

THE SCIENCE  
OF ALCHEMY

“SAPERE AUDE”

# SCIENCE OF ALCHEMY

*Spiritual and Material*

AN ESSAY BY:

**‘SAPERE AUDE’**

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# THE SCIENCE OF ALCHEMY

The subject of Alchemy is one of great interest, both to the members of the Eastern Theosophic school and to Hermetists; but it is preferable to approach the consideration of the science of Alchemy from the standpoint of the just Occult Philosophy, handed down to us from the sages of medieval Europe, and which they obtained from three principal sources. First, from the Arabs, who almost alone preserved the ancient sciences through the dark ages. Secondly, from Jewish scholars, Rabbis of Hebrew culture, who had received the traditional lore now identified by the name 'Kabalah,' that tradition of high magic to which ancient Chaldea and Babylon so largely contributed. Lastly, from Egypt, the ancient Egypt of the Pharaohs, ruled by those mighty priest kings of old, whose wisdom instructed Moses, and whose training enabled him to supersede all minor professors of magical arts, and to rule with some success a turbulent and rebellious people — the early Hebrews.

If we look upon the subject from the point which affords the widest view, it may be said that Alchemy has two aspects: the simply material, and the religious. The dogma that Alchemy was only a form of chemistry, is untenable by any-one who has read the works of its chief professors. The doctrine that Alchemy was religion only, and that its chemical references were all blinds, is equally untenable in the face of history, which shows that many of its most noted professors were men who had made important discoveries in the domain of common chemistry, and were in no way notable as teachers either of ethics or religion.

Firstly, then, Alchemy must be regarded as a science uniting ancient chemistry with a religious basis.

Secondly, it is convenient and permissible to discuss the merits and aims of Alchemy from a Triple point of view, for it has a Cosmic, Human and Terrestrial side. Cosmic, in that by analogy its conclusions when true must be universal as well as particular. Human, because as aforesaid, it has a religious side; and Terrestrial, when it is concerned with mere earth, metals and minerals.

Thirdly, as Blavatsky said, Alchemy, like many of the religio-scientific myths of antiquity, is a suitable subject for consideration under Seven Heads. For

Seven is the number of the Key whose action is most general throughout the universe.

Fourthly, the Hermetic Kabbalist will be justified in demonstrating to his *pupil* the complete fitness of the Sephirotic scheme of the Decad to illustrate the secrets of Alchemy, even as he has found that the Sephiroth have never failed to furnish a symbolic allegory of all the forms of manifested creation.

Yet, fifthly, there is the Key of the Twelve; but this special form of attribution is somewhat limited in use; referring to time and space, rather than form or thought.

No attempt can here be made to follow up these several schemes to their logical conclusions. Space will alone permit of a superficial view of the common exoteric knowledge of the science and of its professors; followed by a glance at Alchemy in its most material aspect, its relation to chemistry, and the reconciliation of chemistry to Alchemy; and alternately a short consideration of the subject as a form of religious and ethical instruction.

Chemistry, the modern science which investigates the constitution of material substances, is the lineal descendant of Medieval and Ancient Alchemy. The syllable AL is the Arabic definite article — like the Hebrew He', meaning 'The' chemistry, the *Higher* chemistry; treating of the essential nature of the Elements, metals and minerals; while modern chemistry rejoices rather in being a science devoted to utilitarian and commercial uses. The earliest use of the word 'Alchemy' is believed to be found in the works of Julius Firmicus Maternus, an Astronomer, who lived in the time of the Emperor Constantine.

Firmicus wrote: 'he should be well skilled in Alchemy, who is Born when the Moon is in the house of Saturn.'

The Imperial Library of Paris is said to possess the oldest Alchymic Volume known; it is by Zosimus of Panopolis, written in Greek, and entitled, *The Divine Art of making Gold and Silver*, and was written about A.D. 400.

The next oldest tract upon Alchemy known to exist is by Aeneas Gazeus, written in Greek, about A.D. 480. The Medieval authors often call Alchemy the 'Hermetic Art,' implying an origin from Hermes Trismegistus of Egypt,

the prehistoric demigod, or inspired teacher, to whom we owe the 'Emerald Tablet,' which has been not inaptly described as being a *résumé* of all alchymic science on a single page.

During the earliest Christian times all the sciences flourished at Alexandria, where men of learning were fostered by the rulers; but with Roman predominance there came a change, so far at least as Alchemy is concerned, for the Roman Emperors, partly from jealousy of the subject city, partly because they feared the reality of the Pharaonic claim to gold making, and that by such means the Egyptian nation might be supported in its efforts. at independence, issued orders for its suppression. History tells us that the Emperor Diocletian ordered that all books relating to the Egyptian ancient arts and sciences should be collected and destroyed.

From this time, science took refuge among the Arabs, whose sages cultured it for centuries, and introduced the sciences into Spain, whence they spread into Germany, where Alchemy, one of the Eastern sciences, was adopted by the monks, who seem in many places to have been permitted to study and investigate, although the clergy in general persecuted laymen who practised the art.

Lenglet du Fresnoy, who made a long and patient investigation among the old Alchymic authors, states as the result of his researches, that he has traced ten famous authorities previous to the Christian era, setting aside the almost unknown works of the Egyptian Magi, whose remains are found among the papyri of Egyptian mummies and the inscriptions of the Tombs of the Nile Valley; Berthelot has lately, in Paris, published a volume of most instructive extracts from these most ancient documents. Lenglet discovered twenty one alchymic authors in the first 1000 years after Jesus, five in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, three in the 12<sup>th</sup>, eleven in the 13<sup>th</sup>, fifteen in the 4<sup>th</sup>, seventeen in the 5<sup>th</sup>, thirty in the 16<sup>th</sup>, and sixty-seven in the 17<sup>th</sup> century of our time.

Amongst the most famous names of European Alchemy we note that several were men who rose to hold high dignities in the church: such were Pelagius, Lynesius a Bishop, Heliodorus a Bishop, Cremer, Ripley a Canon, Albertus Magnus a Dominican, Aquinas, Basil Valentine a Benedictine, Raymond Lully a Franciscan, Trithemius an Abbot of Spanheim, and Pope John XXII.

A SHORT CATALOGUE OF THE MORE FAMOUS ALCHEMISTS IS  
HERE GIVEN.

Geber, an Arab philosopher	Circa 730 A.D.
Rhazes, an Arab physician	” 920 ”
Alfarabi, an Arab chemist	” 954 ”
Avicenna, the Arab physician	” 1030 ”
Kalid, a king in Egypt	” 1110 ”
Albertus Magnus, Bishop of Ratisbon	” 1289 ”
Thomas Aquinas, a theologian	” 1260 ”
Artephius	” 1160 ”
Alain de Lisle	” 1298 ”
Arnold of Villanova, Professor at the University of Barcelona	” 1305 ”
Peter of Abano, or Apone	” 1300 ”
Raymond Lully, a Spanish prelate	” 1314 ”
Roger Bacon, the inventor of gun powder	” 1270 ”
Pope John XXII*	” 1316 ”
Jean de Meung, author of the <i>Romance of the Rose</i>	” 1340 ”



Nicholas Flamel, a benefactor of the poor of Paris	”	1415 ”
George Ripley, Sir, a canon of the Church	”	1490 ”
Basil Valentine, prior of a monastery	”	1450 ”
Bernard of Treves or Trevisanus	”	1490 ”
Trithemius of Spanheim; an abbot	”	1516 ”
Cornelius Agrippa, a very famous occult philosopher	”	1536 ”
Paracelsus, physician and professor	”	1541 ”
Agricola	”	1555 ”
Denis Zachaire	”	1560 ”
Dee, John, an English clergyman	”	1608 ”
Kelly, Edward, a notary	”	1595 ”
Seton the Cosmopolite	”	1603 ”
Sendivogius, Michael	”	1636 ”
Libavius, Andrew	”	1609 ”
Oswald Croll	”	1617 ”
Michael Maier, author of the <i>Atalanta Fugiens</i>	”	1619 ”
Jean d’Espagnet, author of the <i>Hermetic Arcanum</i>	”	1620 ”
Robert Fludd, theologian and mystic	”	1638 ”

Van Helmont, Jean Baptiste	”	1643 ”
Eireneus Philafethes, i.e., Thomas Vaughan	”	1645 ”
George Starkey	”	1646 ”
Elias Ashmole, the antiquary	”	1648 ”
Rudolf Glauber, physician	”	1650 ”
Robert Boyle, chemist	”	1668 ”
Olaus Borrichius	”	1675 ”
Matthieu Dammy, one of the last famous Parisian Alchymists	”	1739 ”
Jean Christophe Kunst, a German professor	”	1737 ”

In 1404, here in England, the art of transmutation was made a felony by 5, Hen., IV. c. 4; this Act was repealed in 1689.

In its most material form the science of Alchemy taught that all substances were essentially and primordially derived from one basic ‘*hyle*’ or foundation. From this basis differentiation arose, and by myriad steps the immense variety of material substances — such as we now see around us — originated by progression. From the common minerals were developed the metals, also in gradation of purity and excellence, until an acme was reached in the two so-called Perfect Metals — Silver and Gold. From this theory arose the Art of Alchemy, the Art of Transmutation, by which it was sought to produce Silver and Gold from other metals the next below them in the series, notably from Mercury, Antimony and Lead. Many indeed were the processes devised, but there was a general consensus of opinion that the last three stages of the chemical process were notable by a series of colour changes, from Black, through White to Red; this red matter was the

Philosophers' Stone, or Red Elixir, which could not only transmute Silver into Gold, but could also procure health and prolong life.

Modern chemistry has, above all things, prided itself on its complete severance from the Alchemy of the Ancients. No modern science has shown more intolerance towards its ancestors than the chemistry of our era has shown to the discoveries of those Egyptian, Arabian and Medieval sages who were the founders of chemistry in the dim and distant past.

The discovery of the elements has been the grand achievement of modern chemistry, and sure and certain renown has for half a century been granted to any chemist who has added a new Element to the existing catalogue. But if we may trust one of the most eminent chemists of the day, Professor Crookes, the future will change all this system, and a niche in the Temple of Fame will in the future be allotted by preference to one who succeeds in dividing one of our present elements into its constituents. The Chemistry of the Future is to destroy the present theory, and to gain the power of reducing all compounds, and all the Elements to one primordial matter, to be named PROTYLE. In other words the most ancient chemical doctrine of the πρωτηλη, or FIRST MATTER, is to become paramount. This, then, is the Reconciliation of the Future.

No sooner is the modern Doctrine of Elements laid aside, than the discoveries of the Primordial Matter, the Transmutation of Metals, and the Elixir of Life reappear and once more enter the range of the possible. Ancient Alchemy claimed no Elements, in our modern sense. An element being defined as 'a body which cannot be decomposed,' or 'a something to which we can add, but from which we can take away nothing,' or 'a body which increases in weight with every chemical change,' or 'a body different from all others, yet having constant characters itself, and indivisible except into parts of itself.' True, the word element was applied to the group of four properties which they so highly esteemed, viz., Fire, Air, Earth, and Water. But a close study of the oldest authors show that these four names are types of four modes of matter, and further that they are four correlative terms, implying states mutually related and dependent, and in no way independent and opposed entities. They were names of the four states,

- Heat and Dryness = Fire,

- Heat and Moistness = Air,
- Cold and Dryness = Earth,
- Cold and Moistness = Water,

as is amply demonstrated even by Aristotle, who shows that the one matter, simple, or combined with its developments, may exist in each of these states.

The Alchemist affirmed the existence of the Primum Ens, or First Being, or First Matter; two opposites or contraries; three principles; and four elementary states of matter.

Beyond these came the seven metals, as forms of matter, essentially stable, except in the hands of the skilled operator, to whom might be given the power of Transmutation, or of changing one of them into the other. Gold as the most perfect one was the effect of the greatest transmutation, which process once known rendered all others of no importance. Hence all the efforts of the greatest Alchemists were directed to this the crowning achievement of the work. For this process one substance was requisite, the Philosopher's Stone, the Quintessence, Son of the Sun, our laton: this was to be derived from the Philosophical Mercury, Salt and Sulphur, and had to pass in the process through the colours Black and White to the Red. This Stone, all powerful for Transmutation, was expected to be also the basis of the Great Elixir of Life when employed to affect living beings, and so confer the power of indefinite prolongation of earthly existence.

Historical proof may be wanting that the Stone of the Philosophers was ever found and used, but no candid observer can doubt that the life, long labours of the Alchemists, and especially their discoveries in Synthesis, and their modes of chemical manipulation and their utensils, have laid the foundation of our modern chemistry, which having mounted by the alchymic ladder to a proud position, now contemptuously spurns that ladder from beneath its feet.

The argument from Analogy is a very powerful one in favour of a Protyle or primordial matter. In the Spiritual or Ideal world, there is no proof of definite bounds and independent existences, but rather of a Great Ain Soph, proceeding into forms by successive emanations. In the Animal and Vegetable Creations, again, there is evidence that although species are distinct for long periods, they are but stages in a long series of forms, one

proceeding from the other, and all traceable to a primordial monad of life.

The most recent advances in knowledge which offer the greatest evidence of the want of elementary characters in our modern elements are the Spectroscope, and the intense heat and light obtainable from electricity. Several elements exposed to the intense heat of the latter show in the spectroscope that they are not simple bodies; and spectroscopic examinations of rays of light from the sun and stars points out that while some of our elements are shown by their spectra to exist in them, other elements are certainly broken up in those regions of intense heat, and their constituents are disseminated and otherwise associated, thereby proving that in the solar regions such elements are compound bodies.

Modern chemists have catalogued up to the present time about seventy substances as elements; why should there be seventy elements, any more than thirty-two in 1720, the days of Lavoisier-any more than sixty-four, as in 1876, or eighty next year perhaps? There is no reason, and none have been suggested. Analogy, or the Kabala, might have pointed out a certain number, if elements there be; but there has been no such suggestion. The statement of seventy elements is a confession of ignorance, a temporary dogma, which the alchemists wisely abstained from propounding. Profs. Crookes and Faraday now say, 'To decompose the metals, to re-form them, to change one into another, and to realise the once absurd notion of transmutation, are the problems given to the chemist of the future for solution.' And this is the Science which a braggart has called 'the wise daughter of a foolish mother.'

But this is a world of progression; every true science is progressive, and if such an one goes astray, it must retrace its steps and begin over again the toilsome ascent of the Mount of Wisdom, of Olympus, of Meru.

It seems then that a true and ancient doctrine of Occult Science has been once more recognized, and bids fair to be the dogma of the future — *Magna est Vcritis, at praevalabit.*

Some examples of Alchymic descriptions of processes entirely on the material plane should here be added. But space will not permit the quotation of long; examples, and it cannot be denied that the Alchemists were given to many words, with which they covered up their meaning.

From the *Open Entrance to the Shut Palace of the King*, by Eirenreus Philalethes, is this clearly chemical passage.

‘Take four parts of the perfected Stone, either red or white; melt them in a clear crucible. Take one part of this powdery mixture to ten parts of purified Mercury; heat the Mercury until it begin to crackle, then throw in your mixture, which will pierce it in the twinkling of an eye: increase your fire until all be melted, and you will have a medicine of an inferior order.’

The following is from Jean d’Espagnet, and shows the use of Alchymic imagery.

‘Take a red dragon, courageous and warlike, to whom no natural strength is wanting: take also seven or nine noble virgin eagles, whose eyes will not wax dull in the rays of the Sun: cast the Birds in with the Beast into a clear prison, shut them up strongly j under which let a bath be placed, that they may be incensed to fight by the warm vapour: in a short time they will enter upon a bard contention; until about the fiftieth day the eagles begin to tear the beast in pieces: this one dying will infect the whole prison with black poison, whereby the eagles also being injured, they will also be soon constrained to give up the ghost.’

It may be easily perceived that this allegory is convertible into a description of chemical processes, thus; —

Take one part of *a* red powder *a*, and add seven or nine parts of the liquid *b*, which is volatile, — *i.e.*, able to fly; mix them, put the mixture into a glass retort = the clear prison; hermetically seal the opening, that is, shut them up strongly; set the vessel on a water bath, and then the heat will make the liquid attack the solid powder and dissolve it, and the result will be the production of a black substance, and both the red powder and the liquid will have lost their chemical characters.

However limited the size of this pamphlet, space must be found for the beautiful verses put by Ainsworth into the mouth of the Sylph of Ruggieri; they differ but slightly from the authentic prose Canons of Jean d’Espagnet, recorded in the *Hermetic Arcanum*. They are as follows: —

I.

Within the golden portal  
Of the garden of the Wise,  
Watching by the seven sprayed fountain  
The Hesperian Dragon lies.  
Like the ever-burning Branches  
In the dream of holy seer;  
Like the types of Asia's churches,  
Those glorious jets appear.  
Three times the magic waters  
Must the Winged Dragon drain,  
Then his scales shall burst asunder  
And his Heart be reft in twain.  
Forth shall flow an emanation,  
Forth shall spring a shape divine,  
And if Sol and Cynthia aid thee,  
Shall the charmed Key be thine.

II.

In the solemn groves of Wisdom,  
Where black pines their shadows fling  
Near the haunted cell of Hermes,  
Three lovely flowerets spring:  
The Violet damask tinted  
In scent all flowers above;  
The milk white vestal Lily,  
And the purple flower of Love.  
Red Sol a sign shall give thee  
Where the sapphire violets gleam,  
Watered by the rills that wander  
From the viewless golden stream;

One Violet shalt thou gather, —  
But Ah-beware, beware ! —  
The Lily and the Amaranth  
Demand thy chiefest care.

III.

Within the lake of crystal,  
Roseate as Sol's first ray,  
With eyes of diamond lustre,  
A thousand fishes play.  
A net within that water,  
A net with web of gold,  
If cast where air bells glitter  
One shining fish shall hold.

IV.

Amid the oldest mountains  
Whose tops are next the Sun,  
The everlasting rivers  
Through glowing channels run;  
Those mountains are of silver,  
Those channels are of gold,  
And thence the countless treasures  
Of the Kings of Earth are rolled.  
But far, far must he wander  
Over realms and seas unknown  
Who seeks the Ancient Mountains  
Where shines the Wondrous Stone.

In the Mytho-Hermetic Dictionary an explanation, upon the material plane, is supplied by an anonymous author.

The old Alchymic books, then, have been shown to be definitely of chemical



nature, let us now turn to the other aspect and note in them how clearly also they are religious works, and provide ethical standards.

So long as modern criticism contented itself with abuse of the Alchemists as being either crazy or as charlatans, there was general surprise and much cheap indignation poured forth at the presumption and impertinence of the Alchemists in introducing so many of their volumes with pious reflections, and in interlarding them with prayers and religious imagery.

When presently it became the fashion to insist that all Alchemy was theology, if not religion, then the professors were abused for including in their works obvious chemical formulae.

But this treatment was at any rate less severe, than the reception which did meet the ancient Alchemist himself, who was on the one hand accused of being in league with the devil and so rendered liable to persecution by the dominant clergy; while on the other hand, every king and powerful baron was on the look out for him, to cajole the Alchemist into his dominions and power, there to convert him into a gold manufacturing slave, working under threats of torture and death.

A third class of critics, ever ready to abuse someone as a trade, combined the condemnations of the realist and of the idealist, by summing up the character of the unfortunate Alchemist, in asserting: 'That he was a limp, flabby being, without the courage of his convictions, offering sops at once to the Cerberus of the world, and to the Pope and his myrmidons.'

The following are quotations from the works of eminent Alchemists, which illustrate their religious attitude.

Geber: —

'Our stone has been described by me in a way agreeable to the Most High, the Blessed Sublime and Glorious God, as it has been infused by the grace of his goodness, who gives and withholds as it pleases him. Study with great industry and labour and by continued deep meditation: be sons of Truth and you shall have most excellent gifts of God.

Flamel: —

‘God reserves to himself to reveal to a select few of such as fear and love him certain things of knowledge, which therefore ought not to be written.’

In the book *Aureus* of Hermes is the following passage: —

‘My Son, before all things I admonish thee to fear God, in whom is thy strength; whatsoever thou hearest consider it rationally.’ ‘It behoves thee to give thanks to God, who has bestowed liberally of his bounty to the wise, and who delivers us from misery. I am proven by the fulness of his

substance and his wonders, and humbly pray that while we live we may come unto him.’

The *Water Stone of the Wise*. Anon: —

‘In the first place the practice of Alchemy enables us to understand, not merely the marvels of nature, but the nature of the Great Divine One himself in his unspeakable glory. It shadows forth in a wonderful manner how Man is an Image of a Divine Trinity; he represents the Union of Substances, as well as the difference of Persons. It illustrates Our purification from sin, and in brief all the Christian faith, and the reasons why man must pass through much tribulation and anguish and fall a prey to death before he Can rise again to a new and higher life. All this we see in our Art as in a Mirror.’

And then in the next sentence reverts to the practical chemical part, adding —

‘Secondly, its earthly use consists in changing all imperfect metals, by means of a Tincture, into pure Gold; as I shall try to show.’

From about the year 1650 the work of the real Alchymists has ceased to be given to the world, either by MSS. or by printed works.

Private traditions have, however, always affirmed the permanence of both the theory and art of transmutation, and considerable evidence. could be laid before a *bonafide* seeker, that even today the, mystery exists and could be put into practice.

So far as regards publication, however, there was a considerable period of Alchymic obscurity. This silence was at last broken by the appearance of a new school of philosophers, who espoused almost entirely the principle of demonstrating the reality of Alchemy upon the Higher planes. Many minor writers tried their pens upon this theme, and some of their works have made an ephemeral reputation.

Dr. Kopp, in his *History of Chemistry*, takes this view; and there is a masterly volume by E. A. Hitchcock, entitled *Remarks upon Alchemy*, where he shows that Man was the 'Matter' of some of the Alchymists. But the greatest success attended one who wrote a most valuable, learned and highly spiritual tractate upon the transcendental side of the writings of the old Alchymists. This Author, who was a clergyman of the Church of England, published his book anonymously, naming it *An Enquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*. So great, however, was the pressure put upon him by his friends and fellow Christians, who were more orthodox than himself, that he was induced to destroy all that remained of the edition, and to call in all the copies already dispersed, so far as he could do so.

The moral and spiritual aspects of the so-called 'Higher Alchemy' have been of late years particularly illustrated by the late Anna Kingsford and her coworker, Edward Maitland. The semi-esoteric, but not private, Hermetic Society which they conducted, and of which I was elected an Honorary Member, frequently listened to discussions upon the question of how far the ancient Alchymic books had a spiritual aspect, and on what lines a spiritual demonstration could be made of their hidden meaning. Anna Kingsford succeeded in many cases in drawing very real explanations of Alchymic language by means of Hermetic allegory, and she succeeded also in demonstrating an Alchymic mode of thought and allusions to transmutation on the, ethical and higher planes from some of the possible but improbable narratives found in the early books of the Bible.

For example, when alluding to a supposed derivation of the word 'Alchemy' from Khemi — black earth the alluvial land of the Nile banks, she refers to the connection between this word and Khemi or Cham, or Ham, one of the sons of the Biblical Noah. Of this Ham it is said he was a son, the offspring of Noah, but that he should be a *servant* to others. Ham, she asserted, referred

to Matter as the lowest mode of Spirit, the opposite polar state of that substance of which manifested spirit is the highest aspect, named in the context Noah — a word comparable to the Greek *nous*, the higher intellectual mind. Ham as son to Noah, she taught, is an allegory of matter proceeding from spirit by downward steps, each stage more dense as it is more removed from its source: until the gross material cognizable by our senses is reached, this so-called Matter being well described as our servant, which is set to do the bidding of the human reason.

The keynote of Alchemy upon this basis is of course the implied possibility of the material once again taking on the spiritual aspect by successive purifications, which may be suitably described by terms allied to the art of chemistry.

Similar terms of art were, she pointed out, eminently suitable to describe the processes of purification by means of external forces and the influence of others, which are observable in the moral sphere of personality, and which are the essential aims of those schemes of moral, ethical and spiritual purification which we call Religion. For Religion should mean the processes which relegate us or re-unite us fallible and erring creatures to our Higher Genius or, as some phrase it, to our God, or God-part.

The common ideal of a God outside created man and created nature, is a somewhat modern notion, and was certainly not a universal concept in that ancient world which gave birth to so many of the greatest philosophies which really are the basis of all modern modes of thought.

We must bear this present development of religious thought in mind as a departure from the *antiquas vias* when we seek comparisons and illustrations of the writings of the sages of a long past age. A neglect of this precaution has rendered some persons unable to grasp the reality of some suggested explanations of old allegories, which when the different basis of speculation has been noted, become much more clearly apparent.

The Higher Alchemy then is almost identical with Religion, as distinct from Theology. The function of Religion and the Great Work of the Alchemist is Spiritualisation. The separation of the subtle from the gross; the redemption of spirit, while still *seated* in matter, from the taint inevitable to the lowest

planes of manifestation. Or again, the transmutation of the low forms of the human forces which are in man, in excess of the bodily needs of sheer subsistence, into the more refined emotions, the more delicate shades of feeling, the purer and higher manifestations of spirit which even the human entity is plainly susceptible of.

From another point of view, and by the use again of other but allied terms, is perceived that aspect of mental purification and that form of transmutation into higher powers which is expressed by the ideal of Atonement, or as Anna Kingsford loved to write it, Atonement: the reunion of the spark to the flame, of the offspring to the parent, of the ray to the sun, of the personal thinker to the divine type of the Christos, the Higher Self, or the overshadowing Divine spirit; from which each one of us has emerged upon a long course of experience to last for ages — until such time as we shall be again reunited by personal effort, enthusiasm, and self-sacrifice to the source of all emanation. To quote from the words of Edward Maitland: —

‘The steps leading by inward purification to at-one-ment are the secret and method of the Christ, a term denoting the culmination of humanity by union with and emergence in divinity: this process is Regeneration, and from Genesis to the Apocalypse this is, in all its mystical books — the theme of the Bible, which thus becomes plainly to our eyes essentially a work on Alchemy.’

The Alchymic expression of ‘Solve et Coagula,’ meaning ‘volatilize and fix,’ as two contrasted changes seen alike in chemistry, physics and in human development, are traceable in the Biblical allegories of the descent of divinity into man, by the putting on of coats of skin, when the human monad becomes material and fixed and suffers the consequent loss of the power of direct spiritual communion with the source divine; while on the other hand, we have the allegory of the Resurrection of the son of the divine one, who obtains reunion with the godhead by casting off the cloak of matter and returning to his father and to our Father; and this resurrection is promised to all who seek it.

By birth upon earth man’s thinker or Manas is fixed, coagulated and fettered by his environment. By death and by the throwing off of scoria, slag, refuse and his precipiolum, man is released from his grosser bondage and passes at

once to a plane of the Arupic worlds, even if his final absorption into Nirvana, or into Paradise be delayed, so that he may still further function as an entity of superior type and more exalted possibilities.

It is not difficult to furnish other examples of the spiritualisation of Alchymic terms on the lines of the Hermetic Science. Numberless quotations might be selected in which, beside the important analogies already alluded to, the use of such terms, as Sol and Luna, which in chemistry refer to Gold and Silver, these terms of art may be well understood as referring on the spiritual plane to the Soul and Body. Mercury, Sulphur and Salt too do clearly in many instances refer to spirit, illumination and substance. Again these three terms have been used as synonyms of some divine triads of spiritual force; as Anna Kingsford has noted, the representation by these terms of the Trinity: a divine Father, Mercury or Spirit; a divine Mother — passive principle salt; and of a Son, or seed and efficient force in manifestation by the Sulphur. As a last example the Black Dragon of putrefaction which by time and force can become fashioned into the White Swan of purity, has been clearly established as a beautiful symbol of the change in man, from a sin-laden reprobate to the purified personality — to the man purified by suffering, chastened by humility, and fit to commune with the holier ones.

The relation of the Alchemy of the Medieval European world, being directly in relation to the justis or Hermetic system of philosophy, and so referring to both ethics and religion, can only be expected to show indirect analogies with the Theosophic school of thought, which has been evolved from the special teachings of the Eastern world and more particularly from those of the East Indies and the Buddhist nations of Tibet. Yet as the Hermetic doctrines are in general parallel to the Theosophic conceptions, as regards Man — the Microcosm, and the Universe — the Macrocosm, so many Alchymic dicta can be illustrated in Theosophic terminology.

It is commonly stated that the mystical books of India do not bear any references to Alchymic processes, but this is not quite exact, as will be shown by a study of the book called *Sarva Darsana Samgraha*. Some portions of this work of chemical philosophy refer to the interactions of 'mercury' and some substance, apparently 'mica.' The word 'Sulphur' does not appear to be used; but this variation is of no importance, because the European Alchymists

by their word 'Sulphur,' did not mean what chemists now refer to by that name.

I make no claim to have investigated Sanskrit authorities farther than this; but my learned friend, Madame Blavatsky, certainly told me that the ancient books of India contained certain other treatises upon transmutation; although the Indian magical arts tended more in other directions; less in the direction of wealth production, and more in manifestations of power over the Forces of Nature, such as the phenomena of thought transference, the stimulation of the growth of plants, the disintegration of solid bodies and their precipitation into previous forms, and the higher processes of the interaction of minds, and intellectual achievements by communion with higher and supra-mundane intelligences.

However this may be, it seems manifest that the writings of the medieval European true Alchemists enshrine a doctrine at once exalted, fascinating in formulation, eloquent in language, and worthy of the serious study of such of us moderns who have any leisure to spare from the time devoted to the race for wealth and fin de siècle respectability.

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Note at the time of original publication in 1893:

A series of volumes *Collectanea Hermetica* is in course of publication by the T.P. Society. This series is edited by Wynn Westcott, Supreme Magus of the Rosicrucian Society in England, and Master of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, and will include many Alchymic treatises. The first volume is the *Hermetic Arcanum*.

# FOOTNOTES

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Villani says he left a fortune of 25,000,000 florins

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