THE ALCHEMISTS.

"The upright art of Alchymic liketh me well."-From the Cornhill Magazine,

PART I.

The odd, lingering, half-alive vitality of old superstitions was curiously instanced some seventy years ago, when an advertisement appeared in the German Reichsanzeiger, purporting to be issued by the "Hermetic Society," and calling for communications from the votaries of alchemy scattered among the public. This was in 1796, the period when the Directory governed in France, and General Bonaparte was conquering North Italy; a time when old beliefs on many important subjects had recently met with sufficiently

rough handling.

Answers to the advertisement came in from all quarters. Persons in every grade of professional and commercial life, tailors and shoemakers, physicians, privy councillors, schoolmasters, watchmakers, apothecaries, organists, professed themselves practical students of the occult science, and desirous of further enlightenment in their as yet unsuccessful quest after the great clixir. The idea that an influential "Hermetic Society" was in existence, infused new hope into these isolated searchers. But on how baseless a fabric their hope was built eventually appeared, when the archives of the society were submitted to inspection, and it was found to have consisted of two members only, two Westphalian doctors of obscure fame. On the letters they had received in consequence of their advertisement were found indorsed the words

"answered evasively. These facts are told us in a lecture recently delivered at Leipsic by Professor Erdmann, and published in the Gartenlaube. From his statements, and from other sources, we propose to put together a few notes relative to the exploded science—the eccentric torchbearer to chemical discovery-whose annals contribute such notable pages to the moral romance of the Middle Ages.

We do not profess to give its history in formal sequence. We do not discuss the traditions of its origin among the sages of Egypt, nor ponder over the ambiguous inscription on the Emerald Table of Hermes Trismegistusthe "Apocalypse of Alchemy," as Dr. Erdmann calls it. That Moses was giving proof of his skill as an "adept" he dissolved the golden calf and made the rebellious Israelites imbibe it in a liquid state, that the long-lived antediluvian patriarchs had in fact got hold of the Elixir Vita, that Noah was commanded to hang up the true and genuine philosopher's stone in the Ark, to give light to all living creatures therein, are opinions we will merely glance at, as some of the most ambitious among the many fictions by which alchemy sought to ennoble its pedigree, when, from an obscure and ill-accredited pursuit, it had come to be admitted into the front ranks of notoriety, to be professed by sages of eminence and patronized powerful monarchs. It was in the thirteenth century that it stepped into this position, brought to it mainly through the intercourse of the Arabs with Europe. The heydey of its dignity may be said to have confinued from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. After the Revival of Learning it declined in estimation; but it still maintained a very considerable sway over those portions of society where mental activity had not been impelled into the new channels. Of its prevalence in Germany, especially during the seventeenth century, Professor Erdmann relates many curious instances. To these we shall presently recur. The absolute death of Alchemy, or the "Spagiric Art," as it used an earlier date than the publication of Lavoisier's "Modern System of Chemistry," eighty years ago. And here again, when we speak of its "absolute death," it must be observed that, even in our own times, chemists of first-rate rank have accorded a certain degree of recognition to its fundamental hypothesis. Sir Humphrey Davy is not alone in avowing his opinion that the transmutations of metals need not be considered an impossibility. Metals, it is argued, are composite bodies, brought into their actual condition by the hidden operations of nature. Why may not man, who has wrested so many secrets from her already, find out this art of metal-making also, and by some imitative process form similar combinations under the same relative conditions? But to what purpose? If the art resulted in a monopoly by some dexterous patentee, goldmaking would before long come to be made penal; if every one might without hindrance carry his own California in his own crucible gold would soon cease to be the standard of

But has the transmutation ever been effected? Here the testimony of enlightened modern inquiry is emphatically No, in spite of the half-affirmations we meet with here and there; as, for instance, in a "History of Alchymy" alluded to by Professor Erdmann, published as late as 1832, wherein the author expresses his belief that at least five "Adepts" or masters of the art of transmutation have, in the course of ages, made good their claims

Before we proceed further, let us note what were the definite objects which the alchemists proposed to themselves in their researches, and which these adepts professed to have accomplished. The doctrines on which their science rested were three:-

1. That gold could be produced from metals which themselves contained no gold, by the application to them of an artificial preparation. This preparation went by the name of the Philosopher's Stone, the Great Elixir, the Great Magisterium, and the Red Tincture. It was applied to metals when they had been fused into a liquid state, and the act of application was called projection. 2. That silver could be similarly produced

out of metals containing no silver, by the application of another preparation called the Stone of the Second Order, the Little Elixir, the Little Magisterium, and the White Tincture. This, naturally, was in much less request than the other, and is much less talked about in the records of alchemy.

3. The same preparation which thus ennobles metals and produces gold is, at the same time, when in a potable state, or even in some forms as a solid, a medicine possessing marvellous qualities for preserving life and renewing youthful vigor. How far the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life were considered identical is, however, left in some doubt by the ambiguity of Spagiric writers. By some the latter has been described as having the properties of sea water; by others as an invigorating paste; by others as liquid gold; by others—Raymond Lulli, instance - as something very like honest port and sherry. This clixir of life was sought by the earlier alchemists much more eagerly than was the stone in its transmuting properties, but it faded into discredit sooner; the avarice of mankind proved stronger than their love of existence; or, perhaps we should say, the great disprover Death was more con-

by astute contrivances where honest means of fabricating it had failed; no deceit could 'exhibit" life in the individual whose hour of fate had really come.

To hit upon the right composition of the greater magisterium, whether as a medicine or a transmuter of metals, was, then, the primary aim and end of alchemy throughout. To decompose all metals into their primitive constituents, so as to ascertain the relative value of each, and to learn how to recombine them in certain specific proportions, was a necessary part of the process; and hence resulted the inestimable service rendered by alchemy to true science—the establishment of the principles of chemical analysis. As to the nature and properties of the wonder-working stone, nothing can be more vague, contra-dictory, and hyperbolical than the reports of professed adepts on the subject, Either they sought to disguise their conscious ignorance by allegorical language, or they pretended to make a mystery of some simple and inefficacious process; or thinking they really had, or were in the way of gaining the secret, they tried to mystify those who might perchance have followed up their indications oo cleverly. This allegorical jargon may be instanced by a quotation from the verses dedicatory of George Ripley, canon of Bridling-ton, the English alchemist, addressed to King Edward IV. He sums up his lore as follows: "This natural process, by help of craft then consum-

mate, Dissolveth the Elicir in its unctuous humiditie, Then in baines of Mary together let them circulate, Like new honey or oil, till they perfectly thicked be: Then will that medicine heal all manner infirmity, And turn all metals to Some and Moone most put Then shall ye have both great Elixir and aurum po By the grace and will of God, to whom be land eter-

Mark the pious sentiment with which Ripley concludes. It is a notable circumstance that from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century the pursuit of alchemy was closely connected with the religious sentiment, or, at all events, professed such connection. Its prominent advocates then, and, indeed, to a later date, were wont to speak of themselves as devout investigators of the truths of God discoverable in the marvels of nature-discoverable only by the pure and patient. They claimed for their pursuit the same religious dignity which Christians of the "broad" school in modern theology are bold to claim for scientific study, on the ground that the God of Revelation is also the God of Nature, and speaks to man by the one mode as well as by the other. Their expressions are often noble and elevated. Hear Johannes Strangunere, in his dying injunctions to his son, in 1432:—"Upon the salvation of thy soul do not forget the poor; and in any case look well to thyself, that thou do not disclose the secrets of this science to any covetous worldly man." In Faber's "Propugnaculum Alchymice," published in 1644, we have the religious theory of the science thus stated:-"The stone of the philosophers is, by all the authors who have treated of it, esteemed to be the greatest gift of God on earth. * * As therefore it is so great and mighty a gift of God, the most necessary thing in order that man should attain to a knowledge of its excellence and worth, is wisdom which is bestowed by God on very few. And Michael Sandivogius, a Polish adept early in the seventeenth century, reputed author of "A New Light of Alchymie taken out of the Fountain of Nature and Manual Experience, as the English translation has it, writes thus: -"Thou, therefore, that desirest to attain to this art, in the first place put thy whole trust in God thy Creator, and urge Him by thy prayers, and assuredly believe that He will not forsake thee; for if God shall know that thy heart is sincer and thy whole trust is put in Him, He will, by one means or another, show thee a way and assist thee in it, that thou shalt obtain thy desire." There is piety, too, in the reason given by this same Sandivogius why the adepts, who have learnt how to circumvent death, chose not to perpetuate their existence on earth: - "Now I do not wonder," he says, when describing the glorious effects of the elixir, 'as before I did, why philosophers, when they have attained to this medicine, have not cared to have their days prolonged, because every philosopher hath the life to come so clearly before his eyes as thy face is seen in a glass." Ben Johnson's impostor acted the character well: -

"He, honest wretch, A notable superstitious good soul, Has worn his knees bare and his slippers baid, With prayer and falling for it, Not a profane word afore him-'t is poison!"

* In the early Middle Ages it is notorious that not only many good and pious men, but many of the highest intellects, pursued the delusive science, and had the popular repute of being "Spaginic sages," or adepts in its mysteries. Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, St. Thomas Aquinus, are the heroes of many fantastic legends: and, indeed, for a long period it was chiefly by eleries, and by monkish cleries, that it was cultivated. In the dreamy solitudes of the cloister, where man's restless inagination so often revenged itself for the restrictions laid on active life. many a tonsured inmate bent over crucible and bellows, "nursing his eternal hope," and praying devoutly for illumination from on

But enthusiasm and imposture are ever close at hand; and what is more strange, the border land between them is perilously ill defined. A liar has been known to lie himself into belief of his own inventions; a fanatic, in his overweening desire for the realization of his dreams, will wilfully forget that evidence needs fact for its basis. The wild stories that spring up like a tangle of weeds round the fama round the fame of every alchemical philosopher of the Middle Ages leave one in amaze both at the credulity and the untruthfulness of our far-off ancestors; and vet might not a glance nearer home suffice to humble those who have lived in the days of table-rapping and spiritualistic scances? The biographies of the earlier alchemists have been largely recorded by the French writars Naude and Lenglet du Fresnoy. We will mention a few of them, but our chief business is with later and less backneyed instances, Among the most famous were Artephius, of the twelfth century, who wrote a treatise on the preservation of life, on the credit of his own experience, being professedly, at the time of writing, in the thousand-and-twentyfifth year of his age; and who used quietly to settle every disputed question of ancient history by the irrefragable plea of person ditestimony. Arnold de Villeneuve, in the thirteenth contury, commonly called Villanovanus, was the reputed author of a recipe for the prolongation of life some hundred years or so, by means of carefully prepared plasters and nostrums. Pietro d'Apone, his contemporary, worked unheard-of wonders with his seven familiar spirits, and used to conjure gold back into his Fortunatus' wallet the moment he had made a disbursement. Greater than any of these was Raymond Lulli, of Majorca, the "enlightened doctor," and

vincing in his arguments than the obstinacy author of the philosophical Ars Lulli, who of metallic ores. Gold might be "exhibited" set up a laboratory at Westminster and filled of Sir Epicure Mammon: the coffers of one of our Edwards to the tune of six millions of rose nobles; though indeed some rationalizing authorities ventured to say it was by inducing the King to lay a tax upon wool, and not by transmuting metals, that he worked that miracle. Nicholas Flamel, a poor Parisian scribe, extracted the secret from a mysterious MS. after twenty years of painful study. Were not the fourteen hospitals, three chapels, and seven churches that he built, restored, or endowed, indisputable evidence of the validity of his claims to the possession of the gold-making stone? What if the incredulous, even in his own time, whispered that he was a miser and usurer, that he extorted his pelf from Spanish Jews, and was a general money-lender to the dissipated youth of Paris? Avaunt, such ignoble calumnies! If the hermetic science bore on the whole

"holy and harmless" character among the inquiring intellects of the thirteenth century, already, in the fourteenth, the quest after th secret of inexhaustible riches had induced a spirit of rivalry and deception which caused serious inconveniences to society. It is to be remarked that the early alchemists invariably went by the name of "philosophers;" the term "gold-makers" was applied in later times and in a derogatory sense. Many Popes and other potentates sought to make the practice of "multiplication," as it was sometimes termed, penal. But in vain: "multipliers multiplied. Coins and medals were minted from what at all events passed for fabricated gold, to the great detriment of commercial interests. Henry IV of England issued a stringent prohibition of the practice. The God-fearing Henry VI eagerly encouraged it, repealing his grandfather's statute, and exhorting all classes of his subjects to search for the secret in the spirit of loyalty, for the replenishment of his coffers; his characteristic piety coming out in the special charge to the clergy, as being undoubtedly possessed of the power of transmuting substances in one way, and therefore more likely perhaps to succeed in the other. Edward IV patronized the art. So did poor Charles VI of France, in his flighty, impulsive way. One of the occupants of the Holy See had the credit of being an alchemist, Pope John XXII, whose bulls issued against the pretenders to the art were perhaps intended to warn off rivals. The eighteen millions of treasure which he was said to have left behind him was the current argument adduced to prove him an adept; the evidence of the fact perhaps as little trustworthy as the inference. Weird fancies have always found a congenial atmosphere within the breast of the Teuton; and it was most conspicuously by Ger-

man emperors and princes that the Spagiric art—so called in fact from a Tentonic word, spaken, to search—was cultivated or patronized. During the fifteenth century it came to be professed by a number of adventurers, "wandering alchemists" as they were styled, who strolled from court to court, sometimes gaining great political influence over their patrons, as, for instance. Hans von Dornberg did over the Landgrave of Hesse: sometimes experiencing the tragic fate of those who sink from great men's favor by a too daring swimming on bladders. The first personage of pre-emment degree who kept a regular "court alchemist" was Barbara, wife of the Emperor Sigismond. She had been instructed, so the story goes, by a wandering sage how to make silver out of copper and arsenic, and to increase the substance of gold by the addition of copper and silver. This metal, on which, at all events, imperial power could pass the flat of currency, she benevolently sold to the poor as genuine metal. The Malgrave John of Brandenburg was so great a proficient in the labors of the crucible that he was surnamed 'the Alchemist," and his residence at the Plassenburg, near Culmbach, was a headquarter of the profession. His fame, however, was outdone in the following century by that of the Emperor Rudolph II, whose soubriquets were "the Prince of Alchemy and "the German Hermes Trismegistus. His superstitious dreams, which cost the empire dear at a time when intellect and energy were required to steer her through her troubles, gave an impetus to "gold-cookery throughout his dominions such as it never received before or after. Adepts fought out

their envious rivalries at his court.

His poet harreate sung of the alchemical processes as of the conflict of allegorical powers in an heroic strife. Here Dee and Kelly, the English mountebank, dropped down for a while on their erratic course. Here Van Helmont was eagerly invited. Here Sandivogius was treated sumptuously, and honored with the title of Councillor of State. Equally zealous with Rudolph, as a student of the art and patron of its professors, was Augustus, Elector of Saxony, who had a laboratory at Dresden, popularly called the Gold House; while his wife, the Electress Anna, practised at Annaburg, and his son and successor, Christian, grew up under their eyes a sharer in the family taste. It was this Christian to whose reign belongs the story of Setonius Scotus (Seaton the Scot), alias the "Cosmopolite," which affords a striking illustration of the precarious conditions of an alchemist's life and fortunes in those days. Setonius professed to have mastered the mystery of gold-making; and the proof he gave of his art, in the presence of the Elector Christian, on one occasion, so greatly impressed that prince's mind: that he caused the luckless adept to be forthwith carried off and imprisoned in a high tower at Dresden, where no one else could get at him to learn his secret, and where a fair field might be left for the Elector's own efforts. He visited his prisoner himself and tried persuasion. Setonius was dumb. Then he employed torture. The poor "Cosmopolite" was racked till within an ace of death. Still no confession; and as it would not do to kill the goose with the golden eggs outright, Seaton was left to linger in the tower, alternately soothed and tormented. One day, by special favor, a Polish visitor was allowed to have access to him. This was Michael Sandivogius, to whom more than once we have already made allusion; he was then a student only, not an adept, in alchemy; he listened eagerly to Seaton's promises of golden reward should he help him to effect his escape. A plan was laid, and successfully executed; the fugitives reached Cracow, but there the strength of Seaton, harassed by long torture and privation, broke down. The cathedral church of Cracow received his re-

mains in 1604. The experience of poor Alexander Scaton was that of many others of his class. The conduct of princes towards the alchemists was, in fact, much like the old fable of the snn and wind. It was a question whether fair means or foul means, favors or tortures, would be most likely to wring the secret out of a man who boasted of carrying it in his breast. More was demanded of the luckless "multipliers" than they were able to per-"Fill my coffers," was the cry of some needy duke or landgrave; "give me money to pay my troops, to feast my re-tainers." Well was it if he did not let his

"My meat shall all come in Indian shells, Dishes of agate set in gold, and studded With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubles; Boiled in the spirit of Sol, and dissolved pearl, Apicius diet, gainst the epilepsy; And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber Headed with dispond and carpungle." Headed with diamond and carour

trade upon, might say, "Give me time to ma-ture my experiments—a little more, and the secret is won." He might thus linger on, well tended and trusted for a while; or should his credit fail, he might be dismissed in disgrace, to go to another petty court, and get 'boarded and lodged" for another term of promise and imposture. On this other hand, if desperately pressed, and confident in his own ingenuity, he might proceed to experi-ment. Then, if he broke down, he might perchance be hung as an impostor-hung in a tinsel-spangled garment, beneath a mocking superscription, like that placed over an unhappy victim at Culmbach, who had boasted of having acquired the much-coveted subdiary art of fixing quicksilver:-

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ment of Ground Rens and published for public information.

JOHN ECKSTEIN, Clerk of Common Council

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Section 2. Whenever any loan shall be made by virtue thereof; there shall be, by force of this ordinance, annually appropriated out of the income of the corporate estates, and from the sum raised by taxation, a som sufficient to pay the interest on additional control of the corporate estates. taxation, a sum sufficient to pay the interest on said certificates, and the further sum of three-tenths of one per centum on the par value of such certificates so issued shall be appropriated quarterly out of said income and taxes to a sinking fund, which fund and its accumulations are hereby especially pledged for the redemption and payment of said certifi-

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And the said Clerk at the stated morting of Council the said Clerk at the stated morting of Council And the said Clerk, at the stated meeting of Councils after the expiration of four weeks from the first day of said publication, shall present to this Council one of each of said newspapers for every day in which the same shall have been

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