

*Alchemy is Occult Chemistry,  
as old as man himself*



## ***Abstract***

Everything which exists in this, our world, is made up of three principles and four aspects, just as is the case with man himself. As man is a composite being, consisting of a body, a rational soul and an immortal spirit, so each object in nature has an objective exterior, a vital soul, and a divine spark which is purely spiritual and subjective.

The basis of Magic is the faculty of Kriyāśakti, creative in its effects. Like the lightning conductor which leads the electric fluid, Kriyāśakti conducts the creative Quintessence and gives it direction. Led haphazardly, it can kill; directed by the human intellect, it can create according to a predetermined plan.

History tells us that Alchemy was cultivated in China more than sixteen centuries before our era, and that it had never been flourishing more than during the first centuries of Christianity. And that it is towards the end of the fourth century, when the East opened its gates to the commerce of the Latin races, that Alchemy once again penetrated into Europe. Byzantium and Alexandria, the two principal centres of this commerce, were suddenly inundated with works on transmutation, while it was known that Egypt no longer had any.

All that was known concerning Alchemy, from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, was imported into Europe from China and transformed later into Hermetic writings. Most of these writings have been fabricated by the Greeks and the Arabs in the eighth and ninth centuries, re-fabricated in the Middle Ages, and even now remain incomprehensible.

The occult sciences, or rather the key which alone explains the jargon in which they are expressed, cannot be divulged. Like the Sphinx who dies the moment the enigma of its being is guessed by an Oedipus, they remain occult only as long as they are unknown to the uninitiated.



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**T**HE LANGUAGE OF ARCHAIC CHEMISTRY OR ALCHEMY has always been, like that of ancient religions, symbolical.

We have shown in *The Secret Doctrine* that everything in this world of effects has three attributes or the triple synthesis of the seven principles. In order to state this more clearly, let us say that everything which exists in this, our world, is made up of three principles and four aspects, just as is the case with man himself. As man is a composite being, consisting of a body, a rational soul and an immortal spirit, so each object in nature has an objective exterior, a vital soul, and a divine spark which is purely spiritual and subjective. As the first of these propositions cannot be denied, the second can hardly be either, for if official Science admits that metals, woods, minerals, powders and drugs can produce effects, then it tacitly recognises the latter. As for the third, the presence of an absolute quintessence in every atom, materialism, which has no use for the *anima mundi*, utterly denies it.

Much good may it derive from that. As materialism is but a proof of moral and spiritual blindness, we may well let the blind lead the blind, and leave it at that.

Thus, as with all else, every science has its three fundamental principles, and may be practically applied by the use of all three, or of only one of them. Before Alchemy existed as a science, its quintessence alone acted in nature's correlations (as indeed it still does) and on all its planes. When there appeared on earth men endowed with a superior intelligence, they allowed it to act, and from it they learned their first lessons. All they had to do was to imitate it. But in order to reproduce the same effects at will, they had to develop in their human constitution a power called, in occult phraseology, *Kriyāśakti*. This faculty, *creative* in its effects, is so, simply because it is the active agent of that attribute on the objective plane. Like the lightning conductor which leads the electric fluid, the faculty of *Kriyāśakti* conducts the creative Quintessence and gives it direction. Led haphazardly, it can kill; directed by the human intellect, it can create according to a predetermined plan.

Thus was born Alchemy, magnetic Magic, and many other branches of the tree of occult science.

When in the course of ages nations developed, which in their egotism and ferocious vanity were convinced of their complete superiority to all others, past or present, when the development of *Kriyāśakti* became more and more difficult and the divine faculty had almost disappeared from the earth, they forgot little by little the science of their earlier ancestors. They even went further and rejected altogether the tradition of their antediluvian parents, denying with contempt the presence of a spirit and a soul in this, the most ancient of all sciences. Of the three great attributes of nature, they only accepted the existence of matter or rather its illusory aspect, for of real

matter or SUBSTANCE even the materialists themselves confess a complete ignorance; and truly they have never caught the slightest glimpse of it, not even from afar.

Thus came to birth modern Chemistry.

Everything changes as an effect of cyclic evolution. The perfect circle becomes One, a triangle, a quaternary and a quinary. The creative principle issued from the ROOTLESS ROOT of absolute Existence, which has neither beginning nor end, or *perpetuum mobile* symbolized as swallowing its tail in order to reach its head, has become the *Azoth* of the Alchemists of the Middle Ages. The circle becomes a triangle, emanating the one from the other as Minerva from the head of Jupiter. The circle hypothecates the absolute; the right line represents a metaphysical synthesis and the left a physical one. When Mother Nature shall have made of her body the horizontal line joining these two, then will be the moment of the awakening of cosmic activity. Until then, *Purusha*, the Spirit, is separated from *Prakriti* — material nature still unevolved. Its legs exist only in a state of potentiality; it cannot move nor has it arms wherewith to work on the objective form of things sublunary. Lacking limbs, *Purusha* cannot begin to build until it has mounted onto the neck of *Prakriti* the blind,<sup>1</sup> when the triangle will become the pentagon, the microcosmic star. Before reaching this stage they must both pass through the quaternary state and that of the cross which conceives. This is the cross of earthly magi, who make a great display of their faded symbol, namely, the cross divided into four parts, which may read “Taro,” “Tora,” “Ator,” and “Rota.” The Virgin-Substance, or Adamic Earth, the Holy Spirit of the old Alchemists of the Rosy Cross, has now become with the Kabbalists, those flunkeys of modern science,  $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$ , *Soda*, and  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_6\text{O}$  or *Alcohol*.

Ah! Star of the morning, daughter of the dawn, how fallen from thine high estate — poor Alchemy! On this our ancient planet, thrice deceived, everything is doomed to tire and to pass away. And yet that which once was, still is and forever shall be, even to the end of time. Words change and their meaning becomes quickly disfigured. But eternal ideas remain and shall not pass away. Under the ass’ skin in which Princess-Nature wrapped herself to deceive fools, as in the fairy-tale of Perrault, the disciple of the philosophers of old will always recognize the truth, and will adore it. This ass’ skin, it would seem, is more congenial to the tastes of modern philosophism and materialistic alchemists, who sacrifice the living soul for the dead form, than Princess-nature in all her nakedness. And thus it is that the skin only falls before Prince Charming, who recognises the marriage betrothal in the ring sent. To all those courtiers who hover round Dame Nature while dismembering her material covering, she has nothing to offer but her outer skin. It is for this reason that they console themselves by giving new names to things as old indeed as the world itself, declaring loudly the while that they have discovered something new. The necromancy of Moses has become modern Spiritualism; and the Science of the old Initiates of the Temple, the Magnetism of the Gymnosophists of India, the healing Mesmerism of Aesculapius, “the Saviour,” are accepted now only when called *hypnotism*, in other words black magic under its proper title.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sāṅkhya* philosophy of Kapila.

False noses everywhere! But let us rejoice; the more false and long they are, the sooner they are sure to become detached and fall on their own accord!

Modern materialists would have us believe that Alchemy, or the transmutation of base metals into gold and silver, has from the earliest ages been but *charlatanism* pure and simple. According to them, it is not a science but a superstition, and therefore all those who believe, or pretend to believe in it, are either dupes or impostors. Our encyclopaedias are full of abusive epithets levelled at Alchemists and Occultists.

Now, Gentlemen-Academicians, this may be all very well, but let us then have some proof of the *absolute* impossibility of transmutation. Tell us how it is that a metallic base is found even in alkalis. We know certain learned physicists, to be sure, who think the idea of reducing the elements to their first state, and even to their one and primordial essence (see for instance Mr. Crookes and his *meta-elements*), not as stupid as it appears at first sight. Gentlemen, these elements, when once you have allowed yourself the hypothesis that they all existed in the beginning in the igneous mass, from which you say the earth's crust has been formed, may be reduced again and brought through a series of transmutations to be once more that which they originally were. The question is to find a solvent sufficiently strong to effect in a few days or even years that which nature has taken ages to perform. Chemistry and, above all, Mr. Crookes has sufficiently proved that there exists so notably a relationship between metals, as to indicate not only a common source but an identical genesis.

Then, Gentlemen, you who laugh so loudly at alchemy and the alchemists and reject that Science, how is it that one of your first chemists, Monsieur Berthelot, author of *La Synthèse chimique*, deeply read in alchemical lore, is unable to deny to alchemists *a most profound knowledge of matter*?

And again, how is it that Monsieur M.-E. Chevreul, that venerable *savant*, whose knowledge, no less than his advanced age, in the full possession of all his faculties,<sup>1</sup> has moved to wonder our present generation, which, with its overweening self-sufficiency, is so difficult to penetrate or rouse; how is it, we say, that he who made so many useful discoveries for modern industry, should have possessed so many works on alchemy?

Is it not possible that the key to his longevity may be found in one of these very works, which, according to you, are but a heap of superstitions as foolish as they are ridiculous?

The fact that this great scholar, the dean of modern chemistry, took the trouble to bequeath after his death, to the Library of the Museum, the numerous works he possessed on this "false science," is most revealing. Nor have we yet heard that the luminaries of Science attached to this sanctuary have thrown these books on alchemy into the wastepaper basket, as useless rubbish allegedly full of fantastic reveries engendered by diseased and unbalanced brains.

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<sup>1</sup> [Michel-Eugène Chevreul, famous French chemist, born at Angers, August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1786. He died at Paris, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1889, being then 103 years old. Vide Bio-Bibliographical Index for more data. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

Besides, our scientific men forget two things: in the first place, never having found the key to the *jargon* of these hermetic books, they have no right to decide whether this *jargon* preaches truth or falsehood; and secondly, that Wisdom was certainly not born for the first time with them, nor must it necessarily *die out* with our modern sages.

Each Science, we repeat, has its *three aspects*; everybody will grant that there must be two, the objective and the subjective. Under the first heading we may put the alchemical transmutations with or without the *powder of projection*; under the second, all intellectual speculations. Under the third is hidden a meaning of the highest spirituality. Now since the symbols of the first two are identical in design and possess, moreover, as I have tried to prove in *The Secret Doctrine*, seven interpretations varying in meaning with their application to one or another of the domains of nature, the physical, the psychic, or the purely spiritual, it will be easily understood that only high initiates are able to interpret the *jargon* of hermetic philosophers. And then again, since there exist more false than true alchemical writings in Europe, Hermes himself would lose his way. Who does not know, for instance, that a certain series of formulae may find their concrete application of positive value in technical alchemy, while the same symbol, on being employed to render an idea belonging to the psychological domain, will possess an entirely different meaning? Our late brother Kenneth MacKenzie expresses this well when he says, speaking of Hermetic Sciences:

. . . To the practical Alchymist, whose object was the production of wealth by the special rules of his art, the evolution of a semi-mystical philosophy was a secondary consideration, and to be pursued without any reference to an ultimate system of theosophy; while the sage, who had ascended to the higher plane of metaphysical contemplation, would reject the mere material part of these studies as unworthy of his further consideration.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it becomes evident that symbols, taken as guides to the transmutation of metals, have very little to do with the methods which we now call *chemical*. Here is a question, by the way: Who of our great scientists would dare to treat as impostors such men as Paracelsus, Van Helmont, Roger Bacon, Boerhaave and many other illustrious Alchemists?

While Gentlemen-Academicians mock at the Kabbala as well as at Alchemy (though at the same time taking from this latter their inspirations and their best discoveries), the kabbalists and occultists of Europe in general begin *sub rosa*<sup>2</sup> to persecute the secret sciences of the East. In fact, the Wisdom of the Orient does not exist for our sages of the West; it died with the three Magi. Nevertheless, alchemy, which if we search diligently, we shall find as the foundation of all occult sciences — comes to them from the Far East. Some assert that it is merely the posthumous evolution of the magic of the Chaldeans. We shall try to prove that the latter is only the heir, first to antediluvian alchemy, and later to the alchemy of the Egyptians. Olaus Borrichius, an authority on this question, tells us to search for its origin in the remotest antiquity.

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<sup>1</sup> *Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia*, p. 310

<sup>2</sup> [Under the rose, a phrase suggesting secrecy or confidentiality.]

To what epoch may we ascribe the origin of Alchemy? No modern writer is able to tell us exactly. Some give us Adam as its first adept; others attribute it to the indiscretion of “the sons of God, who seeing that the daughters of men were beautiful, took them for their wives.”<sup>1</sup> Moses and Solomon are later adepts in the science, for they were preceded by Abraham, who was in turn antedated in the *Science of Sciences* by Hermes. Does not Avicenna tell us that the *Smaragdine Tablet* — the oldest existing treatise on Alchemy — was found on the body of Hermes, buried centuries ago at Hebron, by Sarah, the wife of Abraham? But “Hermes” never was the name of a man, but a generic title, just as the term *Neo-Platonist* was used in former times, and “Theosophist” is being used in the present. What in fact is known about Hermes Trismegistos, “thrice-greatest”? Less than we know of Abraham, his wife Sarah and his concubine Agar, which St. Paul declares to be *an allegory*.<sup>2</sup> Even in the time of Plato, Hermes was already identified with the Thoth of the Egyptians. But this word *thoth* does not only mean “Intelligence”; it also means “assembly” or *school*. In reality Thoth-Hermes is simply the personification of the voice (or sacred teaching) of the sacerdotal caste of Egypt; the voice of the Great Hierophants. And if this is the case, can we tell at what prehistoric epoch this hierarchy of initiated priests began to flourish in the land of *Chemi*? Even if this question could be answered, we should still be far from a solution of our problems. For ancient China, no less than ancient Egypt, claims to be the fatherland of the *alkahest* and of physical and transcendental alchemy; and China may very possibly be right. A missionary, an old resident of Peking, William A.P. Martin, calls it the “cradle of alchemy.” *Cradle* is hardly the right word perhaps, but it is certain that the Celestial Empire has the right to class herself amongst the very oldest schools of occult Sciences. In any case, it is from China that alchemy has penetrated into Europe, as we shall prove.

In the meantime, our reader may choose; for another pious missionary, Hood, assures us solemnly that Alchemy was born in the garden “planted in Eden on the side towards the East.” If we may believe him, it is the offspring of Satan who tempted Eve in the shape of a Serpent; but he forgot to patent his discovery, as our brave writer shows us by the very name of that science. For the Hebrew word for Serpent is *Nahash*, plural *Nahashim*. As is obvious, it is from this last syllable *shim* that the words chemistry and alchemy are derived. Is this not clear as day and established in agreement with the severest rules of modern philology?

Let us now turn to our proofs.

The first authorities on archaic sciences — William Godwin amongst others — have shown us on incontestable evidence that, though Alchemy was widely cultivated by nearly all the nations of antiquity long before our era, the Greeks began to study it only after the beginning of the Christian era and that it did not become popularised until very much later. Of course by this are meant only the lay Greeks, those not initiated. For the adepts of the Hellenic temples of *Magna Graecia* knew it from the days of the Argonauts. The origin of Alchemy in Greece dates therefore from this time, as is well illustrated by the allegorical story of the “Golden Fleece.”

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<sup>1</sup> [Genesis vi, 2]

<sup>2</sup> St. Paul explains it quite clearly: according to him, Sarah represents “Jerusalem which is above” and Agar “a mountain in Arabia,” *Sinai*, which “answereth Jerusalem which now is.” (*Galatians* iv, 25-36)

Thus we need only to read what Suidas says in his *Lexicon* with reference to the expedition of Jason, too well known to require telling here:

*Δέρμας*, Deras, the Golden Fleece which Jason and the Argonauts, after a voyage on the Black Sea in Colchis, took with the aid of Medea, daughter of Aiëtes, King of Aia. *Only instead of taking that which the poets pretended they took, it was a treatise written on a skin (δέρμασι) which explained how gold could be made by chemical means.* Contemporaries called this skin of a ram the Golden Fleece, most probably because of the great value attaching to the instructions on it.

This explanation is a little clearer and much more probable than the erudite vagaries of our modern mythologists,<sup>1</sup> for we must remember that the Colchis of the Greeks is the modern Imeritia on the Black Sea; that the *Rion*, the big river which crosses the country, is the Phasis of the ancients, which even to this day carries traces of gold; and that the traditions of the indigenous races that live on the shores of the Black Sea, such as the Mingrelians, the Abhazians and the Imeritians are all full of this old legend of the golden fleece. Their ancestors, they say, have all been “makers of gold,” that is to say they possessed the secret of transmutation which today is called Alchemy.

In any case it is a fact that the Greeks, with the exception of the initiated, were ignorant of the hermetic sciences up to the time of the Neo-Platonists (towards the end of the fourth and fifth centuries), and knew nothing of the *real* alchemy of the ancient Egyptians, whose secrets were certainly not revealed to the public at large. In the third century of the Christian era we find the Emperor Diocletian publishing his famous edict, ordering a most careful search in Egypt for books treating of the fabrication of gold, which were to be burned at a public *auto-da-fé*. W. Godwin tells us that after this there did not remain one single work on Alchemy above ground, in the kingdom of the Pharaohs, and for the period of two centuries it was never spoken of.<sup>2</sup> He might have added that there still remained *underground* a large number of such works, written on papyrus and buried with the mummies ten millenniums old. The whole secret lies in the ability to recognise such a treatise on Alchemy in what appears to be only a fairy tale, such as we have in that of the *golden fleece* or in the “romances” of the earlier Pharaohs. But it was not the secret wisdom hidden in the allegories of the papyri which introduced Alchemy or the hermetic sciences to Europe. History tells us that Alchemy was cultivated in China more than sixteen centuries before our era, and that it had never been flourishing more than during the first centuries of Christianity. And it is towards the end of the fourth century, when the East opened its gates to the commerce of the Latin races that Alchemy once again penetrated into Europe. Byzantium and Alexandria, the two principal centres of this

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<sup>1</sup> A. de Gubernatis (*Zoological Mythology*, Vol. I, pp. 402-3, 428-32) who finds that because “in Sanskrit the ram is called *mesha* or *meha*, he who spills or who pours out,” the golden fleece of the Greeks should therefore be “the mist . . . raining down water”; and F.L.W. Schwartz who compares the fleece of a ram to a stormy night and tells us that “the speaking ram is the voice which seems to issue from an electric cloud (*Ursprung der Mythologie*, p. 219, note 1), makes us laugh. These brave learned men are rather too full of clouds themselves ever to find their fantastic interpretation accepted by serious students. And yet, P. Decharme, the author of *Mythologie de la Grèce antique*, seems to share their opinions.

<sup>2</sup> [*Lives of the Necromancers*, London, 1834 & 1876. — Boris de Zirkoff.]

commerce, were suddenly inundated with works on transmutation, while it was known that Egypt no longer had any. Whence came then these treatises full of instructions on how to make gold and to prolong human life? It is certainly not from the sanctuaries of Egypt, as these Egyptian treatises did not exist any longer. We affirm that most of them were merely more or less correct interpretations of the allegorical stories of the green, blue and yellow Dragons, and the rose tigers, alchemical symbols of the Chinese.

All the treatises that are to be found now in the public libraries and the Museums of Europe are nothing but questionable hypotheses of certain mystics of various times, left halfway on the road of the great Initiation. All that is needed is to compare some of the so-called “hermetic” treatises with those which have been recently brought over from China, to recognise that Thoth-Hermes, or rather the science of that name, is quite innocent of all that. It follows from this that all that was known concerning Alchemy, from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, was imported into Europe from China and transformed later into Hermetic writings. Most of these writings have been fabricated by the Greeks and the Arabs, in the eighth and ninth centuries, re-fabricated in the Middle Ages, and remain incomprehensible in the nineteenth century. The Saracens, whose most famous school of Alchemy was at Bagdad, while bringing with them more ancient traditions, had lost their secret themselves. The great Geber merits rather the title of Father of modern Chemistry than of Hermetic Alchemy, although it is to him that is attributed the importation of Alchemical Science into Europe.

Ever since the act of vandalism committed by Diocletian, the key to the secrets of Thoth-Hermes lies deeply buried but in the initiatory crypts of the ancient Orient.

Let us then compare the Chinese system with that which is called Hermetic Sciences.

- 1.** The twofold object which both schools aim at is identical; the making of gold and the rejuvenating and prolonging of human life by means of the *menstruum universale* or *lapis philosophorum*. The third object or true meaning of the “transmutation” has been completely neglected by *Christian* adepts; for being satisfied with *their belief in the immortality of the soul*, the adherents of the older alchemists have never properly understood this object. Nowadays, partly through negligence, partly through disuse, it has been completely struck from the *summum bonum* sought for by the alchemists of Christian countries. Nevertheless it is only this last of the three objects which interests the *real* Oriental alchemists. All the Adept-Initiates, despising gold and having a profound indifference for life, care very little about the first two objects of alchemy.
- 2.** Both these schools recognise the existence of *two elixirs*: the great and the small. The use of the second on the physical plane has to do with the transmutation of metals and the restoration of youth. The great “Elixir,” which was only symbolically an elixir, conferred the greatest boon of all: *conscious immortality in the Spirit*, the Nirvāna throughout all cycles, which precedes PARINIRVĀNA, or absolute union with the ONE Essence.
- 3.** The principles which form the basis of the two systems are also identical, namely: the compound nature of metals and their growth emanating from one

common seminal germ. The letter *tsing* in the Chinese alphabet, which stands for “germ,” and *t'ai*, “matrix,” which are found so constantly in Chinese works on alchemy,<sup>1</sup> are the ancestors of the same words which we meet with so frequently in the alchemical treatises of the Hermetists.

4. Mercury and lead, mercury and sulphur are equally in use in the East as in the West, and, adding to these many other ingredients in common, we find that both schools of alchemy accepted them under a triple meaning. It is the last or third of these meanings which European alchemists do not understand.

5. The alchemists of both countries also accept the doctrine of a cycle of transmutations during which the precious metals return to their basic elements.

6. Both Schools of alchemy are closely allied to astrology and magic.

7. And finally they both make use of an *extravagant* phraseology, a fact noticed by the author of “Study of Alchemy in China” who finds that the language of European alchemists, while so entirely different from that of all other Western sciences, imitates perfectly the metaphorical jargon of the Eastern nations, being an excellent proof that alchemy in Europe had its origin in the Far East.

Nor should any objections be raised because we say that Alchemy is intimately allied with *magic* and *astrology*. The word magic is an old Persian term which means *knowledge*, and embraces all the sciences, both physical and metaphysical, studied in those days. The sacerdotal and learned classes of the Chaldeans taught *magic*, from which came *magism* and *gnosticism*. Was not Abraham called a “Chaldean”? And it is Joseph, a pious Jew, who, speaking of the patriarch, says that he taught *mathematics*, or the esoteric science, in Egypt, including *the science of the stars*, a professor of magism being of necessity an astrologer.

But it would be a great mistake to confuse the alchemy of the Middle Ages with that of antediluvian times. As it is understood in the present day, it has three principal agents: the *philosopher's stone* used in the transmutation of metals; the *Alkahest* or the universal solvent; and the *elixir vitae*, possessing the property of indefinitely prolonging human life. But neither the real philosophers nor the Initiates occupied themselves with the last two. The three alchemical agents, like the Trinity, *one and indivisible*, have become three distinct agents solely through Science falling under the influence of human egotism. While the sacerdotal caste, grasping and ambitious, anthropomorphized the Spiritual and absolute Unity by dividing it into three *persons*, the class of false mystics separated the divine Force from the universal *Kriyāśakti* and turned it into *three agents*. In his *Magia naturalis*, Giambattista della Porta tells this clearly:

. . . I promise you neither mountains of gold nor the philosopher's stone . . . nor even that golden liquor which renders immortal him who drinks it . . . All that is *merely dreams*; for the world being mutable and subject to change, all that it produces must be destroyed.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Study of Alchemy in China,” by the Rev. W.A.P. Martin, of Peking.

[Paper read in October 1868, at the meeting of the Oriental Society, at New Haven, Conn., U.S.A. — Boris de Zirkoff.]

Geber, the great Arabian alchemist, is even more explicit. He appears to have written a prophetic forecast of the future, in the following words which we translate:

If we have concealed anything, ye sons of learning, wonder not; for we have not concealed it from you, but have delivered it in such language as that it may be hid from evil men, and that the unjust and vile might not know it. But, ye sons of truth, search and you shall find this most excellent gift of God, which he has reserved for you. *Ye sons of folly, impiety and profanity, avoid you the seeking after this knowledge; it will be destructive to you, and precipitate you into contempt and misery.*<sup>1</sup>

Let us see what other writers have had to say on the question. Having begun to think that alchemy was after all solely a philosophy entirely metaphysical, instead of a physical science (in which they erred), they declared that the extraordinary transmutation of base metals into gold was merely a figurative expression for the transformation of man, freeing him of his hereditary evils and of his infirmities, in order that he might attain to a degree of regeneration which would elevate him to a divine Being.

This in fact is the synthesis of transcendental alchemy and its principal object; but for all that, it does not represent *every end* which this science has in view. Aristotle who told Alexander that “the philosopher’s stone was not a stone at all, that it is in each man, everywhere, at all times, and is called the *final aim* of all philosophers,” was mistaken in his first proposition though right with regard to the second. In the physical sphere, the secret of the *Alkahest* produces an ingredient which is called the philosopher’s stone; but for those who care not for perishable gold, the *alkahest*, as Professor Wilder tells us,<sup>2</sup> “is but the *algeist*, or divine spirit, which removes every grosser nature, that its unholy principles may be removed . . . ” The *elixir vitae* therefore is only the water of life which, as Godwin says, “is a universal medicine possessing the power to rejuvenate man and to prolong life indefinitely.”

Some forty years ago, Dr. Hermann Kopp, published in Germany a *Geschichte der Chemie*. Speaking of alchemy, looked at in its special role of forerunner of modern chemistry, the German doctor makes use of a very significant expression which the Pythagorean and the Platonist will understand at once. “If,” says he, “the term *world* stands for the *microcosm* represented by man, then it becomes easy to interpret the writings of the alchemists.”

Irenaeus Philalethes declares that:

The philosopher’s stone represents the great universe (or macrocosm) and possesses all the virtues of the great system, collected and included in the lesser system. The latter has a magnetic power which draws to it that which it has affinities with in the universe. It is the celestial virtue which spreads throughout creation, but which is epitomized in a miniature abridgment of itself (as man).

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<sup>1</sup> [Quoted by Dr. Alexander Wilder in his *New Platonism and Alchemy*, Albany, N.Y., 1869, p. 26. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.

Full text in our Theosophy and Theosophists Series. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

Listen to what Alipili says in one of his translated works:

He that hath the knowledge of the Microcosm cannot long be ignorant of the knowledge of the Macrocosm. This is that which the Aegyptian industrious searchers of Nature so often said, and loudly proclaimed, that everyone should know himself. This speech their dull Disciples took in a moral sense, and out of ignorance affixt it in their Temples. But I admonish thee whosoever thou art that desireth to dive into the inmost parts of nature, if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee. If thou knowest not the excellency of thine own house, for what doest thou seek and search after the excellency of other things? The universal Orb of the Earth contains not so great mysteries and excellencies as a little Man, formed by God to his image. And he that desires the primacy amongst the studiers of Nature, will nowhere find a greater and better reserve to obtain his desire, than in himself.

Therefore I will here follow the example of the *Aegyptians*, and from my whole heart and certain true experience proved by me, speak to my Neighbour in the *Aegyptians* words, and with a loud voice now proclaim. O Man know thy self; in thee is hid the treasure of treasures . . . <sup>1</sup>

Irenaeus Philaletha Cosmopolita, an English alchemist and Hermetic philosopher, alluding to the persecution to which philosophy was subjected, wrote in 1669:

. . . many do believe (that are strangers to the Art) that if they should enjoy it, they would do such and such things; so also even we did formerly believe, but being grown more wary, by the hazard we have run, we have chosen a more secret method . . . <sup>2</sup>

And the alchemists were wise to do so. For living in an age when for a slight difference of opinion on religious questions, men and women were treated as heretics, placed under a ban and proscribed, and when science was stigmatized as *sorcery*, it was quite natural, as Professor A. Wilder says:

. . . that men cultivating ideas out of the common order would invent a dialect of symbols and passwords by which to communicate with one another, and yet remain unknown by their bloodthirsty adversaries. <sup>3</sup>

The author reminds us of the Hindu allegory of Krishna ordering his adopted mother to look into his mouth. She did and saw therein the entire universe. This agrees exactly with the Kabbalistic teaching which holds that the microcosm is but the faithful reflection of the macrocosm — a photographic copy to him who understands. This is

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<sup>1</sup> [*Centrum Naturae Concentratum*: or the Salt of Nature Regenerated. For the most part improperly called The Philosopher's Stone. Written in Arabick by Alipili a Mauretian, born of Asiatick Parents; published in Low Dutch, 1694, and now done into English, 1696. By a Lover of the Hermetick Science. London, 1696. (British Museum, 1033.d.35.) The translator's name was E. Brice. The passage quoted above may be found on pages 78-80. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

<sup>2</sup> [This is from a small book of Eyræneus Philaletha Cosmopolita entitled *Secrets Revealed: or an open entrance to the Shut Palace of the King*. Containing the greatest treasure in Chymistry, never yet so plainly discovered. Published by William Cooper, Esq., London, 1669. 8vo. The passage may be found in Chapter 13, p. 33, and has been checked with the copy now in the British Museum. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

<sup>3</sup> [*New Platonism and Alchemy*, p. 26. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

why Cornelius Agrippa, perhaps the most generally known of all the alchemists, says:

There is one thing by God created, the subject of all wonderfulness in earth and in heaven; it is actually animal, vegetable and mineral; found everywhere, known by few, by none expressed by his proper name, but hid in numbers, figures and riddles, without which neither alchemy nor natural magic can attain their perfect end.<sup>1</sup>

The allusion becomes even clearer if we read a certain passage in the *Alchemist's Encheiridion* (1672):

Now, in this discourse will I manifest to thee the natural condition of the stone of the philosophers, apparelled with a *triple* garment, even this stone of riches and charity, the strong relief from languishment, in which is contained every secret; being a divine mystery and gift of God, than which there is nothing in this world more sublime. Therefore, diligently observe what I say, namely, that 'tis apparelled with a triple garment, that it to say, with a body, soul and spirit.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, this stone contains: the secret of the transmutation of metals, that of the elixir of long life and of *conscious immortality*.

This last secret was the one which the old philosophers chose to unravel, leaving to the lesser lights with their modern false noses, the pleasure of wearing themselves out in the attempt to solve the first two. It is the *Word* or the "ineffable name," of which Moses said that there was no need to seek it in distant places, "but the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart."<sup>3, 4</sup>

Philalethes, the English alchemist, says the same thing but in other terms:

. . . In the world our writings shall prove a curious-edged knife; to some they shall carve out dainties, and to others it shall serve only to cut their fingers; yet we are not to be blamed; for we do seriously profess to any that shall attempt this Work, that he attempts the highest piece of philosophy that is in nature; and though we write in English, yet our matter will be as hard as Greek to some, who will think they understand us well, when they misconstrue our meaning most perversely; for is it imaginable that they who are fools in Nature, should be wise in our books, which are testimonies unto Nature?<sup>5</sup>

Espagnet warns his readers in the same say:

Let a lover of truth make use of but a few authors, but of best note and experienced truth; let him suspect things that are quickly understood, especially in mystical names and secret operations; for truth lies hid in obscurity, nor do

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<sup>1</sup> [Quoted by Dr. A. Wilder, in *op. cit.*, p. 28. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

<sup>2</sup> [*ibid.* — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

<sup>3</sup> [*Deuteronomy xxx*, 14]

<sup>4</sup> [See "The Ineffable Name" in our Secret Doctrine's First Proposition Series. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>5</sup> [Irenaeus Philaletha or Eirenaeus Philalethes, *Ripley Revived, etc.*, 1678, pp. 159-60. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

philosophers ever write more deceitfully than when plainly, nor ever more truly than when obscurely.<sup>1</sup>

Truth cannot be given to the public; less so today than when the Apostles were advised not to cast pearls before swine.

All these fragments which we have just cited are, we hold, so many proofs of that which we have advanced. Apart from the schools of adepts, almost unapproachable for Western students, there does not exist in the whole world — and more especially in Europe — one single work on occult science, and above all on Alchemy, which is written in clear and precise language, or which offers to the public a system or a method which could be followed as in the physical sciences. Any treatise, which comes from an initiate or an adept, ancient or modern, *unable to reveal all*, limits itself to throwing light on certain problems which are allowed to be disclosed, when needed, to those worthy of *knowing*, while remaining at the same time hidden from those who are unworthy of receiving the truth, for fear they should abuse it. Therefore, he, who complaining of the obscurity and confusion which seems to prevail in the writings of the disciples of the Oriental school, would compare them with those of either the Middle Ages or of modern times, which seem to be more clearly written, would prove only two things: either he deceives the public in deceiving himself; or he advertises modern charlatanism, *knowing all the time* that he is deceiving his readers. It is easy to find semi-modern works which are written with precision and method, but giving only the *personal* ideas of the writer, that is to say, of value only to those *who know absolutely nothing* of the true occult science. We are beginning to make much of Éliphas Lévi, who alone knew, it is true, probably more than all our great European magi of 1889 put together. But, when once the half-dozen books of the Abbé Louis Constant<sup>2</sup> have been read, re-read and learnt by heart, how far are we advanced in practical occult science, or even in the understanding of the theories of the Kabbalists? His style is poetical and quite charming. His paradoxes, and nearly every phrase in his volumes is one, are thoroughly French in character. But even if we learn them so as to repeat them by heart from beginning to end, what, pray, has he really taught us? Nothing, absolutely nothing — except, perhaps, the French language. We know several of the pupils of the great magus of modern times, English, French and German, all men of serious mind, of iron wills, many of whom have sacrificed whole years to these studies. One of his disciples made him a life annuity which he got for upwards of ten years, besides paying him 100 francs for every letter when he was obliged to be away. This person at the end of ten years knew less of magic and of the Kabbala than a chela of ten years' standing of an Indian astrologer. We have in the library at Adyar his letters on magic in several volumes of manuscripts, written in French and translated into English, and we defy the admirers of Éliphas Lévi to show us one single individual who would have become an Occultist, even in theory, by following the teaching of the French magus. Why is this, since he evidently got his secrets from an Initiate? Simply because he *never received the right to initiate others*. Those who know something of occultism will understand what we

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<sup>1</sup> [Quoted by Dr. A. Wilder, in *op. cit.*, p. 29. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

<sup>2</sup> [The proper name of the French Occultist who wrote under the *nom de plume* of Éliphas Lévi.]

mean by this; those who are only *pretenders* will contradict us, and probably hate us all the more for having told such hard truths.

The occult sciences, or rather the *key* which alone explains the jargon in which they are expressed, cannot be divulged. Like the Sphinx who dies the moment the enigma of its being is guessed by an Oedipus, they remain occult only as long as they are unknown to the uninitiated.<sup>1</sup> Then again they can neither be bought nor sold. A Rosicrucian “*becomes, he is not made,*” says an old adage of the Hermetic philosophers, to which the Occultists add, “The science of the gods is mastered by violence; it must be conquered, and does not give itself.” This is exactly what the author of the *Acts of the Apostles* intended to convey when he gave the answer of Peter to Simon Magus:

Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.<sup>2</sup>

Occult knowledge should be used neither to make money, nor to attain any egotistical end, not even as a means to personal vanity.

Let us go further and say at once that — apart from an exceptional case where gold might be the means of saving a whole nation — even the act of transmutation itself, when the only motive is the acquisition of riches, becomes black magic. So that neither the secrets of magic nor of occultism, nor of alchemy, can ever be revealed during the existence of our race, which worships the golden calf with an ever increasing frenzy.

Therefore, of what value would those works be which promise to give us the *key* to initiation into either one or the other of these two sciences, which are in fact only one?

We understand perfectly such Adept-Initiates as Paracelsus and Roger Bacon. The first was one of the great harbingers of modern chemistry; the second that of physics. Roger Bacon in his *Treatise on the Admirable Forces of Art and of Nature* shows this clearly. We find in it a foreshadowing of all the sciences of our day. He speaks in it of cannon powder, and predicts the use of steam as a motive power. The hydraulic press, the diving bell, and the kaleidoscope, are all described therein; he prophesies the invention of flying *machines*, constructed in such a way that he who is seated in the middle of this *mechanical contrivance*, in which we easily recognize a type of the modern balloon, has only to turn a mechanism to set in motion artificial wings which immediately start beating the air in imitation to those of a bird. He then defends his brother alchemists against the accusation of using a secret cryptography.

The Reason then, why wise men have obscured their Mysteries from the multitude, was, because of their deriding and slighting wise men’s Secrets of wisdom, being also ignorant to make a right use of such excellent matters. For if an accident help them to the knowledge of a worthy mystery, they wrest and abuse it to the manifold inconvenience of persons and communities. Hee’s then not discreet, who writes any Secret, unlesse he conceal it from the vulgar, and make the more intelligent pay some labour and sweat before they understand

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<sup>1</sup> [See “Oedipus and Sphinx unriddled,” in our Constitution of Man Series. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>2</sup> [Acts viii, 20]

it. In this stream the whole fleet of wise men have sailed from the beginning of all, obscuring many wayes the abstruser parts of wisdom from the capacity of the generality. Some by Characters and verses have delivered many Secrets. Others by aenigmatical and figurative words . . . Thirdly, they have obscured their Secrets by their manner of Writing, as by Consonants without Vowels, none knowing how to read them, unlesse he know the signification of those words [the hermetic *jargon*] . . .<sup>1</sup>

This kind of cryptography was in use amongst the Jews, the Chaldeans, the Syrians, the Arabs, and even the Greeks, and largely adopted in former times, especially by the Jews.

This is proved by the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament, the books of Moses or the *Pentateuch* rendered ten times more fantastic by the introduction of Masoretic points. But as with the Bible, which has been made to say everything required of it except that which it really did say, thanks to the Masorah and the Fathers of the Church, so it was also with Kabbalistic and alchemical books. The key to both having been lost centuries ago in Europe, the Kabbala (the *good* Kabbala of the Marquis de Mirville, according to the ex-rabbi, the Chevalier Drach, the pious and most Catholic Hebrew scholar) serves now as a witness confirmatory of both the New and the Old Testaments. According to modern kabbalists, the *Zohar* is a book of modern prophecies, especially relating to the *Catholic dogmas of the Latin Church*, and is the fundamental stone of the Gospel; which indeed might be true if it were admitted that both in the Gospels and in the Bible, each name is symbolical and each story allegorical; just as was the case with all sacred writings preceding the Christian canon.

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## Summing up

Before closing this article, which has already become too long, let us make a rapid *résumé* of what we have said.

I do not know if our argument and copious extracts will have any effect on our readers in general. But I am sure, at all events, that what we have said will have the same effect on kabbalists and modern “Masters” as the waving of a red rag in front of a bull; but we have long ceased to fear the sharpest horn. These “Masters” owe all their science to the dead letter of the Kabbala, and to the fantastic interpretation placed on it by some few mystics of the present and the last century, on which “Initiates” of libraries and museums have in their turn made variations; therefore, they are bound to defend such, tooth and nail. People will see but fire and smoke, and he who shouts the louder will remain the victor. Nevertheless — *Magna est veritas et praevalabit.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [The Latin title of Roger Bacon’s work is *De mirabili potestate artis et naturae*, and the date of its original publication is approximately 1256-57. The translation of the passage quoted by H.P. Blavatsky has been checked with the copy in the British Museum which is stated to be a faithful translation “out of Dr. Dee’s own copy, by I.N.” which was published in London in 1659. The passage occurs in Chapter VIII, p. 37. — *Boris de Zirkoff.*]

<sup>2</sup> [Truth is mighty and will prevail.]

**1** It has been asserted that alchemy penetrated into Europe from China, and that, falling into profane hands, alchemy (like astrology) is no longer the pure and divine science of the schools of Thoth-Hermes of the first Egyptian Dynasties.

**2** It is also certain that the *Zohar*, of which both Europe and other Christian countries possess fragments, is not the same as the *Zohar* of Shimon ben-Yohai, but a compilation of old writings and traditions collected by Moses de Leon of Guadalajara in the thirteenth century, who, according to Mosheim, has followed in many cases the interpretations which were given him by Christian Gnostics of Chaldea and Syria where he went to seek them. The real, old *Zohar* is found in its entirety only in the Chaldean *Book of Numbers*, of which there exist now only two or three incomplete copies, which are in the possession of initiated rabbis. One of these lived in Poland, in strict seclusion, and he destroyed his copy before dying in 1817; as for the other, the wisest rabbi of Palestine, he emigrated from Jaffa some few years ago.

**3** Of the real Hermetic books there only remains a fragment known as the *Smaragdine Tablet*, of which we shall presently speak. All the works compiled on the books of Thoth were destroyed and burnt in Egypt by order of Diocletian in the third century of our era. All the others, including *Poimandrēs*, are in their present form merely recollections, more or less vague and erroneous, of different Greek or even Latin authors, who often did not hesitate to palm off their own interpretations as genuine Hermetic fragments. And even if by chance these latter did exist, they would be as incomprehensible to the “Masters” of today as the books of the alchemists of the Middle Ages. In proof of this we have quoted their own personal and thoroughly sincere confessions. We have shown the reasons they give for this:

Their mysteries were too sacred to be profaned by the ignorant, being written down and explained only for the use of a few adept-initiates; and they were also too dangerous to be trusted in the hands of those who were capable of misusing them;

In the Middle Ages the precautions taken were ten times as great; for otherwise they stood a good chance of being roasted alive to the great glory of God and His Church.

**4.** The key to the jargon of the alchemists and to the real meaning of the symbols and allegories of the Kabbala is to be found in the Orient alone. Since it has never been rediscovered in Europe, what then can possibly serve as a guiding star to our modern kabbalists, so that they may recognize the truth in the writings of the Alchemists and in the small number of treatises which, written by *real initiates*, are still to be found in our national libraries?

It follows, therefore, that in rejecting aid from the only quarter whence in this our century they may expect to get the key to the old esotericism and to the Wisdom-Religion, they, whether kabbalists, “elects of God,” or modern “Prophets,” throw to the wind their only chance of studying primitive truths and profiting by them.

At all events we may be sure that it is not the Oriental School which loses by default.

We have permitted ourselves to say that many French kabbalists have often expressed the opinion that the Oriental School will never be worth much, no matter how it may pride itself on possessing secrets unknown to European occultists, *because it admits women into its ranks.*

To this we might answer by repeating the fable told by brother Joseph N. Nutt, “Grand Master” of the Masonic Lodge for Women in the United States,<sup>1</sup> to show what women can do if they are not shackled by males — whether as men or as God:

A lion passing a monument representing an athletic and powerful figure of a man tearing the jaws of a lion said:

If the scene which this represents had been executed by a lion the two figures would have changed places!

The same remark holds good for woman. If only she were allowed to represent the scenes of human life, she would distribute the parts in reverse order. She it was who first took man to the Tree of Knowledge, and made him know Good and Evil; and, if she had been let alone and allowed to do what she wished, she would have led him to the Tree of Life and *thus rendered him immortal.*



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<sup>1</sup> Grand Chapter, State of New York, Order of *The Eastern Star*. Lecture and Discourses in the Grand Chapter: *Woman and the Eastern Star*, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1877.