Some English Alchemical Books

Being an Address

delivered to

The Alchemical Society

on

Friday, October 10th, 1913,

by

Professor John Ferguson, LL.D.,
Honorary President.

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SOME ENGLISH ALCHEMICAL BOOKS.

By Prof. John Ferguson, LL.D.

English printed alchemical literature is not bulky; it may be precious, it has certainly become rare. I have thought that a brief survey of some of the books which I have come across in the course of my inquiries and on which I have made a few notes from time to time, may serve as an introduction to the work of the coming session.

After all, what we know about Alchemy is obtained from books and records. There are no remaining tangible, demonstrable facts. Even supposing that gold coins or medals were ever made from alchemical gold, it is a question whether such relics now exist, and it is still more a matter of evidence whether those extant, if there be such,—which I do not know—are genuine or not.

It is different with technical processes in other departments. Both the methods are known and the objects themselves produced by them, and we can tell how they may or must have been done, even though the described methods are not wholly intelligible, or differ from what we should do now. But in the case of a gold medal or other object, we see the medal certainly and can confirm that it is of gold, but, that the gold was made from mercury or lead or other metal there is no proof, and, even if we believe it, we do not know how it was effected and the books do not explain the process.

All the same, since we have undertaken to investigate the foundations upon which the idea of transmutation is based and the truths which the superstructure may contain, we may as well know what material we have to work upon.

The remark has been already made that the literature in English is not extensive, but it is not the less attractive on that account. It is select and suggests many questions.

In pursuing this survey, however, what exists in manuscript must be excluded, firstly, because of its abundance, which is too great for the brief possibilities of such an address as the present, and, secondly, because of relative inaccessibility. Numbers of manuscripts are preserved in the British Museum, and whoever takes the trouble to consult Black's Catalogue of the Ashmolean MSS. at Oxford, will find more than enough to occupy his attention. I do not speak of the manuscripts which have offered themselves to me in past years, for they were for the most part in Latin and very few indeed were in English, but even now there is no lack of alchemical manuscripts to be had, if one is able and willing to pay a price for them. They are dear, however, and late. One never sees an early manuscript on parchment or even on paper, which might be valuable for supplying a new or unknown tract, or various readings of those known.

Putting all these aside as material for an independent research, attention may be directed to the printed literature.

The printing generally of alchemical books in quan-

tity and especially so in English, began at a comparatively late period. So far as I know the first alchemical book of all was printed in Italy, possibly at Rome, between 1470-80, and it was the *Summa Perfectionis* of Geber. It may have been taken from the Vatican manuscript. There is something rather significant in this selection. It was the only alchemical book printed in the 15th century. It is true there is another work ascribed to the same author, entitled *Flos Naturarum,* which was printed in Italy and is dated 1473, but this is a book of receipts and contains only one or two paragraphs relating to Alchemy; its rarity, besides, puts it out of consideration.

Within recent years it has become the fashion to speak of the reputed author of the *Summa Perfectionis* as the pseudo-Geber, to place him in the 12th Century and there to leave him, without further consideration. This is not the occasion for entering upon a controversial topic such as this, but it savours somewhat of affectation to employ such a qualification of his name, when the works of Dschabir-ben-Hayyan, if there be such a person, have never been in general circulation at all. I say advisedly, if there be such a person, for although his name has been recorded as early as the 10th century and manuscripts of a few of his reputed writings have long existed at Leyden, Paris, and elsewhere, the accounts of him are so discordant that good authorities have not hesitated to regard him as a myth, or a sort of general title for various writers. But whoever Geber may have been and whatever his date, it is remarkable, as has been said already, that his writings should have been selected for printing in preference to those ascribed to Roger Bacon, Avicenna, Arnoldus de Villanova, Raymond Lully, and others, which were not printed till long after. It may have been that the MS. was at hand for the printer; it is also possible that the work was chosen as being the best of its kind then known. It retained this character to comparatively recent times, for editions and translations of Geber's works have been printed steadily during all the centuries, until the 19th. But now, in the 20th, the merit of the *Summa Perfectionis* as a typical treatise is recognised, and a reprint of it is promised as one of a series of epoch-making books. That, it seems to me, is a weighty comment on the pseudo-Geber nomenclature, as if there had ever been another and real Geber whose place had been usurped.

Early in the sixteenth century after the rush of philosophy, school-theology, law and classics was over, those interested in natural history, medicine and science, began to print, and occasionally works on Alchemy appeared; such as those of Pantheus, Augurellus, Raymond Lully, and a little later, Nazari, Picus Mirandulanus, Vallensis and others, for the most part in Latin. At Nürnberg in 1541, appeared one of the earlier collections of tracts, although it was not the first. This mode of publication became popular, and as time went on many gatherings were made: Gratarolo's *Veræ Alchemiæ doctrina, Ars Aurifera,* Albineus' *Bibliotheca Chemica*

Contracta, Pretiosa Margarita Novella, and others, ending in the six densely printed volumes of the *Theatrum Chemicum,* and Manget's *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa,* Roth Scholtz's German *Bibliotheca Chemica,* and Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum,* to be referred to below.

But as yet no alchemical book in English had made its appearance, for such treatises as *The Treasure* of Evonymus, *The Secrets* of Alexis, Brunswick on *Distillation* (1527) and others, were books of medical and technical receipts, containing plenty of primitive chemical detail, but with no reference to transmutation.

In fact, in the sixteenth century, Alchemy was either not cultivated and pursued energetically in England or its literature was rigidly preserved and concealed in manuscript. This latter is probably the correct way of explaining why so little alchemical literature was issued before 1600.

So far as known to me at the present time—there may be others which I have forgotten or have never heard of—there are only two books in English belonging to the sixteenth century; one is George Ripley's *Compound of Alchymy,* 1591, the other, Roger Bacon's *Mirror of Alchemy,* 1597. Both have passed into the limbo of forgotten things, and are now among the great rarities of alchemical literature.

In the sixteenth century also lived John Hester at the sign of the Furnaces at Paul's Wharf, who called himself practitioner in the Art of Distillations, and who translated a number of books on chemistry and pharmacy. More particularly, however, in connection with our present theme, he printed in 1591 the answer which Quercetanus wrote to the work of Aubertus on the origin of metals, in which the latter opposed the current chemical view of their composition and formation. This point was of some importance, for on it turned the possibility and probability of transmutation.

This is a very meagre output on the subject, but either there is nothing more to be had or else I have missed it. This seems unlikely, for had it existed, it could hardly have escaped notice altogether during the time I have been noting these books.

It is hardly better during the first half of the seventeenth century. There is a translation in 1605 of Quercetanus' *Chymical Physick* and *Hermetical Physick,* and Francis Antonie wrote an Apologie for his menstruum called *Aurum Potabile,* London, 1616; but these are mainly medical and do not refer to Alchemy.

There is a book by Th. Tymme: *Philosophical Dialogue, wherein Nature's secret Closet is opened,* London, 1612, 4°, which, from the title, one might expect would furnish an exposition of views respecting the great secret; and another like it by Timothy Willis, 1616, 8vo: *A Search of Causes of a Theosophical Investigation of the Possibility of Transmutatory Alchymy.* These books I have just seen, but have not had the opportunity to examine carefully.

A little later, namely, during the year 1623, there appeared two of the very rarest tracts in English.

The first of them is the brief pamphlet, *A Revelation of the Secret Spirit, declaring the most concealed Secret of Alchymy* written in Italian by Giovanni Battista Agnelli, and Englished by R. N. E., which initials are said to be those of Robert Napier of Merchiston. This is dedicated to Bishop Thornborough, of Worcester, himself the author of a remarkable book, *Lithotheoricos,* which would have been included in this survey had it not unfortunately been in Latin, and just now these observations relate to books in English only. This little tract is written in the most allegorical, allusive and illusive manner; and, while there is no doubt about the secretness of the Spirit, one may well wonder and ask whereabout is the Revelation. It is not, however, a work to be dismissed off-hand, but would require a searching examination for itself.

The other work was Patrick Scot's *The Tillage of Light, or a True Discoverie of the Philosophical Elixir.* This, however, is not an exposition, but a criticism of Alchemy, and the author maintains that the true philosopher pursues spiritual things and not the fabrication of gold with its concomitant evils. This tract belongs, therefore, to a different aspect of the subject.

In the year following, namely 1624, there appeared a translation of Flamel, whose story is well known. It reads like a romance, which in fact it is. His *Hieroglyphical Figures* were published in French in 1612, and were frequently reprinted in collections and in translations. Salmon printed his version in 1691, and the book appeared in London so recently as 1889, edited by Dr. Westcott. Of course, the question always remains in all those cases in which books have appeared under names that are doubtful: If not by their accredited authors, then who were the authors? Almost certainly such a person as Flamel is said to have been never existed, for if we are to believe the legendary history, he lived for some four hundred years, and for that matter may be alive still. Some authorities refuse to believe that Flamel was the author of any Hermetical work, so that, as I have said, the question remains, Who did write the *Hieroglyphical Figures* and other works ascribed to him? That is another topic for examination.

After these there was a lapse of five and twenty years, during which time I have no examples of any work on the subject; but about 1650 began the publication in earnest of alchemical writings of all kinds, to say nothing of mystical and occult books besides. Between the years 1650 and 1675 or 1680 more alchemical books appeared in English than in all the time before and after those dates. As has been pointed out, only a few appeared before this great outburst in 1650, and the output began to slacken about 1680; there were a few in the 18th century and very few original works in the 19th, though there were a good many reprints. The progress of chemical discovery and the preparation of medi-

cines from a chemical point of view, the discussion of the nature of combustion and the criticism of the Aristotelian and alchemical elements, the discovery of numerous new compounds and the stripping away of mystery from chemical reactions, the failure of Alchemy to effect transmutation according to its doctrines and practice, and the evil repute into which it fell through unscrupulous impostors: these drew away attention from the main aim of Alchemy, and transferred it more and more to experimental chemistry and pharmacy. It must not be forgotten that in this same 17th. century and parallel with the books presently to be noticed, there ran a whole series of genuine chemical text-books, giving clear and satisfactory directions for practical chemical manipulation, for the preparation of all the then known chemical substances, metals, acids, salts, tests of various kinds and so on, in language exact and definite; and if the theory was less profound than ours, that was an unavoidable consequence of the less comprehensive knowledge of facts then possessed by the chemists.

Recurring to the alchemical publications of 1650, the first we encounter is one of the most notable of the collections made by J. F., who was almost certainly John French, M.D. It is the quarto edition of *The New Light of Alchymie with the Treatise of Sulphur,* written by Sendivogius, *Nine Books of the Nature of Things* by Paracelsus, and a *Chymicall Dictionary.* This volume also contains the famous Dialogue between Mercury, the Alchymist and Nature. It is somewhat hard to interpret this work and to decide whether it is to be taken literally as a satirical comment on the ordinary alchemist or as an allegory. In any case small respect is shown to the Alchemist.

A later edition appeared in 1674, in 8vo. and there was an independent translation, by John Digby, of the first tract in 1722. Though ascribed to Sendivogius, the dissertation is said to have been written by Alexander Seton, who, in the early seventeenth century, performed many striking transmutations, but, falling into the hands of the Elector of Saxony, Christian II., was tortured to make him reveal the secret and then put in prison and closely guarded. From this prison he was rescued by Sendivogius, who took him to Poland. After Seton's death, Sendivogius obtained a quantity of transmuting powder and manuscripts which he ultimately published under his own name. But while the book is plain enough in parts, it requires much explanation when it deals with the Great Work itself.

John French, about the same time, translated and edited other books on chemistry and Alchemy. In 1651, there came his edition of Glauber's *Philosophical Furnaces,* one of the most original and notable books on chemistry of the century; there was his own book, *The Art of Distillation,* of which there were four editions between 1651 and 1667. The title does not convey fully all that the book itself contains, for there are besides added to it alchemical tracts by Paracelsus, Sendivogius, Pontanus, and the Smaragdine Table

of Hermes. He also translated the *Occult Philosophy of* Cornelius Agrippa, and edited Dr. Everard's translation of the *Divine Pymander* of Hermes Trismegistus.

The year 1652 was a fairly notable one in this record, for in it appeared a book which has to some extent the character of a classic, namely the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* of Elias Ashmole, alluded to above. It is noteworthy on several accounts: Firstly, it is an edition of pieces which, with two or three exceptions, existed previously only in manuscript; secondly, they are all in verse; thirdly, Ashmole has prefixed an introduction and added notes full of interesting matter, though rather discursive. The introduction, if somewhat verbose, contains a review of the early state of learning in England, and Ashmole's justifiable lament over the destruction of the libraries at the dissolution of the monasteries.

Ashmole's book contains Ripley's *Compound of Alchymie* already printed in 1591, and the *Chanon Yeoman's Tale* from Chaucer. His defence of the reprinting of this, which is such a heavy indictment of the fraudulent ways of the alchemists of the time, is that it is a warning how to avoid all such impostors and a vindication of the true sons of art, which position he supports by the authority of Norton, Ripley and Bloomefield.

Norton's *Ordinall* was here printed for the first time in English, but it had already appeared in 1618, translated into Latin by Michael Maier.

There was only one volume of this collection printed, for although Ashmole had apparently gathered a number of prose works sufficient to form a companion volume, he could not be induced to put it to the press. This is to be regretted, for he had not only the material, but he was himself a believer in transmutation, and into his preface and notes he would have infused the spirit and beliefs of the time, in a way utterly impossible for anyone making such a collection to do now, however enthusiastic he might be.

In the same year there was another gathering: *Five Treatises of the Philosopher's Stone;* two were by Alphonso, King of Portugal; one by John Sawtre, a monk; one by Florianus Raudorff, on the Mercury of the Philosophers; and lastly the names of the Stone collected by William Gratarolo. This last tract is instructive, for in the multitude of synonyms and analogies the careless or ignorant reader may easily go astray, and lose his time and labour, not to speak of his temper. William Johnston, too, published his Dictionary which, however, was in Latin, and does not therefore come into this list.

It would be tedious to enumerate individually, outside a professed bibliography, all the books which literally poured from the press during these five and twenty or thirty years, but there are some half-dozen groups of books, which were not only conspicuous then, but have remained to this day landmarks of the literature of the subject, eagerly sought after by the students of the present time. They have even

been reprinted to supply the demand for them, for owing to various causes, the original editions have become unattainable.

Foremost among them are those books of Paracelsus which were translated into English. They are but a meagre representation of the three volumes folio in Latin, or the ten quarto volumes in which Huser collected the writings of the heterodox physician. Some, which pass under his name, as *The Key of Philosophie,* called also *the Secrets of Physick and Philosophy,* are not really by him, but there are *Nine Books of the Nature of Things,* 1650, 1674, published along with Sendivogius' *New Light,* already quoted; his *Dispensatory and Chirurgery,* 1656; *The Supreme Mysteries of Nature,* 1656; *The Chymical Transmutation, genealogy and generation of Metals and Minerals,* along with *Chymical Experiments* by Lully, 1657; *Philosophy to the Athenians, Discovering the wonderful Mysteries of the Creation,* in *Philosophy reformed and Improved,* 1657; *Aurora and Treasure of the Philosophers,* 1659; *Archidoxes, comprised in Ten Books,* containing tracts about transmutation, 1660, 1661 and 1663. There are two or three medical works, besides, and that is all. When Richard Russell tells us in 1678 that he had Englished two of the three volumes of the works of Paracelsus, and about half of the third, which he intended to finish "as time, opportunity, or encouragement shall be offered," and when we know that that translation whether finished or not was never published, we can but lament our loss at the present day, now that Paracelsus is recognised as one of the great leaders of the sixteenth century in the advancing of medicine and the sciences on which it is based. Paracelsus, however, was more of an experimental chemist and pharmacist, than an alchemist; in fact he rather repudiates transmutation as part of chemistry, and the subject interested him more as a theory of matter, perhaps, than for either the material or spiritual and moral gain that was supposed to follow the acquisition of the great elixir.

At the beginning of the 17th century, appeared in German the works of Basil Valentine, most of which were turned into English. Held in greatest esteem were the *Triumphant Chariot of Antimony,* 1656, and a different edition by Russell, 1678; the *Last Will and Testament,* 1651 and 1670; and *Of Naural and Supernatural Things* along with other tracts, 1671.

Over this reputed monk of Erfurt, or, as some say, of Walkenried, there has been no end of controversy. Some, with apparent good documentary evidence, maintain that he really existed and was the author of the works ascribed to him. Others, with apparent equal reasons, assert that no such person ever lived and that the books were written by Thölden, under the fictitious name. It seems an almost hopeless task to adjust the facts and inferences, but the subject is still an open one and affords opportunity for research.

But whatever be the result, it seems fairly certain that the author had worked practically with antimony, and, dis-

counting his hyperbolic and figurative language, that he had made most of the compounds which were in use until comparatively recent times.

A third author whose works attracted a good deal of attention, both in his own life time and since, was Thomas Vaughan, better known perhaps under the name "Eugenius Philalethes." He wrote some half-dozen of little books, not very much in bulk, but weighty in their contents. There may be mentioned: *Anima Magica Abscondita,* 1650; *Anthroposophia Theomagica,* 1650; *Magia Adamica,* 1650; *Lumen de Lumine,* 1651; *Aula Lucis,* 1652; *Euphrates, or the Waters of the East,* 1655, 1671; and some controversial tracts with Henry More, the language of which is in striking contrast to what he employs in some of his other writings. Vaughan was a mystic, and though he seems to have had some practice in alchemical work, his proclivities were mainly in the direction of mystical rather than of physical Alchemy. He was a devoted admirer and follower of Cornelius Agrippa, which is somewhat singular, for the *Occult Philosophy* of that writer can hardly be considered a mystical book. For an estimate of Vaughan's views and an exposition of the general character of mystical science, I must refer you to the excellent reprint of Vaughan's *Magical Writings* by Mr. Waite.

By another of his books Vaughan links on to a fourth section of the literature of this singular epoch, that, namely, which emanated from or was concerned with the Rosicrucians. Vaughan's book in question was a translation of the *Fama et Confessio—the Fame and Confession of the Fraternity of the Rosie Cross,* 1652. The early literature in English is meagre, for besides the book just mentioned there are only Foxcroft's version of the *Hermetic Wedding,* 1690; Michael Maier's *Themis Aurea,* 1656; and the works of John Heydon: *The Rosiecrucian infallible axiomata,* 1660; *The English Physicians Guide,* 1662; *The Wise Man's Crown, or the Glory of the Rosie Cross,* 1664; *Theomagia, or the Temple of Wisdom,* 1664; and *Psonthonphanchia,* 1664.

The German literature was a little more extensive, and the controversial literature most of all. For the Rosicrucian mystery has been a bone of contention ever since the first manifesto concerned with the fraternity was issued, and if the questions no longer provoke discussion, it is not because the problems have been solved, but because they no longer excite any curiosity. Whether there ever was such a fraternity, and if so who originated it and when and where, are points which have been discussed again and again, but here, once more, I must refer you to Mr. Waite's reprints of the main tracts, and the historical introduction in which he discusses fairly the question of origin and the theories advanced by various advocates.

Another writer about this time concerning whom there have been many questions, and who is connected with one of the most mysterious personages in the whole history of

the pursuit, was George Starkey. He is said to have been born in the Burmudas, was educated in America, became an apothecary and made the acquaintance of "Eirenæus Philalethes" (to be referred to later) there. From him he obtained some transmuting powder and MSS. which he afterwards published and appropriated. It is like Seton, the Cosmopolite, and Sendivogius over again. Starkey's own works relate chiefly to medicine and pharmacy, but one, the *Marrow of Alchemy*, was edited by him and published in 1664. His introductions are not signed with his own name but with an anagram: *Egregius Christo*, and *Vir gregis Custos*, which with some wrenching will stand for Georgius Stirk, which seems to have been his true name. From the contents of the Introduction it is not quite clear whether Starkey obtained the MS. direct from the author or not.

The work is in two parts and is in verse, the first book containing the theory, the second the practice. It is a tantalizing book, which doubtless it was intended to be, but, anyhow, when one reads it, it seems fairly intelligible, till one runs up against a phrase or stanza which may contradict what went before or give a totally different significance from what was expected. Even with the help of a commentary the meaning is no clearer. This, however, may be said: that it is apparently of transmutation that the poem treats, though one can never be quite positive on that point.

"Eirenæus Philalethes" or "Philaletha," as seems to be the more correct form, a very obscure person, became an adept at the age of 23, wrote several works, which had a very great reputation and of which some were turned into English. These are: *Secrets Reveal'd, or an Open Entrance to the Shut Palace of the King*, 1669; *Ripley Reviv'd*, 1678; and *Three Tracts of the Great Medicine of Philosophers*, 1694. These last are entitled respectively, *The Transmutation of Metals, A short Manuduction to the Celestial Ruby*, and *The Fountain of Chymical Philosophy*. It is unnecessary to attempt the analysis of these books, it would take a whole lecture to itself.

I cannot, however, pass from them without some reference to Will. Cooper of the Pelican, in Little Britain, Publisher and Bookseller. Unfortunately there is no record of his life, and we only know that he was in Little St. Bartholomew's, near Little Britain, before he moved to the sign of the Pelican. But when one conjures up the nest of that mighty bird, it produces upon us nearly as stirring sensations as the little shop full of black letter and magic and astrology and alchemy—was it Bumstead's?—so effectively pourtrayed by Bulwer Lytton. Cooper, indeed, was a bookseller; his lists demonstrate that; but he was something more—he was a publisher, an author, and above all a collector. Of what his general stock may have been no trace is left, but he specialized in chemistry, in Alchemy, in chemical medicine, and to some extent in natural history. Among the books he published, some have been already mentioned, *Secrets Reveal'd; Ripley Reviv'd; Collectanea Chymica,*

1684; *Aurifontina Chymica,* 1680; Simpson's *Discourse of Fermentation;* Geber's *Works,* 1686; *The Philosophical Epitaph, A Brief of the Golden Calf* from Helvetius, *The Day Dawning or Light of Wisdom,* which last three appeared in a volume in 1673. But it should be especially remembered that in this year he published his *Catalogue of Chymical Books,* which was the first of its kind that appeared in English, and the second in Europe. The first of all was the *Bibliotheca Chimica* of Borellius, 1654, and as it contained all the foreign literature, Cooper confined himself to books in English. As first issued it had been compiled in haste, but by 1673 he had revised it, added many new titles, improved the descriptions and the cross-references, and added a third part, being a catalogue of all the communications on chemistry, mineralogy, mineral waters and such like topics, made to the Royal Society and published in their *Transactions* to date. This was a great novelty, and was the forerunner of similar indexes, since drawn up. I question if Cooper's list is known, or if he has ever got any credit for his foresight. This catalogue contains many of the books which I have alluded to, and enumerates others of great rarity now, which, however, lie beyond the present subject. But interesting though the catalogue be, it is not complete, and requires to be supplemented by the lists which he appended to several of his other publications.

Contemporary with Cooper lived Richard Russell, already quoted, who deserves well of students of chemical and alchemical literature. He it was who translated Beguinus' *Tyrocinium* in 1669, one of the first student's manuals of chemistry in Europe; Helvetius' *Golden Calf, which the world adores and desires,* in 1670; the *Royal Chemistry* of Oswald Crollius, also in 1670; and in 1678, the works of Geber, reissued eight years later. The translations of Paracelsus and of Raymond Lully on which he was at work were never published, unfortunately, as has been already mentioned. From the books he selected it would appear that he too was of the physical school, for these now enumerated have all a practical character, with a leaning towards medicine.

I can do no more than mention other books in English of the period: *Fasciculus chemicus or Chymical Collections,* 1650, by Ashmole, who calls himself James Hasolle; Espagnet's *Enchyridion Physicæ Restitutæ,* or the *Summary of Physicks Recovered,* 1651; Michael Maier's *Lusus Serius,* 1654, one of the very few of his queer books in English; and a collection of chemical and other addresses to Samuel Hartlib, a well known agriculturist of the time, containing among other things, Sir George Ripley's *Epistle Unfolded,* Gabriel Plattes' *Caveat for Alchymists,* and *A Discourse about the Essence or Existence of Metals,* 1655; Henry Nollius' *Hermetical Physick,* 1655; Ludovicus Combachius' *Sal. Lumen, et Spiritus Mundi Philosophici, or the Dawning of the Day, discovered by the Beams of Light: Shewing the True Salt and Secret of the Philosophers,* 1657, translated

probably by Robert Turner, another of the Hermetic students of that time. The last book subsequently appeared with an altered title-page in 1658: *Fundamenta Chymica: or a sure guide to the high and rare Mysteries of Alchymie*, by L.C.

Ashmole's third book, *The Way to Bliss*, came out in 1658, but this is a more general treatise and only a chapter or so deals with that portion of bliss that comes by the metals and by transformation of them to the highest degree of perfection.

George Thornley's *Cheiragogia Heliana, a Manuduction to the Philosophers Magical Gold, . . . to which is added Zoroaster's Cave, or an Intellectual Eccho, etc., Together with the famous Catholic Epistle of John Pontanus upon the Mineral Fire*, was issued in 1659, and again in 1667.

In the next ten years only a few books on the subject were published: Heydon's Rosicrucian books have been already referred to; Joachim Poleman's *Novum Lumen Medicum* and the *Philosopher's Sulphur* came out in 1668, and in the same year Lancelot Colson's *Philosophia Maturata* to which was added St. Dunstan's work on *The Philosopher's Stone*. One or two reprints also were made.

There was more activity in the seventies, though again there were several reprints: Van Suchten's little tract on Antimony, 1670; Helvetius' *Golden Calf;* Webster's *History of Metals*, 1671; Will Cooper's *Catalogue* and other works, 1673; the *New Light of Alchemy*, 1674; Starkey's Treatise on the *Alkahest*, 1675. Kelly's two tracts in Latin, 1676, must be excluded. Then came the three most notable books, published in 1678, already mentioned, Philalethes' *Ripley Revived;* Basil Valentine's *Triumphant Chariot;* and Geber's Works; those last two edited by Richard Russell.

After this the production of new works and the reprinting of old begin to slacken; thus in the next ten years, I can refer to only four books. One is by Becher, *Magnalia Natura, or the Philosopher's Stone lately exposed to Public Sight and Sale*. It contains an account of how one Wenceslaus Seilerus made a successful projection before the Emperor at Vienna. It is a curious story which hardly bears repetition, but Becher, who was on the Commission to investigate the matter, seems to have had no doubt about the virtue and reality of the powder.

Other two of the books are attractive because of their contents and rarity, and both were printed for Cooper. One is the *Collectanea Chymica*, 1684, the other *Aurifontina Chemica*, 1680. The last of the number is a tiny pamphlet of date 1688, and is a translation by Christopher Packe of 153 *Chymical Aphorismes* with one or two additional tracts.

About this time Packe published Glauber's *Complete Works* in a large folio volume. In 1690 appeared the *Aphorismi Urbigerani or Certain Rules clearly demonstrating the Three infallible ways of preparing the Grand Elixir or Circulatum majus*. This is by Baro Urbiger, and he makes

no mystery of his material, provided always that he attaches the same meaning to the names he uses, as we do. Of this I am not quite certain, and I have not had time to verify the good old motto on his title-page: *Experto Crede.* In 1691 appeared a rather interesting volume by the notorious William Salmon, *Medicina Practica.* To this he added translations of Hermes, Kalid, Flamel, Geber, Artefius, Roger Bacon and George Ripley, and arranged them in chapters and clauses for facility of study. Salmon was something more than an alchemist. He practised medicine and pharmacy and wrote books on art and technical subjects, and had a good reputation as a scholar.

Bernardus Penotus was a chemist and physician. Certain tracts by him were published as early as 1593, but in 1692 an English translation was made of his book, *The Alchymists Enchiridion,* in which he treats both of receipts for curing diseases in man and the practice of the red and white elixir for the betterment of the metals. The volume contains also the dialogue of Arislaeus and a reply to Nicholas Guibertus, who denied the possibility of transmutation. Philaletha's three tracts were printed in 1694, and in 1696 an anonymous author wrote *Sanguis Naturæ, or a Manifest Declaration of the Sanguine and Solar Congealed Liquor of Nature.* In these books there seems to be a greater tendency to emphasise the material side of Alchemy. It was becoming infected more or less by the progress of chemistry in the hands of the metallurgists and such experimenters as Boyle, Stahl, Lemery, Becher and many others.

In the 18th century, the publication of alchemical books in English fell off in a marked degree, and of those which I have noted I have not seen more than nine or ten spread over the century. The pursuit of the subject had dwindled almost to nothing, or else it was pursued in private and its devotees studied the old literature. That may account for the scarcity of that literature now—it may have been destroyed by hard usage.

In 1702, and then in 1704, a certain Cleidophorus Mystagogus published a pamphlet called *Mercury's Caducean Rod: or the great and wonderful Office of the Universal Mercury, or God's Vicegerent, displayed.* This is an exposition of the whole art, and the author who was well read in the ancients, after discussing the subject in its theoretical and practical aspects, quotes historical evidence of transmutations actually performed. Careful perusal of it might throw some light on the bodies employed and what they were supposed to be able to do.

In 1714 a little volume appeared "by a Lover of Philalethes," containing *A short enquiry concerning the Hermetick Art*, to which was annexed a *Collection from Kabbala Denudata* and a translation of *Æsch Mezareph or Purifying Fire.* The first part is an exposition of the mystery by a collation of parallel passages, but the fundamental difficulty is not thereby much lessened without a fuller explanation of the terms employed, than is given. For the writers

had a way of juggling with their terms and names which, however ingenious it might be and suggestive to the initiate, is bewildering to the man outside. That, however, is part of the hunt for the Green Lion. About 1732 there was another pamphlet published, called *Wisdom Reputed Folly, or the Composition and Reality of the Philosopher's Stone.* This is dedicated to the Royal Society. Like the preceding tracts, it is an analysis of parallel passages from which is deduced the constitution of the Stone, and as in very many others, the conclusion is that it is fruitless to seek for the generative principle of gold outside of gold itself. The difficulty lies in getting this princple and using it.

The Hermetical Triumph or Victorious Philosopher's Stone, which was an early production, a commentary on the 'Ancient War of the Knights', was published in English in 1723, and reprinted in 1740. This is an allegory capable of various interpretations.

Thirty years later, in 1770, there was published a pamphlet entitled *A Guide to Alchemy, or the grand secret laid open.* It professes to declare clearly the first matter, and the method of operation, and to explain the figurative terms in which the secret has been concealed for ages. But one cannot say that the illumination in this brief abstract throws any more light into the dark recesses of the subject than other works that have been enumerated already.

But the notable thing is that the literature fizzled out—I can use no other term—in the 18th century, that sceptical century of credulity and superstition—and the art itself landed finally in the hands of Cagliostro and such persons.

It was pushed to one side by the chemists who were making discovery after discovery, while the alchemists could only reiterate the old formulæ and phrases about the generation of metals from an ideal sulphur and mercury, which could never be obtained.

So in the nineteenth century there is no new investigation on the old lines, and the only work in English which I remember at the moment that may be called original, is the *Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery and Alchemy* published in 1850, and which I believe, was withdrawn from circulation.* That too is a work which would occupy a whole discourse, and I am unable to consider it here.

A collection printed nearly a hundred years ago, in 1815, was *The Lives of the Alchemystical Philosophers,* said to be by Barrett, the author of *The Magus.* Besides the lives, the book contains reprints or original translations of a number of tracts, but the lives are not very well done. It was revised and remodelled by Mr. Waite, but I doubt if it deserved the trouble bestowed on it.

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* I understand that a new edition, edited with an Introduction by Mme. Isabelle de Steiger, will shortly be issued by Mr. Tait of Belfast.—EDITOR.

Somewhere about twenty years ago the nineteenth century made its contribution to Alchemical Literature in a series of reprints and translations which brought the old and difficultly attainable literature within reach of the modern student of Hermetic lore.

I may add a note here of those that I have seen :—Dr. Westcott's reprint of the translation of Flamel's *Exposition of the Hieroglyphical Figures* . . 1889; a reprint of the *Collectanea Chymica* (Will. Cooper?), 1893; a reprint of John Lilly and Meric Casaubon's edition of the works of Edward Kelly, with an introduction by Mr. Waite; and the following new translations, all edited with useful introductions by Mr. Waite :—Basil Valentine's *The Triumphant Chariot of Antimony,* 1893; Benedictus Figulus' *The Golden and Blessed Casket of Nature's Marvels,* 1893; *The Hermetic Museum,* 2 vols., 1893; *The New Pearl of Great Price,* attributed to Peter Bonus, 1894; *The Turba Philosophorum,* 1896. Besides these there was a series of reprints, and new works entitled *Collectanea Hermetica,* edited by Dr. Westcott, some of which are of alchemical interest :—Espagnet's *The Hermetic Arcanum,* 1893; *A Short Enquiry concerning the Hermetic Art by a Lover of Philalethes,* 1894; *Æsch Mezareph, or Purifying Fire,* 1894; Vaughan's *Euphrates, or the Waters of the East,* 1896. The original editions of these have been quoted in preceding paragraphs.

I had nearly said that these were all, when I remembered that a collection had been made of Paracelsus' Chemical and Hermetical Writings, translated and published in two volumes, and edited by Mr. Waite, in 1894. This brings together all the works of Paracelsus, which are of particular interest to this Society, as distinguished from his medical writings.

I have put now before you a very brief enumeration of the English literature of Alchemy, during three hundred years. It is not complete, for I have omitted books that I know, and have no doubt that there are many that I do not know. If I were to scrutinize the catalogues of the British Museum or the Bodleian Library, I am certain that I should find numerous works to add to the present sketch. But I may say that, except from the bibliographer's point of view, there is ample material in the books now quoted for the most devoted disciple of Hermes to study and digest, and if from these books he cannot get an answer to his questions, or a clearing up of his doubts and difficulties, I can hardly think that the addition of any more books, equally obscure, would help him. But what has now been said may put some of my hearers on the hunt, and they may be rewarded by the discovery of something hitherto unknown which they may be able to communicate to this Society. I hope so, and wish them all success.

What little I have read of these books and of comments upon them seems to me to refer plainly to a metallic transmutation. I have seen in the whole of them, except in a very few, nothing that suggests a mystical or religious signifi-

cance, without a transfiguration of the apparent meaning of the words, which would be much more difficult for me—I speak only for myself—to understand and interpret than the metallic transmutation itself. If such a meaning can be taken out of the words, it is hidden in them more profoundly than the seed in the philosopher's gold, and that is recondite enough for most students.

But when one sees the fuss that Starkey made about the Alkahest, which seems to be ammonia gas or perhaps ammonium carbonate, it is not at all surprising that the obscurer phenomena to them of, say, oxidation and reduction, or the action of sulphur on other bodies, were not only unintelligible, but came to be endowed by them with mystical or transcendental properties, because they could not be otherwise explained.

It is very difficult to sift out the actual facts from their defective or misunderstood and confused descriptions, and when to that is added their effort to conceal what they supposed took place, shifting their terms from one thing to another, the task of interpretation becomes in many cases quite futile. So at least it has appeared to me.

One of the books which was not mentioned under 1652 is entitled in the fanciful manner of the time: *A Hermetic Banquet drest by a Spagirick Cook for the better preservation of the Microcosm.* Personally I feel the sort of spagirick cook "toiling in Geber's kitchen," to quote an old phrase, who might be employed by Hermetical Barmecides. For after you have come to what should have been a feast, I have put before you nothing but an array of dishes, not altogether empty perhaps, but with their contents raw and unprepared.

I am aware of that, but to tell the truth I have been endeavouring to bring together in some sort of order—chronological as it happens on this occasion—material which has not been dealt with in this way as a whole, and you must accept this as a mere preliminary sketch map of the ground, which may be and ought to be surveyed more exactly, and a critical review of the Literature of English Alchemy prepared.

Even as a preliminary it is defective, as I have said, for I have dropped a number of things of which I have some record, just because I was afraid that a prolonged enumeration of authors and titles might prove tedious. I hope it has not been so, and that what has been said will help towards the elucidation of those parts of the subject which have not been examined, and will suggest themes which may be brought up and discussed at the meetings of this Society during the coming or some future winter.

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