ALCHEMY, ITS SCIENCE AND ROMANCE

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Alchemy, Its Science and Romance by J. E. Mercer

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J. E. MERCER

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THE ALCHEMIST.
Proof a polyting by Joseph Wright of Derby.

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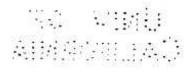
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PREFACE

This may perhaps claim to be an apology for Alchemy. It attempts to set forth, with more of system and of sympathy than is usual, its history, the doctrines it professed, and the results it achieved. It must not, however, be thought that the apologetic intention of the study implies any failure in recognising the weaknesses and follies which abounded in the development of the art, nor the chimerical nature of the means adopted for solving its Grand Secret. The defence is based on a critical estimate of the conditions under which the genuine adepts had to think and work.

I have consulted the works of representative alchemists, especially of the earlier periods. But I lay no claim to detailed research throughout the whole vast range of the literature of the subject. Even Berthelot had to specialise. I have availed myself freely of materials which are more or less easily accessible in modern treatises on the Hermeitic art. I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to the above-mentioned author, and, though in less degree, to such studies as those of Figuier, Muir, and Thorpe, as also to a carefully written article in Hastings' Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics. Fortunately the main features of the subject stand out clearly; a

study of tedious and generally unintelligible detail is unnecessary. What I venture to question is not the evidence, but the justice of the condemnations so often founded upon it. I contend that when we make fair allowance for the conditions under which the genuine alchemists did their work, we shall acknowledge their right to rank as true scientists and discoverers. To judge them from the standpoint of the present is hopelessly irrational.

J. EDWARD MERCER.

February 8, 1920.

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