

Paracelsus on Alchemy and Astrology



From Dr. Franz Hartmann (*Comp., Tr. & Annot.*). *The Life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast, of Hohenheim, Known by the Name of Paracelsus, and the Substance of His Teachings, concerning Cosmology, Anthropology, Pneumatology, Magic and Sorcery, Medicine, Alchemy and Astrology, Philosophy and Theosophy*. Extracted and translated from his rare and extensive works, and from some unpublished manuscripts. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co Ltd., Broadway House, 68-74 Carter Lane, E.C. (2nd ed., 1932) Ch. 8, "Alchemy and Astrology." Full text in our Buddhas and Initiates Series.

THE LOWEST ASPECT OF ALCHEMY IS THE PREPARATION, purification, and combination of physical substances, and from this science has grown the science of modern chemistry, which in its present state is a great advancement over the lower aspect of old chemistry, but which has lost sight entirely of the higher aspects of Nature. A higher advancement of the science of chemistry will bring it again into contact with alchemy. Chemistry decomposes and recombines material substances in certain proportions; it purifies simple substances of all foreign elements, and leaves the primitive elements unchanged; but alchemy changes the character of things, and raises them up into higher states of existence. To exercise this power, not mere mechanical labour, but artistic skill is required.

A person who composes a chemical preparation by manual labour and according to certain rules is a chemist; the weaver who manufactures a cloth, and the tailor who makes a coat, may be called alchemists, because neither clothes nor coats are grown by Nature. The chemist imitates Nature, the artist surpasses her; the labourer lends his hands to Nature, so that she may accomplish something through him. The artist makes use of the material with which Nature provides him, and develops something that exists germinally in Nature. The painter who daubs a wall is a chemist; his work requires skill, but no genius. The artist who composes a picture is an alchemist, because he embodies an idea, and puts his own character into his work.

To understand correctly the meaning of the words alchemy and astrology, it is necessary to understand the intimate relationship and the identity of the Microcosm and Macrocosm, and their mutual interaction. All the powers of the universe are potentially contained in man, and man's physical body and all his organs are nothing else but products and representatives of the powers of Nature. The Microcosm and Macrocosm may not only "be compared together," but they are really and actually essentially one in their power, and one in the constitution of their elements.¹

¹ "Man, being the son of the Microcosm, has in him also all the mineral elements." (*De Peste*)

If I have “manna” in my constitution, I can attract “manna” from heaven. “Melissa” is not only in the garden, but also in the air and in heaven. “Saturn” is not only in the sky, but also deep in the earth and in the ocean. What is “Venus” but the “Artemisia” that grows in your garden? What is “iron” but “Mars”? That is to say, Venus and Artemisia are both the products of the same essence, and Mars and iron are both the manifestations of the same cause. What is the human body but a constellation of the same powers that formed the stars in the sky? He who knows what iron is, knows the attributes of Mars. He who knows Mars, knows the qualities of iron. What would become of your heart if there were no sun in the universe? What would be the use of your *vasa spermatica*² if there were no Venus? To grasp the invisible elements; to attract them by their material correspondences; to control, purify, and transform them by the living power of the Spirit — this is true alchemy.

As the fowl produces a chicken with wings and legs out of the small microcosm contained in the shell of an egg, so the arcana of Nature are ripened by the processes of alchemy. Natural alchemy causes the pear to ripen, and produces grapes on a vine. Natural alchemy separates the useful elements from the food that is put into the stomach, transforms it into chyle and blood, into muscles and bones, and rejects that which is useless. A physician who knows nothing of alchemy can only be a servant of Nature, however well he may be versed in the science of external things; but the alchemist is her lord. If the physician cannot infuse vitality into decaying parts, he cannot effect a cure, but must wait until Nature accomplishes the task; but he who can guide the power of life can guide and command Nature.



² [spermatic vessels, i.e., the instruments of generation]