

## ALCHEMY and FREEMASONRY

By

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To understand the relationship between Alchemy and Freemasonry, it is first necessary to become familiar with Alchemy. The syllable Al is the Arabic definite article, the. Chemia is a Greek work used in Diomeletian's decree against Egyptian works dealing with the transmutation of metals. Alchemy is evidently from the same root as chemistry and is also related to Khem, the Egyptian God of curative herbs. The lineal descendant of Medieval and ancient Alchemy is the modern science of Chemistry. In Medieval time, Alchemy was also called the Hermetic Art or Philosophy because it was said to have been first taught and practiced by Hermes Trismegistus, a legendary Egyptian priest who was supposed to have lived about 2000 B.C.

The oldest volume about Alchemy is by Zosimus of Panopolis, in Greek and is entitled, "The Divine Art of Making Gold and Silver" and was written about 400 AD. The earliest use of the work Alchymy is believed to be the works of Julius Firmicus Maternus, an astronomer who lived in Emperor Constantine's time. At the end of the eighth century, a famous alchemist, Geber, wrote many books in Latin on the transmutation of metals and kindred subjects, listing many formulas, as well as the scientific, mystical, and philosophical aspects of the art. In the tenth century an Arabian medical philosopher named Rhayes or Rhasis wrote "The Establishment of Alchemy." Unfortunately, he presented a copy to his prince who demanded he verify some of his experiments. Failing, he was struck with a whip by the Prince and blinded.

During the next three (3) or four (4) centuries Alchemy was studied by the scientist, and to them lies the credit for the development of science until the Middle Ages.

In the Middle Ages until the end of the seventeenth century, it was an important science, studied by distinguished philosophers such as Avicenna, Albertus Magnus, Raymond Lulli, Roger Bacon, Elias Ashmole and others.

Unfortunately, the mystical terms in which the art was clothed, the great secrecy in which all knowledge was kept, and the esoteric quality of the teaching made it a natural prey of the charlatans, quacks, and fortune tellers. Several of these were put to death because they could not demonstrate some of their claims. Because of these events, sincere and learned scientific men worked in secret to avoid punishment and death.

Kings and rulers retained alchemists in the employ, consulting them as to future events and basing their campaigns upon their prophecies. When these prophecies failed, the rulers took their revenge by condemning the counselors to death or imprisonment. Marie Ziglerin was burned to death in 1575. David Benth committed suicide in fear of the anger of his Elector. In 1590, Brigadino was hanged in Bavaria and William deKrohnemann suffered the same fate at the hands of Margrave of Bayreuth.

The first man of record to put Alchemy to medical use was Paracelsus, born near Zurick in 1493 and died in 1541. He produced many new and powerful drugs in his laboratory including landanum.

Thory says that there was a society of Alchemists in the Hague in 1622 which called itself Rose Croix. It is also claimed that Rosenkreutz founded the order in 1459 with an order that it remain secret for 200 years. Another Alchemy organization, the Hermetic Society, was in existence in 1790 in Westphalia which flourished until about 1819. Around the middle of the fifteenth century, the science as practiced by earlier men was relegated to the past. At that time an Alchemical center was established in England at Oxford with Robert Boyle organizing a class for experiment and research. (Robert Boyle is known for his gas laws in modern chemistry). He was helped by Elias Ashmole and Sir Isaac Newton. Among his students were John Locke and Christopher Wren. A renowned Rosicrucian chemist from Strasburg was brought over to assist. This marked the beginning of modern science and chemistry.

The Alchemists sought by observation and experiment and by research and reflection to gain the secret of nature's means to change base metals into gold and to develop an elixir to cure all diseases and overcome death. They applied moral qualities, virtues, and vices to things of nature. Today, we still speak of noble and base metals, perfect and imperfect gases, good and bad electrical conductors.

Alchemy has two aspects, the material and the spiritual.

Ancient Alchemy recognized none of the present day elements. They had four -- fire, air, earth and water. They were in four states:

Heat and dryness	.Fire
Heat and moistness	.Air
Cold and dryness	.Earth
Cold and moistness	.Water

Alchemy taught that all material substances were derived from one basic "hyle" or foundation. Alchemists affirmed the existence of Primum Ens, two opposites, three principles, four elementary states, minerals, and seven metals. Metals were stable except in the hands of a skilled Alchemist who might change one into another by Transmutation. Gold, the most perfect metal was the end result of the greatest transmutation. Six other metals are Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury and Luna, vulgarly known as Lead, Tin, Iron, Copper, Quicksilver and Silver. Gold is not included; because it is not in its nature a metal. It is all Spirit and incorruptible; wherefore it is the emblem of the sun which presides over the light.

Higher Alchemy is almost identical with religion as separated from Theology. The function of religion, like the work of the Alchemist, is Spiritualization, the separation of the subtle from the gross, the redemption of spirit while dwelling in matter. Or the transmutation of the animal forces which are in men into the more human and refined emotions, more delicate shades of feeling.

The Alchymic expression of "Solve et Coagula" meaning "volatize and fix" as two contrasting processes seem alike in chemistry, physics, and human development are traceable in biblical allegories of the descent of the Soul into man by the putting on of "coats of skin". The human Ego becomes fixed in matter and suffers the loss of power of direct spiritual communion with the source Divine. We also have the allegory of the Resurrection of the Son of the Divine One who obtains reunion with the God head by casting off the cloak of matter and returning to His Father. By birth upon earth, man is fixed, coagulated and fettered by his environment. By death and by throwing off his material body and its animal passions, man is released from his bondage and passes at once to a Higher Plane.

Sol and Luna, which in chemistry refer to Gold and Silver on the spiritual plane, refer to the soul and body of man. Mercury, salt and sulphur have been used as synonyms of the Trinity: the Divine Father as Mercury, the Divine Mother or Holy Ghost as salt, and the Son of God, Christ as sulphur.

The Alchemists, who have been called “physical Rosicrucians,” adopted the metals and their transmutation, the elixir of life, and their universal solvent as symbols by which they concealed the purest dogmas of a religious life.

The Hermetic art is a religion, a philosophy and a natural science. As a religion, it is that of the ancient Magi and the initiates of all ages; as a philosophy, we find its principles in the school of Alexandria and the theories of Pythagoras; as a science from Paracelsus, Nicholas Flamel and Raymond Lulle.

The Sun and Moon of the Alchemists concur in perfecting and giving stability to the Philosophical Stone. They correspond to the two columns of the Temple Jachin and Boaz. The Sun is the hieroglyphic sign of Truth because it is the source of Light; the rough Stone is the symbol of Stability. The Medieval Alchemists indicated the Philosophical Stone as the first means of making the philosophical gold, of transforming all the vital powers figured by the six metals into Sun, that is, into Truth and Light.

To find the immovable bases of true religious Faith, of Philosophical Truth and of Metallic transmutation, is the secret of Hermes, the Philosophical Stone.

The Ritual of the degree of Kabalistic and Hermetic Rose has these passages: “The true Philosophy, known and practiced by Solomon, is the basis in which Masonry is founded”.

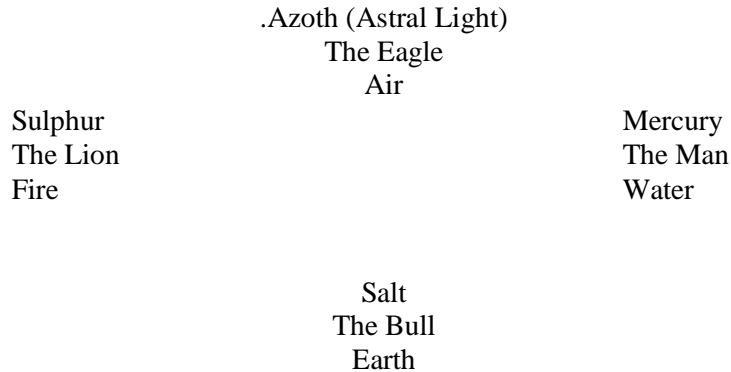
“Our Ancient Masons have concealed from us the most important point of this Divine Art, under hieroglyphic characters, which are but enigmas and parables, to all the Senseless, the Wicked and the Ambitious”.

“A rough ashlar is the shapeless stone which is to be prepared in order to commence the philosophical work; and to be developed, in order to change its form from triangular to cubic, after the separation from it of its Salt, Sulphur, and Mercury by the aid of the Square, Level, Plumb, and Balance, and all the other Masonic implements which we use symbolically”.

To fix the volatile, in the Hermetic language, means to materialize the spirit; to volatilize the fixed is to spiritualize matter. To separate the subtle from the gross in the first operation is to free our soul from all prejudice and all vice. This is effected by the use of the philosophical Salt, that is to say, Wisdom; of Mercury, that is to say, of personal aptitude and labor; and of Sulphur, which represents the vital energy, and the ardor of the will. Thus we succeed in changing into spiritual gold such things even as are of least value, and even the foul things of the earth.

The end and perfection of the Great Work is expressed in Alchemy, by a triangle surmounted by a cross; and the letter Tau, the last of the Sacred alphabet, has the same meaning.

The four Elements, the four symbolic animals, and the re-duplicated Principles correspond with each other and are thus arranged by the Hermetic Masons.



Air and Earth represent the Male Principle. The Fire and Water belong to the Female Principle. To these four forms correspond the four following philosophical ideas.

Spirit, Matter, Movement, Repose  
Alchemy reduces these four things to three  
The Absolute, The Fixed, The Volatile  
Reason, Necessity, Liberty are the synonyms of these three words

As all the great Mysteries of God and the Universe are thus bidden in the Ternary, it everywhere appears in Masonry and in the Hermetic Philosophy under its mask of Alchemy.

The double triangle of Solomon is explained by St. John in a remarkable manner - There are three witnesses in Heaven - The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit and three witnesses on earth, the breath, water and blood. This agrees with the masters of Hermetic Philosophy who give to their Sulphur the name of Ether, to their Mercury the name of philosophical water, to their Salt that of blood of the dragon. The blood or salt corresponds by opposition with the Father, the Azothic or Mercurial water with the Word or Logos, and the breath with the Holy Spirit.

Alchemy has its Symbolic Triad of Salt, Sulphur and Mercury - man consisting, according to the Hermetic philosophers, of Body, Soul and Spirit. The Dove, the Raven and the Phoenix are striking symbols of Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, and the Beauty resulting from the equilibrium of the two.

Freemasonry and Alchemy have sought the same results (the lesson of Divine Truth, and the doctrine of immortal life), and they have both sought it by the same method of symbolism, It is not, therefore, strange that in the Eighteenth Century, and perhaps before, we find an incorporation of much of the science of Alchemy into that of Freemasonry. Hermetic Rites and Hermetic Degrees were common, and their relics are still to be found existing in degrees which do not absolutely trace their origin to Alchemy, but which show some of its traces in their rituals. The 28th degree of the Scottish Rite, or the Knight of the Sun, is entirely a Hermetic study, and claims its parentage in the title of Adept of Masonry by which, it is sometimes known.

But it is a question of some interest to the Masonic scholar whether at the time of the so-called Revival of Freemasonry, in the early part of the 18th Century, certain Hermetic degrees did not exist which sought to connect themselves with the system of Masonry. And it is a question of still greater interest whether this attempt was successful so far, at least, as to impress upon the features of that early Freemasonry a portion of the characteristic tints of the Hermetic philosophy, some of the marks of which may still remain in our modern system.

Johann Valentin Andrea, born in 1586, came from a small town in Wurtemberg in what is now Germany. Being a comforter of the suffering and imbued with a spirit of philanthropy, he attempted to convert the dry, effete theology of the church into a living, active, humanizing system. In order to accomplish his purpose, by stimulating noble minds to the effort, in 1615 invoking the assistance of fiction, he wrote Report of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood in Latin, *Fama Fraternitatis Rosae Crucis*. Previously in 1614, he had written Universal Reformation of the Whole World with a Report of the Worshipful Order of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, addressed to all the Learned Men and Nobility of Europe. In 1616 he published *Chemical Nuptials* by Christian Rosencreutz.

The *Fama Fraternitatis* by Nicolai had undoubtedly excited the curiosity of the Mystics, who abounded in Germany at the time of its appearance, of whom not the least prominent were the Alchemists. These, having sought in vain for the invisible society of the Rosicrucians, as it had been described in the romance of Andrea, resolved to form such a society for themselves. But, to the disappointment and the displeasure of the author of the *Fama*, they neglected or postponed the moral reformation which he had sought, and substituted the visionary schemes of the Alchemists, a body of quasi-philosophers who assigned their origin as students of nature and seekers of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of immortality to a very remote period.

Thus it is that I trace the origin of the Rosicrucians, not to Valentin Andrea, nor to Christian Rosencreutz, who was only the coinage of his brain, but to the influence exerted by him upon certain Mystics and Alchemists who, whether they accepted the legend of Rosencreutz as a fiction or as a verity, at least made diligent use of it in the establishment of their new society.

In the year 1722 there was published in London a work in small octavo bearing the following title:

“Long Livers: A curious History of such Persons of both Sexes who have liv'd several Ages and grown Young again: With the rate Secret of Rejuvenescency of Arnoldus de Villa Nova. And a great many approv'd and invaluable Rules to prolong Life: Also how to prepare the Universal Medicine. Most humbly dedicated to the Grand Master, Masters, Wardens, and Brethren of the last Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of the Free Masons of Great Britain and Ireland.” By Eugenius Philalethes, F.R.S.

Eugenius Philalethes was the pseudonym of Thomas Vaughn, a celebrated Rosicrucian of the 17th Century, who published, in 1652, a translation of the *Fama Fraternitatis* into English. It is sufficient for our purpose to know that it is a Hermetic treatise written by a Rosicrucian, of which the title alone .the references to the renewal of youth, one of the Rosicrucian secrets, to the recipe of the great Rosicrucian Villa Nova, or Arnold de Villanuve, and to the Universal Medicine, the Rosicrucian Elixir Vitae - would be sufficient evidence. But the only matter of interest in connection with the present subject is that this Hermetic work, written, or at least printed, in 1722 one year before the publication of the first edition of Anderson's Constitutions, refers explicitly to the existence of a higher initiation than that of the Craft degrees, which the author seeks to interweave in the Masonic system.

This is evidently shown in portions of the dedication, which is inscribed to “the Grand Master, Masters, Wardens, and Brethren of the Most Ancient and Most Honorable Fraternity of the Free Masons of Great Britain and Ireland”; and it is dedicated to them by their “Brother Eugenius Philalethes.” This fraternal subscription shows that he was a Freemason as well as a Rosicrucian, and therefore must have been acquainted with both systems.

The important fact, in this dedication, is that the writer alludes, in language that can not be mistaken, to a certain higher degree, or to a more exalted initiation to the attainment of which the primitive degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry were preparatory. Indeed it is somewhat singular that although he names both David and Solomon in the course of his narrative, it is with little respect, especially for the latter, and he does not refer, even by a single word, to the Temple of Jerusalem. The Freemasonry of this writer is not architectural, but altogether theosophic. It is evident that as a Hermetic philosopher he sought to identify the Freemasons with the disciples of the Rosicrucian sect rather than with the Operative Masons of the Middle Ages. This is a point of much interest in the discussion of the question of a connection between the two associations, considering that this work was published only five years after the revival. It tends to show, not that Freemasonry was established by the Rosicrucians, but, on the contrary, that at that early period the latter were seeking to ingraft themselves upon the former, and that while they were willing to use the simple degrees of Craft Masonry as a nucleus for the growth of their own fraternity, they looked upon them only as the medium of securing a higher initiation, altogether unmasonic in its character and to which but few Masons ever attained.

Neither Anderson nor Desaguliers, our best because contemporary authority for the state of Masonry in the beginning of the 18th Century, give the slightest indication that there was in their day a higher Masonry than that described in the Book of Constitutions of 1723. The Hermetic element was evidently not introduced into Speculative Masonry until the middle of the 18th Century, when it was infused in a fragmentary form into some of the High Degrees which were at that time fabricated by certain of the Continental manufacturers of Rites.

But if, as Eugenius Philalethes plainly indicates, there were in the year 1721, higher degrees, or at least a higher degree, attached to the Masonic system and claimed to be a part of it, which possessed mystical knowledge that was concealed from the great body of the Craft, “who were not far illuminated, who stood in the outward place and were not worthy to look behind the veil” by which it is clearly implied that there was another class of initiates who were far illuminated, who stood within the inner place and looked behind the veil then the question forces itself upon us, why is it that neither Anderson, or Desaguliers nor any of the writers of that period, nor any of the rituals, make any allusion to this higher and more illuminated system?

The answer is readily at hand. It is because no such system of initiation, so far as Freemasonry was concerned, existed. The Master’s degree was at that day the consummation and perfection of Speculative Masonry. There was nothing above or beyond it. The Rosicrucians, who, especially in their astrological branch, were then in full force in England, had, as we see from this book, their own initiation into their Hermetic and theosophic system.

Freemasonry then beginning to become popular and being also a mystical society, these mystical brethren of the Rosy Cross were ready to enter within its portals and to take advantage of its organization. But they soon sought to discriminate between their own perfect wisdom and the imperfect knowledge of their brother Masons, and, Rosicrucian-like, spoke of an arcana which they only possessed. There were some Rosicrucians who, like Philalethes, became Freemasons, and some Freemasons, like Elias Ashmole, who

became Rosicrucians.

But there was no legitimate derivation of one from the other. There is no similarity between the two systems - their origin is different; their symbols, though sometimes identical, have always a different interpretation; and it would be an impossible task to deduce the one historically from the other.

De Quincey's theory and his self-styled facts may be epitomized as follows:

He thinks that the Rosicrucians were attracted to the Operative Masons by the incidents, attributes, and legends of the latter, and that thus the two Orders were brought into some connection with each other. The same building that was used by the guild of Masons offered a desirable means for the secret assemblies of the early Freemasons, who, of course, were Rosicrucians. An apparatus of implements and utensils, such as was presented in the fabulous pulcher of Father Rosencreutz, was introduced, and the first formal and solemn Lodge of Freemasons, on which occasion the name of Freemasons was publicly made known, was held in Masons' Hall, Masons' Alley, Basinghall Street, London, in the year 1646. Into this Lodge he tells us that Elias Ashmole was admitted. Private meetings, he says, may have been held, and one at Warrington in Lancashire, which is mentioned in Ashmole's Life, but the name of Freemasons' Lodge, with the insignia, attributes, and circumstances of a Lodge, first, he assures us, came forward at the date above mentioned.

Nicolai is more honorable in his mode of treating the question. He does not attribute the use of Freemasonry directly and immediately from the Rosicrucian brotherhood. But he thinks that its mystical theosophy was the cause of the outspring of many other mystical associations, such as the Theosophists, and that, passing over into England, it met with the experimental philosophy of Bacon, as developed especially in his New Atlantis, and that the combined influence of the two, the esoteric principles of the one and the experimental doctrines of the other together with the existence of certain political motives, led to a meeting of philosophers who established the system of Freemasonry as Masons' Hall in 1646. He does not 'explicitly say so, but it is evident from the names that he gives that these philosophers were Astrologers, who were only a sect of the Rosicrucians devoted to a specialty.

The Speculative Masons derived nearly all of their symbols from the implements and the language of the Operative art; the Rosicrucians took theirs from astronomical and geometrical problems, and were connected in their interpretations with a system of theosophy and not with the art of building.

Rosicrucian is a mystical system founded on the Cabala; the other the outgrowth of a very natural interpretation of symbols derived from the usages and the implements of an operative art. The Rosicrucians were theosophists, whose doctrines were of angels and demons, of the elements, of the heavenly bodies and their influence on the affairs of men, and of the magical powers of numbers, of suffumigations, and other sorceress

The Alchemists, who have been called "physical Rosicrucians," adopted the metals and their transmutation, the elixir of life, and their universal solvent, as symbols, if we may believe Hitchcock, by which they concealed the purest dogmas of a religious life.

But Freemasonry has not and never had anything of this kind in its system. Its founders were, as we will see when we come to the historical part of this work, builders, whose symbols, applied in their architecture, were of a religious and Christian character; and when their successors made this building fraternity a speculative association, they borrowed the symbols by which they sought to teach their

philosophy, not from Rosicrucianism, not from magic, nor from the Cabala, but from the art to which they owed their origin. Every part of Speculative Masonry proves that it could not have been derived from Rosicrucianism. The two Orders had in common but one thing . they both had secrets which they scrupulously preserved from the unhallowed gaze of the profane.

Andrea sought, it is true, in his Fama Fraternitatis, to elevate Rosicrucianism to a more practical and useful character, and to make it a vehicle for moral and intellectual reform. But even his system, which was the only one that could have exerted any influence on the English philosophers, is so thoroughly at variance in its principles from that of the Freemasonry of the 17th Century, that a union of the two, or the derivation of one from the other, must have been utterly impracticable

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