

# Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia

*from the Librarian-General's desk . . . .*

## Recommended Reading List No. 2:

### Books on Alchemy

As with Reading List No.1 (Kabbalah) the purpose of this list is to provide a basic guide for Freres wishing to study the subject - whether as a spiritual discipline or as a practical pursuit. With a single exception it is confined to books in English, some of which are to be found in the High Council Library. [See Ordinance VI para 5 for rules re borrowing of these books]. It should be noted that the choice of books on this list, and all comments upon them, reflect the personal opinions of the Librarian-General and do not necessarily reflect those of other members of High Council.

### Alchemical Texts

#### ASHMOLE, Elias: Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum

Containing several Poetical Pieces of our famous English Philosophers ... A reprint of the London edition of 1652 with a new Introduction by Allen Jones. (NEW YORK, 1967)

Includes the texts of Norton's Ordinall of Alchemy and the works of Sir George Ripley, Edward Kelley and others.

#### BACSTROM'S: Alchemical Anthology Edited and with an Introduction by J.W. Hamilton-Jones. 1960

A useful collection of minor pieces edited by a late Frater who was our most distinguished student of alchemy.

BERTHELOT, M.P.E.: Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs (PARIS, 1888) 3 vols. (Reprinted in one volume in 1963)

A standard collection of texts and translations of Greek and Graeco-Egyptian works (variously Hermetic and purely technical).

The HERMETIC MUSEUM Restored and enlarged...1894  
2 vols. (Several later reprints exist)

Now first done into English from the Latin of 1678. Edited by A.E.Waite, this is one of the more important Latin alchemical collections (it contains 22 texts) and the only one readily available in English.

PARACELSUS: The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus. Translated into English and edited by A.E. Waite (1894) 2 vols. Several later reprints.

The only substantial English translation of the most influential of the Renaissance alchemists. It is, however, based on the 1658 edition of the Works, which is not the most reliable, and it may be useful to consult also J. Jacobi's Selected Writings of Paracelsus (1969, recently reprinted)

VAUGHAN, Thomas: The Works of Edited by A.E.Waite, 1919. A modern reprint exists.

This is the most readable and accessible edition of Vaughan. The standard scholarly edition (by Alan Rudrum, OXFORD, 1984) is both difficult to use and very expensive.

The titles listed above are merely representative of the enormous number of extant alchemical texts. Others that may usefully be consulted are those in the series of translations published by A.E. Waite (1893 - 1896; later reprints exist) and the excellent series of reprints currently issued in Adam McLean's Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks

Critical studies and interpretations of Alchemy

ATWOOD, Mary Anne: A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery with a Dissertation on the more celebrated of the Alchemical Philosophers. New edition, with an Introduction by W.L. Wilmshurst. (BELFAST, 1918) Currently reprinted.

A seminal work first issued - but hastily withdrawn and most copies destroyed - in 1850. Its thesis is that alchemy is a path to regeneration of the soul by way of altered states of consciousness. The student should note that it is a most difficult book to read and to digest.

BURCKHARDT, Titus: Alchemy. Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul. 1907. Later reprints

A sound and reliable spiritual interpretation by a modern mystic.

DE ROLA, Stanislas K.: The Golden Game. Alchemical Engravings of the Seventeenth Century. 1988

An extensive selection of alchemical emblems and most useful as an introduction to the pictorial imagery of alchemy.

HOLMYARD, E.J.: Alchemy 1957

A sound and accurate historical introduction viewed principally as a proto-science.

JUNG, C.G. Psychology and Alchemy. 1968

Alchemical Studies. 1967

The interpretation of alchemy in terms of the archetypes of Jung's psychology and in relation to his form of psychoanalysis.

LINDSAY, Jack: The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt. 1970

A popular but reliable work, with a detailed analysis of esoteric ideas in the Hellenistic world.

READ, John: Prelude to Chemistry. An outline of alchemy, its literature and relationships. 1936

A later reprint exists

The Alchemist in Life, Literature and Art. 1947

Two delightful studies that combine elegance of style with a true mastery of the subject.

SIVIN, Nathan: Chinese Alchemy: Preliminary Studies. (CAMBRIDGE, Mass.), 1968

A useful reminder that alchemy is universal and is not confined to the Western Hermetic Tradition.

WAITE, A.E.: The Secret Tradition in Alchemy, its development and records. 1926 (And later reprints)

Waite argues that a spiritual interpretation of alchemical texts cannot be applied to any that are earlier than the late 16th century. This viewpoint is not widely supported but Waite's work is of great value for the information on alchemy in the 18th and 19th centuries. It should be noted that his earlier work, Lives of Alchemystical Philosophers (1888 and modern reprints) needs to be treated with caution as the biographies and bibliography it contains are very unreliable.

### Bibliographies and Journals

The literature of alchemy, both primary and secondary, is vast and often difficult of access, but much important critical and textual material is to be found in specialist journals. The most valuable of these are Ambix (Journal of the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry; 1939 - in progress); The Journal of the Alchemical Society (1913 - 1915); and The Hermetic Journal, edited by Adam McLean (1977 - in progress). There are also useful papers in the Transactions of the Metropolitan College (1885 - in progress) and in The Occult Review (1905 - 1952) A useful guide to much of this periodical literature is PRITCHARD, Alan Alchemy: a Bibliography of English-language writings. 1980

For information on early printed texts the one invaluable work is —

FERGUSON, John: Bibliotheca Chemica. A catalogue of the Alchemical, Chemical and Pharmaceutical works in the collection of the late James Young. (GLASGOW, 1906) (Currently reprinted) 2 vols.

The student will also become aware of numerous recent works advocating alchemy as a practical science dedicated to physical regeneration as well as to spiritual enlightenment. Opinions of their value are necessarily subjective, but among them the works of the American 'Frater Albertus' may be noted and there is one English author, Archibald COCKREN, who claimed to have produced 'results of a tangible, definite and practical nature' which he set out in his book Alchemy Rediscovered and Restored. 1940 (later reprinted)

The Society also publishes a number of Booklets reprinted from Papers given at Study Groups and Circles.

Subsequent Reading Lists will cover: The Rosicrucian Tradition, Astrology, Tarot, Western Mysticism, Buddhism and Gnosticism.