

The Alchemist

by

Fra. Dalton A. Noland, VII^o

After being asked by several brethren concerning the ancient art of alchemy a decision was made for a paper. I hope the following few pages can offer a glimpse into what took them a lifetime of labor to experience. I hope also, that it adds to and not detract from a reader's prior understanding.

Alchemy, according to a myriad of writers, is presented as an old school of arcane wisdom. The alchemist it seems, passed his secrets, formulas and rites, to a worthy initiate of the mysteries who had been tested and had passed several trials.

Many times the writer endeavors to conjure to the mind of the novice a knowledgeable magician scurrying about the confines of his lab where he has subjected one element after another to the glowing coals of a crucible. He cautiously removes impurities as residue, finally arriving with only the pure element. He slowly extracts from the crucible a mass called by many, "the philosopher's stone of the wise."

The alchemist need not be a chemist, physicist, nor a student of the mundane sensual appearance of things. For, if true to the art, he is a student studying the relationship of things to one another. Progressively he develops the relationship within his own consciousness. For it is there all things are first known, compared, comprehended, related and employed. As stated at Delphi, Greece, on the Delphic Oracle "Know first thyself before all things! For through thyself all things will be known!"

Within his laboratory, according to history are to be found the many tools of his craft. But, is not his consciousness also a lab or workshop? Are not things appearing of the World the imagery of the happenings within one's own mind? What appears to be happening out there is being perceived within one's own consciousness. Has it not been proven to us that illusion is very possible when we use our sensory organs? Are not reason and logic required to present to us a fact? Thus, a mystical thread connects the things of our mind with the things of the world. They are constantly interacting with each other, and in fact dependent on each other for an existence of reality. Those who scoff at the idea of tiling the mind and invoking the blessing of God before engaging in physical labors, are only denying this most obvious truth of daily existence.

The alchemist was highly aware of this interdependence of reality and consciousness. To him the whole process of life was a sacred convocation in which the mind was impressed with the realities of his environment. As it was in his consciousness that the elements of his work were composed, he saw first that his thoughts be graced with beauty, purity, and peace. He created within his physical workshop a sanctum sanctorum, his holy of holies, a center of dedication to life in all its varied manifestations.

It was there that he utilized known and familiar elements, which when contemplated, filled his consciousness and imparted their qualities to reside within his thoughts.

The alchemist's workshop was his sanctum. His goal was transformation. In his lab he sought to discover natural laws as they were manifest in matter. He looked to matter for those desirable qualities which brought a value to society. Within his crucible he arranged and rearranged particles so they would present a desired pattern. He deduced similar laws and principles working in the mental and spiritual world. Transformation must take place here too, if the impurities of self are to give way to the purer elements of the personality. The impulses, instincts, reason, logic and intellect must be subjected to the crucible and mixtures of time, education and experience. Thus they will arrange and rearrange themselves and finally appear in a desirable order which we assume as the positive traits of humanity.

The alchemist's art, the transformation of matter, or the transmutation of self, consists of nothing more than the rearrangement of those elements already present. Life is like a giant kaleidoscope, containing a set number of particles, which with every motion causes a new arrangement or a new pattern to be experienced.

In chemistry, arrange the particles of matter and you have lead, gold or mercury, etc. In man, arrange the values of consciousness and you can instill hatred, rearrange those values and you can instill care and love.

The "philosopher's stone" in which the alchemist was truly interested was the "summum bonum," the "greatest good" and the "highest state of self-realization." By cleansing the impurities from the mind he could achieve "that house not made by hands...". For in all things, the evils and the unwanted elements that plague us are but like the darkness. They exist only because of the absence of light, because of our value of the importance of light.

The alchemist's concept was to give little thought to those elements he wished to eliminate from his person, but rather to give great thought to elements he wished his person to be.

Thus, their hope was that in the workshop of the mind, by holding constructive and desirable thoughts, by fixing them through contemplation and affirmation, the residue of negative and harmful thoughts would diminish and transformation soon become evident.

Around this sacred art was always an air of mystery, within it a mysterious beauty, attainable only by one who had devoted his life to this ancient Hermetic art.

May this short discourse provide a key into what has been called the *mysterium magnum*! May it provide a small clue, knowing full well, beyond lies yet another question. Somehow existence flowers with questions and answers. However, it will require more than text to discover the beauty and harmony provided by the mystery. Herein lies not only an end, but also the beginning!

From the manuscript
"Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum"

"Will you with me tomorrow be content,
Faithfully to receive the Blessed Sacrament,
Upon the Oath that I shall here give,
For neither gold, nor silver, so long as you live;
Neither for love you bear toward your kin,
Nor yet to no great man, preferment to win,
That you disclose the secret I shall you teach,
Neither by writing, nor by swift speech,
But only to him, which you can be sure,
Has always searched after the secrets of Nature,
To him you may reveal the secrets of this art,
Under the cover of philosophy, before the world, you depart."