

**ALCHEMY, ITS  
SCIENCE  
AND ROMANCE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649043200

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

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**J. E. MERCER**

**ALCHEMY, ITS  
SCIENCE  
AND ROMANCE**





THE ALCHEMIST.

From a painting by Joseph Wright of Derby.

[Frontispiece.]

ALCHEMY.

---

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

# ALCHEMY

ITS SCIENCE AND ROMANCE

BY THE  
RIGHT REV. J. E. MERCER, D.D.  
SOMETIME BISHOP OF TASMANIA

*WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS*

LONDON  
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING  
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE  
NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, W.C.  
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN CO.

1921

THE  
UNION  
REPRODUCED

Q

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

THE PROBLEM OF CREATION. An attempt  
to define the Character and Trend of the  
Cosmic Process. 328 pp. 7s. 6d.

SOME WONDERS OF MATTER. 192 pp. 5s.

---

S.P.C.K.

## 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 Hermetic 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, 1930.*

## CONTENTS

PREFACE	...	...	...	...	...	...	PAGE iii
---------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-------------

### INTRODUCTION

#### THE ART AND ITS APPEAL ✓

What Alchemy aimed at—Alchemy compared with magic and astrology—Psychological aspects—Romance—Division of the subject	...	...	...	...	...	...	1
---	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	---

## PART I

### GENERAL HISTORY

#### CHAPTER I

##### MYTH AND EARLY HISTORY

Mythical accounts—Hermes Trismegistus—The idea of transmutation—Early references—The Papyri of Leyden—The mystical factor—Spread of the art	...	...	...	...	...	...	11
---	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----

#### CHAPTER II

##### ARABIAN ALCHEMY

The testimony of words—Documents—Geber—Spread of Arabian Alchemy	...	...	...	...	...	...	23
--	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----

## CONTENTS

## CHAPTER III

## ✓ MEDIEVAL ALCHEMY

	PAGE
Gerbert—Albertus Magnus—Aquinas—Roger Bacon—Raymond Lully—Universal diffusion—Medieval criticism—Persecution	81

## CHAPTER IV

## DECADENCE

Medical Alchemy—Paracelsus—Successors of Paracelsus—The Rosicrucians—Chief cause of decadence ... ..	43
--	----

## CHAPTER V

## TRANSITION TO SCIENCE

Robert Boyle—Alchemy at Oxford—Critics—Dr. Price—Semler—The end of Alchemy ... ..	57
---	----

## PART II

## THE IDEA OF TRANSMUTATION

## CHAPTER I

## ✓ SUGGESTIONS FROM NATURAL PROCESSES

A world of change—The alchemist's aim—The quality of colour—Dyeing the metals—Other qualities of metals—Fixed elements—Imperfect analysis—Two receipts for making gold—Precipitates—Appeal to history ... ..	71
--	----

## CHAPTER II

## PHILOSOPHY OF TRANSMUTATION

A passage from Psellus—Platonic theories of matter—Platonism and Alchemy—The mercury of the philosophers—Composition of the metals—Sulphur—Theory and practice—Qualities as separate entities ... ..	86
--	----