced that the vessel is Man himself. Geber, for example, to quote only one among many, declares that the universal orb of the earth contains not so great mysteries and excellencies as Man re-formed by God into His image, and he that desires the primacy amongst the students of Nature will no where find a greater or better subject wherein to obtain his desire than in himself, who is able to draw to himself what the alchemists call the Central Salt of Nature, who also in his regenerated wisdom possesses all things, and can unlock the most hidden mysteries. Man is, in fact, with all adepts, the one subject that contains all, and he only need be investigated for the discovery of all. Man is the true laboratory of the Hermetic Art, his life is the subject, the grand distillery, the thing distilling and the thing distilled, and self-knowledge is at the root of all alchemical tradition. To discover then the secret of Alchemy the student must look within and scrutinize true psychical experience, having regard especially to the germ of a higher faculty not commonly exercised but of which he is still in possession, and by which all the forms of things, and all the hidden springs of Nature, become intuitively known. Concerning this faculty the alchemists speak magisterially, as if it had illuminated their understanding so that they had entered into an alliance with the Omniscient Nature, and as if their individual consciousness had become one with Universal Consciousness. The first key of the Hermetic Mystery is in Mesmerism, but it is not Mesmerism working in the therapeutic sphere, but rather with a theurgic object, such as that after which the ancients aspired, and the attainment of which is believed to have been the result of initiation into the Greater Mysteries of old Greece. Between the process of these Mysteries and the process of Alchemy there is a distinctly traceable correspondence, and it is submitted that the end was identical in both cases. The danger which was the cause of the secrecy was the same also; it is that which is now connected with the Dwellers on the Threshold, the distortions and deceptions of the astral world, which lead into irrational confusion. Into this world the mesmeric trance commonly transfers its subjects, but the endeavour of Hermetic Art was a right disposition of the subject, not only liberating the spirit from its normal material bonds, but guaranteeing the truth of its experiences in a higher order of subsistence. It sought to supply a purely rational motive which

enabled the subject to withstand the temptation of the astral sphere, and to follow the path upwards to the discovery of wisdom and the highest consciousness. There the soul knows herself as a whole, whereas now she is acquainted only with a part of her humanity; there also, proceeding by theurgic assistance, she attains her desired end and participates in Deity. The method of Alchemy is thus an arcane principle of self-knowledge and the narrow way of regeneration into life. Contemplation of the Highest Unity and Conjunction with the Divine Nature, the soul's consummation in the Absolute, lead up to the final stage, when the soul attains "divine intuition of that high exemplar which is before all things, and the final cause of all, which seeing only is seen, and understanding is understood, by him who penetrating all centres, discovers himself in that finally which is the source of all; and passing from himself to that, transcending, attains the end of his profession. This was the consummation of the mysteries, the ground of the Hermetic philosophy, prolific in super-material increase, transmutations, and magical effects." It was impossible in the above synopsis, and is indeed immaterial at the moment, to exhibit after what manner the gifted authoress substantiates her theory by the evidences of alchemical literature. It is sufficient for the present purpose to summarize the interpretation of Alchemy which is offered by the *Suggestive Inquiry*. The work, as many are aware, was immediately withdrawn from circulation; it is supposed that there are now only about twelve copies in existence, but as it is still occasionally met with, though at a very high price, in the book-market, this may be an understatement. Some ten years later, Eliphas Levi began to issue his course of initiation into "absolute knowledge," and in the year 1865 an obscure writer in America, working, so far as can be seen, quite independently of both, published anonymously a small volume of "Remarks on Alchemy and the Alchemists," in which it was attempted to show that the Hermetic adepts were not chemists, but were great masters in the conduct of life. Mr. Hitchcock, the reputed author, was not an occultist, though he had previously written on Swedenborg as a Hermetic Philosopher, and no attention seems to have been attracted by his work. The interpretation of the *Suggestive Inquiry* was spiritual and "theurgic" in a very highly advanced degree: it was indeed essentially mystical, and proposed the end of Mysticism as that also of the Alchemical adepts. The interpretation of Eliphas Levi, who was an occultist rather than

a Mystic, and does not seem to have ever really understood Mysticism, may be called intellectual, as a single citation will suffice to show. "Like all magical mysteries, the secrets of the Great Work possess a three-fold significance: they are religious, philosophical, and natural. Philosophical gold is, in religion, the Absolute and Supreme Reason; in philosophy, it is truth; in visible nature, it is the Sun; in the subterranean and mineral world, it is most pure and perfect gold. It is for this cause that the search for the Great Work is called the search after the Absolute, and that the work itself passes as the operation of the Sun. All masters of the science have recognised that material results are impossible till all the analogies of the Universal Medicine and the Philosophical Stone have been found in the two superior degrees. Then is the labour simple, expeditious, and inexpensive; otherwise, it wastes to no purpose the life and fortune of the operator. For the soul, the Universal Medicine is supreme reason and absolute justice; for the mind, it is mathematical and practical truth; for the body, it is the quintessence, which is a combination of gold and light." The interpretation of Hitchcock was, on the other hand, purely ethical. Now, as professedly an expositor of Mysticism, *The Unknown World* is concerned here only with the first interpretation, and with the clear issue which is included in the following question:- Does the literature of Alchemy belong to Chemistry in the sense that it is concerned with the disintegration of physical elements in the metallic order, with a view to the making of gold and silver, or is it concerned with man and the exaltation of his interior nature from the lowest to the highest condition? In dealing with this question there is only one way possible to an exoteric inquiry like the present, and that is by a consideration of the literature and history of Alchemy. For this purpose it is necessary to begin, not precisely at the cradle of the science, because, although this was probably China, as will be discussed later on, it is a vexatious and difficult matter to settle on an actual place of origin; but for the subject in hand recourse may be had to the first appearance of Alchemy in the West, as to what is practically a starting-point. It is much to be deplored that some esoteric writers at this day continue to regard ancient Greece and Rome as centres of alchemical knowledge. It is true that the Abbe Pernety, at the close of the last century, demonstrated to his own satisfaction that all classical mythology was but a vesture and veil of the *Magnum Opus* and the fable of the Golden Fleece is regarded as a triumphant vindication of

classical wisdom in the deep things of transmutation. But this is precisely one of those airy methods of allegorical interpretation which, once fairly started, will draw the third part of the earth and sea, and the third part of the stars of heaven, in the tail of its symbolism. Neither in Egypt, in Greece, or in Rome, has any trace of Alchemy been discovered by historical research till subsequent to the dawn of the Christian era, and in the face of this fact it is useless to assert that it existed secretly in those countries, because no person is in a position to prove the point. All that is known upon the problem of the origin of Alchemy in the Western Hemisphere is to be found in Berthelot's *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs*, and the exhaustive erudition which resulted in that work is summed up in the following statement:- "Despite the universal tradition which assigns to Alchemy an Egyptian Origin, no hieroglyphic document relative to the science of transmutation has yet been discovered. The Graeco-Egyptian Alchemists are our sole source of illumination upon the science of Hermes, and that source is open to suspicion because subject to the tampering of mystic imaginations during several generations of dreamers and scholiasts. In Egypt, notwithstanding, Alchemy first originated; there the dream of transmutation was first cherished;" but this was during and not before the first Christian centuries. The earliest extant work on Alchemy which is as yet known in the West is the papyrus of Leide, which was discovered at Thebes, and is referable to the third century of this era. It contains seventy-five metallurgical formulae, for the composition of alloys, the surface colouration of metals, assaying, etc. There are also fifteen processes for the manufacture of gold and silver letters. The compilation, as Berthelot points out, is devoid of order, and is like the note-book of an artisan. It is pervaded by a spirit of perfect sincerity, despite the professional improbity of the recipes. These appear to have been collected from several sources, written or traditional. The operations include tinging into gold, gilding silver, superficial colouring of copper into gold, tincture by a process of varnishing, superficial aureation by the humid way, etc. There are many repetitions and trivial variations of the same recipes. M. Berthelot and his collaborator regard this document as conclusively demonstrating that when

Alchemy began to flourish in Egypt it was the art of sophistication or adulteration of metals. The document is absolutely authentic, and "it bears witness to a science of alloys and metallic tinctures which was very skilful

and very much advanced, a science which had for its object the fabrication and falsification of the matters of gold and silver. In this respect it casts new light upon the genesis of the idea of metallic conversion. Not only is the notion analagous, but the practices exposed in this papyrus are the same as those of the oldest Greek alchemists, such as pseudo-Democritus, Zosimus, Olympiodorus, and pseudo-Moses. This demonstration is of the highest importance for the study of the origines of Alchemy. It proves it to have been founded on something more than purely chimerical fancies- namely, on positive practices and actual experiences, by help of which imitations of gold and silver were fabricated. Sometimes the fabricator confined himself to the deception of the public, as with the author of Papyrus X (i.e., the Theban Papyrus of Leide), sometimes he added prayers and magical formulae to his art, and became the dupe of his own industry." Again: "The real practices and actual manipulations of the operators are made known to us by the papyrus of Leide under a form the most clear, and in accrdance with the recipes of pseudo-Democritus and Olympiodorus. It contains the first form of all these procedures and doctrines. In pseudo-Democritus and still more in Zosimus (the earliest among the Greek alchemists), they are already complicated by mystical fancies; then come the commentators who have amplified still further the mystical part, obscuring or eliminating what was practical, to the exact knowledge of which they were frequently strangers. Thus, the most ancient texts are the clearest." Now, there are many points in which the occultist would join issue with the criticism of M. Berthelot, but it is quite certain that the Egyptian papyrus is precisely what it is described to be, and there is, therefore, no doubt that the earliest work which is known to archaeology, outside China, as dealing with the supposed transmutation of metals is in reality a fraudulent business. This fact has to be faced, together with any consequences which it rigidly entails. But before concluding this paper it will be well to notice (I.) That it is impossible to separate the Leide papyrus from a close relationship with its context of other papyri; as admitted by Berthelot, who says:- "The history of Magic and of Gnosticism is closely bound up with that of the origin of Alchemy, and the alchemical papyrus of Leide connects in every respect with two in the same series which are solely magical and Gnostic." (II.) That, as Berthelot also admits, or, more correctly, as it follows from his admissions, the mystic element

entered very early into alchemical literature, and was introduced by persons who had no interest in the practical part, who therefore made use of the early practical documents for their own purposes. (III.) That the Leide papyrus can scarcely be regarded as alchemical in the sense that Geber, Lully, Arnold, Sendivogius, and Philalethes are alchemical writers. It neither is nor pretends to be more than a thesaurus of processes for the falsification and spurious imitation of the precious metals. It has no connection, remote or approximate with their transmutation, and it is devoid of all alchemical terminology. In itself it neither proves nor disproves anything. If we can trace its recipes in avowedly alchemical writers, as M. Berthelot declares is the case, then, and then only, it may be necessary to include alchemists in the category of the compiler of this papyrus. Scanned from the periodical "The Unknown World", No. 2, Vol. 1; Sept. 15, 1894.

[THIRD PAPER] THE next stage of inquiry into the validity of the venous answers which have been given to this question will take us by an easy transition from the nature of the Leide papyrus to that of the Byzantine collection of ancient Greek alchemists. It will be recollected from last month that the processes contained in the papyrus are supposed to represent the oldest extant form of the processes tabulated by Zosinius, pseudo-Democritus, and others of the Greek school. The claims of this school now demand some brief consideration for the ultimate settlement of one chief point, namely, whether they are to be regarded as alchemists in the sense that attaches to the term when it is applied as advigoration of men like Arnold, Lully, and Schmurath. It was stated last month that the compiler of the Leide papyrus could not be so regarded, and it will, furthermore, pass without possible challenge that no person could accuse that document of any spiritual significance. The abbreviated formulae of a common medical prescription are as likely to contain the secret of the tincture or the mystery of the unpronounceable tetrad. In proceeding to an appreciation of the Greek alchemists, our authority will be again M. Berthelot, who offers a signal and, indeed, most illustrious instance of the invariable manner in which a genuine and unbiased archeologist who is in no sense a mystic can assist a mystic inquiry by his researches. M. Berthelot offers further a very special example of unwearied desire after accuracy, which is not at all common even among French savants, and is quite absent from the literary instinct of that nation as a whole. The fullest confidence

may always be reposed in his facts. The collection of Greek alchemists, as it now exists, was formed during the eighth or ninth century of the Christian era, at Constantinople. Its authors are cited, says Berthelot, by the Arabian writers as the source of their knowledge, and in this manner they are really the fountain-head of Western alchemy as it is found during the middle ages, because the matter was derived from Arabia. The texts admit of being separated into two chief classes, of which one is historical and theoretical, the other technical and covered with special fabrications, as for example, various kinds of glass and artificial gems. It is outside the purpose of an elementary inquiry to enumerate the manuscript codices which were collated for the publication of the text as it was issued by M. Berthelot in 1847. It is sufficient to say that while it does not claim to include the whole of the best alchemists, it omits an author who was judged to be of value either to science or archeology, and it is thus practically exhaustive. The following synthetic tabulation will be ample for the present purpose:-

- a. General Indications, including a *Lexicon of the best Chrysopeia*, a variety of fragmentary treatises, an instruction of Iris to Honris, &c.
- b. Treatises attributed to Democritus or belonging to the Democritic school, including one addressed to Dioscorus by Syresius, and another of considerable length by Olympiodorus the Alexandrian philosopher.
- c. The works of Zosinius the Panopolite.
- d. A collection of ancient authors, but in this case the attribution is frequently apocryphal, and the writings in some instances are referable even to so late a period as the fifteenth century. Pelopis the philosopher, Ortanes, Iamthichers, Agathodamion and Moses are included in this section.
- e. Technical treatises on the goldsmith's art, the tincture of copper with gold, the manufacture of various glasses, the sophistic colouring of precious stones, fabrication of silver, incombustible nelpom, &c.
- f. Selections from technical and mystical commentators on the Greek alchemists, including Stephanus, the Christian philosopher, and the Anonymous Philosopher.

This section is exceedingly incomplete, but M. Berthelot is essentially a scientist, and from the scientific standpoint the commentators are of minor importance. The bulk of these documents represent alchemy as it was prior to the Arabian period according to its ancient remains outside Chinese antiquities, and any person who is acquainted with the Hermetic authors of the middle ages who wrote in Latin, or, otherwise, in the vernacular of their country, will most assuredly find in all of them the source of their

knowledge, their method, and the terminology of the Latin adepts. For, on examination, the Greek alchemists are not of the same character as the compiler of the Leyden papyrus, though he also wrote in Greek. With the one as with the other the subject is a secret science, a sublime gnosis, the possessor of which is to be regarded as a sovereign master. With the one as with the other it is a divine and sacred art, which is only to be communicated to the worthy, for it participates in the divine power, succeeds only by divine assistance, and invokes a special triumph over matter. The love of God and man, temperance, unselfishness, truthfulness, hatred of all imposture, and the essential preliminary requisites which are laid down most closely by both schools. By each indifferently a knowledge of the art is attributed to Hermes, Plato, Aristotle, and other great names of antiquity, and Egypt is regarded as *par excellence* the country of the great work. The similarity in each instance of the true process is made evident many times and special stress is laid upon a moderate and continuous heat as approved to a violent fire. The materials are also the same, but in this connection it is only necessary to speak of the importance attributed to many of the great alchemists in order to place a student of the later literature in possession of a key to the correspondence which exist under this head. Finally, as regards terminology, the Greek texts abound with references to the egg of the philosophers, the philosophical stone, the same which is not a stone, the blessed water, projection, the time of the work, the matter of the work, the body of Morpresia, and other arbitrary names which make up the bizarre company of the mediaeval adepts. This fact therefore must be faced in the present enquiry, and again with all its consequences: that the Greek alchemists so far as can be gathered from their names were alchemists in the true sense of Lully and Arnold: that if Lully and Arnold are entitled to be regarded as adepts of a physical science and not as physical chemists, then Zosinius also is entitled to be so regarded: that if Zosinius and his school were, however, houseminters of metal, it is fair to conclude that men of later generations belong to the same category: that, finally, if the Greek alchemists under the cover of a secret and pretended sacred science were in reality fabricators of false sophisticated gold and riches, there is at any rate some presumption that those who reproduced their terminology in like manner followed their objects, and that the science of alchemy ended as it began, an imposture, which at the same time may have been in many cases

"tempered with superstition", for it is not uncommon to history that those who exploit credulity finish by becoming credulous themselves. It is obvious that here is the crucial point of the whole inquiry, and it is necessary to proceed with extreme caution. M. Berthelot undertakes to shew that the fraudulent recipes contained in the Leyden papyrus are met with again in the Byzantine collection, but the judgment which would seem to follow obviously from this fact is arrested by another fact which in relation to the present purpose is of very high importance, namely, that a mystic element had already been imported into alchemy, and that some of those writers who reproduce the mystic processes were not chemists and had no interest in chemistry. Now, on the assumption that alchemy was a great spiritual science, it is quite certain that it veiled itself in the chemistry of its period, and in this case does not stand or fall by the quality of that chemistry, which, as M. Berthelot suggests, may very well have been only imperfectly understood by the mystics who, on such a hypothesis, undertook to adopt it. The mystic side of Greek alchemical literature will, however, be dealt with later on. Scanned from the periodical "The Unknown World", No. 3, Vol. 1; Oct. 15, 1894.

[FOURTH PAPER] WHEN the transcendental interpretation of alchemical literature was first enunciated, the Leyden papyruses had indeed been unrolled, but they had not been published, and so also the Greek literature of transmutation, unprinted and untranslated, was only available to specialists. This same interpretation belongs to a period when it was very generally supposed that Greece and Egypt were sanctuaries of chemical as well as transcendental wisdom. In a word, the *origines* of alchemy were unknown except by legend. Now this paper has already established the character of the Leyden papyrus numbered X. in the series, and it was seen that there was nothing transcendental about it. On the other hand, it was also stated that the Byzantine collection of Greek alchemists uses the same language, much of the same symbolism, and methods that are identical with those of the mediaeval Latin adepts, whose writings are the material on which the transcendental hypothesis of alchemy has been exclusively based, plus whatsoever may be literally genuine in the so-called Latin translations of Arabian writers. Does the Byzantine collection tolerate the transcendental hypothesis? Let it be regarded by itself for a moment, putting aside on the one hand what it borrowed from those sources of which the Leyden Papyrus is a survival, and on the other what it lent to the

long line of literature which came after it. Let it be taken consecutively as it is found in the most precious publication of Berthelot. There is a dedication which exalts the sovereign matter, and seems almost to deify those who are acquainted therewith; obviously a spiritual interpretation might be placed upon it; obviously, also, that interpretation might be quite erroneous. It is followed by an alphabetical *Lexicon of Chrysopeia*, which explains the sense of the symbolical and technical terms made use of in the general text. Those explanations are simply chemical. The Seed of Venus is verdegris; Dew, which is a favourite symbol with all alchemists, is explained to be mercury extracted from arsenic, *i.e.*, sublimed arsenic; the Sacred Stone is chrysolite, though it is also the Concealed Mystery; Magnesia, that great secret of all Hermetic philosophy, is defined as white lead, pyrites, crude vinegar, and female antimony, *i.e.*, native sulphur of antimony. The list might be cited indefinitely, but it would be to no purpose here. The Lexicon is followed by a variety of short fragmented treatises in which all sorts of substances that are well known to chemists, besides many which cannot now be certainly identified, are mentioned; here again there is much which might be interpreted mystically, and yet such a construction may be only the pardonable misreading of unintelligible documents. In the copious annotations

appended to these texts by M. Berthelot, the allusions are, of course, read chemically. Even amidst the mystical profundities of the address of *Isis to Horis*, he distinguishes allusions to recondite processes of physical transmutation. About the fragments on the Fabrication of Asem and of Cinnabar, and many others, there is no doubt of their chemical purpose. Among the more extended treatises, that which is attributed to Democritus, concerning things natural and mystic, seems also unmistakably chemical; although it does term the tincture, the Medicine of the Soul and the deliverance from all evil, there is no great accent of the transcendental. As much may be affirmed of the discourse addressed to Leucippus, under the same pseudonymous attribution. The epistle of Synesius to Dioscorus, which is a commentary on pseudo-Democritus, or, rather, a preamble thereto, exalts that mythical personage, but offers no mystical interpretation of the writings it pretends to explain. On the other hand, it must be frankly admitted the treatise of Olympiodorus contains material which would be as valuable to the transcendental hypothesis as anything that has been cited from mediaeval writers- for example, that the ancient

philosophers applied philosophy to art *by the way of science*- that Zosinius, the crown of philosophers, preaches union with the Divine, and the contemptuous rejection of matter- that what is stated concerning minera is an allegory, for the philosophers are concerned not with minera but with substance. Yet passages like these must be read with their context, and the context is against the hypothesis. The secret of the Sacred Art, of the Royal Art, is literally explained to be the King's secret, the command of material wealth, and it was secret because it was unbecoming that any except monarchs and priests should be acquainted with it. The philosopher Zosinius, who is exalted by Olympiodorus, clothes much of his instructions in symbolic visions, and the extensive fragments which remain of him are specially rich in that bizarre terminology which characterized the later adepts, while he discusses the same questions which most exercised them, as, for example, the time of the work. He is neither less nor more transcendental than are these others. He speaks often in language mysterious and exalted upon things which are capable of being understood spiritually, but he speaks also of innumerable material substances, and of the methods of chemically operating thereon. In one place he explicitly distinguishes that there are two sciences and two wisdoms, of which one is concerned with the purification of the soul, and the other with the purification of copper into gold. The fragments on furnaces and other appliances seem final as regards the material object of the art in its practical application. The writers who follow Zosinius in the collection, give much the same result. Pelagus uses no expressions capable of transcendental interpretation. Ostanes

gives the quantities and names the materials which are supposed to enter into the composition of the all-important Divine Water. Agathodaimon has also technical recipes, and so of the rest, including the processes of the so-called Iamblichus, and the chemical treatise which, by a still more extraordinary attribution, is referred to Moses. The extended fragments on purely practical matters, such as the metallurgy of gold, the tincture of Persian copper, the colouring of precious stones, do not need investigation for the purposes of a spiritual hypothesis, their fraudulent nature being sufficiently transparent, despite their invoking the intervention of the grace of God. There is one other matter upon which it is needful to insist here. The priceless manuscripts upon which M. Berthelot's collection is based contain illustrations of the chemical vessels employed in the processes

which are detailed in the text, and these vessels are the early and rude form of some which are still in use. This is a point to be marked, as it seems to point to the conclusion that the investigation of even merely material substances inevitably had a mystic aspect to the minds which pursued them in the infancy of physical science. Scanned from the periodical "The Unknown World", No. 4, Vol. 1; Nov. 15, 1894.

[FIFTH PAPER] The next point in our inquiry takes us still under the admirable auspices of M. Berthelot, to the early Syriac and the early Arabian alchemists. Not until last year was it possible for anyone unacquainted with Oriental languages to have recourse to these storehouses, and hence it is to be again noted that the transcendental interpretation of Alchemy, historically speaking, seems to have begun at the wrong end. In the attempt to explain a cryptic literature it seems obviously needful to start with its first developments. Now, the Byzantine tradition of Alchemy came down, as it has been seen, to the Latin writers of the middle ages, but the Latin writers did not derive it immediately from the Greek adepts. On the contrary, it was derived to them immediately through the Syriac and Arabian Alchemists. What are the special characteristics of these till now unknown personages? Do they seem to have operated transcendently or physically, or to have recognised both modes? These points will be briefly cleared up in the present article, but in the first place it is needful to mention that although the evidence collected by Berthelot shews that Syria and Arabia mediated in the transmission of the Hermetic Mystery to the middle age of Europe, they did not alone mediate. "Latin Alchemy has other foundations even more direct, though till now unappreciated... The processes and even the ideas of the ancient Alchemists passed from the Greeks to the Latins, before the time of the Roman Empire, and, up to a certain point, were preserved through the barbarism of the first mediaeval centuries by means of the technical traditions of the arts and crafts." The existence of a purely transcendental application of Alchemical symbolism is evidently neither known nor dreamed by M. Berthelot, and it will be readily seen that the possibility of a technical tradition which reappears in the Latin literature offers at first sight a most serious and seemingly insuperable objection to that application. At the same time the evidence for this fact cannot be really impugned. The glass-makers, the metallurgists, the potters, the dyers, the painters, the jewellers, and the goldsmiths, from the days of the Roman

Empire, and throughout the Carovingian period, and still onward were the preservers of this ancient technical tradition. Unless these crafts had perished this was obviously and necessarily the case. To what extent it was really and integrally connected with the mystical tradition of Latin Alchemical literature is, however, another question. The proofs positive in the matter are contained in certain ancient technical Latin Treatises, such as the *Compositiones ad Tingenda*, *Mappa Clavicula*, *De Artibus Romanorum*, *Schedula diversarum Artium*, *Liber diversarum Artium*, and some others. These are not Alchemical

writings; they connect with the Leyden papyrus rather than with the Byzantine collection; and they were actually the craft-manuals of their period. Some of them deal largely in the falsification of the precious metals. The mystical tradition of Alchemy, as already indicated, had to pass through a Syriac and Arabian channel before it came down to Arnold, Lully, and the other mediaeval adepts. Here it is needful to distinguish that the Syriac Alchemists derived their science directly from the Greek authors, and the Arabians from the Syriac Alchemists. The Syriac literature belongs in part to a period which was inspired philosophically and scientifically by the School of Alexandria, and in part to a later period when it passed under Arabian influence. They comprise nine books translated from the Greek Pseudo-Democritus and a tenth of later date but belonging to the same school, the text being accompanied by figures of the vessels used in the processes. These nine books are all practical recipes absolutely unsuggestive of any transcendental possibility, though a certain purity of body and a certain piety of mind are considered needful to their success. They comprise further very copious extracts from Zosimus the Panopolite, which are also bare practical recipes, together with a few mystical and magical fragments in a condition too mutilated for satisfactory criticism. The extensive Arabic treatise which completes the Syriac cycle, is written in Syriac characters, and connects closely with the former and also with the Arabian series. It is of later date, and is an ill-digested compilation from a variety of sources. It is essentially practical. The Arabian treatises included in M. Berthelot's collection contain *The Book of Crates*, *The Book of El-Habib*, *The Book of Ortanes*, and the genuine works of Geber. With regard to the last the students of Alchemy in England will learn with astonishment that the works which have been attributed for so many centuries to this philosopher, which are quoted as of the highest authority by all later

writers, are simply forgeries. M. Berthelot has for the first time translated the true Geber into a Western tongue. Now all these Arabic treatises differ generally from the Syriac cycle; they are verbose, these are terse; they are grandiose, these are simple; they are romantic and visionary, these are unadorned recipes. The book of El-Habib is to a certain extent an exception, but the Arabian Geber is more mysterious than his Latin prototype. El-Habib quotes largely from Greek sources, Geber only occasionally but largely from treatises of his own, and it is significant that in his case M. Berthelot makes no annotations explaining, whether tentatively or not, the chemical significance of the text. As a fact, the Arabian Djarber, otherwise Geber, would make a tolerable point of departure for the transcendental hypothesis, supposing it to be really tenable in the case of the Latin adepts. Scanned from the periodical "The Unknown World", No. 5, Vol. 1; Dec. 15, 1894.

[SIXTH PAPER] Preceding papers have taken the course of inquiry through the Greek, Arabian, and Syrian literatures, and the subject has been brought down to the verge of the period when Latin alchemy began to flourish. Now before touching briefly upon this which is the domain of the spiritual interpretation, it is desirable to look round and to ascertain, if possible, whether there is any country outside Greece and Egypt, to which alchemy can be traced. It must be remembered that the appeal of Latin alchemy is to Arabia, while that of Arabia is to Greece, and that of Greece to Egypt. But upon the subject of the *Magnum Opus* the Sphinx utters nothing, and in the absence of all evidence beyond that of tradition it is open to us to look elsewhere. Now, it should be borne in mind that the first centre of Greek alchemy was Alexandria, and that the first period was in and about the third century of the Christian era. Writing long ago in *La Revue Theosophique*, concerning *Alchemy in the Nineteenth Century*, the late Madame Blavatsky observes that "ancient China, no less than ancient Egypt, claims to be the land of the alkahest and of physical and transcendental alchemy; and China may very probably be right. A missionary, an old resident of Pelun, William A. P. Martin, calls it the 'cradle of alchemy.' Cradle is hardly the right word perhaps, but it is certain that the celestial empire has the right to class herself amongst the very oldest schools of occult science. In any case alchemy has penetrated into Europe from China as we shall prove." Madame Blavatsky proceeded at some length to "compare the Chinese system with that which is called

Hermetic Science," her authority being Mr. Martin, and her one reference being to a work entitled *Studies of Alchemy in China* by that gentleman. When the present writer came across these statements and this reference, he regarded them as an unexpected source of possible light, and at once made inquiry after the book cited by Madame Blavatsky, but no person, no bibliography, and no museum catalogue could give any information concerning a treatise entitled *Studies of Alchemy in China*, so that these papers had perforce to be held over pending the result of still further researches after the missing volume. Mr. Carrington Bolton's monumental *Bibliography of Chemistry* was again and again consulted, but while it was clear on the one hand that Mr. Martin was not himself a myth, it seemed probable, as time went on, that a mythical treatise had been attributed to him. Finally, when all resources had failed, and again in an unexpected manner, the mystery was resolved, and Mr. W. Emmett Coleman will no doubt be pleased to learn- if he be not aware of it already- that here as in so many instances which he has been at the pains to trace, Madame Blavatsky seems to have

derived her authority second-hand. The work which she quoted was not, as she evidently thought, a book separately published, but is an article in *The China Review*, published at Hong Kong. From this article Madame Blavatsky has borrowed her information almost verbatim, and indeed where she has varied from the original, it has been to introduce statements which are not in accordance with Mr. Martin's, and would have been obviously rejected by him. Mr. Martin states (1) that the study of alchemy "did not make its appearance in Europe until it had been in full vigour in China for at least six centuries, or *circa* B.C. 300. (2) That it entered Europe by way of Byzantium and Alexandria, the chief points of intercourse between East and West. Concerning the first point Madame Blavatsky, on an authority which she vaguely terms history, converts the six centuries before A.D. 300, with which Mr. Martin is contented, into sixteen centuries before the Christian era, and with regard to the second she reproduces his point literally. Indeed, it is very curious to see how her article, which does not treat in the smallest possible degree of alchemy in the nineteenth century, is almost entirely made up by the expansion of hints and references in the little treatise of the missionary, even in those parts where China is not concerned. Mr. Martin, himself more honourable, acknowledges a predecessor in opinion, and observes that the Rev. Dr.

Edkins, some twenty years previously, was the first, as he believes to "suggest a Chinese origin for the alchemy of Europe." Mr. Martin, and still less Dr. Edluns, knew nothing of the Byzantine collection, and could not profit by the subsequent labours of M. Berthelot, and yet it is exceedingly curious to note that the researches of the French savant do in no sense explode the hypothesis of the Chinese origin of alchemy, or rather, for once in a season to be in agreement with Madame Blavatsky, perhaps not the origin so much as a strong, directing, and possibly changing influence. The Greek alchemists appeal, it is true, to Egypt, but, as already seen, there is no answer from the ancient Nile, and China at precisely the right moment comes to fill up the vacant place. The mere fact that alchemy was studied in China has not much force in itself, but Mr. Martin exhibits a most extraordinary similarity between the theorems and the literature of the subject in the far East and in the West, and in the course of his citations there are many points which he himself has passed over, which will, however, appeal strongly to the Hermetic student. There is first of all, the fundamental doctrine that the genesis of metals is to be accounted for upon a seminal principle. Secondly, there is the not less important doctrine that there abides in every object an active principle whereby it may attain to "a condition of higher development and greater efficiency." Thirdly, there is the fact that alchemy in China as in the West was an occult science, that it was perpetuated "mainly by means of oral tradition," and that in order to preserve its secrets a figurative phraseology was adopted. In the fourth place, it was closely bound up with astrology and magic. Fifthly, the transmutation of metals was indissolubly allied to an elixir of life. Sixthly, the secret of gold-making was inferior to the other arcanum. Seventhly, success in operation and research depended to a large extent on the self-culture and self-discipline of the alchemist. Eighthly, the metals were regarded as composite. Ninthly, the materials were indicated under precisely the same names: lead, mercury, cinnabar, sulphur, these were the chief substances, and here there is no need to direct the attention of the student to the role which the same things played in Western alchemy. Tenthly, there are strong and unmistakable points of resemblance in the barbarous terminology common to both literatures, for example, "the radical principle," "the green dragon," the "true lead," the "true mercury," etc. In such an inquiry as the present everything depends upon the antiquity of the literature. Mr. Carrington Bolton includes in his

bibliography certain Chinese works dealing with Alchemy, and referred to the third century. Mr. Martin, on the other had, derives his citations from various dates, and from some authors to whom a date cannot be certainly assigned. Now, he tells us, without noticing the pregnant character of the remark, that "one of the most renowned seats of Alchemic industry was Bagdad, while it was the seat of the Caliphate"- that an extensive commerce was "carried on between Arabia and China"- that "in the eighth century embassies were interchanged between the Caliphs and the Emperors"- and, finally, that "colonies of Arabs were established in the seaports of the Empire." As we know indisputably that Arabia received Alchemy from Greece, it is quite possible that she communicated her knowledge to China, and therefore, while freely granting that China possessed an independent and ancient school, we must look with suspicion upon its literature subsequent to the eighth century because an Arabian influence was possible. But, independently of questions of date, comparative antiquity, and primal source, the chief question for the present purpose is whether Chinese Alchemy was spiritual, physical, or both. Mr. Martin tells us that there were two processes, the one inward and spiritual, the other outward and material. There were two elixirs, the greater and the less. The alchemist of China was, moreover, usually a religious ascetic. The operator of the spiritual process was apparently translated to the heaven of the greater genii. As to this spiritual process Mr. Martin is not very clear, and leaves us uncertain whether it produced a spiritual result or the perpetuation of physical life

THE HERMETIC ARCANUM

The work of an anonymous author,  
penes nos unda tagi.

### **The secret work of the hermetic philosophy**

**Wherein the secrets of nature and art concerning the matter of the philosophers' stone and the manner of working are explained in an authentic and orderly manner.**

1. The beginning of this Divine Science is the fear of the Lord and its end is charity and love toward our Neighbour; the all-satisfying Golden Crop is properly devoted to the rearing and endowing of temples and hospices; for whatsoever the Almighty freely bestoweth

on us, we should properly offer again to him. So also Countries grievously oppressed may be set free; prisoners unduly held captive may be released, and souls almost starved may be relieved.

2. The light of this knowledge is the gift of God, which by His will He bestoweth upon whom He pleaseth. Let none therefore set himself to the study hereof, until having cleared and purified his heart, he devote himself wholly unto God, and be emptied of all affection and desire unto the impure things of this world.

3. The Science of producing Nature's grand Secret, is a perfect knowledge of universal Nature and of Art concerning the Realm of Metals; the Practice thereof is conversant with finding the principles of Metals by Analysis, and after they have been made much more perfect to conjoin them otherwise than they have been before, that from thence may result a catholic Medicine, most powerful to perfect imperfect Metals, and for restoring sick and decayed bodies, of any sort soever.

4. Those that hold public Honours and Offices or be always busied with private and necessary occupations, let them not strive to attain unto the acme of this Philosophy; for it requireth the whole mans, and being found, it possesseth him, and he being possessed, it debarreth him from all other long and serious employments, for he will esteem other things as strange, and of no value unto him.

5. Let him that is desirous of this Knowledge, clear his mind from all evil passions, especially pride, which is an abomination to Heaven, and is as the gate of Hell; let him be frequent in prayer and charitable; have little to do with the world: abstain from company keeping; enjoy constant tranquillity; that the Mind may be able to reason more freely in private and be highly lifted up; for unless it be kindled with a beam of Divine Light, it will not be able to penetrate these hidden mysteries of Truth.

6. The Alchemists who have given their minds to their well-nigh innumerable Sublimations, Distillations, Solutions, Congelations, to manifold Extraction of Spirits and Tinctures, and other Operations more subtle than profitable, and so have distracted themselves by a variety of errors, as so many tormentors, will never be inclined again by their own Genius to the plain way of Nature and light of Truth; from whence their industrious subtilty hath twined them, and by

twinings and turnings, as by the Lybian Quicksands, hath drowned their entangled Wits: the only hope of safety for them remaineth in finding out a faithful Guide and Master, who may make the Sun clear and conspicuous unto them and free themselves from darkness.

7. A studious Tyro of a quick wit, constant mind, inflamed with the study of Philosophy, very skilful in natural Philosophy, of a pure heart, complete in manners, mightily devoted to God, though ignorant of practical Chymistry, may with confidence enter into the highway of Nature and peruse the Books of the best Philosophers; let him seek out an ingenious and sedulous Companion for himself, and not despair of obtaining his desire.

8. Let a Student of these secrets carefully beware of reading or keeping company with false Philosophers; for nothing is more dangerous to a learner of any Science, than the company of an unskilled or deceitful man by whom erroneous principles are stamped as true, whereby a simple and credulous mind is seasoned with false Doctrine.

9. Let a Lover of truth make use of few authors, but of the best note and experience truth; let him suspect things that are quickly understood, especially in Mystical Names and Secret Operations; for truth lies hid in obscurity; for Philosophers never write more deceitfully - than when plainly, nor ever more truly - than when obscurely.

10. As for the Authors of chiefest note, who have discoursed both acutely and truly of the secrets of Nature and hidden Philosophy, Hermes and Morienus Romanus amongst the Ancients are in my judgment of the highest esteem; amongst the Moderns, Count Trevisan, and Raimundus Lullius are in greatest reverence with me; for what that most acute Doctor hath omitted, none almost hath spoken; let a student therefore peruse his works, yea let him often read over his Former Testament, and Codicil, and accept them as a Legacy of very great worth. To these two volumes let him add both his volumes of Practice, out of which works all things desirable may be collected, especially the truth of the First Matter, of the degrees of Fire, and the Regimen of the Whole, wherein the final Work is finished, and those things which our Ancestors so carefully laboured to keep secret. The occult causes of things, and the secret motions of

nature are demonstrated nowhere more clearly and faithfully. Concerning the first and mystical Water of the Philosophers he hath set down few things, yet very pithily.

11. As for that Clear Water sought for by many, found by so few, yet obvious and profitable unto all, which is the Basis of the Philosophers' Work, a noble Pole, not more famous for his learning than subtilty of wit, who wrote anonymously, but whose name notwithstanding a double Anagram hath betrayed, hath in his *Novum Lumen Chymicum, Parabola and Aenigma*, as also in his Tract on Sulphur, spoken largely and freely enough; yea he hath expressed all things concerning it so plainly, that nothing can be more satisfactory to him that desireth knowledge.

12. Philosophers do usually express themselves more pithily in types and enigmatical figures (as by a mute kind of speech) than by words; see for example, Senior's Table, the Allegorical Pictures of Rosarius, the Pictures of Abraham Judaeus in Flamel, and the drawings of Flamel himself; of the later sort, the rare Emblems of the most learned Michael Maierus wherein the mysteries of the Ancients are so fully opened, and as new Perspectives they present antiquated truth, and though designed remote from our age yet are near unto our eyes, and are perfectly to be perceived by us.

13. Whosoever affirmeth that the Philosophers' grand Secret is beyond the powers of Nature and Art, he is blind because he ignores the forces of Sol and Luna.

14. As for the matter of their hidden Stone, Philosophers have written diversely; so that very many disagreeing in Words, do nevertheless very well agree in the Thing; nor doth their different speech argue the science ambiguous or false, since the same thing may be expressed with many tongues, by divers expressions, and by a different character, and also one and many things may be spoken of after diverse manners.

15. Let the studious Reader have a care of the manifold significations of words, for by deceitful windings, and doubtful, yea contrary speeches (as it should seem), Philosophers wrote their mysteries, with a desire of veiling and hiding, yet not of sophisticating or destroying the truth; and though their writings abound with ambiguous and

equivocal words; yet about none do they more contend than in hiding their Golden Branch.

Which all the groves with shadows overcast,  
And gloomy valleys hide.

Nor yieldeth it to any Force, but readily and willingly will follow him,  
who

Knows Dame Venus Birds  
And him to whom of Doves a lucky pair  
Sent from above shall hover 'bout his Ear.

16. Whosoever seeketh the Art of perfecting and multiplying imperfect Metals, beyond the nature of Metals, goes in error, for from Metals the Metals are to be derived; even as from Man, Mankind; and from an Ox only, is that species to be obtained.

17. Metals, we must confess, cannot be multiplied by the instinct and labour of Nature only; yet we may affirm that the multiplying virtue is hid in their depths, and manifested itself by the help of Art: In this Work, Nature standeth in need of the aid of Art; and both do make a perfect whole.

18. Perfect Bodies as Sol and Luna are endued with a perfect seed; and therefore under the hard crust of the perfect Metals the Perfect Seed lies hid; and he that knows how to take it out by the Philosophers' Solution, hath entered upon the royal highway; for-

In Gold the seeds of Gold do lie,  
Though buried in Obscurity.

19. Most Philosophers have affirmed that their Kingly Work is wholly composed of Sol and Luna; others have thought good to add Mercury to Sol; some have chosen Sulphur and Mercury; others have attributed no small part in so great a Work to Salt mingled with the other two. The very same men have professed that this Clear Stone is made of one thing only, sometimes of two, or of three, at other times of four, and of five; and yet though writing so variously upon the same subject, they do nevertheless agree in sense and meaning.

20. Now that (abandoning all blinds) we may write candidly and truly, we hold that this entire Work is perfected by two Bodies only; to wit,

by Sol and Luna rightly prepared, for this is the mere generation which is by nature, with the help of Art, wherein the union of male and female doth take place, and from thence an offspring far more noble than the parents is brought forth.

21. Now those Bodies must be taken, which are of an unspotted and incorrupt virginity; such as have life and spirit in them; not extinct as those that are handled by the vulgar; for who can expect life from dead things; and those are called impure which have suffered combination; those dead and extinct which (by the enforcement of the chief Tyrant of the world) have poured out their soul with their blood by Martyrdom; flee then a fratricide from which the most imminent danger in the whole Work is threatened.

22. Now Sol is Masculine forasmuch as he sendeth forth active and energizing seed, Luna is Feminine or Negative and she is called the Matrix of Nature, because she receiveth the sperm, and fostereth it by monthly provision, yet doth Luna not altogether want in positive or active virtue.

23. By the name of Luna Philosophers understand not the vulgar Moon, which also may be positive in its operation, and in combining acts a positive part. Let none therefore presume to try the unnatural combination of two positives, neither let him conceive any hope of issue from such association; but he shall join Gabritius to Beia, and offer sister to brother in firm union, that from thence he may receive Sol's noble Son.

24. They that hold Sulphur and Mercury to be the First Matter of the Stone, by the name of Sulphur they understand Sol; by Mercury the Philosophic Luna; so (without dissimulation) good Lullius adviseth his friend, that he attempt not to work without Mercury and Luna for Silver; nor without Mercury and Sol for Gold.

25. Let none therefore be deceived by adding a third to two: for Love admitteth not a third; and wedlock is terminated in the number of two; love further extended is not matrimony.

26. Nevertheless Spiritual love polluteth not any virgin; Beia might therefore without fault (before her betrothal to Gabritius) have felt spiritual love, to the end that she might thereby be made more cheerful, more pure and fitter for union.

27. Procreation is the end of lawful Wedlock. Now that the progeny may be born more vigorous and active, let both the combatants be cleansed from every ill and spot, before they are united in marriage. Let nothing superfluous cleave unto them, because from pure seed comes a purified generation, and so the chaste wedlock of Sol and Luna shall be finished when they shall enter into combination, and be conjoined, and Luna shall receive a soul from her husband by this union; from this conjunction a most potent King shall arise, whose rather will be Sol and his mother Luna.

28. He that seeks for a physical tincture without Sol and Luna, loseth both his cost and pains: for Sol afforded a most plentiful tincture of redness, and Luna of whiteness, for these two only are called perfect; because they are filled with the substance of purest Sulphur, perfectly clarified by the skill of nature. Let thy Mercury therefore receive a tincture from one or other of these luminaries; for anything must of necessity possess a tincture before it can tinge other bodies.

29. Perfect metals contain in themselves two things which they are able to communicate to the imperfect metals. Tincture and Power of fixation; for pure metals, because they are dyed and fixed with pure Sulphur to wit both white and red, do therefore perfectly tincture and fix, if they be fitly prepared with their proper Sulphur and Arsenic: otherwise they have not strength for multiplying their tincture.

30. Mercury is alone among the imperfect metals, fit to receive the tincture of Sol and Luna in the work of the Philosophers' Stone, and being itself full of tincture can tinge other metals in abundance; yet ought it (before that) to be full of invisible Sulphur, that it may be the more coloured with the visible tincture of perfect bodies, and so repay with sufficient Usury.

31. Now the whole tribe of Philosophers do much assert and work mightily to extract Tincture out of gold: for they believe that Tincture can be separated from Sol, and being separated increases in virtue but:-

Vain hope, at last the hungry Plough-man cheats  
With empty husks, instead of lusty meats.

For it is impossible that Sol's Tincture can at all be severed from his natural body, since there can be no elementary body made up by

nature more perfect than gold, the perfection whereof proceedeth from the strong and inseparable union of pure colouring Sulphur with Mercury; both of them being admirably pre-disposed thereunto by Nature; whose true separation nature denieth unto Art. But if any liquor remaining be extracted (by the violence of fire or waters) from the Sun, it is to be reputed a part of the body made liquid or dissolved by force. For the tincture followeth its body, and is never separated from it. That is a delusion of this Art, which is unknown to many Artificers themselves.

32. Nevertheless it may be granted, that Tincture may be separable from its body, yet (we must confess) it cannot be separated without the corruption of the tincture: as when Artists offer violence to the gold destroying by fire, or use Aqua fortis, thus rather corroding than dissolving. The body therefore if despoiled of its Tincture and Golden Fleece, must needs grow base and as an unprofitable heap turn to the damage of its Artificer, and the Tincture thus corrupted can only have a weaker operation.

33. Let Alchymists in the next place cast their Tincture into Mercury, or into any other imperfect body, and as strongly conjoin both of them as their Art will permit; yet shall they fail of their hopes in two ways. First, because the Tincture will neither penetrate nor colour beyond Nature's weight and strength; and therefore no gain will accrue from thence to recompense the expense and countervail the loss of the body spoiled, and thus of no value; so:-

Want is poor mortal's wages, when his toil Produces only loss of pain and oil.

Lastly, that debased Tincture applied to another body will not give that perfect fixation and permanency required to endure a strong trial, and resist searching Saturn.

34. Let them therefore that are desirous of Alchemy, and have hitherto followed impostors and mountebanks, found a retreat, spare no time nor cost, and give their minds to a work truly Philosophical, lest the Phrygians be wise too late, and at length be compelled to cry out with the prophet, "Strangers have devoured his strength."

35. In the Philosophers' work more time and toil than cost is expended: for he that hath convenient matter need be at little expense;

besides, those that hunt after great store of money, and place their chief end in wealth, they trust more to their riches than their own art. Let, therefore, the too credulous tyro beware of pilfering pickpockets, for while they promise golden mountains, they lay in wait for gold, they demand bright gold (viz., money beforehand), because they walk in evil and darkness.

36. As those that sail between Scylla and Charybdis are in danger from both sides: unto no less hazard art they subject who pursuing the prize of the Golden fleece are carried between the uncertain Rocks of the Sulphur and Mercury of the Philosophers. The more acute students by their constant reading of grave and credible Authors, and by the radiant sunlight, have attained unto the knowledge of Sulphur but are at a stand at the entrance of their search for the Philosophers' Mercury; for Writers have twisted it with so many windings and meanderings, involved it with so many equivocal names, that it may be sooner met with by the force of the Seeker's intuition, than be found by reason or toil.

37. That Philosophers might the deeper hide their Mercury in darkness, they have made it manifold, and placed their Mercury (yet diversely) in every part and in the forefront of their work, nor will he attain unto a perfect knowledge thereof, who shall be ignorant of any Part of the Work.

38. Philosophers have acknowledged their Mercury to be threefold; to wit, after the absolute preparation of the First degree, the Philosophical sublimation, for then they call it "Their Mercury," and "Mercury Sublimated."

39. Again, in the Second preparation, that which by Authors is styled the First (because they omit the First) Sol being now made crude again, and resolved into his first matter, is called the Mercury of such like bodies, or the Philosophers' Mercury; then the matter is called Rebis, Chaos, or the Whole World, wherein are all things necessary to the Work, because that only is sufficient to perfect the Stone.

40. Thirdly, the Philosophers do sometimes call Perfect Elixir and Colouring Medicine - Their Mercury, though improperly; for the name of Mercury doth only properly agree with that which is volatile; besides that which is sublimated in every region of the work, they call Mercury: but Elixir - that which is most fixed cannot have the simple

name of Mercury ; and therefore they have styled it "Their Mercury" to differentiate it from that which is volatile. A straight may is only laid down for some to find out and discern so many Mercuries of the Philosophers, for those only:-

- Whom just and mighty Jove  
Advanceth by the strength of love;  
Or such who brave heroic fire,  
Makes from dull Earth to Heaven aspire.

41. The Elixir is called the Philosophers' Mercury for the likeness and great conformity it hath with heavenly Mercury; for to this, being devoid of elementary qualities, heaven is believed to be most propitious; and that changeable Proteus puts on and increaseth the genius and nature of other Planets, by reason of opposition, conjunction, and aspect. In like manner this uncertain Elixir worketh, for being restricted to no proper quality, it embraceth the quality and disposition of the thing wherewith it is mixed, and wonderfully multiplieth the virtues and qualities thereof.

42. In the Philosophical sublimation or first preparation of Mercury, Herculean labour must be undergone by the workman; for Jason had in vain attempted his expedition to Colchos without Alcides.

One from on high a Golden Fleece displays  
Which shews the Entrance, another says  
How hard a task you'll find.

For the entrance is warded by horned beasts which drive away those that approach rashly thereunto, to their great hurt; only the ensigns of Diana and the Doves of Venus are able to assuage their fierceness, if the fates favour the attempt.

43. The Natural quality of Philosophical Earth and the tillage thereof, seems to be touched upon by the poet in this verse:-

Let sturdy oxen when the year begins  
Plough up the fertile soil,  
For Zephyrus then destroys the sodden clods.

44. He that calleth the Philosophers' Luna or their Mercury, the common Mercury, doth wittingly deceive, or is deceived himself; so the writings of Geber teach us, that the Philosophers' Mercury is

Argent vive, yet not of the common sort, but extracted out of it by the Philosophers' skill.

45. The Philosophers' Mercury is not Argent vive in its proper nature, nor in its whole substance, but is only the middle and pure substance thereof, which thence hath taken its origin and has been made by it. This opinion of the grand Philosophers is founded on experience.

46. The Philosophers' Mercury hath divers names, sometimes it is called Earth; sometimes Water, when viewed from a diverse aspect; because it naturally ariseth from them both. The earth is subtle, white and sulphurous, in which the elements are fixed and the philosophical gold is sown; the water is the water of life, burning, permanent, most clear, called the water of gold and silver; but this Mercury, because it hath in it Sulphur of its own, which is multiplied by art, deserves to be called the Sulphur of Argent vive. Last of all, the most precious substance is Venus, the ancient Hermaphrodite, glorious in its double sex.

47. This Argent vive is partly natural, partly unnatural; its intrinsic and occult part hath its root in nature, and this cannot be drawn forth unless it be by some precedent cleansing, and industrious sublimation; its extrinsic part is preternatural and accidental. Separate, therefore, the clean from the unclean, the substance from the accidents, and make that which is hid, manifest, by the course of nature; otherwise you make no further progress, for this is the foundation of the whole work and of nature.

48. That dry and most precious liquor doth constitute the radical moisture of metals wherefore by some of the ancients it is called Glass; for glass is extracted out of the radical moisture closely inherent in ashes which offer resistance, except to the hottest flame notwithstanding our inmost or central Mercury discovers itself by the most gentle and kindly (though a little more tedious) fire of nature.

49. Some have sought for the latent Philosophical earth by Calcination, others by Sublimation; many among glass, and some few between vitriol and salt, even as among their natural vessels; others enjoin you to sublime it out of lime and glass. But we have learned of the Prophet that "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth, and the Earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the Deep, and the spirit of God moved upon the

Waters, and God said, Let there be Light, and there was Light; and God saw the Light that it was good, and he divided the light from the darkness, etc." Joseph's blessing spoken of by the same Prophet will be sufficient to a wise man. "Blessed of the Lord be his Land, for the Apples of Heaven, for the dew, and for the Deep that liveth Beneath: for the Apples of fruit both of sun and moon, for the top of the ancient mountains, for the Apples of the everlasting hills, etc.," pray the Lord from the bottom of thy heart (my son) that he would bestow upon Thee a portion of this blessed earth.

50. Argent vive is so defiled by original sin, that it floweth with a double infection; the first it hath contracted from the polluted Earth, which hath mixed itself therewith in the generation of Argent vive, and by congelation hath cleaved thereunto; the second borders upon the dropsy and is the corruption of intercutal Water, proceeding from thick and impure water; mixed with the clear, which nature was not able to squeeze out and separate by constriction; but because it is extrinsic; it flies off with a gentle heat. The Mercury's leprosy infesting the body, is not of its root and substance, but accidental, and therefore separable from it; the earthly part is wiped off by a warm wet Bath and the Laver of nature; the watery part is taken away by a dry bath with that gentle fire suitable to generation. And thus by a threefold washing and cleansing the Dragon putteth off his old scales and ugly skin is renewed in beauty.

51. The Philosophical sublimation of Mercury is completed by two processes; namely by removing things superfluous from it, and by introducing things which are wanting. In superfluities are the external accidents, which in the dark sphere of Saturn do make cloudy glittering Jupiter. Separate therefore the leaden colour of Saturn which cometh up out of the Water until Jupiter's purple Star smile upon thee. Add hereunto the Sulphur of nature, whose grain and Ferment it hath in itself, so much as sufficeth it; but see that it be sufficient for other things also. Multiply therefore that invisible Sulphur of the Philosophers until the Virgin's s milk come forth: and so the First Gate is opened unto thee.

52. The entrance of the Philosophers' garden is kept by the Hesperian Dragon, which being put aside, a Fountain of the dearest water proceeding from a sevenfold spring floweth forth on every side of the entrance of the garden; wherein make the Dragon drink thrice the

magical number of Seven, until having drunk he put off his hideous garments; then may the divine powers of light-bringing Venus and horned Diana, be propitious unto thee.

53. Three kinds of most beautiful flowers are to be sought, and may be found in this Garden of the wise: Damask-coloured Violets, the milk-white Lily, and the purple and immortal flower of love, the Amaranth. Not far from that fountain at the entrance, fresh Violets do first salute thee, which being watered by streams from the great golden river, they put on the most delicate colour of the dark Sapphire; then Sol will give thee a sign. Thou shall not sever such precious flowers from their roots until thou make the Stone; for the fresh ones cropped off have more juice and tincture; and then pick them carefully with a gentle and discreet hand; if the Fates frown not, this will easily follow, and one White flower being plucked, the other Golden one will not be wanting; let the Lily and the Amaranth succeed with still greater care and longer labour.

54. Philosophers have their sea also, wherein small fishes plump and shining with silver scales are generated; which he that shall entangle, and take by a fine and small net shall be accounted a most expert fisherman.

55. The Philosophers' Stone is found in the oldest mountains, and flows from everlasting brooks; those mountains are of silver, and the brooks are even of gold: from thence gold and silver and all the treasures of Kings are produced.

56. Whosoever is minded to obtain the Philosophers' Stone, let him resolve to take a long peregrination, for it is necessary that he go to see both the Indies, that from thence he may bring the most precious gems and the purest gold.

57. Philosophers extract their stone out of seven stones, the two chief whereof are of a diverse nature and efficacy; the one infuseth invisible Sulphur, the other spiritual Mercury; that one induceth heat and dryness, and this one cold and moisture: thus by their help, the strength of the elements is multiplied in the Stone; the former is found in the Eastern coast, the latter in the Western: both of them have the power of colouring and multiplying, and unless the Stone shall take its first Tincture from them it will neither colour nor multiply.

58. Recipe then the Winged Virgin very well washed and cleansed, impregnated by the spiritual seed of the first male, and fecundated in the permanent glory of her untouched virginity, she will be discovered by her cheeks dyed with a blushing colour; join her to the second, by whose seed she shall conceive again and shall in time bring forth a reverend off-spring of double sex, from whence an immortal Race of most potent Kings shall gloriously arise.

59. Keep up and couple the Eagle and Lion well cleansed in their transparent cloister, the entry door being shut and watched lest their breath go out, or the air without do privily get in. The Eagle shall snap up and devour the Lion in this combination; afterwards being affected with a long sleep, and a dropsy occasioned by a foul stomach, she shall be changed by a wonderful metamorphosis into a coal black Crow, which shall begin to fly with wings stretched out, and by its flight shall bring down mater from the clouds, until being often moistened, he put off his wings of his own accord, and falling down again he be changed into a most White Swan. Those that are ignorant of the causes of things may wonder with astonishment when they consider that the world is nothing but a continual Metamorphosis; they may marvel that the seeds of things perfectly digested should end in greatest whiteness. Let the Philosopher imitate Nature in his work.

60. Nature proceedeth thus in making and perfecting her works, that from an inchoate generation it may bring a thing by divers means, as it were by degrees, to the ultimate term of perfection: she therefore attaineth her end by little and little, not by leaps; confining and including her work between two extremes; distinct and severed as by spaces. The practice of Philosophy, which is the imitator of Nature, ought not to decline from the way and example of Nature in its working and direction to find out its happy stone, for whatsoever is without the bounds of Nature is either in error or is near one.

61. The extremes of the Stone are natural Argent vive and perfect Elixir: the middle parts which lie between, by help whereof the work goes on, are of three sorts; for they either belong unto matter, or operations, or demonstrative signs: the whole work is perfected by these extremes and means.

62. The material means of the Stone are of divers kinds, for some are extracted out of others successively: The first are Mercury

Philosophically sublimated, and perfect metals, which although they be extreme in the work of nature, yet in the Philosophical work they supply the place of means: of the former the seconds are produced; namely the four elements, which again are circulated and fixed: of the seconds, the third is produced, to wit, Sulphur, the multiplication hereof doth terminate the first work: the fourth and last means are leaven or ointments weighed with the mixture of the things aforesaid, successively produced in the work of the Elixir. By the right ordering of the things aforesaid, the perfect Elixir is finished, which is the last term of the whole work, wherein the Philosophers' Stone resteth as in its centre, the multiplication whereof is nothing else than a short repetition of the previous operations.

63. The operative means (which are also called the Keys of the Work) are four: the first is Solution or Liquefaction; the second is Ablution; the third Reduction; the fourth Fixation. By Liquefaction bodies return into their first form, things concocted are made raw again and the combination between the positive and negative is effected, from whence the Crow is generated lastly the Stone is divided into four confused elements, which happeneth by the retrogradation of the Luminaries. The Ablution teacheth how to make the Crow white, and to create the Jupiter of Saturn, which is done by the conversion of the Body into Spirit. The Office of Reduction is to restore the soul to the stone exanimated, and to nourish it with dew and spiritual milk, until it shall attain unto perfect strength. In both these latter operations the Dragon rageth against himself, and by devouring his tail, doth wholly exhaust himself, and at length is turned into the Stone. Lastly, the operation of the Fixation fixeth both the White and the Red Sulphurs upon their fixed body, by the mediation of the spiritual tincture; it decocteth the Leaven or Ferment by degrees ripeneth things unripe, and sweeteneth the bitter. In fine by penetrating and tincturing the flowing Elixir it generateth, perfecteth, and lastly, raiseth it up to the height of sublimity.

64. The Means or demonstrative signs are Colours successively and orderly affecting the matter and its affections and demonstrative passions, whereof there are three special ones (as critical) to be noted; to these some add a Fourth. The first is black, which is called the Crow's head, because of its extreme blackness whose crepusculum sheweth the beginning of the action of the fire of nature and solution, and the blackest midnight sheweth the perfection of liquefaction, and

confusion of the elements. Then the grain putrefies and is corrupted, that it may be the more apt for generation. The white colour succeedeth the black wherein is given the perfection of the first degree, and of the White Sulphur. This is called the blessed stone; this Earth is white and foliated, wherein Philosophers do sow their gold. The third is Orange colour, which is produced in the passage of the white to the red, as the middle and being mixed of both is as the dawn with his saffron hair, a forerunner of the Sun. The fourth colour is Ruddy and Sanguine, which is extracted from the white fire only. Now because whiteness is easily altered by another colour before day it quickly faileth of its candour. But the deep redness of the Sun perfecteth the work of Sulphur, which is called the Sperm of the male, the fire of the Stone, the King's Crown, and the Son of Sol, wherein the first labour of the workman resteth.

65. Besides these decretory signs which firmly inhere in the matter, and shew its essential mutations, almost infinite colours appear, and shew themselves in vapours, as the Rainbow in the clouds, which quickly pass away and are expelled by those that succeed, more affecting the air than the earth: the operator must have a gentle care of them, because they are not permanent, and proceed not from the intrinsic disposition of the matter, but from the fire painting and fashioning everything after its pleasure, or casually by heat in slight moisture.

66. Of the strange colours, some appearing out of time, give an ill omen to the work: such as the blackness renewed; for the Crow's young ones having once left their nest are never to be suffered to return. Too hasty Redness; for this once, and in the end only, gives a certain hope of the harvest; if therefore the matter become red too soon it is an argument of the greatest aridity, not without great danger, which can only be averted by Heaven alone forthwith bestowing a shower upon it.

67. The Stone is exalted by successive digestions, as by degrees, and at length attaineth to perfection. Now four Digestions agreeable to the four abovesaid Operations or Governments do complete the whole work, the author whereof is the fire, which makes the difference between them.

68. The first digestion operateth the solution of the Body, whereby comes the first conjunction of male and female, the commixtion of both seeds, putrefactium, the resolution of the elements into homogeneous water, the eclipse of the Sun and Moon in the head of the Dragon, and lastly it bringeth back the whole World into its ancient Chaos, and dark abyss. This first digestion is as in the stomach, of a melon colour and weak, more fit for corruption than generation.

69. In the second digestion the Spirit of the Lord walketh upon the waters; the light begins to appear, and a separation of waters from the waters occurs; Sol and Luna are renewed; the elements are extracted out of the chaos, that being perfectly mixed in Spirit they may constitute a new world; a new Heaven and new Earth are made; and lastly all bodies become spiritual. The Crow's young ones changing their feathers begin to pass into Doves; the Eagle and Lion embrace one another in an eternal League of amity. And this generation of the World is made by the fiery Spirit descending in the form of Water, and wiping away Original sin; for the Philosophers' Water is Fire, which is moved by the exciting heat of a Bath. But see that the separation of Waters be done in Weight and Measure, lest those things that remain under Heaven be drowned under the Earth, or those things that are snatched up above the Heaven, be too much destitute of aridity.

Here let slight moisture leave a barren Soil.

70. The third digestion of the newly generated Earth drinketh up the dewy Milk, and all the spiritual virtues of the quintessence, and fasteneth the quickening Soul to the body by the Spirit's mediation. Then the Earth layeth up a great Treasure in itself, and is made like the coruscating Moon, afterwards like to the ruddy Sun; the former is called the Earth of the Moon, the latter the Earth of the Sun; for both of them are beget of the copulation of them both; neither of them any longer feareth the pains of the Fire, because both want all spots; for they have been often cleanseth from sin by fire, and have suffered great Martyrdom, until all the Elements are turned downward.

71. The Fourth digestion consummateth all the Mysteries of the World, and the Earth being turned into most excellent leaven, it leaveneth all imperfect bodies because it hath before passed into the

heavenly nature of quintessence. The virtue thereof flowing from the Spirit of the Universe is a present Panacea and universal medicine for all the diseases of all creatures. The digestions of the first work being repeated will open to thee the Philosophers secret Furnace. Be right in thy works, that thou mayest find God favourable otherwise the ploughing of the Earth will be in vain; Nor:-

Will the expected Harvest e'er requite  
The greedy husbandman.

72. The whole Progress of the Philosophers' work is nothing but Solution and Congelation; the Solution of the body, and Congelation of the Spirit; nevertheless there is but one operation of both: the fixed and volatile are perfectly mixed and united in the Spirit! which cannot be done unless the fixed body be first made soluble and volatile. By reduction is the volatile body fixed into a permanent body, and volatile nature doth at last change into a fixed one, as the fixed nature had before passed into volatile. Now so long as the Natures were confused in the Spirit, that mixed spirit keeps a middle Nature between Body and Spirit, Fixed and Volatile.

73. The generation of the Stone is made after the pattern of the Creation of the World; for it is necessary, that it have its Chaos and First matter, wherein the confused Elements do fluctuate, until they be separated by the fiery Spirit; they being separated, the Light Elements are carried upwards, and the heavy ones downwards: the light arising, darkness retreats: the waters are gathered into one place and the dry land appears. At length the two great Luminaries arise, and mineral, vegetable and animal are produced in the Philosophers' Earth.

74. God created Adam out of the mud of the Earth, wherein were inherent the virtues of all the Elements, of the Earth and Water especially, which do more constitute the sensible and corporeal heap: Into this Mass God breathed the breath of Life, and enlivened it with the Sun of the Holy Spirit. He gave Eve for a Wife to Adam, and blessing them he gave unto them a Precept and the Faculty of multiplication. The generation of the Philosophers Stone, is not unlike the Creation of Adam, for the Mud was made of a terrestrial and ponderous Body dissolved by Water, which deserved the excellent name of Terra Adamica, wherein all the virtues and qualities of the Elements are placed. At length the heavenly Soul is infused thereinto

by the medium of the Quintessence and Solar influx, and by the Benediction and Dew of Heaven; the virtue of multiplying ad infinitum by the intervening copulation of both sexes is given it.

75. The chief secret of this work consisteth in the manner of working, which is wholly employed about the Elements: for the matter of the Stone passeth from one Nature into another, the Elements are successively extracted, and by turns obtain dominion; everything is agitated by the circles of humidum and siccum, until all things be turned downwards, and there rest.

76. In the work of the Stone the other Elements are circulated in the figure of Water, for the Earth is resolved into Water, wherein are the rest of the Elements; the Water is Sublimated into Vapour, Vapour retreats into Water, and so by an unwearied circle, is the Water moved, until it abide fixed downwards; now that being fixed, all the elements are fixed. Thus into it they are resolved, by it they are extracted, with it they live and die; the Earth is the Tomb, and last end of all.

77. The order of Nature requireth that every generation begin from humidum and in humidum. In the Philosophers' Work, Nature is to be reduced into order, that so the matter of the Stone which is terrestrial, compact and dry, in the first place may be dissolved and flow into the Element of Water next unto it, and then Saturn will be generated of Sol.

78. The Air succeeds the Water, drawn about by seven circles or revolutions, which is wheeled about with so many circles and reductions, until it be fixed downwards, and Saturn being expelled, Jupiter may receive the Sceptre and Government of the Kingdom, by whose coming the Philosophers' Infant is formed, nourished in the womb, and at length is born; resembling the splendour of Luna in her beautiful and Serene countenance.

79. The Fire executes the courses of the Nature of the Elements, extreme Fire assisting it; of the hidden is made the manifest; the Saffron dyeth the Lily; Redness possesseth the cheeks of the blushing Child now made stronger. A Crown is prepared for him against the time of his Reign. This is the consummation of the first work, and the perfect rotation of the Elements the sign whereof is, when they are all terminated in Siccum, and the body void of Spirit lieth down, wanting

pulse, and motion; and thus all the Elements are finally resolved into Terra.

80. Fire placed in the Stone is Nature's Prince, Sol's Son and Vicar, moving and digesting matter and perfecting all things therein, if it shall attain its liberty, for it lieth weak under a hard bark; procure therefore its freedom that it may succour thee freely; but beware that thou urge it not above measure, for being impatient of tyranny it may become a fugitive, no hope of return being left unto thee; call it back therefore by courteous words, and keep it prudently.

81. The first mover of nature is External Fire, the Moderator of Internal Fire, and of the whole Work; Let the Philosopher therefore very well understand the government thereof, and observe its degrees and points; for from thence the welfare or ruin of the work dependeth. Thus Art helpeth Nature, and the Philosopher is the Minister of both.

82. By these two Instruments of Art and Nature the Stone lifteth itself up from Earth to Heaven with great ingenuity, and slideth from Heaven to Earth, because the Earth is its Nurse, and being carried in the womb of the wind, it receiveth the force of the Superiors and Inferiors.

83. The Circulation of the Elements is performed by a double Whorl, by the greater or extended and the less or contracted. The Whorl extended fixeth all the Elements of the Earth, and its circle is not finished unless the work of Sulphur be perfected. The revolution of the minor Whorl is terminated by the extraction and preparation of every Element. Now in this Whorl there are three Circles placed, which always and variously move the Matter, by an Erratic and Intricate Motion, and do often (seven times at least) drive about every Element, in order succeeding one another, and so agreeable, that if one shall be wanting the labour of the rest is made void. These Circulations are Nature's Instruments, whereby the Elements are prepared. Let the Philosopher therefore consider the progress of Nature in the Physical Tract, more fully described for this very end.

84. Every Circle hath its proper Motion, for all the Motions of the Circles are conversant about the subject of Humidum and Siccum, and are so concatenated that they produce the one operation, and one only consent of Nature: two of them are opposite, both in respect of their causes and the effects; for one moveth upwards, drying by heat;

another downwards, moistening by cold; a third carrying the form of rest and sleep by digesting, induceth the cessation of both in greatest moderation.

85. Of the three Circles, the first is Evacuation, the labour of which is in extracting the superfluous Humidum and also in separating the pure, clean and subtle, from the gross and terrestrial dregs. Now the greatest danger is found in the motion of this Circle, because it hath to do with things Spiritual and makes Nature plentiful.

86. Two things are chiefly to be taken heed of in moving this Circle; first, that it be not moved too intensely; the other, that it be not moved for too long a time. Motion accelerated raiseth confusion in the matter, so that the gross, impure and undigested part may fly out together with the pure and subtle, and the Body undissolved be mixed with the Spirit, together with that which is dissolved. With this precipitated motion the Heavenly and Terrestrial Natures are confounded, and the Spirit of the Quintessence, corrupted by the admixture of Earth is made dull and invalid. By too long a motion the Earth is too much evacuated of its Spirit, and is made so languishing, dry and destitute of Spirit, that it cannot easily be restored and recalled to its Temperament. Either error burneth up the Tincture, or turneth it into flight.

87. The Second Circle is Restoration; whose office is to restore strength to the gasping and debilitated body by Potion. The former Circle was the Organ of sweat and labour, but this of restoration and consolation. The action of this is employed in the grinding and mollifying the Earth (Potter-like), that it may be the better mixed.

88. The motion of this Circle must be lighter than that of the former, especially in the beginning of its Revolution, lest the Crow's young ones be drowned in nest by a large flood, and the growing world be drowned by a deluge. This is the Weigher and Assayer of Measures, for it distributeth Water by Geometrical Precepts. There is usually no greater Secret found in the whole practice of the Work than the firm and justly weighed Motion of this Circle; for it informeth the Philosophers' infant and inspireth Soul and Life into him.

89. The Laws of this Circle's motions are, that it run about gently: and by little and little, and sparingly let forth itself, lest that by making haste it fail from its measure, and the Fire inherent be overwhelmed

with the Waters, the Architect of the Work grow dull, or also be extinguished: that meat and drink be administered by turns, to the end there may be a better Digestion made, and the best temperament of Humidum, and Siccum; for the indissoluble colligation of them both is the End and Scope of the Work. Furthermore see, that you add so much by Watering, as shall be found wanting in assaying, that Restoration may restore so much of the lost strength by corroborating, as Evacuation hath taken away by debilitating.

90. Digestion, the last Circle, acteth with silent and insensible Motion; and therefore it is said by Philosophers, that it is made in a secret furnace; it decocteth the Nutriment received, and converteth it into the Homogeneous parts of the body. Moreover, it is called Putrefaction; because as meat is corrupted in the Stomach before it passeth into Blood and similar parts; so this operation breaketh the Aliment with a concocting and Stomach heat and in a manner makes it to putrefy that it may be the better Fixed, and changed from a Mercurial into a Sulphurous Nature. Again, it is called Inhumation, because by it the Spirit is inhumated, as a dead man buried in the ground. But because it goeth most slowly, it therefore needeth a longer time. The two former Circles do labour especially in dissolving, this in congealing although all of them work in both ways.

91. The Laws of this Circle are, that it be moved by the Feverish and most gentle heat of Dung, lest that the things volatile fly out, and the Spirit be troubled at the time of its strictest Conjunction with the Body, for then the business is perfected in the greatest tranquillity and ease; therefore we must especially beware lest the Earth be moved by any Winds or Showers. Lastly, as this third Circle may always succeed the second straightways and in due order, as the second the first: so by interrupted works and by course those three erratic Circles do complete one entire circulation, which often reiterated doth at length turn all things into Earth, and makes similarity between opposites.

92. Nature useth Fire, so also doth Art after its example, as an Instrument and Mallet in cutting out its works. In both operations therefore Fire is Master and Perfector. Wherefore the knowledge of Fire is most necessary for a Philosopher, without which as another Ixion (condemned to labour in vain) he shall turn about the Whorl of Nature to no purpose.

93. The name Fire is Equivocal amongst Philosophers; for sometimes it is used by Metonymy for heat; and so there be as many fires as heats. In the Generation of Metals and Vegetables Nature acknowledgeth a Three-fold Fire; to wit, Celestial, Terrestrial and Innate. The First flows from Sol as its Fountain into the Bosom of the Earth; it stirreth up Fumes, or Mercurial and Sulphurous vapours, of which the Metals are created, and mixeth itself amongst them; it stirreth up that torpid fire which is placed in the seeds of Vegetables, and addeth fresh sparks unto it, as a spur to vegetation. The Second lurketh in the bowels of the Earth, by the Impulse and action whereof the Subterraneous vapours are driven upwards as through pores and pipes, and thrusts outwards from the Centre towards the surface of the Earth, both for the composition of Metals, where the Earth swelleth up, as also for the production of Vegetables, by putrefying their seeds, by softening and preparing them for generation. The third Fire, viz., Innate is also indeed Solar; it is generated of a vapid smoke of Metals, and also being infused with the monthly provision grows together with the humid matter, and is retained as in a Prison; or more truly, as form is conjoined with the mixed body; it firmly inhereth in the seeds of Vegetables, until being solicited by the point of its Father's rays it be called out, then Motion intrinsically moveth and informeth the matter, and becomes the Moulder and Dispenser of the whole Mixture. In the generation of Animals, Celestial Fire doth insensibly co-operate with the Animal, for it is the first Agent in Nature; for the heat of the female answereth to Terrestrial Fire; when the Seed putrefies, this warmth prepareth it. For truly the Fire is implanted in the Seed; then the Son of Sol disposeth of the matter, and being disposed, he informeth it.

94. Philosophers have observed a three-fold Fire in the matter of their work, Natural, Unnatural, and Contra-Natural. The Natural they call the Fiery Celestial Spirit Innate, kept in the profundity of matter, and most strictly bound unto it, which by the sluggish strength of metal grows dull, until being stirred up and freed by the Philosophers' discretion and external heat, it shall have obtained a faculty of moving its body dissolved, and so it may inform its humid matter, by Unfolding Penetration, Dilatation and Congelation. In every mixed body Natural Fire is the Principle of Heat and Motion. Unnatural Fire they name that which being procured and coming from without is introduced into the matter artificially; that it may increase and

multiply the strength of the natural heat. The Fire Contrary to Nature they call that which putrefieth the Compositum, and corrupteth the temperament of Nature. It is imperfect, because being too weak for generation, it is not carried beyond the bounds of corruption: such is the Fire or heat of the menstruum: yet it hath the name improperly of Fire against Nature, because in a manner it is according to Nature, for although it destroys the specific form, and corrupteth the matter, yet it disposeth it for reproduction.

95. It is more credible nevertheless that the corrupting Fire, called Fire against Nature, is not different from the Innate, but the first degree of it, for the order of nature requireth, that Corruption should precede Generation: the fire therefore that is innate, agreeable to the Law of Nature, performeth both, by exciting both successively in the matter: the first of corruption more gentle stirred up by feeble heat to mollify and prepare the body: the other of generation more forcible, moved by a more vehement heat, to animate and fully inform the Elementary body disposed of by the former. A double Motion doth therefore proceed from a double degree of heat of the same fire; neither is it to be accounted a double Fire, for far better may the name of "Fire contrary to Nature" be given to violent and destructive fire.

96. Unnatural Fire is converted into Natural or Innate Fire by successive degrees of Digestion, and increaseth and multiplieth it. Now the whole secret consisteth in the multiplication of Natural Fire, which of itself is not able to Work above its proper strength, nor communicate a perfect Tincture to imperfect Bodies; for although it be sufficient to itself, yet hath it not any further power; but being multiplied by the unnatural, which most aboundeth with the virtue of multiplying doth act far more powerfully, and reacheth itself beyond the bounds of Nature-colouring strange and imperfect bodies, and perfecting them, because of its plentiful Tincture, and the abstruse Treasure of multiplied Fire.

97. Philosophers call their Water, Fire, because it is most hot, and indued with a Fiery Spirit; again Water is called Fire by them, because it burneth the bodies of perfect Metals more than common fire doth for it perfectly dissolveth them, whereas they resist our Fire, and will not suffer themselves to be dissolved by it; for this cause it is also called Burning Water. Now that Fire of Tincture is hid in the belly of

the Water and manifests itself by a double effect, viz., of the body's Solution and Multiplication.

98. Nature useth a double Fire in the Work of generation, Intrinsic and Extrinsic; the former being placed in the seeds and mixtures of things, is hid in their Centre; and as a principle of Motion and Life doth move and quicken the body. But the latter, Extrinsic, whether it be poured down from Heaven or Earth, raiseth the former, as drowned with sleep, and compels it to action; for the vital sparks implanted in the seeds stand in need of an external motor, that they may be moved and act.

99. It is even so in the Philosophers' work; for the matter of the Stone possesseth his Interior Fire, which is partly Innate, partly also is added by the Philosophers Art, for those are united and come inward together, because they are homogeneous: the internal standeth in need of the external, which the Philosopher administereth according to the Precepts of Art and Nature; this compelleth the former to move. These Fires are as two Wheels, whereof the hidden one being moved by the visible one, it is moved sooner or later; and thus Art helpeth Nature.

100. The Internal Fire is the middle agent between the Motor and the Matter; whence it is, that as it is moved by that, it moveth this; and if so be it shall be driven intensely or remissly, it will work after the same manner in the matter. The Information of the whole Work dependeth of the measure of External Fire.

101. He that is ignorant of the degrees and points of external Fire, let him not start upon the Philosophical Work; for he will never obtain light out of darkness, unless the heats pass through their middle stages, like the Elements, whose Extremes are not converted, but only their Means.

102. Because the whole work consisteth in Separation and perfect Preparation of the Four Elements, therefore so many grades of Fire are necessary there unto; for every Element is extracted by the degree of Fire proper to it.

103. The four grades of Heat are called the heat of the Water Bath, the heat of Ashes, of Coals, and of Flame, which is also called "Optetic:" every grade hath its degrees, two at least, sometimes three; for heat is to be moved slowly and by degrees, whether it be increased or

decreased; so that Matter, after Nature's example, may go on by degrees and willingly unto formation and completion; for nothing is so strange to Nature as that which is violent. Let the Philosopher propound for his consideration the gentle access and recess of the Sun, whose Light and Lamp bestoweth its heat to the things of the world, according to the times and Laws of the Universe, and so bestoweth a certain temperament upon them.

104. The first degree of the Bath of Heat is called the heat of a Fever; the second, of Dung. The first degree of the second grade is the simple heat of Ashes, the second is the heat of Sand. Now the degrees of Fire, Coals and Flame want a proper Name, but they are distinguished by the operation of the intellect, according to their intensity.

105. Three Grades only of Fire are sometimes found amongst Philosophers, viz., the Water Bath, of Ashes and of Flame: which latter comprehendeth the Fire of Coals and of Flame: the Heat of Dung is sometimes distinguished from the Heat of the Bath in degree. Thus for the most part Authors do involve the light in darkness, by the various expressions of the Philosophers' Fire; for the knowledge thereof is accounted amongst their chief secrets.

106. In the White Work, because three Elements only are extracted, Three degrees of Fire do suffice; the last, to wit the "Optetic," is reserved for the Fourth Element, which finisheth the Red Work. By the first degree the eclipse of Sol and Luna is made; by the second the light of Luna begins to be restored; by the third Luna attaineth unto the fulness of her splendour; and by the fourth Sol is exalted into the highest apex of his glory. Now in every part the Fire is administered according to the rules of Geometry; so that the Agent may answer to the disposition of the Patient, and their strength be equally poised betwixt themselves.

107. Philosophers have very much insisted upon secrecy in regard to their Fire; they scarce have been bold to describe it but shew it rather by a description of its qualities and properties, than by its name: as that it is called Airy Fire, Vaporous, Humid and Dry, Clear or Star-like; because it may easily by degrees be increased or remitted as the Artificer pleaseth. He that desireth more of the knowledge of Fire may be satisfied by the Works of Lullius, who hath opened the Secrets of Practice to worthy minds candidly.

108. Of the conflict of the Eagle and the Lion also they write diversely, because the Lion is the strongest animal, and therefore it is necessary that more Eagles act together (three at least, or more, even to ten) to conquer him: the fewer they are, the greater the contention, and the slower the Victory; but the more Eagles, the shorter the Battle, and the plundering of the Lion will more readily follow. The happier number of seven Eagles may be taken out of Lullius, or of nine out of Senior.

109. The Vessel wherein Philosophers decoct their work is twofold; the one of Nature, the other of Art; the Vessel of Nature which is also called the Vessel of Philosophy is the Earth of the Stone, or the Female or Matrix, whereinto the sperm of the Male is received putrefies, and is prepared for generation; the Vessel of Nature is of three sorts, for the secret is decocted in a threefold Vessel.

110. The First Vessel is made of a transparent Stone, or of a stony Glass, the form thereof some Philosophers have hid by a certain Enigmatic description; sometimes affirming that it is compounded of two pieces, to wit, an Alembic and a Bolt-head; sometimes of three at other times of the two former with the addition of a Cover.

111. Many have feigned the multiply of such like Vessels to be necessary to the Philosophical Work, calling them by divers names with a desire of hiding the secret by a diversity of operations; for they called it Dissolvent of solutions; Putrefactory for putrefaction; Distillatory for distillation; Sublimatory for sublimation; Calcinatory for calcination &c.

112. But all deceit being removed we may speak sincerely, one only Vessel of Art sufficeth to terminate the Work of either Sulphur; and another for the Work of the Elixir; for the diversity of digestions requireth not the change of Vessels; yea we must have a care lest the Vessel be changed or opened before the First work be ended.

113. You shall choose a form of glass Vessel round in the bottom (or cucurbit), or at least oval, the neck a hand's breadth long or more, large enough with a straight mouth made like a Pitcher or Jug, continuous and unbroken and equally thick in every part, that it may resist a long, and sometimes an acute Fire The cucurbit is called a Blind-head because its eye is blinded with the Hermetic seal, lest anything from without should enter in, or the Spirit steal out.

114. The second Vessel of Art may be of Wood, of the trunk of an Oak, cut into two hollow Hemispheres, wherein the Philosophers' Egg may be cherished till it be hatched; of which see the Fountain of Trevisan.

115. The third Vessel Practitioners have called their Furnace, which keeps the other Vessels with the matter and the whole work: this also Philosophers have endeavoured to hide amongst their secrets.

116. The Furnace which is the Keeper of Secrets, is called Athanor, from the immortal Fire, which it always preserveth; for although it afford unto the Work continual Fire, yet sometimes unequally, which reason requireth to be administered more or less according to the quantity of matter, and the capacity of the Furnace.

117. The matter of the Furnace is made of Brick, or of daubed Earth, or of Potter's clay well beaten and prepared with horse dung, mixed with hair, so that it may cohere the firmer, and may not be cracked by long heating; let the walls be three or four fingers thick, to the end that the furnace may be the better able to keep in the heat and withstand it.

118. Let the form of the Furnace be round, the inward altitude of two feet or thereabouts, in the midst whereof an Iron or Brazen plate must be set, of a round Figure, about the thickness of a Penknife's back, in a manner possessing the interior latitude of the Furnace, but a little narrower than it, lest it touch the walls; it must lean upon three or four props of Iron fixed to the walls, and let it be full of holes, that the heat may be the more easily carried upwards by them, and between the sides of the Furnace and the Plate. Below the Plate let there be a little door left, and another above in the walls of the Furnace, that by the Lower the Fire may be put in, and by the higher the temperament of the heat may be sensibly perceived; at the opposite part whereof let there be a little window of the Figure of a Rhomboid fortified with glass, that the light over against it may shew the colours to the eye. Upon the middle of the aforesaid plate, let the Tripod of secrets be placed with a double Vessel. Lastly, let the Furnace be very well covered with a shell or covering agreeable unto it, and take care that the little doors be always closely shut, lest the heat escape.

119. Thus thou hast all things necessary to the First Work, the end whereof is the generation of two sorts of Sulphur; the composition and perfection of both may be thus finished.

## The Practice of the Sulphur.

Take a Red Dragon, courageous, warlike, to whom no natural strength is wanting; and afterwards seven or nine noble Eagles (Virgins), whose eyes will not wax dull by the rays of the Sun: cast the Birds with the Beast into a clear Prison and strongly shut them up; under this let a Bath be placed, that they may be incensed to fight by the warmth, in a short time they will enter into a long and harsh contention, until at length about the 45th day or the 50th the Eagles begin to prey upon and tear the beast to pieces, which dying will infect the whole Prison with its black and direful poison, whereby the Eagles being wounded, they will also be constrained to give up the ghost. From the putrefaction of the dead Carcasses a Crow will be generated, which by little and little will put forth its head, and the Heat being somewhat increased it will forthwith stretch forth its wings and begin to fly; but seeking chinks from the Winds and Clouds, it will long hover about; take heed that it find not any chinks. At length being made white by a gentle and long Rain, and with the dew of Heaven it will be changed into a White Swan, but the new born Crow is a sign of the departed Dragon. In making the Crow White, extract the Elements, and distil them according to the order prescribed, until they be fixed in their Earth, and end in Snow-like and most subtle dust, which being finished thou shalt enjoy thy first desire, the White Work.

120. If thou intendest to proceed further to the Red, add the Element of Fire, which is not needed for the White Work: the Vessel therefore being fixed, and the Fire strengthened by little and little through its grades, force the matter until the occult begin to be made manifest, the sign whereof will be the Orange colour arising: raise the Fire to the Fourth degree by its degrees, until by the help of Vulcan, purple Roses be generated from the Lily, and lastly the Amaranth dyed with the dark Redness of blood: but thou mayest not cease to bring out Fire by Fire, until thou shalt behold the matter terminated in most Red ashes, imperceptible to the touch. This Red Stone may rear up thy mind to greater things, by the blessing and assistance of the holy Trinity.

121. They that think they have brought their work to an end by perfect Sulphur, not knowing Nature or Art, and to have fulfilled the Precepts of the secret are much deceived, and will try Projection in vain; for the

Praxis of the Stone is perfected by a double Work; the First is the creation of the Sulphur; the Second is the making of the Elixir.

122. The aforesaid Philosophers' Sulphur is most subtle Earth, most hot and dry, in the belly whereof the Fire of Nature abundantly multiplied is hidden. Therefore it deserveth the name of the Fire of the Stone, for it hath in itself the virtue of opening and penetrating the bodies of Metals, and of turning them into its own temperament and producing its like, wherefore it is called a Father and Masculine seed.

123. That we may leave nothing untouched, let the Students in Philosophy know that from that first Sulphur, a second is generated which may be multiplied ad infinitum: let the wise man, after he hath got the everlasting mineral of that Heavenly Fire, keep it diligently. Now of what matter Sulphur is generated, of the same it is multiplied, a small portion of the first being added, yet as in the Balance. The rest, a tyro may see in Lullius, it may suffice only to point to this.

124. The Elixir is compounded of a threefold matter, namely, of Metallic Water or Mercury sublimated as before; of Leaven White or Red, according to the intention of the Operator; and of the Second Sulphur, all by Weight.

125. There are Five proper and necessary qualities in the perfect Elixir, that it be fusible, permanent, penetrating, tincturing, and multiplying; it borroweth its tincture and fixation from the Leaven; its penetration from the Sulphur; its fusion from Argent vive, which is the medium of conjoining Tinctures; to wit of the Ferment and Sulphur; and its multiplicative virtue from the Spirit infused into the Quintessence.

126. Two perfect Metals give a perfect Tincture, because they are dyed with the pure Sulphur of Nature, and therefore no Ferment of Metals may be sought except these two bodies; therefore dye thy Elixir White and Red with Luna and Sol; Mercury first of all receives their Tincture, and having received it, doth communicate it to others.

127. In compounding the Elixir take heed you change not or mix any thing with the Ferments, for either Elixir must have its proper Ferment, and desireth its proper Elements; for it is provided by Nature that the two Luminaries have their different Sulphurs and distinct tinctures.

128. The Second work is concocted as the First, in the same or a like Vessel, the same Furnace, and by the same degrees of fire, but is perfected in a shorter time.

129. There are three humours in the Stone, which are to be extracted successively; namely, Watery, Airy, and Radical; and therefore all the labour and care of the Workman is employed about the humour, neither is any other Element in the Work of the Stone circulated beside the humid one. For it is necessary, in the first place, that the Earth be resolved and melted into humour. Now the Radical humour of all things, accounted Fire, is most tenacious, because it is tied to the Centre of Nature, from which it is not easily separated; extract, therefore, these three humours slowly and successively; dissolving and congealing them by their Whorls, for by the multiplied alternative reiteration of Solution and Congelation the Whorl is extended and the whole work finished.

130. The Elixir's perfection consisteth in the strict Union and indissoluble Matrimony of Siccum and Humidum, so that they may not be separated, but the Siccum may flow with moderate heat into the Humidum, abiding every pressure of Fire. The sign of perfection is that if a very little of it be cast in above the Iron or Brazen Plate while very hot, it flow forthwith without smoke.

Let three weights of Red Earth or of Red Ferment, and a double weight of Water and Air well ground up be mixed together. Let an Amalgama be made like Butter, or Metalline Paste, so that the Earth being mollified maybe insensible to the touch. Add one weight and a half of Fire; let these be transferred to the Vessel and exposed to a Fire of the first degree; most closely sealed; afterwards let the Elements be extracted out of their degrees of Fire in their order, which being turned downwards with a gentle motion they may be fixed in their Earth, so as nothing Volatile may be raised up from thence; the matter at length shall be terminated in a Stone, Illuminated, Red and Diaphanous; a part whereof take at pleasure, and having cast it into a Crucible with a little Fire by drops give it to drink its Red Oil and incerate it, until it be quite melted, and do flow without smoke. Nor mayest thou fear its flight, for the Earth being mollified with the sweetness of the Potion will retain it, having received it, within its bowels: then take the Elixir thus perfected into thine own power and keep it carefully. In God rejoice, and be silent.

132. The order and method of composing and perfecting the white Elixir is the same, so that thou usest the white Elements only in the composition thereof ; but the body of it brought to the term of decoction will end in the plate; white, splendid, and crystal-like, which incerated with its White Oil will be fused. Cast one weight of either Elixir, upon ten times its weight of Argent-vive well washed and thou wilt admire its effect with astonishment.

133. Because in the Elixir the strength of Natural Fire is most abundantly multiplied by the Spirit infused into the Quintessence, and the depraved accidents of bodies, which beset their purity and the true light of Nature with darkness, are taken away by long and manifold sublimations and digestions; therefore Fiery Nature freed from its Fetters and fortified with the aid of Heavenly strength, works most powerfully, being included in this our Fifth Element: let it not therefore be a wonder, if it obtain strength not only to perfect imperfect things, but also to multiply its force and power. Now the Fountain of Multiplication is in the Prince of the Luminaries, who by the infinite multiplication of his beams begetteth all things in this our Orb, and multiplieth things generated by infusing a multiplicative virtue into the seeds of things

134. The way of multiplying the Elixir is threefold: By the first: R, Mingle one weight of Red Elixir, with nine times its weight of Red Water, and dissolve it into Water in a Vessel suitable for Solution; the matter being well dissolved and united coagulate it by decoction with a gentle Fire, until it be made strong into a Ruby or Red Lamel, which afterwards incerate with its Red Oil, after the manner prescribed until it melt and flow; so shalt thou have a medicine ten times more powerful than the first. The business is easily finished in a short time.

135. By the Second manner. R, What Portion thou pleasest of thy Elixir mixed with its Water, the weights being observed; seal it very well in the Vessel of Reduction, dissolve it in a Bath, by inhumation; being dissolved, distil it separating the Elements by their proper degrees of fire, and fixing them downwards, as was done in the first and second work, until it become a Stone; lastly, incerate it and Project it. This is the longer, but yet the richer way, for the virtue of the Elixir is increased even an hundred fold; for by how much the more subtle it is made by reiterated operations, so much more both of

superior and inferior strength it retaineth, and more powerfully operateth.

136. Lastly, take one Ounce of the said Elixir multiplied in virtue and project it upon an hundred of purified Mercury, and in a little time the Mercury made hot amongst burning Coals will be converted into pure Elixir; whereof if thou castest every ounce upon another hundred of the like Mercury, Sol will shine most purely to thine eyes. The multiplication of White Elixir may be made in the same way. Study the virtues of this Medicine to cure all kinds of diseases, and to preserve good health, as also other uses thereof, out of the Writings of Arnold of Villa Nova, Lullius and of other Philosophers.

137. The Significator of the Philosopher will instruct him concerning the Times of the Stone, for the first Work "ad Album" must be terminated in the House of Luna; the Second, in the second House of Mercury. The first Work "ad Rubeum," will end in the Second House of Venus, and the last in the other Regal Throne of Jupiter, from whence our most Potent King shall receive a Crown decked with most precious Rubies:

Thus doth the winding of the circling Year Trace its own Foot-steps, and the same appear.

138. A Three-Headed Dragon keepeth this Golden Fleece; the first Head proceedeth from the Waters, the second from the Earth, the third from the Air; it is necessary that these three heads do end in One most Potent, which will devour all the other Dragons; then a way is laid open for thee to the Golden Fleece. Farewell! diligent Reader; in Reading these things invoke the Spirit of Eternal Light ; Speak little, Meditate much, and Judge aright.

### **The Times of the Stone.**

The interpretation of The Philosophers' Significator. To every Planet two Houses were assigned by the Ancients, Sol and Luna excepted; whereof the planet Saturn hath his two houses adjoining. Philosophers in handling their Philosophical work, begin their years in Winter, to wit; the Sun being in Capricorn, which is the former House of Saturn; and so come towards the right hand. In the Second place the other House of Saturn is found in Aquarius, at which time Saturn, i.e., the Blackness of the work of the Magistry begins after the forty-fifth or

fiftieth day. Sol coming into Pisces the work is black, blacker than black, and the head of the Crow begins to appear. The third month being ended, and Sol entering into Aries, the sublimation or separation of the Elements begin. Those which follow unto Cancer make the Work White, Cancer addeth the greatest whiteness and splendour, and doth perfectly fill up all the days of the Stone, or white Sulphur, or the Lunar work of Sulphur; Luna sitting and reigning gloriously in her House, In Leo, the Regal Mansion of the Sun, the Solar work begins, which in Libra is terminated into a Ruby Stone or perfect Sulphur. The two signs Scorpio and Sagittarius which remain are required for the completing of the Elixir. And thus the Philosophers' admirable offspring taketh its beginning in the Reign of Saturn, and its end and perfection in the Dominion of Jupiter.

## ALCHEMY and HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY: AN OVERVIEW

By Lance Storm ©

(From: Investigator 65, 1999 March)

### Prologue

The alchemical tradition, incorporating hermetic philosophy and gnosticism, extends chronologically, from pre-Christian times right up to the modern era, and geographically, throughout Europe, Arabic countries (Egypt, Iran, etc.), and even as far as India and China. The practitioners of the *spagyric* art/science (from Greek *spaein* = to rend, tear apart, and *ageirein* = to bring together) claimed matter as both the source of their wisdom (though many had a spiritual orientation), and the salvation of their soul's desire. In its simplest form, the transmutation of base metals (lead, mercury, etc.) into gold was the primary goal, and the attempt to bring this about was taken literally, and quite seriously. Running parallel with this effort was the search for the philosopher's stone (the *lapis*, Latin = stone) and the elixir of life ("drinkable gold").

Alchemy, as proto-chemistry, later developed into the science of Chemistry at the time of the Age of Enlightenment, while the more metaphysical statements of the hermetic philosophers became the subject of philosophy and psychology. Transmutation became an ultimate reality in the twentieth century at two levels: psychologically, in the recognition of the alchemist's

visions as representations of developmental and structural transformations in the psyche as given in the Jungian tradition, and physically, with the manufacture of new elements through transmutation of already existing elements (for example, hundreds of tonnes of plutonium are manufactured each year in the United States alone) as a result of a more detailed knowledge of the structure of the building blocks of matter (the atom), and an associated understanding of both the immense forces which bind subatomic particles and the awesome energies which may be released through nuclear fission and fusion. Thereby, late twentieth-century humanity was launched into the nuclear age—a world very different from that imagined by the alchemists.

### **The Politico-religious World of the Alchemist**

In an age-old human world of values, aspirations, goal-seeking and the like, it is not surprising that a kind of 'meritocratic' attitude should have emerged as a fundamental aspect of human nature (this may be a human construction based on an a priori instinctual pattern of survival). Existing side by side with other political systems of increasing complexity as civilisations grew, this type of meritocracy emerged in accordance with the notion that the measure of an individual's merit (intelligence, strength, personality and character, talent and skill, etc.) can only be proven in competition, or measured against personal wealth.

Hand in hand with the individual's "heroic quest" is the distortion of this necessary striving for egohood and identity into an over-valuation in materialistic societies of the 'object' as a symbol of personal power and spiritual strength in highly prized (because rare) elements and other products of matter (gold, silver, precious jewels, and so on). It is therefore not surprising that a socially constructed type - the alchemist - should also have emerged: an individual whose sole aim was to acquire wealth - whether this be measured as *aurum vulgi* (common gold = material riches) or *aurum philosophorum* (philosophical gold = emotional balance and wholeness).

Another split was also reflected in the character of the alchemists. Human credulity and avarice prompted many power-seeking and opportunistic rulers to seek out successful alchemists who, having mastered the art of gold-making, were later shown to be tricksters and charlatans leading both themselves and their gullible sponsors either to financial ruin or narrow escape from vengeful creditors (Holmyard 1957: 14; De Rola 1973: 12-14). Other less ambitious, more honest practitioners of the art maintained a life-

long and steady - if not fruitful - attempt at transmutation through cautious efforts in the laboratory, and avoidance of a public life, lest they be found out (Holmyard 1957: 14; De Rola 1973: 12-14; Aylesworth 1973; 39-41).

Secrecy was especially important since all alchemists were regarded as heretics by the Church for adopting the gnostic belief that spiritual salvation could be achieved through knowledge of nature and matter, and *speculative* interpretation of Scripture. Believing that human nature could be perfected in a laboratory through chemical magic was an insult to Christian doctrine and Church authority, where faith and *spiritual* interpretation of Scripture was the only accepted path to God. Not that the alchemists in Christian Europe were unchristian or antichristian - certainly they were not Godless. They believed that the darkness of nature could only be illuminated by the light of the Holy Spirit, *Deo concedente* (with God's Will), with the art itself being an arcanum of the *Sapientia Dei* (God's Wisdom) (Jung 1973: 26, 52).

### **The Hermetic Tradition**

It is from a religious position that the idea of correspondences was most highly honoured amongst the more insightful of alchemists. Those that were well versed in the hermetic teachings of the mythical Hermes Trismegistos - who supposedly lived contemporaneously with Moses of Exodus fame, and produced many works on alchemy, magic, philosophy and astrology - held the belief that a practical, experimental approach to matter and an understanding of its nature, mirrored or corresponded with the workings of the human soul and its nature, culminating in a liberation from the earthly realm, "after knowledge and experience of this world have been gained" (Bernoulli 1970: 319).

Fowden (1986: 22) notes that hermetic thought extends as far back as ancient Egypt to the Egyptian Thoth (god of science, intellect, and knowledge) who was later equated with both the Greek god Hermes (god of travel, communication, and language) and the Roman god Mercury (god of commerce, eloquence and skill). Fowden writes that since God was taken by the hermetic philosophers to be a part of everything, it naturally followed that "sympathetic correspondences, or 'chains'" existed between all things, held together by "divine powers" or "energies":

affinities [exist] between the most disparate areas of the natural realm, so that each animal, plant, mineral or even part of the human or animal body corresponds to a particular planet or god whom (or which) they can be used

to influence, providing the right procedures and formulae are known (Fowden 1986: 77-78).

Consequently, the equation of metals, animal natures and heavenly bodies with human characteristics was inevitable. The colours of precious metals became the 'soul' - the animating principle as merged with the metal's 'body' (the mere physical quality of the metal); so too the human soul - character, personality, mind - was a higher, more sublime component imprisoned in the flesh and blood of the human body. The aim of the 'true' alchemist was "dissolution of the body and the separation of the soul from the body" (Fowden 1986: 90). This secret was the 'absolute truth' about the soul and it corresponded directly with the Philosopher's Stone - it was eternal, and to have it meant not only knowledge of the mystery of life, but mastery over matter and an ability to make gold.

Such a 'truth' had to be guarded from the greedy and foolish masses. Therefore, as a means of protecting themselves, and their knowledge, Holmyard (1957: 14) claims that "alchemists used to describe their theories, materials, and operations in enigmatic language, efflorescent with allegory, metaphor, allusion and analogy" which often led interpreters to assume that the alchemists' statements were sometimes of a "purely esoteric significance." However, their 'formulations' were made just as often unconsciously as they were made deliberately. For the most part, the practices and materials were, as Holmyard states, described esoterically, but the images, and the theories constructed from these images, were spontaneous (unconscious) psychic products and were represented by the alchemist as well as hand and eye would permit in ambiguous and incomprehensible paintings and drawings.

Jung recognised the value of these seemingly paradoxical and nonsensical images when he discovered the connection between the unconscious psychic processes of the alchemist and his experiments with matter (Jung 1970: 228, 242ff; 1989: 488ff). Although the tenth-century Persian physician Avicenna scoffed at the literal-mindedness of the 'puffers' (so named from their constant use of the bellows), and many disillusioned but enlightened alchemists closed their laboratory doors for good to pursue the finer, more spiritual points of the art, most alchemists were never aware of the psychic component in their alchemical transmutations (Holmyard 1957: 90; Jung 1970: 217).

Understandably so, since the unconscious content of the alchemist's psyche was not recognised as personal (related to the ego) and was therefore seen in the laboratory flask or vessel. Jung writes:

All projections are unconscious identifications with the object. Every projection is simply there as an uncriticized datum of experience, and is recognized for what it is only very much later, if ever. Everything that we today would call "mind" and "insight" was, in earlier centuries, projected into things, and even today individual idiosyncrasies are presupposed by many people to be generally valid (Jung 1989: 488).

The veritable panoply and diversity of imagery which constitute the iconography of alchemy reflects the complex nature of the psyche - particularly the unconscious - which communicates to the ego in images, since they convey more meaning than the spoken word (not that language is not used by the unconscious, but the image is universal and accessible to all people, while language is limiting and particular to a people). As de Rola observes:

in their images alchemists have spoken in ingenious and often very beautiful ways of things about which they have never written. This pictorial language, in which not a single detail is ever meaningless, exerts a deep fascination on the sensitive beholder (de Rola 1973: 9).

Even today, images, mythical or otherwise, such as dragons, kings and queens, ravens, lions, unicorns, royal marriages, peacocks, trees, and so on, can be experienced to almost numinous heights in the human imagination (dreams, visions, fantasies), and even in the visual arts, such as painting, sculpture, and film.

### **The Magnum Opus (The Great Work)**

The first principle of the opus was the Stone of the Philosophers. This Stone must be "transformed and perfected by the art," becoming paradoxically, the *lapis philosophorum* (Philosopher's Stone) (de Rola 1973: 10).

Psychologically, the *lapis* refers to the psyche—its closest equivalent for the alchemist being the human soul. In fact, the stone was called the "stone that is not a stone," coming as it did "from God but not from God" (Aylesworth 1973: 36). Although the terms, before and after transmutation, (first, Stone

of the Philosophers, then, Philosopher's stone) vary in word order, the *lapis* is essentially the same, just as transformation in a person's personality is detectable only through relationship, but not physically - effectively the person is the same, but different, somehow.

The *lapis* occupies an extremely high position in the arcanum of the alchemist, and as such, tended to be referred to in the texts more often than the gold, which was the transmuted base metal made possible by the *lapis* in the first place. Specifically, the "transformed and perfected" Stone was attained by a union of opposites symbolised by the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) between *Sol* (Sun) and *Luna* (Moon) principles. These principles were embodied in the anthropomorphic couple of King and Queen, which Jung equates with consciousness and the unconscious, respectively. They are antagonistic and polar opposites and may involve friction and violent reaction when brought 'face to face'—the process of self-discovery is equally demanding. This reaction was observable in the alchemist's vessel upon heating a mixture of the standard ingredients Sulphur (Sun) and Mercury (Moon), and was a highly volatile procedure symbolised by two dragons at war.

Should success be attained, the royal couple would merge and become the hermaphrodite or androgyne. Unfortunately, there were always difficulties, even disaster, during the opus, and many stages, involving putrefaction, sublimation (evaporation) and distillation (purification), were necessary to bring the process to completion. Jung (1970: 228-232) observes that the "death of the product of the union" might follow, which took the alchemist into the *nigredo* (blackness) stage. A 'baptism' or washing may lead the alchemist to the *albedo* (whiteness) stage, or the soul may return to the "dead" body, or perhaps the *cauda pavonis* (peacock's tail) symbolism of many colours might appear. This symbolism too, marks the advent of the albedo, which is indicated by the 'presence' of silver - the moon condition.

The final stage, the *rubedo* (reddening) or sunrise stage is reached when the highest temperatures purge the product of its impurities. Once again the "red and the white are King and Queen, who may also celebrate their "chymical wedding" at this stage, symbolising a personality of even and balanced temperament and exhibiting the best qualities of both natures—a 'golden' disposition (Jung 1970: 228-232).

The entire opus is steeped in confusing symbolism, a conflation of real chemical reactions with the alchemist's projections (it is known that the

fumes from heated mercury can induce hallucinations) - an undifferentiated merging of natural events in the physical world with mental events in the psyche - which generally produced an incoherent philosophy that could not, or should not, be seen as referencing the same reality. The psychically real and the physically real were one and the same to the alchemist, hence the difficulty the modern mind has in deciphering these images. With the advent of modern depth psychology a separation of these two factors became possible.

## **Epilogue**

It cannot be stated conclusively whether the ideals of the hermetic philosophers - the 'true' alchemists - were ever realised in practice. Throughout the many centuries during which the alchemists have plied their craft only a few are claimed to have discovered the *lapis* and actually transmuted base metals into gold. One notable alchemist, a French scrivener of the 1400s, Nicolas Flamel, and his wife Pernelle, are held to have amassed a vast fortune in gold upon their discovery of the lapis, and there is documented evidence recording the great many charitable acts performed on their part as a result of such wealth (Sadoul 1972: 72-84).

As mentioned in *Investigator #54*, a relatively new theory of 'low energy transmutation' by Kervran (1980), as distinct from the 'high energy' transmutation described previously, challenges modern physics' conceptions of matter. His theory sits alongside chemical theory and does not challenge its precepts, but the physicist's theory of the atomic nucleus is challenged in so far as it does not necessarily take extremely high levels of energy to create one element from another. Numerous examples are given in Kervran's book.

The legacy of the alchemists remains: from their hard work and personal sacrifice, extending over thousands of years, arose the disciplines of modern medicine, pharmacology, organic and inorganic chemistry, mineralogy and nuclear physics. That which started in the imagination of the hermetic philosophers - the psychophysical parallelism of the human being with nature, the dream of transmutation, the discovery of many new elements, the nature of crystalline structures, and genuine scientific work (including improvements in laboratory techniques) - led to the empirical foundations of the world as we know it today.

The testament of the alchemists: advances in medicine (cures for venereal disease and other ailments, smelling salts, sleeping potions and pain killers),

waterproofing for leather and cloth, rust inhibitors, luminous inks and explosives, and so on, have all arisen from the imagination and the endeavouring human spirit. As Jung has said: "the debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable. It must not be forgotten that it is just in the imagination that a [person's] highest value may lie" (Jung 1971: 63). This value, the alchemist's dream, may well be the philosophical gold.

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# THE HERMETIC WRITINGS OF PARACELSUS

## A Short Catechism Of Alchemy (18)

The Aurora Of The Philosophers (23)  
The Coelum Philosophorum (15)  
The Tincture Of The Philosophers (11)  
The Treasure of Treasures for Alchemists (5)

## THE STONE OF THE PHILOSOPHERS – ELAGABALUS

VOCATIO SOL AURUM  
From Transcendental Magic  
By Eliphas Levi

THE ANCIENTS adored the Sun under the figure of a black stone, which they named Elagabalus, or Heliogabalus. What did this stone signify, and how came it to be the image of the most brilliant of luminaries? The disciples of Hermes, before promising their adepts the elixir of long life or the powder of projection, counselled them to seek for the Philosophical Stone. What is this Stone, and why is it so called? The Great Initiator of the Christians invites His believers to build on the stone or rock, if they do not wish their structures to be demolished. He terms Himself the cornerstone, and says to the most faithful of His Apostles, “Thou art Peter (petrus), and upon this rock (petram) I will build My church.”

This Stone, say the masters in Alchemy, is the true Salt of the Philosophers, which is the third ingredient in the composition of AZOTH. Now, we know already that AZOTH is the name of the great Hermetic and true Philosophical Agent; furthermore, their Salt is represented under the figure of a cubic stone, as may be seen in the TWELVE KEYS of Basil Valentine, or in the allegories of Trevisan. Once more, what is this Stone actually? It is the foundation of absolute philosophy, it is supreme and immovable reason. Before even dreaming of the metallic work, we must be fixed for ever upon the absolute principles of wisdom; we must possess that reason which is the touchstone of truth. Never will a man of prejudices become the king of Nature and the master of transmutations. The Philosophical Stone is hence before all things necessary; but how is it to be found? Hermes informs us in his “Emerald Table”. We must separate the subtle from the fixed with great care and assiduous attention. Thus, we must separate our certitudes from our beliefs, and distinguish

sharply the respective domains of science and faith, realizing that we do not know things which we believe, and that we cease immediately to believe anything which we come actually to know. It follows that the essence of the things of faith is the unknown and the indefinite, while it is quite the reverse with the things of science. It must be inferred from this that science rests on reason and experience, whilst the basis of faith is sentiment and reason.

In other words, the Philosophical Stone is the true certitude which human prudence assures to conscientious researches and modest doubt, whilst religious enthusiasm ascribes it exclusively to faith. Now, it belongs neither to reason without aspirations nor to aspirations without reason; true certitude is the reciprocal acquiescence of the reason which knows in the sentiment which believes and of the sentiment which believes in the reason which knows. The permanent alliance of reason and faith will result not from their absolute distinction and separation, but from their mutual control and their fraternal concurrence. Such is the signifi<sup>94</sup>

### *The Doctrine of Transcendental Magic*

cance of the two Pillars of Solomon's Porch, one named JAKIN and the other BOAZ, one white and the other black. They are distinct and separate, they are even contrary in appearance, but if blind force sought to join them by bringing them close to one another, the roof of the temple would collapse. Separately, their power is one; joined, they are two powers which destroy one another. For precisely the same reason the spiritual power is weakened whensoever it attempts to usurp the temporal, while the temporal power becomes the victim of its encroachments on the spiritual. Gregory VII ruined the Papacy; the schismatic kings have lost and will lose the monarchy. Human equilibrium requires two feet; the worlds gravitate by means of two forces; generation needs two sexes. Such is the meaning of the arcanum of Solomon, represented by the two Pillars of the Temple, JAKIN and BOAZ.

The Sun and Moon of the alchemists correspond to the same symbol and concur in the perfection and stability of the Philosophical Stone. The Sun is the hieroglyphic sign of truth, because it is the visible source of light, and the rough stone is the symbol of stability. This is why the ancient Magi regarded the stone Elagabalus as the actual type

of the sun, and for this reason the mediaeval alchemists pointed to the Philosophical Stone as the first means of making philosophical gold, that is to say, of transforming the vital forces represented by the six metals into Sol, otherwise into truth and light, the first and indispensable operation of the Great Work, leading to the secondary adaptations and discovering, by the analogies of Nature, the natural and grosser gold to the possessors of the spiritual and living gold, of the true Salt, the true Mercury and the true Sulphur of the philosophers. To find the Philosophical Stone is then to have discovered the Absolute, as the masters say otherwise. Now, the Absolute is that which admits of no errors; it is the fixation of the volatile; it is the rule of the imagination; it is the very necessity of being; it is the immutable law of reason and truth. The Absolute is that which is. Now that which is in some sense precedes he who is. God Himself cannot be in the absence of a ground of being and can exist only in virtue of a supreme and inevitable reason. It is this reason which is the Absolute; it is this in which we must believe if we desire a rational and solid foundation for our faith. It may be said in these days that God is merely a hypothesis, but the Absolute Reason is not: it is essential to being.

St. Thomas once said: "A thing is not just because God wills it, but God wills it because it is just." Had St. Thomas deduced all the consequences of this beautiful thought, he would have found the Philosophical Stone, and besides being the angel of the schools, he would have been their reformer. To believe in the reason of God and in the God of reason is to render atheism impossible. When Voltaire said: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him," he felt rather than understood the reason which is in God. Does God really exist? There is no knowing, but we desire it to be so, and hence we believe it. Faith thus formulated is reasonable faith, for it admits the doubt of science, and, as a fact, we believe only in things which seem to us probable, though we do not know them. To think otherwise is delirium; to speak otherwise is to talk like illuminati or fanatics. Now, it is not to such persons that the Philosophical Stone is promised.

The ignoramuses who have turned primitive Christianity from its path by substituting faith for science, dream for experience, the fantastic for the real – inquisitors who, during so many ages, have waged a war of extermination against Magic – have succeeded in enveloping with

darkness the ancient discoveries of the human mind, so that we are now groping for a key to the phenomena of Nature. Now, all natural phenomena depend upon a single and immutable law, represented by the Philosophical

Stone and especially by its cubic form. This law, expressed by the tetrad in the Kabalah, equipped the Hebrews with all the mysteries of their divine Tetragram.

It may be said therefore that the Philosophical Stone is square in every sense, like the heavenly Jerusalem of St. John; that one of its sides is inscribed with the name SHLMH and the other with that of GOD; that one of its facets bears the name of ADAM, a second that of HEVA, and the two others those of AZOT and INRI. At the beginning of the French translation of a book by the Sieur de Nuisement on the Philosophical Salt, the spirit of the earth is represented standing on a cube over which tongues of flame are passing; the phallus is replaced by a caduceus; the sun and moon figure on the right and left breast; the figure is bearded, crowned and holds a sceptre in his hand. This is the AZOTH of the sages on its pedestal of Salt and Sulphur. The symbolic head of the goat of Mendes is occasionally given to this figure, and it is then the Baphomet of the Templars and the Word of the Gnostics, bizarre images which became scarecrows for the vulgar after affording food for reflection to sages – innocent hieroglyphs of thought and faith which have been a pretext for the rage of persecutions. How pitiable are men in their ignorance, but how they would despise themselves if only they came to know!

THE PICTORIAL SYMBOLS OF ALCHEMY

By Arthur E. Waite

THE Hermetic Mystery- upon the higher interpretation of which I have spoken at considerable length in the previous paper and have created an analogy between its hidden meaning and that which I should term the centre of the Religions Mystery in Christendom- is the only branch of mystic and occult literature which lent itself to the decorative sense. I suppose that there are few people comparatively who at this day have any notion of the extent to which that sense was developed in the books of the adepts. It will be understood that in speaking now upon this subject I am leaving my proper path, but though the fact does not seem to have been registered, it is so utterly

curious to note how a literature which is most dark and inscrutable of all has at the same time its lighter side- a side, indeed, of pleasant inventions, of apologue, of parable, of explicit enigma, above all of poetry. The fact is that alchemy presented itself as an art, its books were the work of artists; and for the sym-pathetic reader, even when he may understand them least, they will read sometimes like enchanting fables or legends. When in this manner some of the writers had exhausted their resources in language, they had recourse to illustrations, and I wonder almost that no one has thought to collect the amazing copper-plates which literally did adorn the Latin and other tracts of the seventeenth century.

As I propose to print some selected specimens of the pictorial art in alchemy because they are exceedingly curious, and not for a deeper reason, the reader will not expect, and for once in a way will perhaps be rather relieved, that I am not going in quest especially of their inner meanings. So far as may be possible, the pictures shall speak for themselves, seeing that I write for the moment rather as a lover of books- a bibliophile- than a lover of learning. I will begin, however, with a definition. The alchemists whom I have in my mind may be classified as artists on the decorative side and in their illustrations- but I know not whether they were their own draughtsmen- they approached the Rabelaisian method. The school on both sides is rather of Germanic origin; and it is such entirely, so far as the pictures are concerned. The French alchemists had recourse occasionally to designs, but they are negligible for the present purpose. This is a clearance of the ground, but it must be added that the great and authoritative text-books have not been illustrated- as, for example, *The Open Entrance to the Closed Palace of the King*, which is the work of Eirenaeus Philalethes, and the *New Light of Alchemy*, which is believed to be that of Alexander Seton. If I may attempt such a comparison, Philalethes- in the work mentioned- reads rather like a Pauline epistle and Seton like an *Epistle to the Hebrews* but the analogy in both cases is intended to be allusive only, and strict in no sense. So also they read here and there as if they were almost inspired; but they could not be termed decorative. The really practical works- as, for example, the Latin treatises ascribed to Geber- are never illustrated, except by crude sketches of material vessels used in the material art for the aid of the neophyte on his way to the transmutation of metals. I do not think that they really helped him, and they are of

no account for our purpose. The pictures of the adepts were the allegorical properties of the adepts, and though the criticism has a side of harshness they were almost obviously provided for the further confusion of the inquirer, under the pretence of his enlightenment. At the same time, authors or artists were sages after their own manner, their allegories had a set purpose and represent throughout a prevailing school of symbolism. It is quite easy to work out the elementary part of the symbolism; it is not difficult to speculate reasonably about some of the more obscure materials. But the true canons of alchemical criticism yet remain to be expounded; and I believe that I have intimated otherwise the difficulty and urgency attaching to this work, so that there may be one unerring criterion to distinguish between the texts representing the spiritual and those of the physical work. On the latter phase of the subject it would be useless- and more than useless- to discourse in any periodical, even if I could claim to care anything and to know sufficiently thereof. I know neither enough to hold my tongue nor enough to speak, so that I differ in this respect- but for once only- from my . excellent precursor Elias Ashmole. Like him and like Thomas Vaughan, I do know the narrowness of the name *Chemia*, with the antiquity and infinity of the proper object of research; thereon we have all borne true witness in our several days and generations.

It is a matter of common report that the old Hermetic adepts were the chemists of their time and that, as such, they made numerous and valuable discoveries. This is true in a general sense, but under what is also a general and an exceedingly grave reserve. There is little need to say in the first place, that the spiritual alchemists made no researches and could have had no findings in the world of metals and minerals. Secondly, there was a great concourse of witnesses in secret literature, who were adepts of neither branch; but they expressed their dreams and speculations in terms of spurious certitude, and were often sincere in the sense that they deceived themselves. They produced sophistications in the physical work and believed that their tinctures and colorations were the work of philosophy; these discovered nothing, and misled nearly every one. They also- in the alternative school- pursued erroneous ways or translated their aspirations at a distance into root-matter of spiritual Hermetic tradition; they reached the term of their folly and drew others who were foolish after them, who had also no law of differentiation between things of Caesar and

God. Finally- but of these I say nothing- there were arrant impostors, representing the colportage of their time, who trafficked in the interest of the curious, assuming alchemy for their province, as others of the secret sciences were exploited by others of their kindred. Now, between all these the official historians of chemistry in the near past had no ground of distinction, and there is little certainty that they were right over many or most of their judgments. Once more, the canon was wanting; as I have shown that in another region it is either wanting for ourselves, or- to be correct- is in course only of development. This work, therefore, was largely one of divination, with a peculiar uncertainty in the results.

I have now finished with this introductory part, and I offer in the first place a simple illustration of the alchemist's laboratory, as it was conceived by Michael Maier at the beginning of the seventeenth century. He had a hand in the Rosicrucianism of his period and published some laws of the brotherhood, or alternatively those of an incorporated sodality based on similar lines. He was a man of great and exceptional learning, but withal of a fantastic spirit; he is proportionately difficult to judge, but his palmary concern was the material side of the *magnum opus*. He may have veered, and did probably, into other directions. The illustration is chosen from *The Golden Tripod*, being three ancient tracts attributed respectively to Basil Valentine, Thomas Norton, and John Cremer- a so-called abbot of Westminster. It is these personages who are apparently represented in the picture, together with the *zelator*, servant or pupil, attached to the master of the place, whose traditional duty was the maintenance with untiring zeal of the graduated fire of the art. Basil Valentine, in the course of his tract, makes it clear that he is concerned therein only with the physical work, and in the decorative manner which I have mentioned he affirms that if the three alchemical principles- namely, philosophical Mercury, Sulphur and Salt- can be rectified till "the metallic spirit and body are joined together inseparably by means of the metallic soul," the chain of love will be riveted firmly thereby and the palace prepared for the coronation. But the substances in question are not those which are known under these names, and it is for this reason, or for reasons similar thereto, that no process of metallic alchemy can be followed practically by the isolated student, because everything essential is left out. The tradition is that the true key was imparted only from the adept to his son in the art. This

notwithstanding, Basil Valentine calls the particular work to which I am here referring, *The Twelve Keys*, and it is said that they open the twelve doors leading to the Stone of the Philosophers and to the true Medicine. The same terminology would be used by the spiritual alchemists in another and higher sense; but this school possesses a master-key which opens all the doors. Basil Valentine's second key is that of Mercury, as it is pictured here below.

This, it will be seen, is the crowned or philosophical Mercury, bearing in either hand the caduceus, which is his characteristic emblem, and having wings upon his shoulders, signifying the volatilized state. But there are also wings beneath his feet, meaning that he has overcome this state, and has been fixed by the art of the sages, which is part of the Great Work, requiring the concurrence of the Sun and Moon, whose symbols appear behind him. The figures at either side carry on their wands or swords respectively the Bird of Hermes and a crowned serpent. The latter corresponds to that serpent which, by the command of Moses, was uplifted in the wilderness for the healing of the children of Israel. As in this figure Mercury has become a constant fire, one of the figures is shielding his face from the brilliance. He is on the side of the increasing moon, but on the side of the sun is he who has attained the Medicine, and he looks therefore with a steadfast face upon the unveiled countenance of the vision. According to Basil Valentine, Mercury is the principle of life. He says also that Saturn is the chief key of the art, though it is least useful in the mastery. The reference is to philosophical lead, and he gives a very curious picture representing this key, as it is shown on the next page [here below. Ed.].

The King in Basil Valentine's terminology is the stone in its glorious rubefaction, or state of redness, when it is surrounded by the whole court of the metals. The Spouse of the King is Venus; Saturn is the Prefect of the royal household; Jupiter is the Grand Marshal; Mars is at the head of military affairs; Mercury has the office of Chancellor; the Sun is Vice-Regent; the office of the Moon is not named, but she seems to be a Queen in widowhood. Before them there is borne the banner attributed to each: that of the King is crimson, emblazoned with the figure of Charity in green garments; that of Saturn- which is carried by Astronomy- is black, emblazoned with the figure of Faith in garments of yellow and red; that of Jupiter- which is carried by Rhetoric- is grey, emblazoned with Hope in party-coloured garments;

that of Mars is crimson, with Courage in a crimson cloak, and it is borne by Geometry; that of Mercury is carried by Arithmetic, and is a rainbow standard with the figure of Temperance, also in a many-coloured vestment; that of the Sun is a yellow banner, held by Grammar and exhibiting the figure of Justice in a golden robe; that of the Moon is resplendent silver, with the figure of Prudence, clothed in sky-blue, and it is borne by Dialectic. Venus has no banner apart from that of the King, but her apparel is of gorgeous magnificence.

I pass now to another order of symbolism which delineates the spiritual work by means of very curious pictures, accompanied by evasive letterpress. These are also from a Germanic source, and the writer-if not the designer-was Nicholas Barnaud, who went among many others in quest of Rosicrucians, but it does not appear what he found. I will give in the first place a Symbol which represents Putrefaction, being the disintegration of the rough matter in physical alchemy and on the spiritual side the mystery of mystical death.

According to *The Book of Lambspring*, which is the name of the little treatise, the sages keep close guard over the secret of this operation, because the world is unworthy; and the children of philosophy, who receive its communication in part and carry it to the proper term by their personal efforts, enjoy it also in silence, since God wills that it should be hidden. This is the conquest of the dragon of material and manifest life; but it is like the old folklore fables, in which an act of violence is necessary to determine an enchantment for the redemption of those who are enchanted. The work is to destroy the body, that the body may not only be revived, but may live henceforth in a more perfect and as if incorruptible form. The thesis is that Nature is returned unto herself with a higher gift and more sacred warrant and the analogy among things familiar is the sanctification of intercourse by the sacrament of marriage. The dragon in this picture is destroyed by a knight, but we shall understand that he is clothed in the armour of God, and that St. Paul has described the harness.

The next illustration concerns the natural union between body soul and spirit; it is represented pictorially in the tract after more than one manner, as when two fishes are shown swimming in the sea, and it is said that the sea is the body. Here it is a stag and an unicorn, while the body is that forest which they range. The unicorn represents the spirit, and he who can couple them together and lead them out of the forest

deserves to be called a Master, as the letterpress testifies. The reason is that on their return to the body the flesh itself will be changed and will have been rendered golden. In respect of the alternative illustration, the mystery of this reunion is likened to a work of coaction, by which the three are so joined together that they are not afterwards sundered; and this signifies the Medicine. In yet another picture the spirit and soul are represented by a lion and lioness, between which an union must be effected before the work upon the body can be accomplished. It is an operation of great wisdom and even cunning, and he who performs it has merited the meed of praise before all others. I suppose that rough allegory could hardly express more plainly the marriage in the sanctified life between the human soul and the Divine Part. Neither text nor illustration continue so clear in the sequel, more especially as different symbols are used to represent the same things. In the next picture the war between the soul and the spirit is shown by that waged between a wolf and a dog, till one of them kills the other, and a poison is thus generated which restores them in some obscure manner, and they become the great and precious Medicine which in its turn restores the sages.

The tract then proceeds to the consideration of Mercury, and to all appearance has changed its subject, though this is not really the case, as might be demonstrated by an elaborate interpretation; but I omit this and the pictures thereto belonging, not only from considerations of space but because the task would be difficult, since it is not possible to say what the spiritual alchemists intended by Mercury, this being the secret of a particular school. When the sequence is again taken up the human trinity is presented under another veil, being that of the Father, the Son and the Guide. The symbolism is strangely confused, but some apologists would affirm that this was for a special purpose. In any case, the soul now appears as a boy; the Guide is the Spirit, and the illustration shows them at the moment of parting, when the soul is called to ascend, so that it may understand all wisdom and go even to the gate of Heaven. Their hands are interlinked, and it will be seen that the highest of all is distinguished- except for his wings- by an utter simplicity, characterized by his plain vestments. He, on the other hand, who represents the body has the symbols of earthly royalty. The story concerning them tells how the Soul ascended till it beheld the throne of Heaven. The next picture is intended to set forth this vision, when the soul and spirit are seen on the high mountain of

initiation, with all the splendours of the celestial canopy exhibited above them. It is said to be a mountain in India, which in books of the Western adepts seems always to have been regarded as the symbolical soul's home and the land of epopts. The text states, notwithstanding, that the mountain lies in the vessel, and those who remember what was set forth in my previous paper will know exactly what this means- an intimation on the part of the alchemist that he is dealing only with events of experience belonging to the world within. That which is expressed, however, as a result of the vision is that the soul remembers the body-spoken of here as the father- and longs to return thereto, to which the Spirit Guide consents, and they descend from that high eminence. Two things are illustrated hereby- (1) that the soul in its progress during incarnate life has the body to save and to change, so that all things may be holy; but (2) that it is possible- as is nearly always the case in parables of this kind- to offer a dual interpretation, and the alternative to that which I have given would be an allegory of return to the House of the Father in an entirely different sense. But it is obvious that I cannot speak of it- at least, in the present place. The next picture- and assuredly the most grotesque of all- represents the reunion of body and soul by the extraordinary process of the one devouring the other, during which operation it should be noted that the spirit stands far apart. The text now approaches its close and delineates the construction of a reborn and glorified body, as the result of which it is said "The son ever remains in the father, and the father in the son... By the grace of God they abide for ever, the father and the son triumphing gloriously in the splendour of their new Kingdom." They sit upon one throne and between them is the spirit, the Ancient Master, who is arrayed in a crimson robe. So is the triadic union accomplished, and herein is the spiritual understanding of that mystery which is called the Medicine in terms of alchemical philosophy.

The finality of the whole subject can be expressed in a few words, and although it may be a dark saying for some of my readers it may prove a light to others, and for this reason I give it as follows: The experiment of spiritual alchemy was the Yoga process of the West. The root-reason of the statement must be already, as I think, obviously- probably from the present paper and assuredly from that which preceded it. The physical experiment of the *magnum opus* may have been carried in the past to a successful issue. I do not know, and of my

concern it is no part; but those who took over the terminology of the transmutation of metals and carried it to another degree had opened gates within them which lead into the attainment of all desire in the order which is called absolute, because after its attainment all that we understand by the soul's dream has passed into the soul's reality. It is the dream of Divine Union, and eternity cannot exhaust the stages of its fulfillment.