

THE SECRET TRADITION IN ALCHEMY

Its Development and Records

Arthur Edward Waite

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:
ALCHEMY



ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:
ALCHEMY

THE SECRET TRADITION IN
ALCHEMY

**THE SECRET TRADITION IN
ALCHEMY**

Its Development and Records

ARTHUR EDWARD WAITE

Volume 6

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1926

This edition first published in 2013

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1926 Arthur Edward Waite

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-415-63753-4 (Set)

eISBN: 978-0-203-08445-8 (Set)

ISBN: 978-0-415-63825-8 (Volume 6)

eISBN: 978-0-203-08309-3 (Volume 6)

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

THE
SECRET TRADITION
IN ALCHEMY
ITS DEVELOPMENT AND RECORDS

BY
ARTHUR EDWARD WAITE

LONDON
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRUBNER & CO., LTD.
NEW YORK: ALFRED A. KNOFF
1926

CONTENTS

PREFACE

	PAGE
Of books written within and without—Of Cryptic Literature—The old dream of Alchemy—Its affirmed Transmission as a Secret Knowledge—Fact of the Literature and its Problem—Whether and to what extent it may be explicable as emanating from an Initiating Centre—Difficulties about this view—Proposition that the Alchemical Secret belongs to Spiritual Science and not to an Art of Metals—Estimation of the Evidence, if any, as the object of this work	XV

CHAPTER I

ALCHEMY AND SUPERNATURAL LIFE

Extent of Alchemical Literature—Its Veil of Allegory and Symbolism—Alleged to conceal a Mystic Science of the Soul—Proposed Investigation of the Claim—Deep Searchings of Jacob Böhme—The Stone of Philosophy and Christ as the Corner-Stone—Work of the Tincture and Seal of God thereon—Alchemy and the Second Birth—The Transmutation of Metals in the Light of Divine Magic—A Second Witness on Spiritual Alchemy—The Kentish Theosophist Robert Fludd—Of True and False Alchemy—Spurious Chemia and the Gold of God—The Life communicated by Christ—Spiritual Chemistry and Man as its Subject—The Body of Adeptship—The Soul and Contemplation of God—Alchemy and Natural Philosophy—The Theo-Philosophical Stone	1
---	---

CHAPTER II

MODERN VIEWS ON THE HERMETIC MYSTERY

Böhme and contemporary Alchemists—Fludd and Experimental Chemistry—The next stage of the Subject—Publication of the *Suggestive Inquiry*—Its author—Content of the Work—Views on

	PAGE
Alchemy and Chemistry—Mesmerism as a Key to the Hermetic Mystery—Alchemy a Secret Method of Self-Knowledge—Union with the Source of All—Identity of the Hermetic Object with that of the Ancient Mysteries—Critical Examination and Rejection of this Thesis—Alleged identity of Term in Alchemy and Neoplatonic Theosophy—Rebutting Evidence—The Alchemists do not appear in their lives as Hierophants of Divine Mystery—Their general concern exhibited—Exploration of their Religious and Devotional Character—The Philosopher's Stone and its alleged Spiritual Generation	16

CHAPTER III

FURTHER SPECULATIONS ON PHILOSOPHICAL GOLD

Analogical Speculations and Reveries of Éliphas Lévi—His Search for the Absolute—Hypothesis concerning the Quintessence—Azoth of the Sages—Appeal to a Traditional Science—The Great Magical Agent—The Will in Transmutation—An American Interpreter—Hitchcock's Remarks on Alchemy—His Concealed Subject of Hermetic Adepts—Ethical Culture of Triune Man—Unity of Human and Divine Nature—The New Birth, New Condition of Being and <i>Donum Dei</i> —Concerning Salt, Sulphur and Mercury—Of Conscience understood Hermetically—The Still Small Voice in Alchemy—Philosophical Contrition—Long Life and Immortality—Transmutation and the Conversion of Man—Subject and End of the Art—A Reservation in this Respect—The Speculation left in Suspension—Its failure for this reason as well as on other grounds—Super-physical production of Precious Metals—The views of Jacob Böhme unknown or ignored by Hitchcock—Distinctions on Alchemy and Chemistry—Last Words on the Way of the Wise—Of Swedenberg as a Hermetic Philosopher—Hitchcock on the Mystery of Godliness— <i>Secretum Artis</i>	33
---	----

CHAPTER IV

ANCIENT HERMETIC BOOKS AND THE WAY OF THE SOUL THEREIN

Hermes as Protagonist of Alchemy—Trismegistic Literature—Its Broad Divisions—Doctrine of the Literature—Origin and Destiny of Man—The Soul's Divinity—Gnosis and the Virtue of the Soul—Path of Devotion and Path of Doctrine—The Way of Birth in God—Of Intimations and Developments—The Tradition of Alchemy—Its Doctrine of Alleged Experience—The Practice and the Theory	48
---	----

CONTENTS

vii

CHAPTER V

ALCHEMY IN CHINA

	PAGE
Classical Mythology as a supposed Veil of the <i>Magnum Opus</i> — Berthelot on Alchemy in Egypt—The Silence of the Sphinx— Alleged antiquity of the Art in China—Evidence of William A. P. Martin—Similarity of Theory and Symbolism in the Far East and the West—A Material and Spiritual Side—Uncertainty on the Point of Antiquity—The question left over—Martin's later work on the Chinese—His <i>Lore of Cathay</i> —Chinese Texts on the Elixir of Life—Views of Edkins	55

CHAPTER VI

THE TESTIMONY OF BYZANTINE ALCHEMY

The Four Periods of Alchemical Literature—The Line of Trans- mission—Berthelot's Collection of Greek Alchemists—The Papyrus of Leyden—An Artisan's Note-Book—Alleged Debt of Greek Alchemy thereunto—But it understood the Processes of the Text after another manner—The Idea of Transmutation developed from Sophisticating Arts—So-called Mystical Elements in Greek Alchemy—Date and Content of the Byzantine Collection—Its Art as Sacred and Divine—Its analogies with Latin Alchemy— Its high importance in the Literature—Examination in full of its Content—The Lexicon of Chrysopœia—Various Fragments of Treatises—The Philosophical Egg—An Address of Isis to Horus— The <i>Diplosis</i> of pseudo-Moses—A <i>Discourse</i> referred to Synesius— The School of Democritus—Olympiodorus on <i>The Sacred Art</i> — Works of Zosimus the Panopolite—His obvious concern—His Two Sciences and Two Wisdoms—His <i>Final Summary</i> —Testimony of Pelagus—The Tract of Agathodaimon—A supposititious Moses on <i>The Eight Tombs</i> —Tracts of the Christian Philosopher—In- ferences from the Byzantine Collection—General Position of Berthelot on the Critical Side	62
--	----

CHAPTER VII

ARABIAN AND SYRIAC ALCHEMY

Later Collections of Berthelot—Transmission of Technical Processes
to Mediæval Times—Syriac Alchemical Texts—Preliminary Note—
Translations of pseudo-Democritus and Zosimus—Preamble on
Arabian Texts—A Short Examination of Syriac Alchemy—Con-
cerning Fixed Mercury—The Philosophical Stone—Gilding Pro-
cesses—The Rule of Silver—Many Elixirs—The Work of Gold—

	PAGE
Alleged Mystical Doctrines—Preparations—An Arabian Text and its Content—Sources of Arabian Alchemy—The Book of Crates—The Book of El-Habib—The Book of Ostanes the Wise—The Arabian Djaber or Geber—The Matter of the Work, according to this Adept—The Two Elixirs—The Two Stones—Concerning Philosophical Mercury—Process of the Work—The Principle of Transmutation—The Perfect Stone and its Virtue—Conclusion on Syriac and Arabian Alchemy with special reference to the Arabian Geber	87

CHAPTER VIII

THE EARLY LATIN LITERATURE

The story of <i>Turba Philosophorum</i> —Its original language—Its Authority and Influence—Analogies with the Byzantine School—Documentary position—Commentaries—Its connection with Greek Alchemy—Notes on Content—Khaled and his <i>Book of Secrets</i> —The <i>Book of the Three Words</i> —The Hermit Morien—Memoirs presented by Himself—Story of the Servant Galip— <i>Liber de Compositione</i> and its Theme in Alchemy—Artephius and the Texts ascribed to him—His alleged Age—Content of <i>Liber Secretus</i> —Office of Fire in Alchemy—First Matter of the Art—Rhasis—Alfarabi—Avicenna—His Work on Minerals—The Treatise <i>De Anima</i> —Aristotle on the Perfect Mastery— <i>Lumen Luminum</i> —The Philosophical Stone—The Latin Geber—His <i>Sum of Perfection</i> — <i>Invention of the Mastery</i> —His Witness to the Great Work . . .	103
---	-----

CHAPTER IX

THE LATER CHAIN OF HERMES

Mythical Names in Latin Alchemy—Roger Bacon on the Power of Art and Nature—Principles of all Metals—Vessels of the Art—Process of the Great Work—The two Elixirs—The Medicine of Men—Albertus Magnus—His place in Legend—False ascription of Alchemical Works in his name—Other forged Writings—*Libellus de Alchemia*—*Concordantia Philosophorum*—The pseudo-Thomas Aquinas—*Thesaurus Alchemiæ*—Arnold de Villanova—Questions concerning his life—Charges preferred against him—His Alchemical Writings—His *Testament*—*Semita Semitæ*—The Work according to Arnold—Raymond Lully—His Thesis on the

CONTENTS

ix

	PAGE
Transmutation of Metals—His First Matter—The quality of his affirmed Adeptship—Pietro Bono and Janus Lacinius— <i>The New Pearl of Great Price</i> —Its testimony on the end of the Art—Efferarius and Ferarius—Pope John XXII—Picus de Mirandula—Jean Fontaine	120

CHAPTER X

THE MYTH OF FLAMEL

The Alleged Memoir of a Paris Scrivener—The Book of Abraham the Jew—Its Pictorial Designs and Letterpress—A Revelation of the Great Work—The Quest of its Meaning—A Pilgrimage to Santiago—Meeting with a Jewish Doctor—Secret of the First Matter—The Mastery Fulfilled—Charities of Flamel—The Story of Dubois—Excavations on the Premises of Flamel—His Sculptures and Symbolic Paintings—Alleged Written Memorials—His Will and that of his Wife—Early Hostile Criticism of his Story—Circumstances of its first Publication—An Early Manuscript—Its unsatisfactory Position—Examination of his alleged Alchemical Designs—The Romance of Paul Lucas—Conclusion on the Historical Side of the Flamel Legend—Bernard and Flamel—The autobiographical Memorial of Bernard Trévisan—The Quest of Alchemy—Tale of a thousand Processes—A Monk of Citeaux—A German Priest—Bernard's years of Travel—Another Monk and his Process—The Study of Text-Books—Alleged Success therein—The Written Record and its Value	137
--	-----

CHAPTER XI

THE CHARIOT OF BASIL VALENTINE

His own story concerning the Way of Attainment—His autobiographical Allusions—The Cloud about him—Views of Stael and Boerhaave—Identified with Tholden and Estchenreuter—Examination of these Theories—Basil's probable Period—Reasons for placing it in the Sixteenth Century— <i>The Triumphal Chariot of Antimony</i> —Its importance in the History of Chemistry—Basil's Preparations for Study—Their light on the claims of so-called Spiritual Alchemy—Basil on the Alchemical Work— <i>The Twelve Keys</i> —The Tincture and its virtue—The Fixed Gold of Transmutation	163
--	-----

CHAPTER XII

PARACELSUS

	PAGE
A New Spirit of the Age—The two Isaacs of Holland—Trithemius— Agrippa—Solomon Trismosin as an alleged teacher of Paracelsus— His mythical Memorial—His Quest in Mines and among Miners— His alchemical operations in Venice—His <i>Golden Fleece</i> —Paracelsus on the First Matter and its Cosmic Aspects—His Commentary on the <i>Revelation</i> of Hermes—The Secret Subject of Art— The Stone according to Paracelsus—The Indestructible Essence— A Perfect Equation of Elements—The Soul of the World—Chemical Path of Paracelsus—The Tincture of Philosophers—The Primal and Ultimate Matter—Paracelsus and Jacob Böhme	177

CHAPTER XIII

DENYS ZACHAIRE AND OTHERS

Bibliographical and textual Problems of Alchemical Literature— Memoirs of Denys Zachaire—His Studies at Bordeaux and Toulouse —His Book of Alchemical Processes—Law abandoned for Alchemy —An Italian Souffleur—An Aged Philosopher—A zealous Abbé— Zachaire proceeds to Paris—A Greek and his Process—A Summons from the King of Navarre—Recommendation of a Natural Philosopher—New Doubts and Difficulties—A discovery in <i>Rosarium Magnum</i> —A Projection on Mercury—Complete Success —Zachaire arranges his Future—His <i>Opusculum Chemicum</i> — Leonardi Fiorovanti—Giovanni Braccesco—Palingenius and his <i>Zodiacus Vitæ</i> —A Study of this Poem—Its account of the Great Work—Palingenius as a Master of Alchemy—Johannes Aurelius Augurellus	188
---	-----

CHAPTER XIV

FAMOUS ENGLISH PHILOSOPHERS

The Collection of Ashmole—George Ripley—Views of Eirenæus Philalthes on this Adept— <i>The Compound of Alchemy</i> —The Stone according to Ripley—Philosophical Mercury—Ripley's Twelve Gates—The <i>Ordinal</i> of Norton—A book on the Increase of Riches —The Medicine of Philosophy—Misadventures of Norton—Tales of other Alchemists—Charnock's <i>Breviary of Philosophy</i> —The <i>Camp</i> of Bloomfield—The <i>Work</i> of John Dastin—The <i>Work</i> of Carpenter —Other English Texts	202
---	-----

CHAPTER XV

ALCHEMY AND EXPLOITATION

	PAGE
An Aspiration of Edward Kelley—His Birth and early Life—The Charges laid against him—Alleged refuge in Somerset—An Alchemical Manuscript—Red and White Tinctures—The Treasures secured by Kelley—His Introduction to Dr. Dee—The Calling of Spirits—Dee's concern therein—Kelley as Skryer to Dee—Dee and Alchemy—A Mysterious Cipher— <i>The Book of St. Dunstan</i> —Adalbert Alaski—His visits to Dee—Dee and Kelley proceed with this Prince to Poland—Visions at Cracow—Prague and Alchemy—The Emperor Rudolph II—He receives counsels from Dee—Stephen King of Poland—The Pope banishes Dee and Kelley from Prague—Kelley makes Projection—Kelley "opens the Great Secret" to Dr. Dee—Stories of Kelley's Transmutations—His Claims—Dee and Kelley part—Death of Kelley—Dee returns to England—His later History—His Death— <i>The Book of St. Dunstan</i> —Writings of Arthur Dee—Arthur Dee and Sir Thomas Browne—Browne and Ashmole—Critical Study of Kelley's Pretensions	217

CHAPTER XVI

THE NEW LIGHT OF ALCHEMY

The <i>New Light</i> and the <i>Open Entrance</i> —A Wreck on the Scottish Coast—Alexander Seton—His visit to Holland—His Transmutation of Metals—Further Travels—He convinces Wolfgang Dienheim and Jacob Zwinger—Basle, Strasbourg and Cologne—Marriage of Seton—The Elector of Saxony—Imprisonment and Sufferings of Seton—Michael Sendivogius—He delivers Seton—Death of the Alchemist—He inherits Seton's Powder—Marries the widow of Seton—His Transmutations—Publishes the <i>New Light</i> —Visits Rudolph II—Projections at Warsaw—Ennobled at the Court of Würtemberg—Astonishes the King of Poland—Alleged exhaustion of the Powder—Testimony of Bodowski—The Rosicrucian Brotherhood—Death of Sendivogius—Analysis of the <i>New Light</i> —The Story of Gustenhover	237
--	-----

CHAPTER XVII

THE REFORMATION AND GERMAN ALCHEMY

Reform of Paracelsus and Reform of Luther—Khunrath and Spiritual Alchemy—*Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*—The Mystic

	PAGE
Stone of Philosophers—The Stone and Christ—The Elohim and Nature—Two aspects of the Stone—The Stone of Truth—The Stone which transmutes Metals—The Doctrine of Regeneration—The First Matter—The Stones confused together—Khunrath antecedent to Böhme—Other texts of the Period— <i>The Water Stone of the Wise</i> —The Heavenly and Earthly Stone—Benedictus Figulus—His <i>Golden and Blessed Casket</i> —His Hermetic Mass—His devotion to the Art—Alexander von Suchten—His alchemical Quest—His Teacher in Alchemy—The Great Work and the creation of the Greater World—The Stone and the Perfect Medicine—The Spirit of Truth—The Incarnation—Weigel and Gutmann—Suchten as a Precursor of Böhme	253

CHAPTER XVIII

THOMAS VAUGHAN

The Rosy Cross in England—Its reflections in Eugenius Philalethes—Vaughan as an Alchemist—Consideration of <i>Lumen de Lumine</i> as his chief text—His Spiritual or Divine Magic—Judgment on <i>Lapis Chemicus</i> —Of Spiritual Medicine—Gold of Wisdom—Vaughan's Secret Science—The Divine in Man—Metempsychosis—The Fire-Spirit of Life—Work of Christ in the Soul—Christian Kabalism—Vaughan's Supernatural Centre—Progression and Return of the Soul—The Microcosmos—The Ether and its Divine Virtue—Vaughan's interblending of Spiritual and Physical Things—His notions of the First Matter—Tincture of Physical Things and the Soul's Tincture—Ferment of a New Life—The Hidden Intelligence—Vaughan as Mystical and also Hermetic Philosopher—His Secret of Art and Gift of God—An Exotic Theology—A Letter from the Rosy Cross—The Law of Concealment—The Key is Christ	265
--	-----

CHAPTER XIX

THE COSMOPOLITE

Eirenæus Philalethes—A recent proposal to identify him with George Starkey—Examination and rejection of this view—Testimony of Eirenæus concerning himself— <i>The Open Entrance</i> —His attainment of the Great Work—His perils and escapes—The Stone as a Gift of God—How it was vouchsafed to him—His dealings with other Adepts—His debt to other Writings—The works to which he confessed—His Final Message—The Story of George Starkey concerning Eirenæus and his alleged Pupil	292
---	-----

CONTENTS

xiii

CHAPTER XX

JOHN FREDERICK HELVETIUS

	PAGE
Evidence of Transmutations by some who were not Adepts— Helvetius and his <i>Golden Calf</i> —His account of Elias the Artist— The Stone exhibited—A second visit of Elias—Confession of Helvetius—He receives a minute fragment of the mysterious Powder—Theory and Process of the Work—Elias promises to visit Helvetius for a third time—The Promise is not redeemed—Helvetius transmutes lead in his wife's presence—Tests applied to the gold thus produced—Impressions concerning the Artist—Other tales of Transmutation—John Baptist van Helmont—His testimony to the fact of the Stone—His account of Butler—Conclusion on the evidence of Helvetius	307

CHAPTER XXI

AN ALCHEMIST OF MITYLENE

The Story of Lascaris—An alleged Archimandrite—Appearance at Berlin—He presents Powder of Projection to J. F. Bötticher— Who transmutes Metals—Is honoured by the Elector of Saxony— Exhausts the Powder—Becomes a Prisoner—Lascaris employs Pasch to save him—Pasch also imprisoned—He escapes and dies— Later History of Bötticher—Other persons enriched by the Powder of Lascaris—His own alleged Transmutations—Domenico Manuel —Delisle and Aluys—Yet other Tales of Wonder—Richthausen and Busardier—Three centuries of the Physical Stone—Alchemy as a Work of Art	320
---	-----

CHAPTER XXII

THE MYSTIC SIDE OF ALCHEMY

The chaos of Religious Reform in Germany—A new spirit in
Alchemy—English Developments—the Four Stones of Elias
Ashmole—Jean d'Espagnet—Intimations of his *Arcanum*—Trans-
mission of an Operative Secret—Possibility of an Occult School—
Succession of historical Adepts—Later Records on the Spiritual
Side—Further notions of Böhme—*The Golden Age Restored*—
Gloria Mundi—Nuysement—Harprecht and his *Lucerna Salis*—
The Mythical Alipuli—J. G. Cortalasseus—The Rosy Cross in the
late Eighteenth Century—Its Secret Rituals—Testimonies from
various Sources—*The Secret Symbols*—Its pregnant Intimations—

	PAGE
The Old Birth and the New—Furthest Development of Spiritual Alchemy—Whether it connotes mental conceptions only or Inward Realisation—The Rosy Cross in Russia—Spiritual Alchemy as a Way of Life—Summary of the Whole Subject	334

APPENDICES

I. ANIMAL MAGNETISM IN 1850	369
II. KABALISTIC ALCHEMY	377
III. RECENT EDITIONS OF THE <i>Suggestive Inquiry</i>	395
IV. THE <i>Mutus Liber</i> AND <i>Janitor Pansophus</i>	398
INDEX	409

PREFACE

FROM Holy Scripture to the *Quest of the Holy Graal*, and thence onward to a comparatively recent epoch in the stream of time, it can be said of many great books that they are “written within and without”. In alternative words, they suggest meanings within them which do not appear on their surface ; and it may happen that some which are presented obviously as allegorical—for example, the *Pilgrim’s Progress*—are not so deep in their intimations as are others with an interior significance less consciously, or openly at least, designed by their writers. The *Romance of the Rose* is an allegory, and Jean de Meung—who completed it—took care that its whole significance should be manifest in the text itself, while the intention, as it happens, conveys nothing that matters. The second part of *Faust* has meaning within meaning, and though its design emerges, the picture-symbolism exceeds allegorical measures. There must be, however, still a few persons—perhaps many—who are unaware of large literatures which depend for their assumed importance solely on an inner meaning that differs from their outward sense, the latter in certain cases being unintelligible in the absence of a key. One of these literatures is that which was concerned in the past with the supposed transmutation of metals, and for many past generations enlisted the interest as it commanded also the convictions of notable persons throughout western Europe. Setting aside the question of possibility—whether, that is to say, metallic conversions were accomplished as a result of any process or by any accident in the past, and whether they will be performed in the future—there is no more singular literature than that of Alchemy, and even at the present day it offers material for speculation to persons who, without any pre-

disposition towards so-called secret sciences, and believing most probably that no such sciences exist, are yet not wholly disassociated from an interest in old-world curiosities of experiment and its records in book-writing.

The secret theosophies, like Kabalism, and one at least of the secret sciences were perpetuated *ex hypothesi* by reception, in other words, by transmission from one person and generation to another. They suppose therefore custodians, without which such transmission would be impossible. On the face of alchemical literature the claim of this custody is plainly written: possibly it is the only thing which is plain or demonstrable concerning it. It forms part of a considerable body of evidence that certain knowledge—whether actual or fanciful does not signify at the moment—was handed down from an early period and through the Middle Ages to later times. Such knowledge was sometimes concerned with matters of research belonging to the domain of physics, as in the case of Alchemy; at others it transmitted old ideas of philosophy: Cornelius Agrippa had claims on the past in this respect and even Paracelsus—great innovator as he was, and notwithstanding his favourite motto¹—confesses to something brought down.² In yet other cases religious practices, connoting religious beliefs of antiquity, under one or other guise and amidst inevitable mutations, have been apparently handed on.

So far as the West is concerned, the literature of Alchemy is in the main a Latin literature, and it rose up in Europe about the beginning of the tenth century. It was by no means to be regarded as new, for, setting China aside, we shall see that it had Greek, Arabian and Syriac antecedents which take the subject back some few centuries further, though by no means into proximity with the beginnings of Christianity. But it assumed certain new and more methodical characteristics when it put on a Latin garb, so that we get into closer

¹ See page 177 of the present work: it is the inscription written about the portrait which appears in the great Geneva edition of his collected works.

² It is in part by way of appeal to the philosophers and Kabalists who preceded him, to the old "spagyrist" and "the good arts which existed in the first age," as in *The Book Concerning the Tincture of Philosophers*—and in part by reference to a hidden knowledge coming down from the prediluvian past. See my *Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus*, 1894, Vol. I, pp. 19 *et seq.*

touch with its claim and have a better knowledge of those concerned in its production. From the tenth century to the end of the seventeenth and even later this literature was carried on without any interruption, using the same symbolical style, preferring the same pretensions and being then, as it remains still, without any real meaning for the general world. No critical writers have ever taken hold of the gross fact of this literature and succeeded in explaining it on any principle of mere crass imposition or forgery of the ordinary kind. They have seized on it at certain late periods—notably at the end of the sixteenth century and in the decades which followed thereon; they have tried to shew that the ignorance and credulity then prevalent on physical subjects created a demand for such books and that booksellers supplied it then as they might do now if the commodity were marketable. There is obvious truth in this impeachment, and it accounts for many spurious tracts on Alchemy which were produced then and later. But it does not account for Greek, Arabian, Syriac and Hebrew or Aramaic texts which did not see print for centuries, which were put upon no market. It does not account for obscure alchemical poems containing the memorials and note-books of obscure and often unknown workers which did not emerge into daylight till they were brought forth by Ashmole, the antiquary. It does not account for four centuries of production, and more even than this, between the period of the Latin Geber and that of Caxton, when there was no printing and no ready method of circulating manuscripts so that profit could be assured to their authors.

The same quality of criticism might point to the wider fact that alchemists, for obvious reasons, were often popular with princes, were honoured guests at their courts, and that illusory pretensions arose in this manner; but such persons—a few well known exceptions set apart—Edward Kelley is an instance—were not the alchemists who created or contributed materially to the literature of metallic transmutation. Few cycles of book production have been more independent of patronage. Many of the works in question were either anonymous or passed under names which were obviously not those of their real authors. When a courtly connection existed it tended to produce the opposite effect

to that which such criticism would suggest. There is Arnoldus de Villa Nova, once a respected royal physician, who—according to one story—lost position, home, personal security and in the end life itself, because of his devotion to a problematical art. There is Raymund Lully, the so-called Jewish neophyte, not the *doctor illuminatus* of *Ars Magna* but that obscure and indeed unknown master about whom we know only on his proper testimony what he suffered at the hands of royal avarice. Passing to later times, there is here the gentleman from Scotland who was imprisoned and racked, suffering all martyrdom except its crown, because of the alleged knowledge which he refused. Again there is the English adept whose name has never transpired, who describes himself as a wanderer upon the face of the earth, set apart by his secret from all common familiarity with men and ever occupied in eluding his enemies. Later still there is the so-called Greek Archimandrite who—as if possessed by some missionary fever—travelled from place to place, exhibiting a mysterious gift about which we know only that he gained nothing by dispensing it, while it brought misery on those who received.

If we take the palpable fact of this strange literature of the centuries and suppose for a moment, in accordance with their recurring claim, that the men who wrote these books were members of some Secret Fraternity, speaking a common language by which at any time and in any place they could understand one another, then the mere existence of the literature may seem comparatively intelligible. On the surface it pretended to afford an instruction which could be grasped by the uninitiated if he gave himself utterly to their subject, and if his intent above all were so worthy that he might win help from God ; but actually it may have registered—for those who also knew—the individual paths followed in the course of attainment by each as he worked alone. I am not putting forward a personal hypothesis but looking at a possible way of understanding a claim made and the texts in which it is enshrined. From this point of view, if only in a vague and general sense, we can get a certain light of purpose in which to regard the literature—whether the transmutation of metals was actually the object in view or whether this ostensible design covered a different purpose, being precisely that question which it is the proposal of the present volume

to investigate. But it will by no means prove explanatory along the whole line, and it offers nothing which can be said to account for itself. There is very little to shew why the alchemists—if they were at work in physics—should have recourse to such a device, why it was necessary or desirable that they should communicate for each other's benefit that which they had performed, working with more or less agreed formulæ on things put into their hands.

On the other hand, if—as it has been advanced—they were recording the results of explorations in the spiritual nature of man, there is no assignable reason on the surface why they should have adopted the veil of *Chemia*. Moreover, and in either case, there is not only nothing to indicate the existence of any method by which it was possible to reach those who were addressed, but there was almost certainly none. On the hypothesis of initiation, it lay between individual master and apprentice or pupil. It is not until the seventeenth century, and then in the most dubious manner, that we hear of adepts assembled, of their palaces, temples or houses, under the denomination of the Rosy Cross. That there was finally no distribution of manuscripts among persons concerned seems proved by the fact of important typical texts, like the *Ordinal* of Thomas Norton, remaining entombed for generations. In so far therefore as the speculation seems tolerable it means only that people who performed the work of Alchemy—whatever it happened to be—were prompted to record their achievement and did it in such a manner that they might be understood by other masters, and by those only. By a bare possibility they may have written in order that, from age to age, there might be always a witness in the world.

It has been implied that the texts on their surface—and, so to speak, in the book-aspects of their history—are against this view, though it offers a certain indication of purpose going on from century to century, ever saying the same thing, yet ever saying it differently, and at the same time revealing nothing that was intelligible to the unversed mind. On the surface the literature of Alchemy existed to teach the Art, to awaken those who were prepared, the supposition being apparently that students who had fitting dedications would be enabled to interpret the cryptic writing, while it would remain dark to others. There has also to be registered, as further points

against it, (1) that a few of the accepted witnesses affirm their attainment of the secret by reading and comparing the best texts, from which it would follow that they were self-initiated and bound by no undertaking; (2) that yet a few others while making this claim refer also to pledges, initiation in the first case being reduced automatically and at best to a possibly shorter way, while in the second it figures as something imposed presumably from time to time on persons who had bought their knowledge by individual toil, and it seems then to intervene for no other purpose than that of insuring secrecy. It follows that there is not so much help from the consideration here elaborated as might appear *prima facie* and that from whatever point of view we approach the alchemical subject our path is strewn with difficulties. For example, it is paraded everywhere that no writer has ever revealed the First Matter of the Work, in which case it seems idle to suggest that any one could get to know it by a comparison of different texts. There is no answer to this, unless any one elects to think that the grand desideratum is really hidden in the records, for those who are skilled to find it. As to this there is no evidence; and did it happen to be true, the class of people who would discover the Great Secret would be comparable to those who are found now among us winning prizes in cross-word puzzles and other competitive exercises: in other words, they would be in possession of a faculty which by no means connotes the high qualities that all alchemical masters declare essential, namely, love of God, unselfishness, charity, detachment from earthly interests—including material wealth—and dedication to eternal things.

To enumerate such stipulations suggests that every succeeding sentence in these prefatory words serves mainly to bring forth a new problem: conditions, dedications, warranties of this kind are out of all proportion to anything offered by Alchemy on its serious side, speaking within the measures of its literal sense. If we separate lying texts, like that which passes under the name of Artephius, those who accomplish the *Magnum Opus* can prolong their life, if they choose, to the fullest limit permitted by God and Nature, because the Medicine of Metals is a Medicine also of Man. There is no question, moreover, that the successful alchemist had the

key of wealth in his hands, by the hypothesis of the Art, though the only supposed adept who left great treasures behind him was Pope John XXII, and his legend is fraudulent—like the tract ascribed to him. Now, natural longevity—not that there is evidence of its attainment by the aid of any elixir—and as much or as little of precious metal as Alchemy could produce in crucibles, according to its own shewing, are no adequate ground for postulating signal virtues as a prime condition in those who would attain the Art.

On considerations like these the surface claim of the literature has an air of colossal pretence or alternatively conveys the suggestion that it is talking about one thing in the terms of another; and this is precisely what has been advanced concerning it. Out of this possibility also the present work arises. The transmutation of metals *per se* is no concern of mine; but it has been said that great secrets of the soul are hidden under veils of *Chemia*; that they are of a kind which called for concealment in those persecuting days when the literature came into being; and that even now—when things are proclaimed on the housetops which used to be whispered in crypts—it is impermissible to speak of them openly because they are liable to abuse. There is nothing in the last suggestion to inspire a moment's confidence, but it can be left to stand at its value because of the major claim, which is not of to-day altogether, of this or the last century. And when a question of the soul arises—whatever the issue may prove—it is not of my concern only but my part of life and its province. I have set myself therefore to collect and estimate such evidence—if any—as it may be possible to ascertain of that which lies behind the surface sense of alchemical literature through the ages of Christendom. To examine such a scheme of cryptology is no easy task, but it is also no excursion through a realm of fantasy, for there is at least a surface suggestion in the long succession of texts that they are not what they seem—at least always and only. If we can find out that which they are I shall not have undertaken in vain this further journey in research. It may be said by way of conclusion to these prefatory words that the present volume completes my examination of the Secret Tradition transmitted through Christian Times,

Alchemy being the one branch so far unexplored of that which has claimed to constitute Theosophy in Christ, illustrated in experience rather than by formal doctrine. If I am spared for further efforts in these directions, they will belong to the work of revision, when the series at large may come to be drawn together into a collected form.

A. E. WAITE.

CHAPTER I

ALCHEMY AND SUPERNATURAL LIFE

WHILE the explorations and discoveries of science grow from more to more and are offering us at this time not all uncertain suggestions of still untrodden fields, on the threshold of which we stand, there are moments also when apparently quixotic quests, beliefs and hopes of a nearer or further past appear to us less extravagant than they did a few decades ago. Among several illustrations the most obvious perhaps is found in the changes of radium, which have reminded every one about the old dream of the alchemists concerning the transmutation of metals, though offering otherwise little to the elucidation of its cryptic records. Between the new demonstrated facts and the untutored experiments promoted by free imagination in the dark of things, there may be nothing better than a surface analogy; but behind these latter there was the faith of the alchemists, howsoever grounded, on the root-unity of such elements as came within their purview, and this also seems passing from realms of speculation towards those of workable hypothesis. Now, it happens that for the majority at this day, Alchemy is little more than a name and a name also are certain books, if indeed any, which have been heard of as devoted to its subject. It is realised very little at least that the old Art, setting China aside, as a world beyond the ken in this particular respect, is represented by a literature which began about the fourth or fifth century of the Christian era, and continued till late in the eighteenth; that a bibliography of the subject would fill a very large volume; that it is in Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Latin, and in the vernaculars of various countries of western Europe—especially German, French, English and even Italian. From beginning to end the texts are written in a strange symbolical language for the express purpose of concealment, so that they are to all intents and purposes unintelligible, in the absence of a Key, and although there

2 ALCHEMY AND SUPERNATURAL LIFE

are several lexicons of Alchemy¹ such a Key is wanting. Were it otherwise, it seems certain that long since there would have been a serious examination of the literature, to see what experiments are recorded and for what in reality they stand. All difficulties notwithstanding, some attempts of the kind have been made, but among those which rank as serious it seems necessary at the moment to particularise only those of Berthelot, the distinguished French chemist, on the group of Byzantine texts and on Arabian and Syriac Alchemy. We shall meet with occasional critical opinions in the course of the present inquiry and shall learn what is needful concerning the elucidations offered by various students of the literature and its problems.

It should be understood that on my part I am offering no contribution to the early history of chemistry, nor a canon of criticism in respect of physical experiments couched in evasive terms. My concern in alchemical literature has its point of departure from a very different ground, and the textual examination proposed in the present work is based upon considerations which are of no physical kind. I am well aware that this statement will appear very strange to those who are unversed, and that to investigate the books of alleged processes for transmuting metals from a non-physical point of view must seem a distracted undertaking. Let as much be granted out of hand on the simple surface of things ; but in respect of my personal sanity be it understood further that I am engaged in the criticism of certain views on the literature which do not happen to be of my own invention. For the rest I have intimated that it is written in symbolical language, and it may be thought colourable that the pretence of expounding alleged methods for transmuting

¹ There is, for example, that of Johnson, among things that are ready to the hand, being available in English, and there is the large *Lexicon Alchimie* of Martinus Rulandus, 1612, which also has appeared in translation together with a supplement, only six copies being printed circa 1892. The most interesting of all is the *Dictionnaire Mytho-Hermétique* of Antoine Joseph Pernety. Paracelsus has had his own vocabulary explained in alphabetical order, and I appended something of the kind to my edition of his *Hermetic and Alchemical Writings* long years ago. I have even met in manuscript with a similar list of so-called "hard words" in the writings of Dr. Dee. This passed under the name of Dr. Rudd, and had nothing in reality to do with the learned mathematician of Mortlake: it was borrowed matter—I think, from Johnson and others. Finally the compilation of Johnson was reproduced in the *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* of Mangetus, 1702. The list is by no means exhausted, but it would serve little purpose to carry the enumeration further.

putative metals may after all be part of the veils and the figurative sense of terms.¹ If it has so been regarded for a considerable period of time by persons who count as serious, it is not an insensate inquiry, and may prove to be in a different category from the “mysteries of platonic love in the middle ages”, from the consideration of Dante as “arch heretic and revolutionary”, or from the supposed concealed authorship of the Shakespeare plays—subjects which in themselves are not of necessity distracted but tend so to become in the hands of those who treat them.

There has grown up in mystical circles, more especially of recent years, and there has been reflected thence among persons outside the circles, even in the secular press,² a feeling that Alchemy was in reality a spiritual experiment, connoting spiritual attainments, “veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols,” and neither a dark groping in mere physics nor a successful attempt to transmute metals, literally understood. Those who have met with alchemical texts seem to

¹ It is a question of logic to place this point on record, but it should be understood that the voice of the literature on *Secretum Artis* is not as to the end and object of experiment but as to materials and procedure. The end was a Medicine of Metals, though in one of its forms it could prolong human life. Now, a literature which claims to communicate—under veils or otherwise—the secret of metallic transmutation must be held to deal therewith unless there is full evidence to the contrary. The “philosophers” may affirm that they are most deceptive when on the surface they are most clear, but it must not be inferred from a suggestion of this kind that when they are dealing obviously with things belonging to the mineral world they are concerned in reality, and under heavy veils, with a subject or subjects at some opposite pole of thought. There is no indication throughout the entire literature that its authors were deceptive in respect of universals but of particulars only. These willing misdirections, moreover, are to be distinguished from things that are admittedly hidden. It is an open secret that the First Matter is called by many names and that all are veils, the *Secretum Artis*, as we have seen, having been declared by none. There is one point more: supposing for a moment an array of textual evidence against metallic transmutation as the real end in view, it does not follow that the alchemical concern was spiritual. Spiritual intimations—if any—discerned throughout the literature may be assuredly another veil. If William Shakespeare did not write the plays which pass under his name, the fact does not signify that of necessity they were the work of Francis Bacon. So also, if Alchemy is not that which it claims, a mystery of the mineral kingdom, the sole alternative is not that it is a mystery of the human soul. Its records may be cryptic manifestoes of some Secret Order which from time immemorial has prepared a political transformation of the world. They may have told those who knew how it was faring with the scheme at one and another time, among these and those persons, and in that or this place and country of the world.

² As, for example, in *The Spectator* of June 14, 1924, reviewing my book on *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross*, it is proposed that the formulæ of Alchemy were “used in parable”; that Salt, Sulphur and Mercury seem to be spiritual principles; that the secret purpose was to analyse, rectify, integrate, the human spirit; and to produce the perfect man.

4 ALCHEMY AND SUPERNATURAL LIFE

find such a notion confirmed by the deep religious fervour displayed in many and the suggestion there and here of Spiritual Mysteries which are analogous to the Hermetic Work : some of the latter have been accepted as seemingly accidental but really purposed hints about the nature of the hidden subject.

So much and very shortly of present impressions and dreams which do not arise from knowledge, or in most cases even from passing acquaintance. Behind them, however, are certain facts in the records, and behind these are others of an earlier period, from both of which something has filtered through and accounts for the persistent and indeed recurring rumours. Between 1850 and 1858 there were published three obscure works—in England and America—by two authors who knew nothing of one another but who wrote for the purpose of shewing that Alchemy, represented by its literature, all claims and material objects on the surface notwithstanding, was an experimental art or science practised in the soul and mind, instead of a work on metals ; that only in a figurative and emblematic sense was lead transmuted into gold ; and that the alleged elixir of life was not contained in vials or made in stills.¹ Two centuries and more behind these modern explanations there were men in Germany and England who spoke of Philosophical Gold and used other terms of the Art, to indicate that it had no place in physics and that the true *Alchemia* was a practice of Divine Knowledge.

It follows that there is a problem offered to consideration, that there is a concern of the past and present therein, while it is barely possible that there is something behind it which has the suggestion of a provisional warrant. My proposition therefore is to survey alchemical literature and

¹ We shall see that when the proposed allegorical understanding of Alchemy arose in the nineteenth century, it had from the beginning one fatal and seemingly indelible mark scored against it, being that of unacquaintance with the literature at its fountain-sources. These were not only unprinted and in Greek, Arabic or Syriac, but were available for the most part to palæographers alone. They are fortunately in our hands now, the texts edited and printed by the care of scholars, while they have been translated, moreover, into French. It must be added that if such a mark against the interpreters mentioned disqualified them utterly there would be no need for the present work ; but while it happens that their individual speculations will be set aside in the end they have opened a way to another view of the subject in connection with later characteristics and developments of alchemical texts.

its history, to ascertain what evidence—if indeed any—it may offer thereupon, but perhaps especially whether we can trace from the beginning the presence of any spiritual intent in the literature at large. It should be understood that so formulated the design is to proceed on the evidence offered by the records, for the reason that there is none other, unless it be those occasional lights afforded, so commonly in all subjects, by the lives of their authors, to the extent that they may prove available. It is obvious that the views of those who preceded me in the attempt to fix a spiritual and mystical significance on that which the alchemists themselves were accustomed to term the *Work of Philosophy*, are of my concern in the sense that to their intimations and unfoldings I owe my whole subject, since it is not to be assumed—either by myself or others—that in the absence of specific leading I should have done more than investigate the external history of Alchemy in connection with other occult studies, undertaken for definite reasons in the course of my literary life. Having registered this position on the score of sincerity, it remains to say that the inquiry which follows after the early chapters will be a first-hand survey of the subject for the purpose of answering in the only valid manner a postulated question whether there is in fact, not in hypothesis or reverie, (1) a spiritual aspect of alchemical literature at large, or alternatively (2) whether the authentic texts call to be regarded altogether from a standpoint of spiritual purpose. As preliminary hereunto it is desirable in this first chapter to say something briefly of what has been done by early antecedent expositors in dealing with this twofold question, leaving the evidence—if any—of professed alchemists to a later stage.¹

We are taken back in this manner to the first decades of the seventeenth century and to the “deep searchings” of Jacob Böhme, the Teutonic Theosopher, on all things relative to God, man and the universe, but especially the great subject of all his writings, which is Man in the Christ-State. It is to be observed on his own authority that he was not an alchemist, as this class of researcher was understood at the period: he was an expositor who stood apart and, on the faith of other knowledge—received by what must be

¹ The chief among these and the earliest is Heinrich Khunrath.

6 ALCHEMY AND SUPERNATURAL LIFE

called revelation—was in a position—*ex hypothesi sua*—to unfold the true nature of the Great Work and the qualifications essential to its performance. His position is defined when he says: “I have it not in the *praxis*,”¹ and again, speaking of the Stone: “I cannot yet make it myself, albeit I know something.”² He is the first who affirms

¹ “Also concerning the Philosophical Work of the Tincture, its progress is not so bluntly and plainly to be described; albeit I have it not in the *Praxis*, the Seal of God lieth before it to conceal the true ground of the same, upon pain of eternal punishment, unless a man knew for certain that it might not be misused. There is also no power to attain unto it, unless a man first become that himself which he seeketh therein: no skill or art availeth; unless one give the tincture into the hands of another, he cannot prepare it unless he be certainly in the New Birth.”—*The Epistles of Jacob Behmen, aliter Teutonicus Philosophus*. Translated out of the German language, 1649. 23rd Epistle, p. 171.

² He speaks also of two central fires, affirming that they are a chief part of the Mystery, that “the might of all things consists therein”, and that they are easy of attainment by those who are fitted, adding, however, as follows: “It behoves us not to break the Seal of God, for a fiery mountain lieth before it, at which I am myself amazed and must wait whether it be God’s will. How should I teach others expressly thereof? I cannot yet make it myself, albeit I know somewhat. And let no man seek more of me than I have.”—*Ibid.* Compare the *Third Epistle*, p. 44. “I see it well enough, but I have no manual operation, instigation, or art unto it; but I only set forth an open Mystery, whereunto God shall stir up labourers of his own. Let no man seek the Work from me, or think to get the knowledge and operation of the Philosopher’s Stone [or Universal Tincture from me]. And though it is known clearly and might be opened more clearly, yet I have broken my will and will write nothing, but as it is given to me, that so it may not be my work, lest I should be imprisoned in the *Turba*”—described elsewhere as that which accomplishes the anger of God.

With these citations we may compare what is said in *Aurora*, the first of Böhme’s writings, according to Sparrow’s translation. The thesis is that gold and silver cannot be made “pure or fine” unless they are “melted seven times in the fire”. When that is done gold or silver “remaineth in the middle or central seat in the heart of nature, which is the water, sitting in its own quality and colour”. Whether this obscure statement can have any reference to ordinary refining processes must be left open, and the same observation may apply to the “sixth melting”, which is said to be “the greatest danger for chemists” in the preparation of their silver and gold, because it demands a very subtle fire which may burn or kill, while the metals become “very dim” when the fire is too cold. The further explanation of this point is worded as follows, and shall be left to those who are instructed on the metallurgy of gold: “If the fire be too hot in the fifth and sixth meltings then the new life, which hath generated itself in the rising up of the light’s power out of the water, is kindled again in the fierceness in the wrath-fire, and the mineral ore becomes a burnt scum and dross, and the alchemist hath dirt instead of gold.” When the metal is melted for the seventh time “the life riseth up and rejoiceth in the love, and will shew forth itself in infinity”. At the end of all these processes, and after the attainment of true virtue and colour, there is one thing wanting only: “the spirit cannot elevate itself with its body into the light, but must remain to be a dead stone; and though indeed it be of greater virtue than other stones, yet the body remaineth in death.” This is said to be “the earthly god of blind men”, otherwise a dead god and of such a kind “as hath thrown many into hell”. Thereafter Böhme exhorts his reader not to take him for an alchemist, because he writes only “in the knowledge of the spirit and not from experience”. At the same time he could shew something else, or “in how many days and in what hours these things must be prepared; for gold cannot be made in one day, but a whole month is requisite for it”. H.

that the gift of Alchemy is the gift of supernatural life and that the Stone is Christ—that is to say, Christ the Spirit. “This is the noble precious Stone—*Lapis Philosophorum*—the Philosopher’s Stone, which the Magi do find, which tinctureth Nature and generateth a new Son in the old.” It is at once manifest and hidden : it is hidden in this world and yet may be had everywhere. “And this Stone is Christ, the Son of the Living God, Which discovereth Itself in all those that seek and find it.” The apostles “went about with this Stone, in power and doing miracles”, but it has been persecuted always by the schools of the worldly wise. It is offered by God and bestowed on man ; it is to be had by those who desire it ; and the power of the whole Deity lies therein.¹

Whether it can be accommodated or not to the subject-matter of alchemical symbolism and its literature, we cannot affirm that there is anything remote or unlikely in an attempt to understand the Stone of Philosophy in the sense of that Stone which is Christ : on the contrary, it is the institution of an analogy which is a little of the obvious order, since it is written at large in Scripture. That Blessed Stone which is the desire of the eyes in Alchemy could do no otherwise than recall the “Living Stone”,² the head in chief of the corner, elect and precious,³ the Spiritual Rock.⁴ And because according to the alchemists the matter of their Stone is common and mean of price, while the Stone itself is *Lapis*

confesses that he does not know “how to manage the fire” : “neither do I know the colours or tinctures of the qualifying or fountain spirits in their outermost birth or geniture, which are two great defects.” He adds that he is acquainted with them according to the regenerate man, “which standeth not in the palpability.” See *Aurora*, edited by C. T. Barker, 1914, *cap.* xxii.

¹ See *The Threefold Life of Man*, Englished by J. Sparrow, 1650, c. vi, v. 98, p. 101 ; v. 100, p. 102 ; c. vii, v. 14, p. 105 ; v. 26, p. 107 ; v. 40, 41, p. 109 ; c. xiii, v. 1, p. 207.

² The Stone of which there is no end to the virtue and glory.—*Ibid.*, c. vii, v. 100, p. 102.

³ “He who hath it and knoweth it, if he seek, he may find all things whatsoever [which] are in heaven and in earth. It is the Stone which is rejected of the builders and is the Chief Corner Stone. Upon whatsoever it falleth it grindeth it to powder and kindleth a fire therein. All universities seek it but find it not by their seeking : sometimes it is found by one that seeketh it rightly. But others [that seek it in self and for their own gain] despise it and cast it away ; and so it remaineth hidden still.”—*Ibid.*, v, 102. Compare c. vii, v, 9, p. 104, concerning the Garland of Pearl, adorned with the noble and highly precious Stone, that *Lapis Philoch. Angularis, sive Philosophorum*.

⁴ Compare the “Spiritual Ground” and what is said of its six properties.—*Epistles*, as *ante*, p. 164, v. 8.

8 ALCHEMY AND SUPERNATURAL LIFE

exillis and as Böhme plainly describes it, "a very dark disesteemed Stone, of a grey colour,"¹ it is inevitable that it should be compared in the mind—whether versed or not in the labyrinth of the Hermetic subject—with that Stone rejected of the builders,² which is a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence.³ But as Christ is also the Stone of Salvation,⁴ so is the Philosophical Stone that in which "lieth the highest tincture"⁵ If there is anything valid in analogies it will be seen, I think, that no other can be more exact and catholic after its own kind. But I am concerned at the present stage only with the fact of the comparison so formulated and not with its inherent value.

Having obtained in this manner what may be termed a clear issue, an unthinkable proposition remains. If the Stone of Alchemy is Christ, it is to be understood spiritually;⁶ and if Alchemy itself is a doctrine and practice, as I have intimated, of supernatural life according to Jacob Böhme, we should suppose it to be at the poles asunder from any material workings. On the contrary, those who understand the symbolism in this high sense and have attained the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65. Compare also the Ninth Epistle, p. 106, concerning precious gold growing in a "rough stone". There is a variant in the *Threefold Life of Man*, c. vi, v. 100, p. 102, as follows: "It is accounted the meanest of all Stones in the Adamical eyes and is trodden underfoot, for it affordeth no lustre to the sight. If a man light upon it he casteth it away as an unprofitable thing: none inquire for it, though it be so very much sought for in this world. There is none on earth but desireth it. All the great ones and the wise seek it: indeed they find one and think it is the right, but they miss it. They ascribe power and virtue to it, and think they have it and will keep it, but it is not that: it needeth no virtue to be ascribed to it." According to *ibid.*, v. 41, 42, p. 109, the false Stone is "glistening, with a pleasant outside or sound." But it belongs to "the wall of the great building of this world, in which the seven seals accomplish their wonders, and under which the Seven Spirits of the anger of God pour forth their vials of wrath."

² Ps. cxviii, 22. See also I St. Peter, ii, 4, 6.

³ Is. viii, 14.

⁴ Acts, iv, 12.

⁵ Böhme's Fourth Epistle, v, 111, p. 65.

⁶ It is to be understood also in the sense of the Christ within, for Böhme says: "Among many thousand in this world, Thou art scarce rightly known of any one; and yet Thou art carried in many that know Thee not," the invocation being addressed to *Lapis Philosophorum*. *Threefold Life of Man*, c. vi, v. 99, p. 101. It was found by Abel and Jacob; Isaac attained it in his mother's womb; it was loved by David, and Solomon had it in his heart. Moses and all the prophets worked their miracles by it; and this Stone "discovereth itself in all those that seek it". *Ibid.*, c. vii, v. 36-40, pp. 108, 109. "Christ hath put into us the Noble Stone, namely, the Water of Eternal Life." *Ibid.*, v. 50, p. 110. "It is hidden to us men, unless a man have attained the Stone upon the Cross, and then he findeth where reason saith there is nothing," *Ibid.*, c. x, v. 9, p. 152. "In this Stone there lieth hidden whatsoever God and the eternity . . . contain . . ." *Ibid.*, c. xiii, v. 1, p. 207.

spiritual estate which is connoted by supernatural life are those only who are qualified to perform the work of physical transmutation ;¹ and I see no warrant for assuming that the Teutonic Theosophist is here testifying otherwise than at the literal and face value of his words. The thesis is that by Divine knowledge and understanding "all the metals of the earth may be brought to the highest degree of perfection, yet only by the Children of the Divine Magia who have the revelation—or experimental science—of the same".² It is said also that "the Holy Ghost is the Key to it";³ and he that understands rightly the Centre of Nature "may well find it in metals".⁴ So also in respect of the Tincture, neither doctor nor alchemist has the true ground thereof "unless he be born again in the spirit".⁵ On this understanding, according to Böhme, "the work is easy and the Art is simple : a boy of ten years might make it," though "the wisdom is great therein" and it is "the greatest mystery". It is said further that "every one must seek it himself".⁶

¹ It is to be observed that neither Jacob Böhme nor any one or other of his peers and coheirs suggested that Alchemy was not concerned in its past with metallic transmutation. They set forth a Higher Alchemy, while admitting the possibility of that which was sought in crucibles.

² Böhme's *Third Epistle*, v. 33, p. 44. Compare *Fourth Epistle*, v. iii, p. 65 : "Would you search out the *Mysterium Magnum*, then take before you only the earth with its metals, and so you may well find what the magical or kabalistical ground is."

³ *Fourth Epistle*, v. 110, pp. 64, 65, addressed to a correspondent who has "undertaken a very hard labour"—namely Vaughan's "blind work on metals"—and yet it is wholly needless. "He that findeth and knoweth the Great Mystery, he findeth all things therein. There needs no literal demonstration : God, Christ, and the eternity—with all wonders—do lie therein." Also v. iii : "Searching only doth nothing."

⁴ *Threefold Life of Man*, c. ix, v. 8, p. 129. It is added that it is not difficult : "if he learn but the right entrance, he hath the end at hand." Compare, however, the *Twenty-third Epistle*, v. 16, p. 171 : "Therefore, Sir, do not trouble and toil yourself . . . with any gold or minerals : it is all false"—the nearest approach to a condemnation of past procedure which is found in Böhme anywhere.

⁵ *Ibid.*, v. 15, p. 171.

⁶ *Twenty-third Epistle*, v. 18, p. 171. It has been affirmed previously—v. 16—that it is far off and nigh at hand, that "the place is everywhere, where it may be had ; but every one is not fit and prepared for it. Neither doth it cost any money, but what is spent upon the time and bodily maintenance : else it might be prepared with two florins and less". The same testimony in almost the same words is borne by Heinrich Khunrath in *Amphitheatrum Sapientie Æternæ*, 1609, a work with which Jacob Böhme may have been acquainted. It is added in this connection—v. 17—as follows : "The world must be made heaven, and heaven the world. It is not of earth, stones, or metals, and yet it is of the ground of all metals." It is "a spiritual being which is environed with the four elements, which also changeth the four elements into one, a doubled Mercury, yet not quicksilver, or any other mineral or metal". With reference to Khunrath it should be said that he was a practical alchemist and that his testimony is therefore reserved.

10 ALCHEMY AND SUPERNATURAL LIFE

We have heard of "astrology theologised", otherwise an art in ruling the stars by a law of grace, and this is within comprehension, on the hypothesis, since it is the government of influence according to one kind by another and higher influence; but the annals of sanctity and of the attainments reached therein may be searched through East and West before and after the Teutonic Theosopher, and in no other quarter shall we find it on record or claimed that the second birth of the mystic gives the power to elevate so-called base metals into the "perfect form" of gold. I conceive therefore that the notion originated at his time in Germany, in the main with him, and although it is put forward in dogmatic terms as part of his revelations, that it belonged to the region of reverie. In this connection he reaffirms indeed expressly: "I cannot yet make it myself," nor does he suggest that there is any authority behind him derived from those who could.¹ It may be thought that I am dwelling over seriously on an ultra-fantastic dream; but in the first place it belongs to the exegesis of that subject into the validity of which we are inquiring, while in the second we shall meet with it again among modern expositors. At the moment it will be sufficient to add that in the midst of his own experiences and at his day in the world it was not possible for the mind which was Böhme to challenge, in the face of its literature, the claims on material transmutation. I have shewn elsewhere and recently² that Alchemy was followed in Germany at that period with perfervid zeal; the testimonies to the fact of transmutation were everywhere—real or alleged; he explained therefore to himself and from himself to others his view of the conditions on which the things that were affirmed to be actual lay within the possibility of attainment.

The second witness on Alchemy, understood spiritually, was contemporary in England with Jacob Böhme in the Teutonic Fatherland. This was Robert Fludd, to whom I have devoted a considerable chapter in my work already

¹ Jacob Böhme seldom appealed to authorities outside Holy Scripture. In all his alchemical expositions he mentions one tract only, and that is the *Water-Stone of the Wise*, of which he says: "Therein is much truth; and it is, moreover, clear."

² *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross*, c. iii.

mentioned,¹ and may reasonably refer thereto, even while I extend therefrom. The Kentish Theosophist's disposition towards a mystical understanding of the Hermetic subject is found early in his literary life; he distinguishes in his second publication between those who possess the true Alchemy and the false operators who seek to make "metallic gold", caring nothing for the treasures of heaven, "the spiritual splendour and light."² A work which he translated into Latin, being the production of a friend who wrote it in his defence, which he also prepared for press and which represents on all points his own views and principles, devotes an entire section to the same contrast, namely, spurious chemistry, working vainly on tinctures and striving to turn White into Red, and the true gold, which is not that of the vulgar but living "gold of God".³ This is life communicated by Christ, the very Word of Jehovah. It works transmutations as by a spiritual chemistry, but they are performed on the subject Man, whom It sublimates by virtues and adorns with sacramental graces, so that he attains a perfection which is comparable in analogy to purest gold and becomes truly the House of God. So far in respect of the inward nature or part of soul in man. But Spiritual Alchemy can transmute also the body⁴—as it is said—into the Divine

¹ *Ibid.*, c. x.

² *Tractatus Theologo-Philosophicus, in Libros Tres distributos, quorum I De Vita, II De morte, III De Resurrectione*, etc. Oppenheim, 1617.

³ *Summum Bonum, quod est verum Subjectum veræ Magiæ, Cabalæ, Alchymicæ verorum Fratrum Rosæ Crucis*. Frankfurt, 1629. A careful consideration of things cited in my text above will suggest to those who are acquainted with Christian mystical literature that albeit Robert Fludd and he who was his *alter ego* and apologist in *Summum Bonum* by no means belonged to the great tradition of Latin Catholicism, they had not only derived therefrom but may have also attained a certain inward realisation as to its term of quest. The first point seems to me beyond question, meaning that it is an irresistible inference, and it should be remembered in this connection that Fludd was neither Puritan nor Protestant of his period. The second is subject to a certain qualification, for it seems to me that he had realised by the normal processes of thought and intellectual dedication but not by the way of the mystics, in the still contemplation of the soul.

⁴ Compare *Tractatus Theologo-Philosophicus* on the body of resurrection, which the Eternal Spirit shall make like unto that of Enoch and Elias. Such a renovation is for those who die in Christ and are raised also by Him. The inspiration comes obviously from St. Paul and is like an elaborate unfoldment of the thesis that "it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body"; but the "glorious resurrection" of the Christian Funerary Service is not regarded as reserved to a postulated General Judgment, approximate or remote. In writers like Thomas Vaughan, if not in Robert Fludd—but inferentially, I think, also in him—the transfiguration of Tabor was an exemplary manifested in advance of the "robe of glory", the radiance of immortal vesture. So also was the face of Moses descending from Sinai,

12 ALCHEMY AND SUPERNATURAL LIFE

Image, and we make contact here with what I have found to be a recurring *Theosophia Hermetica* concerning the body of adeptship. From this point of view the true gold is also a true elixir, a Cup of Wisdom, life and food from God, bread and water of life. It is that which sustained Elias in the desert, Moses on Mount Horeb and Christ in the forty days' fast.¹ With this kind of Alchemy Fludd held that Holy Scripture is concerned throughout. The Stone of Philosophy, Stone of Wisdom, the Corner Stone is the Word of God before the beginning of things, and this Stone or Word is Christ, by Whose Divine Alchemy the world was made.² By this same Alchemy and by this Divine Alchemist the true is separated from the false, pure from impure, light from darkness, good also from evil, or in the symbolism of spiritual chemistry authentic gold and silver are set apart from the things of this world. From another point of view, and so far as man is concerned, the Stone which tinges and transmutes is the Blood of Christ; those who have been redeemed therein become alchemists on their own part³ and enter into very life immortal of the soul. This is the Stone, tried and precious, which was laid for a foundation in Zion, and in man himself it is comparable to a "fixed gold".⁴ It enables the soul to contemplate God clearly and

according to *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, and so was the state of Enoch in translation, according to *Caelum Terræ*. But this "spiritual and heavenly body" was brought forth in the work of adeptship, according to the same text. See my *Works of Thomas Vaughan*, pp. xxxi, xxxii.

¹ It follows according to Fludd and his *alter ego* that there is attainable by man and unto him communicated a Divine Nutriment, of which material Bread is the symbol, and an Arch-Natural Elixir, represented Sacramentally by Wine. They are administered to those who seek and find the Tree of Life, the White Stone, the New Name, and that garment of "fine linen" which is "the righteousness of saints."

² Hence one of the charges preferred against Fludd by Petrus Gassendus in his *Epistolica Exercitatio*. Parisiis, 1630: *Totam scripturam sacram referri ad alchymiam, et principia alchymistica. Sensum scripturæ mysticum non esse alium, quam explicatum per alchymiam et philosophicum lapidem. Non interesse ad illum habendum cujus religionis sis, Romanæ, Lutheranæ, aut alterius. Catholicum ille solum esse qui credit in Lapidem Catholicum, hoc est Philosophicum, cujus ope homines dæmonia ejiciant*, etc. The position of the Kentish theosophist is summarised with perfect accuracy in these lines, and when Fludd answered the French theologian his task was one of defence and further exposition.

³ Compare the further charge of Gassendus: *Hominem justum esse alchymistam, qui Philosophico Lapide invento, illius usu immortalis fiat. Mori tamen dici, cum partes corruptibiles abjicit; resurgere, cum fit incorruptibilis; glorificari, cum proinde easdem dotes assequitur, quæ tribuuntur corporibus gloriosis . . . Moysen cum creationem mundi descripsit fuisse alchymistam, itemque Davidem, Salomonem, Jacob, Job et omnes alios*.

⁴ It is that also which transforms man into the Divine Image, as it is said, by the power of the resurrection. Respecting the *verum aurum*, it is fire and life

conforms it to the likeness of the angels, for *Theosophia Fluddana* fell short of real mysticism and conceived the end of being in terms of the Blessed Vision, the Paradise of Thomist Theology and of Dante, not in the state of unity with God, though Fludd has been charged with pantheism by those who have failed in reading him to any serious purpose. But if he did not raise created human being over the threshold of Divine Identity, it was for him the Holy Place, and there was a Holy of Holies within it.¹

“As for Man, there is such a supereminent and wonderful treasure hidden in him, that wise men have esteemed that the perfect wisdom of this world consisteth in the knowledge of a man’s self, namely, to find out that secret mystery which doth lurk within him. For man is said to be the centre of every creature, and for that cause he is called *Microsmus*, or the little world, *centrum et miraculum mundi*, containing in himself the properties of all creatures, as well celestial as terrestrial. . . . Man is *Templum Dei, Corpus Christi, Habitaculum Spiritus Sancti*, as the Apostle hath taught us. Neither verily may it be imagined that God would make choice of an unworthy dwelling-place. . . . Seeing that Man is rightly reported by Hermes to be the son of the world, as the world is the Son of God—seeing that it is framed after the image of the archetype—for which cause he is termed the Little World, it will be requisite to understand that he is in like manner divided into a heaven and earth, as the great world was, and consequently containeth . . . his heavens, circles, poles and stars.”²

In the light of his contemptuous references to the gold and silver of the common herd and to the vulgar fire of the false alchemists, it may be concluded that Fludd had no part in the dream of material transmutation by the power of spirit and proffered no such thesis as his contemporary Jacob Böhme. It must be said, however, that if we read between the lines it may be found that they were not far apart from

from Christ, in Whom all treasures of wisdom and science are hidden, according to Fludd’s last work, entitled *Philosophia Moysaica*. The “Spiritual Christ” is the “true fountain of essential philosophy”.

¹ It should be added, however, that while affirming the creation of the soul, there is at least one place in which Fludd testifies that it is of the essence of Deity and is not divided from its source.—*Historia Microcosmi, Lib. iii, cap. 9*, Oppenheim, 1619.

² *Philosophia Moysaica*, Goudæ, 1638.

14 ALCHEMY AND SUPERNATURAL LIFE

one another, though there are at best but vague intimations on the side of the English mystic, since desire of the spiritual gold had eaten him up. In the person of his anonymous defender, Joachim Fritz, he affirms that when the Divine Spirit covenants to teach all things there is no science excluded; and on his own authority¹ it is maintained (1) that Alchemy is part of natural philosophy, (2) that the work of the alchemist is analogous to that of the Divine Spirit, and (3) that the breath of the power of God is "the True Theosophical Stone, whereby all animal, vegetable and mineral things are blessed and multiplied." But he does not apparently suggest that those who, spiritually speaking, have become mystic alchemists and tingeing stones in and through Christ are for that reason empowered, actually and literally, to transmute material metals, or otherwise to produce physical gold by a super-physical act. We shall see when the time comes to what extent, if any, Paracelsus was the originator of this fantastic view and may be the source of Böhme's reveries, as well as of the undeveloped *arrière pensée* in the mind of Fludd and his apologist.

Two things remain to be said, as final considerations arising out of this chapter: (1) Had Jacob Böhme proceeded to what he calls the *praxis*, his deep consideration of powers and offices belonging to the regenerated would have brought him grievous disillusion when it was applied to the work on metals. If any one in the occult schools and their houses of supreme folly should challenge this statement, the matter must be left in his hands, not that he would be called upon to produce gold on his own part by arch-natural means, but as an irreducible minimum he should give evidence that it has

¹ It is quite certain and matters nothing to the present subject that Fludd would have accepted the historical claims and evidences in respect of metallic transmutation as they stand forth in the alchemical literature which preceded his own time. The evidences on the point of alleged fact would have satisfied him if they had been only half as strong as they are actually in appearance, for on such matters he was by temperament unduly credulous in an age which must be called credulous, within and without the circle of occult arts and philosophy. On the other hand, I do not think that he understood the jargon of alchemists or had much patience towards it, though he would not have challenged the duty of those who had performed the work to keep its secrets secretly. When he says that it belongs to natural philosophy he is recognizing its broad claim as a valid mental proposition, but he proceeds forthwith to that which for him is its only true and practical aspect, the Theosophical Stone—"Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God," by Whom the world was made and being made was blessed and set to grow and multiply in its own order and kingdom.

been performed, shewing when, by whom and where. We have seen radium transform into helium and matter changes daily in the hands of many chemists; but it is a work of Nature in the one and of science in the other case: it takes place in laboratories, not in Sanctuaries of rebirth. We may yet arrive at a process for "building up heavy atoms of gold from lighter metals"; but where shall search be followed in any lexicon of physicists or in sane psychology for terms to characterise the proposition that such upbuilding is reserved to those who have been "born again in the spirit"? (2) In respect of Robert Fludd his *Spiritual Alchemy* is excellent and perfect, like the "new commandment" of a Prince Rose Croix, but unfortunately it leads nowhere. It signifies but little in the living sense if there is an Alchemy which tells us that the Stone is Christ, unless it can offer also a fuller light on the finding of this Stone within us than is taught in official houses of faith and doctrine. The Lost Word of Freemasonry is Christ in the High Degrees, and is said to be found therein; but here is only an aid to reflection, and Masonry for this reason is a gift of remembrance and not a way of attainment. If such and such only is the story of Alchemy on its physical side, it profits nothing that it has been told. We might fare no worse in believing that there is something in the transmutation of metals on the faith of any single witness who seems to carry authentic seals.

CHAPTER II

MODERN VIEWS ON THE HERMETIC MYSTERY

WE have seen that Jacob Böhme, by his own account, had not gone on to the *praxis*. There is no evidence to shew that he had ever engaged personally in any experiments which would answer to the denomination of chemistry at that period, or even that he had witnessed any. On the other hand, there is every reason to suppose that he was fairly conversant with what was being said and done in a subject which was about him on every side, which was in all men's mouths, and on which almost every month brought forth some new venture in the form of tract or volume. In his own revelations he made use of the simple and more comprehensive alchemical terms, which were indeed of general acceptance. His extant correspondence tells us that he was at least occasionally appealed to by those on the quest in metals, and he is likely to have been visited by alchemists. In the booths and the market places, in his own stall or kitchen, the Great Work may have been debated often enough, he taking a part therein. His revelations, moreover, belong to the hectic epoch of Rosicrucian claims and clamour: they are never mentioned in his writings, but he could not fail to know concerning them, and it is even possible that some of the pamphlets put forth on behalf of the Brotherhood may have given him a first intimation that there was another ground of Alchemy than that which Thomas Vaughan called in his later day "the blind torturing of metals". But whether he derived impressions in this manner and they were unfolded subsequently by the quick spirit within him, or whether they came independently, the point is that he had neither been taught a lesson by failure in laboratory gropings nor had he attempted to produce gold by the arch-natural process in the authenticity of which he believed, so that he was spared—as we have also seen—another and for him more serious failure. It follows that his contribution to the alchemical subject was one of wild speculation, reflected

possibly—as I have intimated—among other sources from the obscure reveries of Paracelsus, on a kind of psycho-transmutation, which was simpler and much more efficient than anything accomplished in laboratories. With these I shall deal in their place, being concerned in this initial chapter with those only who have fashioned the spiritual hypothesis at their desks and familiarised it in the modern occult circles. It happens that, from first to last, they were not practitioners in chemistry.

Robert Fludd, of course, must have tried experiments in his day, for the paths of his quest were many, as his folios shew ;¹ but the fact remains that he came out of the laboratory to write on *Alchemia*, as upon a Divine Art and Science, upon the Theosophical Stone of Scripture and the Mystic Body of adeptships in light derived from St. Paul. It cannot be said that he contributed anything substantial to the modern theme and view, for his works were in Latin, and they have never been easy of access in this country, because they were printed abroad and found a public there. He is at best a connecting link between Jacob Böhme, who had a considerable following in England, and the next stage of the subject, more than two hundred years after the Kentish Theosophist was laid in his grave at Bearstead. In the year 1850 there was published anonymously *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*, written by Mary Anne South, afterwards Mrs. Atwood, at the age of thirty-three years: it was printed in large octavo and extended to nearly five hundred pages.² Written with extraordinary

¹ The most elaborate and ambitious of his works is *Utriusque Cosmi Majoris scilicet et Minoris Metaphysica, Physica atque Technica Historia*. It embodies distinct treatises on arithmetic, geometry, music, perspective, cosmography, astrology, and even the art of war, not to speak of music—including that of the spheres—geomantic and pythagorical numerology, and so forth. He wrote also on optics, physiognomy and the art of memory. It is more especially in *Summum Bonum, sub nomine Joachim Fritz*, that a specific and considerable section is devoted to Alchemy, but it is of the class that has been described in my text, a spiritual and mystical chemistry, contrasted with another which is spurious and goes in quest of vain tinctures. *Clavis Philosophiæ et Alchymicæ* includes a new exposition and defence of Divine Alchemy, as an answer in fine to his continental critics.

² *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery, with a Dissertation on the more celebrated Alchemical Philosophers, being an attempt towards the Recovery of the Ancient Experiment of Nature*. London: Trelawney Saunders, 1850. A post-humous second edition appeared at Belfast in 1918, based on two corrected copies—one being in the hand of the authoress—and a third, at the same place, in 1920. Always excessively rare in its original issue, the fashion which I have mentioned caused a demand to grow up during the intervening sixty-eight years.

18 VIEWS ON THE HERMETIC MYSTERY

elaboration and in terms as strange as its subject, there is no doubt that it set the fashion of occult thought for something like fifty years on the higher understanding of Alchemy. There is no doubt also that as the work of a young woman it was and will remain a notable and almost monumental performance. The fact of its authorship did not emerge clearly for many years after its appearance, but it happened that during the interim adventitious circumstances added an artificial mystery to that which inhered in the subject and—it may be said—in the peculiarity of its treatment.

The *Suggestive Inquiry* opens with a summary sketch of alchemical literature and its writers, nearly in chronological order and designed apparently to shew that there was not only a long line of claimants to success in metallic transmutation but a recurring testimony to the fact that metals were transmuted literally in the past. It begins in the twilight of myths, accepts all attributions of authorship, however questioned and questionable, and concludes its examination—not perhaps unwisely—with Eirenæus Philalethes. A Theory of Transmutation is presented in the next place, with special reference to the First Matter of Alchemy, concerning which it is affirmed, as an inference from many citations, (1) that it is “the homogeneity of the radical substance of things”, otherwise “the radical moisture of which they are uniformly composed”¹; (2) that this is “a fluid or vitalising principle invisibly permeating all things”, a “distinct substance universally diffused”; (3) that it is “the simple generated substance of life and light, immanifestly flowing throughout Nature”;² (4) that it is “a pure ethereality”³ which can be separated by artificial means; (5) that it reaches perfection “earliest and easiest” in the mineral kingdom and there produces gold; (6) that in vegetable life it gives the Elixir of the Wise, “through superior skill and coction”⁴; and (7) that as regards the

¹ See part i, c. 2, original edition, pp. 68, 69, and reprint of 1920, pp. 72, 73. The whole Hermetic doctrine is said to hinge hereon.

² *Ibid.*, p. 74 and pp. 78, 79. Homberg, Boerhaave, and Boyle are cited in this connexion. Also pp. 85 and 90.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 91 and p. 96. This definition is said to be founded on the concurrent sense of many alchemical philosophers. But the “pure ethereality” of Nature is an expression which belongs to Mrs. Atwood, and to her only; it is not used by alchemists and no definite meaning can be attached to it.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91 and p. 97.

kingdom of animals it assumes in men "an Image that is Divine and more potent than all the rest".¹

This constitutes Mrs. Atwood's "exoteric view" of the subject, for we can pass over the fact that she adds thereto a translation of *Tractatus Aureus* under the name of Hermes Trismegistus, premising (1) that it has been "considered to be one of the most ancient and complete pieces of alchemical writing extant", and (2) that "it wears the impress of very great antiquity."² The question of metallic transmutation is now suspended completely and in the bulk of the work which follows, after one initial statement, we have to glean as we can best her reasons for presenting it as a fact of science reposing on veridic testimony. And the attempt proves a failure.

The sole connection, according to Part II of the *Suggestive Inquiry*, which subsists between Alchemy and the modern science of chemistry is one of terms only.³ Alchemy is not an art in metals, but it is the Art of Life; the chemical phraseology is a veil only. It was adopted, however, not with any arbitrary desire to conceal for the sake of concealment, or even to insure safety during ages of intolerance, but because the alchemical experiment is attended with real danger to man in his normal state. That which the adepts strove most strenuously to protect in their writings was the nature of the Hermetic vessel.⁴ It was affirmed to be a Divine Secret, and yet no one can study the texts intelligently without being convinced that this Vessel is Man himself. The *Centrum Naturæ Concentratum*, for example, to quote only one among many texts, 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

¹ *Ibid.*, The "image" is said to remain an embryo "in this life", but this is presumably under normal circumstances and for the rank and file of man. It is added immediately that "when unfolded through a new birth in universal intelligence" the Divine Image "transcends the limits of this nether sphere and passes into communion with the highest life". The inspiration is Jacob Böhme.

² This is Mrs. Atwood's judgment, but it "wears" nothing of the kind; there is no Greek original and even as a Latin forgery it must be called late. I shall mention it again at the end of my fourth chapter.

³ See Mrs. Atwood's original edition, p. 135, and that of 1920, p. 143.

⁴ *Mariæ Prophetissæ Practica* and other texts are quoted in this connection and will be considered on this subject in their several places. Meanwhile it must be said that there is nothing less concealed than the Vessel of Art in the general succession of texts on which Mrs. Atwood depends for her thesis that the alchemical subject is Man.

20 VIEWS ON THE HERMETIC MYSTERY

primacy among the students of Nature will nowhere find a greater or better subject wherein to obtain his desire than in himself.¹ For he is able to draw unto himself what alchemists call the Central Salt of Nature ; he possesses all things in his regenerated wisdom and can unlock the most hidden Mysteries. Man is for 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 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 investigate true psychical experience, having regard especially to the germ of a higher faculty which is not commonly exercised but of which he is possessed, and whereby the forms of things and the hidden springs of Nature become known intuitively. Concerning this faculty the alchemists speak magisterially, as if it had enlightened their understandings, so that they had entered into alliance with Omniscient Nature, and as if their individual consciousness had become one with Universal Consciousness. The first Key of the Hermetic Mystery is in Mesmerism, not working, however, in the therapeutic sphere but rather with a theurgic object, comparable to that after which the ancients aspired and the attainment of which is affirmed to have been consequent on initiation into the Greater Mysteries of ancient Greece. Between the process of these Mysteries and the process of Alchemy there is said to be a traceable correspondence, and it is submitted that the end was identical in both cases. The danger which demanded secrecy was the same also, being that of the Dweller on the Threshold, according to the goblin terminology which modern occultism has borrowed from *Zanoni*, otherwise, the distortions and deceptions of the astral world, which lead into irrational confusion.

Into this world the mesmeric trance commonly transfers its patients, while the endeavour of Hermetic Art was not only to liberate the subject from his material bonds but to guarantee the truth of his experiences in a higher order of

¹ There is something to be said of this tract which appeared under the name of Alipuli, for the first time, in a German edition of 1682, with a claim on an Arabic origin.