

Hermetic Philosophy

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[Page 3] HERMES MERCURIUS TRISMEGISTUS, the Egyptian Thot, who was identified as early as the time of Plato with the Grecian Hermes, is not generally regarded as the real author of the Hermetic works popularly ascribed to him: and although these latter are considered to embody real Egyptian doctrine they are accorded, on the strength of internal evidence, a Grecian origin. Says H.P.B. in the *Secret Doctrine*, "They may be Hermetic works, but not works written by either of the two Hermes, or rather, by Thot (Hermes) the directing intelligence of the Universe, or by Thot, his terrestrial incarnation called Trismegistus of the Rosetta Stone". The Egyptian Thot according to Suidas lived before the time of the Pharaohs about 400 years previous to Moses; the probability however is that this was a generic name assumed by initiates, and is as old as thought itself. This view finds its confirmation in the fact that Jambhchus asserts Hermes to be the author of 20,000 works, and Manetho even speaks of 36,525, being the same number as that which he assigns to his several dynasties of Kings. Clemens Alexandrinus mentions as extant in his time, that is in the second century, forty-two books of Hermes containing all knowledge, human and divine. "This Prince", writes the author of "A suggestive enquiry into the Hermetic Mystery", "is highly celebrated by antiquity for his wisdom and skill in the secret operations of Nature and for his reputed discovery of the quintessential perfectability of the Three Kingdoms in their homogeneal Unity; hence he is called the 'Thrice Great Hermes' having the spiritual intelligence of all things in the Universal Law."

Dr. Anna Kingsford, in her introduction to "The Virgin of the World", points out that the panoply with which Greek art invests Hermes is symbolical of the function of the understanding. He has four implements, the rod, the wings, the sword and the cap, denoting the science of the magian, the courage of the adventurer, the will of the hero and the discretion of the adept. There is a certain analogy between these attributes and those with which Krishna is sometimes represented in Indian art, and which are the sceptre, the lotus, the cup, and a kind of circular disk: while it is curious to notice the rapport which seems to exist between the four suites of the Tarot cards, sometimes called "The Book of Thoth", and the symbolical attributions referred to. In addition to these symbols Hermes is invariably represented grasping the Crux Ansata, the great Egyptian symbol of spiritual [Page 4] life, and which it will be remembered bears a sort of resemblance to the astronomical sign of Venus.

The great esteem in which the Hermetic writings were held in the early days of the Christian Church, as evinced by the writings and records of the early fathers of the Church, is very significant to the student of the Christian genesis. St. Augustine, Lactantius, Cyril and others prized them very highly, invoking their testimony on behalf of the Christian mysteries; though how far the books called Hermetic today are genuine records of the books current even in the early days of our era is by no means clear.

But however the learned may disagree — and they do vary considerably — as to the real origin of these works, the fact remains that Egypt must be regarded as the earliest home of Hermetic philosophy, receiving it no doubt in her turn from Aryan sources at some very remote period. The great renown of Egypt for its wealth, wisdom, and magic skill, is universally attested by contemporaneous history, and the subsequent decline of its high civilisation is one of those enigmas of the past, due no doubt to the mysterious working of cyclic Law. It was this land of mystery and fable that attracted the greatest of Grecian philosophers, Pythagoras, Thales, Democritus, and Plato, who all achieved their initiation there. For what is now a region of the dead was then the great centre of a mysterious civilisation, virtually governed by its priesthood, the members of which, there is good reason to believe, were not only very learned, but actual initiates: they boasted descent from divine ancestors and claimed historical records, which, like those of the Phoenicians, were said to stretch over a period of some thirty thousand years. And what relics of its former splendour have survived the Egypt of old? Tombs, principally, from which the petrified dead come forth at the behest of our nineteenth century "Egyptologists", yielding up perchance in last witness a few papyri which are regarded as incredible and legendary on the interpretation of the learned! Who in the face of the conditions of life today, and in the light of the past, cannot appreciate the significance of the prophecy of Hermes in Asclepius in that beautiful passage: "To thee I cry, O most sacred River, to thee I announce the coming doom! Waves of blood, polluting thy divine waters, shall overflow thy banks: the number of the dead shall surpass that of the living; and if indeed a few inhabitants of the land remain, Egyptians by speech, they will in manner be aliens! ... In those days the religious man will be thought mad; the impious man will be hailed as a sage; savage men will be deemed valiant; the evil-hearted will be applauded as the best of men. The soul and all that belongs thereto, whether born mortal or able to attain eternal life, . . . will be matters for ridicule and will be esteemed foolishness". With the exception of the modern discovery of the [Page 5] Ritual of the Dead, which has thrown so much light upon the religion of Egypt, the Hermetic books in so far as they are a real Egyptian survival form the only bond of union between Christendom and the priests of Chemi.

Towards the close of the third century, we learn that the Egyptians employed their transmuting skill in the manufacture of gold and silver with such success that the envy of the Emperor Diocletian was excited and orders were issued for the destruction of all Hermetic and alchemical works, as it was feared Egypt would become too rich to remain tributary to Rome. On this point there is an interesting note in the *Secret Doctrine*, "Had not Diocletian burned the esoteric works of the Egyptians in 296, together with their books on alchemy; Caesar 700,000 rolls at Alexandria, and Leo Isaurus 300,000 at Constantinople (18th century); and the Mahomedans all they could lay their sacrilegious hands on, the world might know today more of Atlantis than it does. For alchemy had its birth-place in Atlantis during the fourth race and had only its renaissance in Egypt".

The workings of Karma are strange and it is significant evidence of the presence of Kali Yuga to trace the vicissitudes through which philosophic thought passed from the first down to the seventh century of our era. In the remarkable revival of mysticism which took place at Alexandria under the name of Neoplatonism a union was effected between the doctrines of Persia and Egypt and those of Greece. This great school founded by Plotinus and maintained after him by Porphyry, Jamblichus, Hierocles and Proclus — each of these leaders professing a genuine knowledge of the Theurgic art and of experimental physics on the Hermetic ground — had no doubt an enormous effect upon Hermetic Philosophy in conjunction with the numerous Gnostic schools of the period. Indeed during this epoch of history the arena of thought was vitalised with the highest activities, and possibilities full of hope for the cause of spiritual humanity seemed to hold forth. But the realization of these was denied and the lethal influence of the Iron Age subsequently asserted. Dr. Menard says — "The multiplicity of the sects springing up in

our days can give but a slight notion of that astonishing intellectual chemistry which had established its chief laboratory at Alexandria. Humanity had put up to competition vast moral and philosophical issues, the origin of evil, the destiny of souls, their fall and their redemption; "the prize offered was the dictatorship of consciences. The Christian solution prevailed".

The intellectual developments of Alexandria seem to have culminated in an environment eminently hostile, and a reaction subsequently took place attendant with all the persecutions incidental to those times: in such wise that the prudent sons of the light divine were forced to remain quiescent and hide their knowledge before the increasing ascendancy of a materializing Church. [Page 6]

Notwithstanding, however, the taking of Alexandria by the Arabs in the year 640 A.D., and the death-blow Hermetic and occult science thereby sustained, in face too of the obscurations of true spiritual wisdom consequent upon sacerdotal domination and its relentless persecutions, it never appears to have been left without a witness, and hence it is from that time onwards we find individuals springing up in every age and country in Christendom testifying with one accord to the truth of Hermetic methods and the value of the ancient Wisdom.

With these few remarks I shall now proceed to roughly shadow forth some of the more salient features of this Great Philosophy and the nature of the teaching involved.

The principle of correspondence is the key-note of the Hermetic writings; the celebrated precept of the Smaragdine Tablet, "As above so below", is indeed that of every system worthy of the name which has sought to establish the great Truth of the Unity of the Universe. Thus it is that a parallelism is traced between man the microcosmos and the macrocosmos or greater world. The whole solar system of the macrocosm with its hierarchy of gods and elemental powers is regarded as resumed in the human system of the microcosm, and it will be at once seen in the light of the foregoing remark that the Hermetic writings are thus susceptible of several modes of interpretation, and therein indeed are they truly Hermetic. The ancient writers who were responsible for these works, seem to have possessed the faculty of saying several different things at the same time and of veiling their real meaning under the guise of an obvious sense, to a very marked degree, and when it is considered how difficult authorship of this order must be, it will be conceded that "Pyramider", "the Virgin of the World", and "Asclepius", present some of the most curious specimens of this manner of work extant.

Some of the Hermetic writings, in fact the principal part, take the form of discourses between Hermes and Tatios, Asclepius, *etc.* : while the "Virgin of the World", is a dialogue between Isis and Horus. In this latter book it is worthy of remark that Osiris, although spoken of, is not himself represented as speaking; he is the divine ideal subsisting as the potential type for the realization of which the Universe was manifested. Osiris is called the "crucified one", and we find Isis saying, "At length I understood ... that the secrets of Osiris were hidden near the symbols of the cosmic elements". In another aspect Osiris is the Sun at the winter solstice and thus represents the triumph of Apophis, the principle of darkness, and hence Horus, who is the renewed aspect of the former principle, is called "the avenger of his father" : he is the child of the woman of Revelations who was "to rule the nations with a rod of iron". Horus is represented as the conqueror of Typhon, as Apollo was of Python, when the [Page 7] Sun in the Upper Hemisphere, or at the summer solstice, causes the Nile to leave its bed and inundate the country. Then the physical evils and the sterility of which Typhon is the principle disappear or are healed. Isis

symbolises the Moon and is thus the divinity of Astral Nature, the great Karmic agent, the regulator of destiny, and the executive of judgment; in the light of this fact too, the connection between the woman and the (astral) serpent in Genesis becomes apparent, and many other analogies more or less striking occur, Hermetic philosophy containing the key to Christian symbolism.

Broadly speaking, Hermetic Cosmogony establishes a threefold division, dealing with what is described as "The ineffable mysteries of the Earth, the Heavens, and of the sacred fluid which lies between". The Heavens were the archetype of the Earth, and the intermediate spaces the medium of transmission of the celestial influx. "O my Son", says Hermes, "matter becomes; formerly it was, for matter is the vehicle of becoming. Becoming is the mode of activity of the uncreate and foreseeing God. Having been endowed with the germ of becoming, matter is brought into birth, for the creative force fashions it according to the ideal forms".

In "Pyramander", as in the "Sepher Yetzirah" a more or less detailed analogy is traced between the component parts of the sense constitution of Man and the various signs of the Zodiac. This is a point of great interest, for according to the system under exposition the Heavens are in the Earth after an earthly manner, and the faculties of our senses and of our physical nature are but the more or less faithful reflections of a divine ideal. But reflection involves reversal, and thus it is said "Nothing good upon Earth; nothing evil in Heaven. . . . Whatsoever is in Heaven is unalterable, all upon Earth is alterable . . . Nothing in Heaven is servanted; nothing upon Earth free. . . . Nothing unknown in Heaven, nothing known upon Earth".

Hence it came about that the vital life principle was considered to fulfil its successive functions in the human constitution in similar fashion to the apparent motion of the Sun, the life-giver, through the celestial signs, and in this way an interesting analogy is established: "This Tabernacle, O Son", says Hermes, "consists of the Zodiacal circle".

From the most ancient times a connection has been traced between the four elements of Fire, Air, Earth, and Water, and the Zodiac, and this is of course a feature of the science of Astrology as handed down to our own day. The real nature of these four elements in terms of the microcosm is not altogether apparent; this symbology, however, seems to have applied to the spiritual, mental, psychic and physical planes of human existence, and it is to be noted that the alchemical symbols of these elements are all formed of a triangle inverted or upright, which is a reference to the three-fold [Page 8] constitution of each element, *viz.*, fixed, mutable and volatile. Furthermore Sound and Rhythm are closely allied therewith, each of these elements symbolising certain rates of vibration. Still further within, however, according to this ancient teaching, and as the noumenon of everything manifest, lay the subtle and tenuous Aether; this all pervading essence of the Universe alone contained the principle of permanence, to that were ascribed the divinest virtues, it was the celestial pleroma of the Gods, the bosom of the Virgin Mother Isis, and the very Soul of the Deity. This Aether was regarded as of a three-fold constitution, and is together with the four lower elements identical with the Theosophical Septenary.

No one in reading the Hermetic books can fail to be struck by the deeply religious tone running through them: Ignorance of God is described as the greatest of all evils, and with becoming reverence and a refined subtlety of reasoning the position of Man in his relations with the Supreme Being, his pre-natal and post-mortem states are treated of.

The whole philosophy is pervaded by an exalted Pantheism which forcibly resembles the Sacred Books of a still older race, the Aryan. Thus in "Pyramander", we find Tatios saying "I am in Heaven, in the Earth, in the Water, in the Air; I am in living creatures, in plants" . . . everywhere"; and again "O father, I now see the Universe and myself in the Mind".

Compare this with the Catechism in which the Master is made to ask the Pupil:

"Lift thy head, O Lanoo: dost thou see one or countless lights above thee, burning in the dark midnight sky ? "

"I sense one flame, oh, Surudeva, I see countless undetached sparks shining in it".

And it will be seen that the spirit of both is identical.

The Universal Consciousness is everywhere diffused, though the modes thereof are many. It has two aspects, the unmanifest and the manifest, which latter is the external Universe, the "second God" of Hermetic doctrine, and the "word made flesh". Hence it is said in the "Divine Pyramander": — "He needeth not to be manifest; for He subsisteth eternally. But in that He is One, He is not made nor generated, but is unapparent and unmanifest. But by making all things appear, He appeareth in all and by all; but especially is He manifested to or in those wherein He willeth".

Far too reverent were the old initiates to attempt to anthropomorphize their conception of the Deity, or to define and thereby dethrone. All things manifest to the senses, as everything subjective, were regarded as graduated phases of the One Life. Many indeed were the Gods, fixed and wandering, great the number of Immortals as of mortals, myriads the lives composing the one life, but the old Kabbalistic aphorism, " Aleph with each, [Page 9] Aleph with all," is alike the spirit of Hermetic Philosophy. For, it is said, "From One Soul of the Universe are all those souls which in the World are tossed up and down, as it were, and severally divided".

"Concerning the void", says Hermes, "to which so much importance is attached, my judgment is that it does not exist, that it never has existed and never will exist. For all the various parts of the Universe are filled, as the earth also is complete and full of bodies" . . . And again, "For God is all and all come forth from Him and depend on His Will: . . . Apart from Him nothing has been, nothing is, nothing will be".

Passing then from this more metaphysical aspect it will be interesting to examine the Hermetic view of the constitution of Man, and of the nature and destiny of the Soul. Now the spiritual and permanent part of our nature is viewed as directly opposed to the physical senses, and hence it is that we find a distinction drawn between Knowledge (*i.e.*, true Spiritual knowledge) and Sense, — "For Sense is of things that surmount it, but Knowledge is the "end of Sense". Explaining the nature of THE SUPREME BEING, Trismegistus says, "For the knowledge of it is a divine Silence and the rest of all the senses; for neither can he that understands that understand anything, nor he that sees that, see anything else, nor hear any other thing, nor in sum move the body. . . . For shining steadfastly upon and round the whole mind it enlighteneth all the Soul; and loosing it from the bodily senses and motions, it draweth it from the body, and changeth it wholly into the essence of God. . . . For it is possible for the Soul . . . to be deified

while yet it lodgeth in the body of Man, if it contemplate the beauty of the Good".

This teaching is of course identical with that of the older Indian systems; while apart from its philosophic merit it is couched in its translated form in terms of easy comprehension.

Of the nature of the spiritual principles of Man as classified in this system, it is difficult to speak with any degree of confidence, as the exposition is purposely obscured. There was of course the broad threefold division of Spirit, Soul and Body, and there is a remarkable passage in "Pymander" explaining and drawing a distinction between the two former principles. "The Spirit" says our author, "being diffused and going through the veins, arteries, and blood, both moveth the living creature, and after a certain manner beareth it. Wherefore some also have thought the Soul to be the blood, being deceived in Nature, not knowing that first the spirit must return into the Soul, and then the blood is congealed and the veins and arteries emptied and then the living thing dieth: and this is the death of the body".

The word "Soul" seems to be used in the Hermetic writings in a sense which is quite analogous to the Theosophical teaching about Buddhi, [Page 10] the Higher and Lower Manas: three sorts of Souls are referred to, viz, the divine, human and irrational. We are further informed that "Every Soul is immortal and always in movement". This expression "always in movement" is very curious and occurs frequently. Hermes moreover informs Ammon that "The divine Soul abides in a divine form, it is therein that she has her energy ; therein she moves and acts. When this Soul separates herself from mortal creatures, she forsakes her irrational parts and enters into the divine form; and as she is always in motion she is borne along in the universal movement". This divine Soul is thus the Sutra-atma or string upon which the pearls of life are thread; the immortal ego possessing the memories of the past and the fruition of all experience.

I have already indicated that the four elements of the ancients play a most important part in the constitution of man according to these teachings. Any consideration, however, of the number of principles is of course dependent upon how the matter is regarded: for instance, if the fourfold classification be adopted, that, viz., of Spirit, Soul, Astral body and physical body, this is an eminently practical attribution: while the more detailed Theosophical (and equally Hermetic) Septenary is preferable for purposes of study, offering as it does greater facility of comparison and careful analogy with the larger world or Macrocosm.

But a closer examination of the few Hermetic writings which have been preserved to us reveals a fourfold and even a tenfold classification and while the latter is not altogether apparent it is reasonable to assume it to be analogous to the Kabbalistic scheme of the Sephiroth, which it will be remembered the Jews brought with them out of Egypt, evidence of its Egyptian origin. The powers of darkness are represented as being driven away by the Ten Powers. "For the number of Ten, O Tat, is the begetter of Souls, and there Life and Light are united where the number of Unity is born of the Spirit".

As H. P. B. was ever pointing out, the secret knowledge of the Wise of which Theosophy has been the special exponent to the Western World has never been really absent from the traditions of men, — which indeed it dictated. In Hermetic philosophy the main teachings of Theosophy are fully borne out, a fact that an attentive study of the subject cannot fail to reveal: and it is exceedingly helpful to the student to approach familiar ground from such an old World standpoint.

Much space in the Hermetic writings is taken up with a description of the progressive manifestation exteriorly of the Universe and the parallel development or emergence of life upon the physical plane: the description of this work and the method of its execution by the agency of working Gods, Titans and builders is eminently the teaching of Theosophy today; while the way in which the planets, or rather the Regents thereof, contribute [Page 11] each their special quota to the building up of the human being is very suggestive. Indeed the passage bearing upon this point is well worth reproduction here; it is as follows: — "And when he (the Lord of the Universe) spake to them of the creation of man, asking of each what he would bestow upon the race about to be born, the Sun first replied: — 'I will illuminate Mankind'. Then the Moon promised enlightenment in her turn, adding that already she had created Fear, Silence, Sleep and Memory. Kronos announced that he had begotten Justice and Necessity. Zeus said 'In order to spare the future race perpetual wars, I have generated Fortune, Hope and Peace'. Ares declared himself already father of Conflict, impetuous Zeal and Emulation. Aphrodite did not wait to be called upon, 'As for me, O Master', she said, 'I will bestow upon Mankind Desire with voluptuous joy and laughter, that the penalty to which our sister Souls are destined may not weigh on them too hardly'. These words of Aphrodite, O my son, were welcomed gladly. 'And I', said Hermes, 'will endow human nature with Wisdom, Temperance, Persuasion and Truth: nor will I cease to ally myself with invention. I will ever protect the mortal life of such men as are born under my signs, seeing that to me the Creator and Father has attributed in the Zodiac signs of Knowledge and Intelligence, above all when the movement which draws thereto the Stars is in harmony with the physical forces of each'".

This is only one of many analogies, all more or less parallel with the tenets of the *Secret Doctrine*.

The transmigration of Souls, or, as it is better expressed, "Re-incarnation", is a prominent feature of Hermetic Doctrine, and in reviewing the vast body of alchemical and occult literature with which Christendom has been deluged since the 7th or 8th century of our era, it is surprising to notice how little this most vital truth seems to have been taught. In fact the theory of Re-incarnation, so eminently the explanation of the many anomalies of human life, has been more or less lost sight of; and this is the more astonishing when the great reverence with which the canonical scrolls of Hermes have been ever regarded by occult students, is borne in mind. Doubtless if this teaching had been as fully disseminated in the West as it has been from time immemorial in the East, the conditions of existence in Christendom had been ameliorated and the historical records of the last eighteen centuries less full of strife and more nearly approaching those of the peaceable Buddhist nations. For the remarkable and practical effect on daily life of anything like a due regard for this truth is one of the most actively spiritualizing factors in the world of thought. For inseparably connected therewith is the application of the law of cause and effect to the moral world, and we find the doctrine of Karma as clearly set forth in the Hermetic writings as anywhere in the [Page 12] sacred books of the East. In the "Virgin of the World" Osiris, the Supreme Self, is thus represented as addressing the Souls about to be incarcerated in fleshly bodies: — "It is not according to chance that I have ordained your destiny. If you act ill, it will be worse. It will be better if your action are worthy of your birth. It is myself and not another who will be your witness and your judge. ... In different bodies, as I have already told you, your rebirths will be different. Dissolution shall be a benefit, restoring your former and happy condition. But if your conduct be unworthy of me, your prudence becoming blinded and guiding you backwards, will cause you to take for good fortune chat which is really a chastisement and to dread a happier lot as though it were a cruel injury".

This process of Re-incarnation is necessary in order that the ego may learn the great lessons of experience, and, focusing the divine spirit within the Soul, achieve its immortality; while it is clearly set

forth that "he that through the error of love, loveth the Body, abideth wandering in darkness, sensible, suffering the things of death". For from the moment of the Soul's association with matter it is hampered by the sensual attractions of its mortal part and prone to forgetfulness. Not until the astral nature is thoroughly purged and purified in the fiery ordeal of suffering can the Soul conceive the great treasure, at once the stone of the wise and the principle through which regeneration is effected. "Ceaseless whirling on the wheel" of the astral serpent is only surmounted by the passage of the Soul through the "four states" symbolised by the four 'elements' and thence into the Seven Worlds, "the Worlds of Rest Eternal". Such perfection necessarily involves the ebb and flow of many lives: for this spiritual efflorescence is the accretion of Time. In this connection an interesting correspondence has been indicated by Mr. Maitland, who points out that just as the body uses up and sheds many times its external covering of integument, plumage, shell or hair, to say nothing of its artificial clothing, so the Soul wears out and sheds many bodies.

According to Hermetic doctrine, the lapse of human Souls into animal bodies is impossible, for the Soul "is not to be compared to any brute beast upon the Earth, but to them that are above in Heaven, that are called Gods". It is however pointed out that. "If you become guilty of graver crime, if you turn away from the end for which you have been formed, then indeed you shall dwell neither in Heaven, nor in human bodies, but thenceforth you shall pass into those of animals without reason". This statement is however qualified by Hermes, who says to Horus, " And such a Soul, O Son, hath no mind; wherefore neither must such a one be called Man". This terrible contingency it is which is referred to in Christian writings as the "second death"; for the law of progress alike renders retrogression possible, and thus the great question of responsibility is involved. [Page 13]

Another of the more prominent of the Hermetic teaching is the insistence on absolute purity both of body and mind as essential to the process of regeneration. The elevation of the Spiritual side of our Nature is only possible at the expense or rather the transmutation of the animal and passional instincts, and hence it is that "a pure diet without animal flesh" is enjoined in "Asclepios" as a most necessary condition to the fulness of beatific vision. This precept is at once that of divine compassion and the pure life: it is however dictated by something more than mere sentiment, and has a profound occult significance owing to the fact that the blood; alike of Man and Animal is highly charged with a certain astral nature, which from a spiritual point of view disturbs the magnetic harmony of the human organism which ingests it. In the process of the great work, the human will has to be united with the divine, and if the magnetic elements of our natures remain insurgent to the central will of the system this is impossible of attainment. Speaking of the triumph over the passions and the elevation of the true rector to his original rule, Hermes says, "For thou must first forsake the body before the end, and get the victory in this contention and strife of life, and when thou hast overcome, return".

Another feature of the Hermetic works is the doctrine of Nature or Elemental Spirits, which is to be found covertly laid down in various places. And in "Asclepios" the whole rationale of Idol worship is clearly and lucidly stated in a way which cannot fail to enlighten the reader. "Our ancestors", says Hermes, "wandering astray in matters of faith concerning the Gods, and unable to lift their minds to the Divine knowledge and religion, discovered the art of making Gods; and, having discovered it, they invested their products with appropriate virtues drawn from the nature of the world. And as they could not make Souls, they evoked the Spirits of Genii and Angels, and endowed with them the holy Images and sacraments, thus enabling their idols to exercise power for good or ill".

These genii or elementals which thus assisted in the manufacture of idols are stated to dwell with man, *i.e.*, in the lower air, and are thus the dwellers of the elements of mediaeval romance.

Thus far these observations have been confined to what I may call the general scheme of this system. For to go into its more detailed and practical aspects within the limits of a short article of this kind is impossible. There is, however, a more fascinating aspect in connection with the subject, and this has reference to the alchemical teachings of Trismegistos. No paper on Hermetic Philosophy can afford to omit reference to the celebrated Smaragdine Tablet of which Eliphas Levi writes: "This tablet of Emerald is the whole of magic in a single page". A very celebrated Hermetic relic and a singular confirmation of Theosophical doctrine, it is well worthy of careful attention at the hand of every occult student. Read aright, it is [Page 14] said to contain the secret of the *lapis philosophorum*. "The culmination of the secret work", says H.P.B., "is spiritual perfect man at one end of the line: the union of the three elements is the occult solvent in the Soul of the World, the cosmic Soul or astral light, at the other, and on the material plane it is hydrogen in its relation to the other gases".

The treatise "Minerva Mundi", attributed to Hermes Trismegistos, contains, under the most poetical and profound allegories, the dogma of the self-creation of beings, or of the law of creation that results from the accord of two forces, those which the alchemists called the fixed and the volatile, and which are in the absolute, liberty and necessity. There are two magnetic currents in the human constitution, as there are the two forces, centrifugal and centripetal, in the greater world, or macrocosm, and it is these two currents, passive and active, which have from all time been symbolised by the cross. "When", says Levi, "the alchemists tell us that little time or money is required to accomplish the work of occult science, when above all they affirm that a single vase is necessary, when they speak of the grand and unique athanor that everyone may put in use, which is at everybody's hand, and that everyone possesses without knowing it, they make allusion to alchemy philosophic and moral, — in fact a strong and decided will can in a short space of time arrive at absolute independence, and we all possess the alchemical instrument which serves to separate the subtil from the gross and the fixed from the volatile. This instrument as complex as the world, and of mathematical precision, is indicated by sages under the emblem of the Pentagram or five pointed star, which is the sign absolute of human intelligence. I will imitate the wise in not naming it, it is too easy to divine".

To fix the volatile in the Hermetic language means to materialize the Spirit; to volatilize the fixed is to Spiritualize matter.

To separate the subtil from the gross is to free our soul from all prejudice and vice. This is effected by the use of the philosophical Salt, *i.e.*, of Wisdom; of Mercury, *i.e.*, of personal aptitude and labour; and of Sulphur, which represents the vital energy, and the ardour of the Will. Thus we succeed in changing into spiritual gold such things as are of least value, and even the foul things of the earth.

It is needless to point out the value of any system which, seeking to elevate the eternal and permanent above the temporal and evanescent, establishes a true basis of morality by illuminating the intellect with the effulgence of the spiritual gnosis. For the Hermetic philosophy is no crude conception of the Deity, or mere barren contemplation of the Soul and religious things: — the direct repository of a primeval revelation and a channel through which the Secret Doctrine has been transmitted, it has ever attracted the attention of the most luminous and percipient minds in [Page 15] the past. And if a callous world

today fails to appreciate and understand the beauty and grandeur of these conceptions, it is because the race itself is retrograde, or perchance the law of progress works by an alternating movement which will render the present oblivion about things spiritual but the prelude to a clearer and more universal illumination. The awe and reverence which the Mysteries inspired of old was neither the result of superstition nor ignorance, it was but a due appreciation of the spiritual side of our nature. The body was regarded as but the prison chamber of the Soul, the place of ordeal and house of correction. The Saptaparna, or Man plant, had its roots in Heaven, for as is said in "Pymander", " The earthly Man is a mortal God, and the Heavenly God is an Immortal Man". The Soul had lost its wings, clogged by the viscosity of matter; it would recover them when it extricated itself from matter and recommenced its upward flight. But the Heaven of the Seven Virtues and the pure light was not attainable by those who allowed the body to waylay the Soul, or who succumbed in the conflict with their lower nature: while the goal of the "good fight" was the immortality of the Gods.

The Egyptian Priests related that Hermes dying said: "Hitherto I have been an exile from my true country: now I return thither. Do not weep for me: I return to that celestial land where each goes in his turn. There is God. This life is but a death".

Hermetic philosophy is at once a union of the reason and the religious instinct: it offers a key to unlock the mysteries of being and is a testimony to the eternal aspiration of the religious sentiment in man to become united with the Divine.