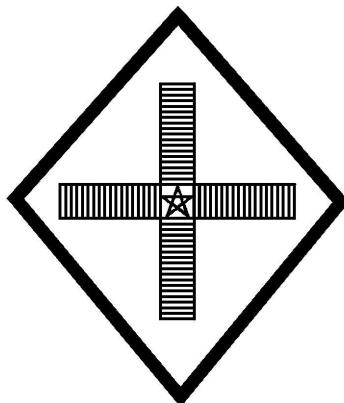


Societas Rosicruciana
In
Anglia



Notes for the Practicus

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Opening

The opening ceremony and prayer make very clear the subject of The Grade of Practicus - Alchemy and the transmutation of the Elements, but in this ceremony the Ancients, who are arranged in the College as in the Grade of Thcoricus, do not have an active role.

The Work

The ritual makes it clear that although the secret knowledge of Alchemy is not directly contained within the ceremonies we perform, certain keys and clues are given to the candidate, to assist him in understanding the key points of this ancient science. Indeed the candidate has already been given some clues as to where to look in the Fellow Craft Degree where he is directed to study "The hidden mysteries of nature and science". However, with this aid it is hoped that he will be able to understand and resolve the issues and paradoxes that are presented to him both in this Grade and in his related studies. But, it is up to the new Practicus to do this work himself, because as the Celebrant says, "We can but point out the Way; you yourself must follow the path you yourself must perform the steps of the process."

Emphasis is placed on the steps of the process in physical Alchemy, as presented in the writings of our ancient brethren, but the candidate is also advised that there is a spiritual Alchemy which must be pursued. The processes and symbolism used in this Higher Alchemy are briefly referred to in this Grade and its lecture, but more is given on this subject in a higher Grade. Above all it must be remembered that just as the study of the other systems of beliefs was in order to draw the seeker back to the realms of his creator, so too does the study of this subject bring the candidate nearer to his God.

The Cross

The particular Cross which is carried by the candidate is a Sw. or F. Cross, and is of very ancient date. Although it is given a Christian explanation, the symbol in fact comes from pre-Christian times. For example, it can be found prominently displayed on Hindu temples in India etc. But in the Practicus ceremony, the Cross is presented in a Christian context and therefore within the Western esoteric tradition, and so it points to the importance of such things as the Ancients, the Elements, the Zodiac, and the Names of God etc., as we understand them in the West.

The explanation of the Cross given to the candidate by the Celebrant is an excellent summary of its various meanings. It links up with the special knowledge that the Frater has already received, and also presents some additional information, such as the Names of God in different languages. All of these correspondences the candidate is encouraged to explore.

The Lecture

The lecture on Alchemy, although extensive, only skims the surface of the subject. The Lecture is printed in the ritual. It reviews the etymology of the word Alchemy / Alchymy, its origins and development as a science (and as precursor to modern chemistry), and refers to some of the great alchemists who contributed to its development, from ancient Egypt and Greece to the present day. Some technical terms relating to the alchemical process which are referred to in the ritual are then explained. Higher Alchemy, or Spiritual Alchemy, is also mentioned as the next area of study in the Society.

The study of ancient Alchemy, as a precursor to modern-day chemistry, is useful information to have in its own right. It is also one source of our understanding of the cosmology of the ancient world. The science of Alchemy reveals to us, albeit in symbolic terms, how our

ancient brethren saw the dynamic relationship between spirit and matter between heaven and earth, between God and Man, between the various 'elements' of the material world and Man's own nature, and how he may be able to control or change them.

The splitting of the atom and the manipulation of subatomic particles achieved in recent times is merely a continuation of Man's efforts to harness energy and control Nature. Modern-day technology is certainly superior to that of our predecessors, but our insights into the nature of matter and how it can be changed also supports many of the theories which were used by our predecessors as the basis of their alchemical work. (Remember, the ancient Greeks proposed the theory of the atom long before we could 'prove' its existence.)

The Lecture then goes on to say that we are also to explore another aspect of this ancient science and one which our predecessors believed to be of even greater importance; this is what they called the Higher Alchemy. This is the alchemy or transformation of the soul and it uses the language, symbols and processes of physical Alchemy as metaphors for this personal psycho-spiritual development and its various stages. For this reason, the two 'types' of Alchemy, both Material and Spiritual, are in fact interdependent; they are two sides of the one alchemical coin! And so the so-called 'spiritual' cannot be properly understood without first studying the 'physical' side of Alchemy.

These are the aims of the Grade of Practicus :-

- i to understand the physical process of ancient alchemy.
- ii to use this science as a spiritual alchemy of the soul, i.e. for one's own moral and spiritual development.
- iii to seek the Philosopher's Stone in Christ.

These are in fact what the Frater committed himself to undertake when he was admitted to the Society.

The Great Work has begun.

An Outline of Alchemy

By R.Wy.Fr. Robert Black

Alchemy, a member of the great Hermetic quartet that consists of alchemy, astrology, the Kabbalah and magic, has recently been defined as “*The art of liberating parts of the cosmos from temporal existence to achieve perfection, which for metals was gold and for man, longevity, immortality and finally redemption.*” Material perfection was sought through the action of a preparation (for example the Philosopher’s Stone for metals; the Elixir of Life for humans), while spiritual ennoblement could result from the receipt of inner revelation (gnosis or other mystical experience).

It is uncertain precisely where the art of alchemy first began although the earliest practitioners of which there is any detailed knowledge come from the Egypto-Greek world. Democritos (c.460 - c.370 BC) defined alchemy as ‘*an art purporting to relate to the transmutation of metals, and described in a terminology at once physical and mystical*’. There had always been a mystical side to early metallurgical processes. Gold in particular, from its natural occurrence in its metallic form, was regarded as the most beautiful and perfect of metals. Among primitive people sacred rituals involving a preparation of fasting, sexual abstinence, accompanied metallurgical operations on gold and strict silence was kept while the metal was melted and poured into the mould. Because of its beauty, attempts were made to make other metals take on the appearance of gold and recipes for such processes are to be found in the Ebers and the Leyden and Stockholm papyri. The Ebers papyrus was compiled about 1550 BC and the Leyden and Stockholm papyri during the early centuries of the Christian era.

The theoretical basis of alchemy derived from the concept that all matter was derived from the combination of the properties of the four elements, earth, air, water and fire, in different proportions. Transmutation was merely the adjustment of the proportions of the

elements in a given metal to those qualities characteristic of gold. This adjustment could be brought about by the use of a fifth element, the Quintessence (later to become the Philosopher's Stone), ascribed to Aristotle, a student and friend of Plato.

Alchemical work became centred on the great library at Alexandria and in a sense alchemy, the science of the time, was based on the study of Nature and was an attempt to understand how the various different metals were produced in the earth as minerals. When the library was destroyed in 640 AD alchemy suffered a decline but was to receive stimulation from an unexpected source -the Moslem empire of the Caliphs of Baghdad. Under such enlightened rulers as Harun Al-Raschid many Greek works on alchemy and science, philosophy and mathematics were translated into Arabic, for the most part by Syriac-speaking Nestorians in the University of Jundi-Shapur in South West Persia. It was by the later re-translation of these Arabic manuscripts back into Latin by scholars such as Robert of Chester that Western alchemy revived in the 12th and 13th centuries. These Islamic manuscripts had been enriched by concepts derived from the great Indian and Chinese alchemists that had travelled along the trade routes of Asia -the Silk Road. In this way alchemy acquired the ideas of immortality, from China the Elixir of Life and from India the intoxicating and enlightening power of Soma.

In the West, many of the students of alchemy such as Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon and Thomas Aquinas were closely associated with the Church or with monastic orders and from this and a very real belief in the close nature of things spiritual and temporal, the "as it is above, so below", of the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistos, gave rise to work in the laboratory in conjunction with that in the oratory (Laborare est orare!). From this it became obvious that the discovery of the prime material, from which the Philosopher's Stone might be prepared was a God given gift and could only be obtained by divine inspiration or by an oral tradition from a 'father in alchemy'. Many alchemists sought long and hard before they attained the goal. Some like Nicholas Flamel set out on an alchemical pilgrimage to the shrine

of St. James at Compostella in Spain having been encouraged by the acquisition of an old illustrated book which needed explanation by a master of the art. The search for the Stone had many of the attributes of the quest for the Holy Grail. Both Stone and Grail being not quite of this world!

The literature of alchemy is highly symbolic as alchemists were not permitted to disclose the secrets of their work but could only hint at their procedures in terms understandable by other adepts but hidden from the mundane world. For example one word might stand for many substances while another substance might be named under many words! Illustrations were used to depict processes and the alchemical engravings of the 17th century are notorious for their beauty and depth of understanding.

During the last thousand years an immense amount has been written and published on the subject of alchemy. Scientists as eminent as Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton have laboured valiantly in order to establish the truth behind the apparently successful reports and demonstrations of transmutation carried out during the 17th century by such mysterious characters as the 'Elias of the Gold-makers', who travelled the continent with the object of convincing sceptics of the reality of transmutation of base metals into gold. As recently as 1922, however, Eugene Canseliet claimed to have transmuted 100 grams of lead into gold in the laboratory of a gasworks at Sarcelles near Paris, using a minute quantity of the Philosopher's Stone given to him by his master a contemporary alchemist writing under the name of Fulcanelli.

While it is known from the work of Lord Rutherford that the metal platinum can be transmuted in minute quantities into (the less expensive!) gold by bombarding a target of that metal with high energy neutrons, there is some doubt on the part of the scientific establishment whether transmutation by the method described by the alchemists was in fact ever achieved. Even the accounts of transmutation carried out by eminent scientists of the past, such as Helvetius, Van Helmont and Robert Boyle, with small quantities of the Stone are open to doubt

although modern research into the methods employed by the alchemists would indicate that some of the effects that they reported can be duplicated in a modern chemical laboratory. Alchemists such as Nicholas Flamel, who lived during the 14th century; managed to amass considerable wealth; build fourteen hostels for the poor, three chapels and repair some seven churches among his other charitable activities in the city of Paris, although spending his life as a public notary. This could only have been achieved by supernatural means. Flamel possessed all the characteristics that might be expected of a true alchemist: the long search, the providential guidance, the participation of a female collaborator, his wife Perrenelle, the 'rags to riches' transformation and the evidence for longevity or of some mystical personality change. It may well be that the alchemists unknowingly developed some form of hyper-chemistry as yet unknown! Only the future will tell.

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The History of the Fraternity

Part 3

In the morning the door was opened and there appeared behind it a vault of seven sides; every side was 5 feet wide and 8 feet high; and although the sun could never shine in this vault, it was brightly lit from the centre of the ceiling.

In the midst was a round altar covered over by a plate of brass on which was engraven:-

"A.C.R.C. This compendium of the Universe I made in my lifetime to
be my tomb".

Round the first circle or brim were the words, "Jesus is my all". Whilst in the middle were four images of figures which were enclosed in circles, whose circumscription was:-

"A vacuum exists nowhere.
The yoke of the Law.
The liberty of the Gospel.
The whole Glory of God.

With this discovery we all knelt down together and gave thanks to God who hath shown us so much more than all men's wit could have thought out.

The upper and lower part of the vault was divided into triangles and those from the seven sides of the upper part met at a mysterious light in the centre, which brilliantly illuminated the whole place. In every side or wall there was a door behind which was contained a chest in which was stored many strange things, books and the supposedly lost arcanum of the Fraternity. We then returned to the altar that was in the centre and moved it to one side and lifted a strong plate of brass from

the top. There we found the body of our Father which, most strangely, was entirely whole and without any decomposition. In his hand he held a parchment book called "I", which next to the Bible is our greatest treasure. At the end of this book stands the following eulogy:-

"C.R.C. sprang from the noble and renowned German family of R.C.: a man admitted into the mysteries and secrets of heaven and earth through the Divine Revelations, subtle cogitations and unwearied toil of his life, In his journeys through Arabia and Africa he collected a treasure passing that of Kings and Emperors, but finding it not suitable for his times, he kept it guarded for posterity to uncover, and appointed loyal and faithful heirs to his arts and also of his name. He constructed a microcosm corresponding in all motions to the Macrocosm, and finally drew up his compendium of things past, present and to come. Then having now passed the century of years (106), though oppressed by no disease, which he had neither felt in his own body nor allowed to attack others, but summoned by the spirit of God, amid the last embraces or his brethren he rendered up his illuminated soul to God his Creator. A beloved father, an affectionate brother, a faithful teacher, a loyal friend, he was hidden here by his disciples for 120 years,

Under this were subscribed the initials of eight Fratres, and at the end was written:-

"We are born from God; we die in Jesus; we live again through the Holy Ghost."

We then covered the body again with the brass plates, and returned the altar to its original position; shut the door and made it secure with all our seals. Then we departed one from the other, and left the natural heirs in possession of our Jewels, knowing that after a time there would be a general reformation, both of Divine and human things. Then we hope some few may join together to increase the numbers and revitalize our Fraternity and make a happy renewal of our philosophical canons as prescribed by our Bro. C.R.C., and thus be partakers with us of our treasures, and walk not blindly in the knowledge of the wonderful works of God.

Recommended Reading

Simple alchemical books are rare, but there are certain books that relate to the subject and I have listed a good few below.

The Lecture in the Ritual of the Grade The Secret Art of Alchemy -Robert M. Black (SRIA publication No.16)

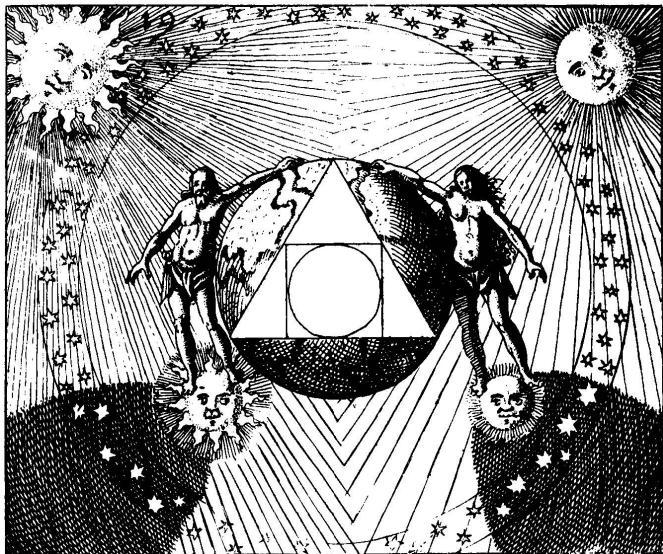
The Secret Art of Alchemy -Stanislas Klossowski de Rola (Thames & Hudson)

The Kabalistic Universe -Z'ye ben Shimon Halevi

Sacred Geometry -Robert Lawler

Hermetic Papers of A. E. Waite. -R. A. Gilbert

There is also a list of books at the back of Robert Black's book on Alchemy that are worthy of study.



The Questions set out below are designed to assist the Frater in his understanding of the Grade of Practicus as well as his preparation for the Grade of Philosophus. You are invited to write a short paragraph or a series of 'notes' on each subject and to send them to your College Co-ordinator of Studies who will pleased to receive them and discuss them with you.

Points of Contemplation

1. What is the name of the Cross carried during the ceremony?
2. What are the sacred letters attributed to the four Elements on the Cross, and what are the Hebrew and Latin words to which they refer?
3. What is your understanding of the terms "the Way", "the path" and "the goal" used by the Celebrant?
4. What is the purpose of Physical Alchemy?
5. What is the purpose of Higher or Spiritual Alchemy?
6. What is the retort that your Soul is placed in and what are the forces that act upon it?
7. What are the four states of Matter?
8. All Chemical and Alchemical processes take time but what does the concept of time mean to you? Is time constant or is it variable?
9. What do you understand by the term "Solve and Coagule"?
10. In the Closing Prayer we ask that the Supernal Triad be with us and that each and every attribute of the Divine Sephiroth assists us in our exertions. What are you asking for?