

# Light and Life

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"Mysticism, properly understood, represents the Spiritual side of Life."—F. F.

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## Alchemy and the Alchemists.

### INTRODUCTORY.\*



It may seem superfluous in the author of the following remarks to disclaim the purpose of reviving the study of Alchemy, or the method of teaching adopted by the Alchemists. Alchemical works stand related to moral and intellectual geography, somewhat as the skeletons of ichthyosauri and plesiosauri are related to geology. They are skeletons of thought in past ages.

It is chiefly from this point of view that the writer of the following pages submits his opinions upon Alchemy to the public. He is convinced that the character of the Alchemists, and the object of their study, have been almost universally misconceived; and as a matter of *fact*, though of the past, he thinks it of sufficient importance to take a step in the right direction for developing the true nature of the studies of that extraordinary class of thinkers.

The opinion has become almost universal, that Alchemy was a "pretended science by which gold and silver were to be made by the transmutation of the baser metals into these substances, the agent of the transmutation being called the philosopher's stone." Those who professed this *Art* are supposed to have been either impostors or under a delusion created by impostors and mountebanks. This opinion has found its way into works on Science, and has been stereotyped in biographical dictionaries and in encyclopædias, large and small; and, in general, allusions to Alchemy, in histories, romances, and novels, are of but one character, and imply that the professors of the *Art* were either deluders or deluded,—were guilty of fraud or the victims of it.

It may be a hopeless task to announce a different persuasion with the expectation of superseding this deeply-rooted prejudice; but the author

\* From volume published in New York, 1865.

thinks it a duty to declare the opinion he has derived from a careful reading of many alchemical volumes, and in the following remarks he has taken for his thesis the proposition that *Man* was the *subject* of Alchemy; and that the *object* of the Art was the perfection, or at least the improvement, of Man.

The salvation of man—his transformation from evil to good, or his passage from a state of nature to a state of grace—was symbolized under the figure of the transmutation of metals. Under this point of view the works of the Alchemists may be regarded as treatises upon religious education, though they may now only serve to show past opinions upon this important subject.

The writings of the Alchemists are all symbolical, and under the words gold, silver, lead, salt, sulphur, mercury, antimony, arsenic, orpiment, sol, luna, wine, acid, alkali, and a thousand other words and expressions, infinitely varied, may be found the opinions of the several writers upon the great questions of God, nature, and man, all brought into or developed from one central point, which is Man, as the image of God.

The author is perfectly aware of the latitude of interpretation to which all symbolical writings are exposed, and that it is possible for an undisciplined imagination to make from such writings *anything of anything*, and indeed to make almost anything of *nothing*. He needs no schooling on this subject, but feels himself, on the contrary, in a position to justify his warning the readers of all symbolical works, that they cannot be too cautious and guarded against supplying from their own imaginations and afterthoughts, interpretations to all such works. They should hold themselves absolutely upon the immovable foundation of truth and nature, whereby alone they can save themselves from misapprehensions and from the danger of being carried entirely away from reality into mere dreams and fictions. But with the proper guards, supplied by sound theory and a knowledge of nature, it is extremely interesting, and the author thinks instructive, to interpret bygone forms of thought, even in alchemical volumes, in which it is quite possible that many precious jewels may be found, though the philosopher's stone be missed.

It would be a useless labour to enter here upon a defence of symbolic writing, when nothing is more certain than that men of genius in all ages, seemingly by a constraint of nature, have fallen into it. That the Sacred Scriptures are full of it must be confessed by all who are not in a condition to read as literal truth the history of Robinson Crusoe and of Gulliver's Travels;—not that the author would institute a comparison between these works and the sacred writings. He only means, by a reference to the Revelation, to the story of the man of Uz, to the beautiful parables of the New Testament, &c., to show that teaching by way of similitude, parable, fable, allegory, or in one word, by symbolism, is as old as writing itself.

While this form of teaching appears naturally to have been adopted by genius, from the earliest time, its preservation seems due to a corresponding working in the human mind, to which all symbolism is addressed. It is plain that, if a symbolic work finds no echo in the human heart, it must perish; while, for this very reason, where such works have been preserved through many ages, it affords a fair presumption that their authors have struck a vein of imperishable truth.

This species of writing is also the most innocent in the world, for the reason, that, while its literal sense is very frequently no sense at all, and is therefore harmless, its hidden sense, as intended by its author, must be equally harmless; for if the sense intended does not exist in nature, no counterpart is discoverable, and nothing permanent can come from it; while, if an echo is readily found, the symbolism must be true,—and all truth is valuable.

In the case of the Alchemists, who promised heaps of riches, it is admitted that multitudes of men were deluded by the mere literal reading of their works, or rather by their own absorbing desire of wealth. Such men were said, by the Alchemists, to have "the gold fever, which had darkened their senses." Men wholly bent on worldly treasures were rather the dupes of their own passions than deceived by the writings of the Alchemists, more especially since their writings are full of cautions against this very misunderstanding. The riches they promised were "the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. xi. 23), and "of his grace" (Ephes. ii. 7).

The Alchemists were *Reformers* in their time, obliged indeed to work in secret, but, nevertheless, making their impression upon the public. They lived, for the most part, in an age when an open expression of their opinions would have brought them into conflict with the superstition of the time, and thus exposed them to the stake;—where, indeed, many of them perished, not having been sufficiently guarded in their language.

They were religious men when the spirit of religion was buried in forms and ceremonies, and when the priesthood had armed itself with the civil power to put down all opposition, and suppress all freedom, intellectual, civil, moral, and religious.

It was in that midnight of darkness that a light from heaven, as it seemed, was treated of in books for the initiated, as the Elixir of Life, the Water of Life, the Universal Medicine, and the Philosopher's Stone.

The volumes in which this thought of the time was enshrined were written in symbolic form, to hide the subject from the crowd, not in a condition to profit by it, and to screen the authors from persecution. They are now measurably forgotten, and, the occasion of them having passed away, will never be revived and studied on their own account; but they yet exist for us and for future times as marvellous *skeletons*, where may be found abundant evidences that there were "giants in those days," though they made but little show in the world, living as they did in retirement, upon the "still, small voice," wherein lay chiefly their so much talked of secret.

In reading their works, with a knowledge of the historical position of the writers, one is strongly reminded of the query of Sir Thomas Browne. Who knows, says he, whether better men have not been forgot, than stand recorded in the book of time, who, nevertheless, may be registered in the book of God?

I have examined a great many alchemical works, at a time of life and under circumstances when the imagination, if it ever deceived me, has "yielded its plumage," and I feel entirely able, as I am certainly willing, to see things as they are. I therefore say, after much study and deliberation, that the works of the *genuine* Alchemists, excluding those of ignorant imitators and mischievous impostors, are all essentially religious, and that the best external assistance for their interpretation may be found in a study of the Holy Scriptures, and chiefly in the New Testament,—that "light which was, before the light," being by no means, and on no account, overlooked.

There was no doubt an abundance of impostors who played upon the credulity and cupidity of the public, but the genuine Alchemists were religious men, who passed their time in legitimate pursuits, earning an honest subsistence, and in religious contemplations, studying how to realise in themselves the union of the divine and human nature, expressed in man by an enlightened submission to God's will; and they thought out and published, after a manner of their own, a method of attaining or entering upon this state as the only rest of the soul.\*

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\* The Hermetic Poetry given here is omitted for the present.

"The Philosophers," says Flammel, "have a garden, where the sun as well morning as evening remains with a most sweet dew, without ceasing, with which it is moistened; whose earth brings forth trees and fruits, which are transplanted thither, which also receive nourishment from the pleasant meadows. And this is done daily: and there they are corroborated and quickened, without ever fading; and this more in one year than in a thousand where the cold affects them."

Let an idea of the isle or garden gleam upon the soul as an attainable object, and the experience of that idea will explain much of the literature of past ages; especially such poems as the "*Romaunt of the Rose*," translated by Chaucer. It may afford a hint in explanation of those *Love Tales*, the abuse of which style of writing brought out Cervantes; and, indeed, the large class of poems, as well as tales, excluding the base imitations, the counterfeit coin, known as the *Love Literature of the Middle Ages*, will find their interpretation in that idea, including the *Sonnets* and the *Triumphs of Petrarch*, and even the *Divina Commedia* itself.

If to yearn for such a life was folly, and is judged incompatible with the practical demands upon man living under the so-called curse of labour, it was, at least, an innocent folly, with which the world has never been over-burdened; and the few who found, or thought they found, their rest in that Eden, may be pardoned by those who glory in what they call a more enlightened age. Even to seek it had a charm which smoothed the hardest external fate, as undoubtedly it supported many while suffering in the flames lighted by the Inquisition.

But, as I have elsewhere said, that Life is like an Art, which must be sought, if sought at all, for itself, and not for its rewards. Admission into the gardens of the Hesperides is accorded only to those whose "dreams" are exclusively upon the "beauty" of the presiding queen; for—and the reader may ponder on this principle—the success is contained in the dream itself, and is developed from it, just as every desire contains an essence of its own, which works itself into manifestation, whether it be good or whether it be evil;—but its quality is not to be estimated by what it accomplishes outwardly, but by what it deposits, that is, to use the language of Alchemy, by the *salt* it leaves in the soul where it originates.

I think proper to add, that my original design in preparing these remarks was simply to express a mere opinion, and support it by a few citations from the works on Alchemy, and I thought a small pamphlet would answer this purpose. I have unexpectedly exceeded the size of a pamphlet, and find it necessary to go to press in a book form, though I did not aspire to "write a book." But although my appearance must be more formal than I intended, I desire to say that nothing original, as coming from myself, need be looked for in the volume. Whatever interest the work may have will be due to the class of men I have written about, who have furnished me with materials, and especially with extracts from their own writings, which I have been obliged to use freely in support of a simple opinion in regard to their labours and studies. This opinion, I am very sure, has some novelty to the present generation, and, if well founded, must then have some interest; though it may commend itself principally to speculative men who delight in a study but little regarded in our "practical age." But neither steam power nor telegraphs, with all their admitted wonders, themselves the product of the human mind, can ever destroy in man the tendency to search into the arcana of his own sublime and all but infinite nature, in whose "heart," as we read in the Holy Scriptures, God hath "set the world."

E. A. H.

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, *January, 1857.*

## Jacob Boehme: His Life and Teaching, or Studies in Theosophy.

By the late Dr. Hans Lassen Martensen.

(Continued from page 24.)

It is much to be regretted that the Danish Bishop had not seen Freher's expositions: evidently he had not; for a student so candid could never have written as he does if these *had* been known to him. Those who have access to the late Mr. Christopher Walton's *Memorial of William Law* (unpublished), must feel deeply grateful to him for putting such large portions of Freher's writings within their reach in English. But for these, this Bishop's version of Boehme's teaching as to the relation of Eternal Nature to the Eternal Spirit would have found me ill prepared to meet it, and I should have been induced to think the greatest of mystics in error, or, at best, rash in expression. Martensen's whole indictment is clear and forcible, but too long for quotation; this in brief is its outline. Boehme represents God, who is a Spirit, as needing Eternal Nature for His own perfected life; the source of all Being and all existences as needing His instrument of manifestation for *self-consciousness* and self-knowledge. What I now offer of Freher's anticipatory defence will sufficiently meet the misunderstandings exposed from page 110 to 127.

If, as I am fain to believe, the blessed dead retain their memory, and their interest in the pursuit of truth which occupied them in this world, I cannot but think this good man will, for truth's sake, be pleased to have his mistakes of an earlier teacher rectified.

"Concerning understanding, knowing and perceiving itself, both these are affirmed and denied of the first Abyssal Being by Teutonicus, and both are consistent with each other with respect to two different worlds."—(*Memorial of Law*, page 265.)

"As to the first Abyssal World, no affirmative saying from this world can be admitted into that, though never so much refined and exalted, because there is *no coherence, no analogy, and no mutual answerableness* between them, the one of them being in Nature, and the other without Nature."—(*Ibid*, page 268.)

"This first world is deeper than any natural sense or thought can reach. But now, when such a sense is denied, the question is, what is then left, or what benefit can we reap from such descriptions?" (as Boehme's.) Answer.—There is left a deeper sense, excluding the generation of Eternal Nature, and therefore not conceivable by creatures what or how, but only knowable that it is. The words of Boehme signify that all our ideas of this first Abyssal world must be negative; and that no affirmative one, truly to be called so, can be had thereof by any creature."—(*Ibid*, page 269.)

"I know very well that, according to the principles of Teutonicus, in various senses, upon different accounts, and with several respects, that which is by him considered as before Eternal Nature, may be called both something and nothing; and may be said again to be neither nothing nor something; and truly he cannot be blamed for such variety and seeming contradictory expressions. He could not help it, and no man living on earth shall be found able to represent these things to the understanding of another, with such expressions as never should seem to cross and contradict each other. If the Spirit of God in the Revelation could have said of one and the same thing it was, and was not, and yet was, nay, could have added *here is wisdom*, &c., who can justly complain of Teutonicus?"—(*Page* 262.)

"Wisdom, in the first world, is not an empty name, but it implieth not only a perceiving its abyssal state, but also a finding itself able and all-sufficient for



performing its intent, viz., for going through the first three properties of dark Nature into the fire, and through the fire into the light: for this is its going into the second world, and its becoming in this world, that which it will be, and not yet can be in the first world."—(Page 272.)

"We do not deny that all the Divine perfections are in the Triune Being without Nature, yet we say that they are not yet exerted, and cannot become exerted but by the raising up and passing through the properties of Nature;" . . . "and so we cannot so properly say God is Omnipotent without all Nature, but more properly we say, He is all-sufficient to show forth His omnipotence in the generation of Nature. Which all-sufficiency cannot raise in us any idea of defect or imperfection, but rather of all and every perfection, only considered as still concentrated, and not yet out of that centre unfolded and displayed."—(Pages 296 and 297.)

It was after reading Freher's reply to objections similar to Bishop Martensen's that a *Mr. Pierce* thus acknowledged its sufficiency. "I return many thanks for the sight of these papers; before which I did not distinguish between the Eternal generation and the Eternal manifestation, but conceived the Three-fold Spirit in the Abyss to be ungenerate and hidden; but now I understand the Triune Spirit to be in the Abyss generate and manifest to itself before Nature. And that which pleaseth me much more is to see none of the former descriptions denied or laid aside, but reconciled with the latter, which I did not understand further than the Eternal Nature; but might well have expected more in them than in the former had I considered that the author (Boehme) saith '*the descriptions are one deeper than another*,' and that he *saw more and more*; but I, not minding this, took the former to be complete, and thought he knew all at first, though not able to set it all down, and for that reason I laid by what I could not find in them, thinking it was enough to know as far as the Eternal Nature."—(*Walton's Memorial of Law*, page 286.)

Martensen's misapprehensions of Boehme on this point were due to just this arrest of thought. *Beyond* no creature can imagine, but to believe Eternal Nature, the *all* of which the God of gods is cognisant, is to fall below rational thought. From page 126 to 132, commenting on what he terms "the dark-nature principle in God," Martensen is so wholly on the wrong track that to answer his assertions in detail would be unfair as well as waste of time. He writes on this subject as correctly as any one might who, while describing some chemical experiment, was ignorant himself of one of its main factors; and I do not believe that the most acute mind, studying Boehme without Freher's aid, could altogether escape a false conclusion here. Less powerful intellects may have been aware that the contradictions found in his teaching were *apparent* only, if convinced that Boehme spoke from a higher ground than Reason; but, to the best of my knowledge, Freher alone has faced these perplexing disagreements, and thoroughly resolved their discord. Until his Treatise on "*Deity, considered as manifesting Himself through Eternal Nature*" is placed by some benefactor of mankind within reach of an English public, I do not think Boehme's hardest knots can *ever* be loosened even to the degree they then might be—by every reader patient enough for close attention to the slow windings of an eighteenth-century style. With such attention this admirable Treatise is not at all hard reading.

On one point alone—the action of the *Lubet*, or, as Boehme sometimes calls it, the *Liberty*—(because that divine pleasure is free from all necessity)—in evolving the seven forces of Eternal Nature, Freher's elucidation is priceless. For many years, not perceiving what is *implied* in Boehme's own words, I foolishly supposed these forces would of themselves lead from the first harsh astringency to the striking up of fire, and all subsequent effects; unconsciously sharing the superstitions of the materialist, who attributes *life* to protoplasm,

but from Freher one learns that without the Lubet, Eternal Nature could not be: it was and is the desire of Divine love that comprised and thus concealed its omnipotency in those first severe *conditions* of evolution, that Deity might be manifested—and oh! how infinitely much more than that form of speech implies!—let us say rather that the generation of the ever blessed Trinity in a lower world might be made possible in an endless *naturing* of souls.

How the right evolution of light in *this* Universe was arrested, and for a vast period of time hindered by the rebellion of the “throne-angel” called Lucifer, Boehme has stated, and Freher has explained, in the Treatise mentioned above, and this part of his revelations the Bishop seems to have grasped with great distinctness.

Instead of combating one by one such misconceptions of his as this at *page* 133 “If God, as the Being of all Beings, is to be conceived as the Union of Spirit and Nature”—and at *page* 144, “That God, as Spirit, is regarded as potential not actual, a life which is not a life, but a mere figure and schema of life,” I venture for the satisfaction of *some* readers, at the risk of fatiguing others, to quote Freher again in reply.

“It is absolutely false that Boehme considereth God only so. For though he hath the same expressions that are in this objection mentioned, viz., that God is considered *only* in the second principle of light, yet it is as clear as the day at noon that this *only* is by Himself united and confined to Eternal Nature, and especially to the three tintured and harmonized properties thereof. So that it is to say that God, as manifested in Eternal Nature, is considered only in the second principle. And so this *only* doth not at all import that there is not a deeper and more central consideration of God, since it is notorious that he considereth God also as unmanifest, in that Abyss where there is neither darkness nor light, that is before Eternal Nature.”—(*Memorial of Law*, *page* 260.)

To Martensen’s saying “God as Spirit, or God in the still mystery, is for Boehme only universal will, or the will of Unity, the mystic freedom which at root wills nothing, and can only become a definite will through the agency of Nature.”—(*Page* 112.)

Freher’s words answer—“God will manifest Himself in Nature, which cannot be done without the desire; but having in Himself a Lubet, wherein the Eternal generation of the Trinity is implied, He is manifest to Himself before and without the manifestation in Nature, and cannot but know, perceive, and find Himself.”—(*Memorial of Law*, *page* 282.)

The first few paragraphs of the 16th chapter of Boehme’s *Signatura Rerum* are so explicit on this subject that it alone might have saved the Bishop from his mistaking there.

Freher’s Treatise on “Regeneration” gives a fulness of satisfaction to every inquirer as to this profound mystery; to quote from it is to take but a drop of water as a sample of the *quality* of waters in a deep well.

When at *page* 140 of his Studies Martensen says—“God as a Personality is severity and self-exaltation, is holiness and righteousness, is the jealous God who vindicates His own honour, and is also gentleness, self-surrender, and love,” with context to the end of that page, one feels very powerfully what Boehme’s teaching has done to *relieve* the mind from any idea of the High and Holy God such as this; for surely here is the anthropomorphic concept of Deity which is rebuked by the saying, “Thou thinkest I am such a One as Thyself;” here the fountain source of the degrading barbarities man has attributed to God, and practised upon his fellow-creatures for “*the glory of God*;” here the justification of Puritans and Calvinists who, like “the renowned Dr. Preston,” when rebutting in the time of Charles the Second all arguments of hope for hardened sinners after death, declared that “never did

strong man glory of his strength more than God doth of His sovereignty. Now if it fall that in the illustration and exercise of these His glorious attributes and excellences, some creatures smart, yet He delights not in their smart and sufferings, but in the demonstration of His Omnipotency."

I thank God the two centuries and a half which have elapsed since those words were uttered by a holy man, have raised our conceptions of Deity from that childish level!

But how does Boehme teach as to this? On what basis can he plant contrary convictions? On this, that all which is predicated in the Scriptures, and all we see and feel of severity, wrath, jealousy, and the like, is referable to the spirits of God's Eternal Nature acting in the world where their properties are in manifest distemperature *according* to that divided state. God Himself, he tells us—conformably to St. John's repeated assertion—is *Love*, and *can only love*. "God loves all His creatures, and can do nothing else but love; for He is the only Love itself. But His wrath is understood to be in the temporal and Eternal Nature."—(*Election, chap. 5, par. 75.*)

This very important key to all the discords of our present life would have taken the Bishop more fully into Boehme's meaning as to *necessity* of evil. "There is a poison and malignity in all things, and it must be so, otherwise there would be no life and no mobility, nor would there be any colour or virtue, thickness or thinness, or any perception whatever; but all would be as nothing. In this high consideration it is found that all is through and from God Himself, and that it is His own substance, and that He has created it out of Himself. And the evil belongs to the forming and mobility and the good to the love, and the *austere, severe* or contrary will belongs to the joy."—(*Preface to the Three Principles, as quoted in Martensen's Studies.*)

Taking this assertion alone, one is not surprised that he was "stumbled" by it; and such expressions are incautious, as much so as many to be found of the Hebrew prophets in our Bible; but I submit that they are not fairly to be taken alone until we have discerned their truest sense. As I understand this passage, Boehme speaks here of the outcome of the properties of Nature, derived from Eternal Nature, but—in our world—broken off from the perfect harmony and *equality* in which they originally interacted. Now that their holiness (wholeness) is in discord, the poison and malignity are indeed as indispensable as the gall bladder to the animal body, but *not the manifestation* of this poison.\* What can be meant by such an expression when he speaks of *colour, virtue, thickness, and thinness, depending on that poison?* Surely the same that he indicates when saying that *all* life must proceed from "the anguish chamber."

The first three "tormentive properties" of Nature that kindle and maintain life are those which the words *harsh astringency, mobility, and anguish*, but faintly point to: these tremendous forces, he teaches us, *must* underlie life in every degree of creatureliness.† [The dread alternative is what he calls *the great still-standing death*, where astringency holds captive all the evolutionary forms of nature.]

"In this high consideration," he adds, "it is found that all is through and from God Himself, and that it is His own substance, and that He has created it out of Himself." Yes, verily, for the desire of the Abyssal God *imagined*,

\* "The anguish, trouble, sorrow, and anxiety which are in man's outward mind and nature, being exterior to the depth of his eternal soul, are only a shadowy figure thereof, and quite unable to declare the inward essentiality of so deep a thing—a thing so transcendent all external nature."—*Dionysius Freher.*

† "That is the poison source whence the fierce wrath and all evil and malignity originally ariseth, and yet is the right original of the perceptible life; the life findeth itself thus."—*Incarnation, Part 2, chap. 4, par. 30.*



and thus formed the nature which is "His somewhat"—"all things are arisen through the Divine imagination, and do yet stand in such a birth, station, or government."—(*Sixth Epistle, par. 78*). "Every imagination maketh substantiality." How much more the imagination of the Supreme Spirit!

"And the evil belongs to the forming, and mobility, and the good to the love, and the austere, severe, or contrary will belongs to the joy." In quoting this problematic passage, Martensen should have finished the sentence, "so far as the creature is in the light of God, so far as the wrathful and contrary will maketh the rising Eternal joy, but if the light of God be extinguished it maketh the rising painful torment and the hellish fire."—(*Preface to Three Principles, par. 14.*)

So far, inasmuch as the greater the fire the greater the light to arise from it, for "the fire of God is a cause of the light, and of the power, strength, and omnipotency. But in the love the fire dieth and transmuteth itself into the kingdom of joy, for at the end death originated, which is as a dying in the fire; out of which dying the light as another source or quality originateth."

"Every angel and soul which will live in God's Light and Power must die to the selfhood of the fire's dominion in the desire."—(*Third Apology, Text 1, pars. 57, 59, and 60.*)

Who does not know what anguish it often is to die to the selfhood, in the fire of wrath, or any strong desire in the "Fire's dominion," i.e., Nature unatoned; but let all who read this believe it! "If there were no anguish there would be no fire; if there were no fire there would be no light; if there were no light there would be neither Nature nor substance, and God would not be manifested."—(*Second Apology, Part 1, par. 141.*)

To apprehend this great fact in spiritual nature more clearly and fundamentally, the third chapter of Boehme's Treatise on the Election of Grace should be studied with care and patience.

At page 151, where his main error as an interpreter of Boehme is repeated, "Boehme views God in the still mystery as mere potentiality"—which he does not—Martensen seems to me to have stated his doctrine as to the efflux which makes up the Divine Quarternary with great clearness, but apparently without seeing that so stated the Heavenly Wisdom and the glory of God are identical. I believe they are closely related. I have been gradually led to that conclusion, during the last two or three years, by noticing the agreement of all Boehme says of the one, with almost every reference made in Scripture to the others in an objective sense.

Yet I scarcely like to express the strength of my convictions on this head, knowing that they must seem fanciful and presumptuous to any one who has not long and carefully examined all Boehme's intimations.

The Bishop seems to catch, and soon again to lose, this *glint* of light, for he proceeds to speak of God's glory in quite another sense than that of an "objectivity different from God, and yet inseparable from Him; prior to, and independent of, the created world: the first and eternal production" (emanation would be, I think, a fitter word) "of the Triune God, the mirror from which His riches are reflected upon Him."—(*Martensen, page 151.*)

My belief is that by "glory" is meant that by which [through the medium of the Wisdom] the Holy Ternary becomes perceptible.\* The Wisdom Boehme often speaks of as the "outflow Word"—inseparable from The Word from which all created existence derives, and so to speak, the passive recipient of Being from the Father of Spirits; and thus in a very exact sense the Mother of all worlds. "For from the Eternal Mother the inceptive Mother

\* In his *Third Apology, Text 1, par. 213*, we find this expression, "The Eternal Wisdom, viz., the glance of His glory."

came to be." . . . "Out of the Eternal Nature God hath manifested or revealed His Wisdom; for in the Divine Wisdom hath the *substance* of the spirits and creatures been from Eternity; but with the moving of God the Father it passed into a *formed* creation, according to the property of the Essence in the word *fiat*, in the word of power."—(*Apology* 1, *Part* 2, *pars.* 173 and 184.)

When Moses said on the Mount, "I beseech Thee show me Thy glory," I suppose that *this*, the Heavenly Wisdom, was what he was permitted to see a glimpse of. When the shepherds were told by angels of the birth of the Saviour, and the glory of God shone round about, I understand the same. Again, when in *Romans* vi. *ver.* 4, St. Paul says, "like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father," I believe the "corporeity" of the Triune God—as Boehme calls the Wisdom—must be understood. Space cannot be spared for citing other passages of the Bible susceptible of the same interpretation, but these are enough to explain the bearings of the hypothesis. And in that oft-quoted and oft-misapplied injunction to *do all to the glory of God*, I find for it further support. Can the creature be supposed in *any literal* sense to increase or heighten what we *usually* understand by the glory of the infinitely great God? Surely it is but a puerile notion adapted to our ignorance to imagine it; but this is what the human creature *can* do to increase Deific glory; it can by meekness—by death to self—*produce* reciprocity for the *water of eternal life*, of which "divine substantiality, Christ's heavenly corporeity" is formed; and just to the degree that Christ is formed in us, so is the glory of God extended.

It would require a volume almost as large as the one under review duly to scrutinise the Bishop's remarks upon the created and the uncreated Heavens, where I find it more difficult to get a thoroughfare for thought than in any page of Boehme's, just because of the intricate blending of true and false readings of his lore: I shall therefore pass on to what he says of the Wisdom, and believing its connection with the glory of God to be nothing less than that of the *unmanifest* with the *revealed*, I will venture to touch upon one branch of this great mystery which seems to me to admit of some degrees of apprehension.

If Martensen had not so wholly missed or refused Boehme's teaching as to "essentiality," by which word, in the original, *substantiality* was undoubtedly meant—(see *Martensen's Studies*, page 273)—we should not find him saying, "As Theosophy frequently reiterates Wisdom, the Idea, can at the same time diffuse itself throughout all created space, can pervade and most subtilly permeate all things, and can also concentrate itself and dwell absolutely in one individual soul," without any reference to all Boehme says of the *formation of heavenly substance in the human soul*.

The difficulties surrounding this part of his writings are so very great that one cannot be surprised at any attempt at *thinking out* the subject failing utterly. For following Boehme's many and emphatic words about the Wisdom, we have to combine images that naturally conflict, viz., "the outspoken substance of the Deity," "Corporeity of the Holy Spirit," "the Mirror of the Abyssal God," and the Helpmeet—the woman of Adam before he fell and needed his Eve. This is the most confounding assertion of all! Thirty-two years ago I began to read Boehme, and only ten years ago could I attach the faintest apprehensible idea to such words as meet us again and again in one of his easiest and simplest writings—the *Way to Christ*. For example. "When Christ the corner-stone stirreth Himself in the extinguished image of man, in his hearty conversion and repentance, then *Virgin Sophia* appeareth in the stirring of the Spirit of Christ, in the extinguished *image*, in her *virgin's attire* before the soul."—(*Way to Christ*, page 55.) So repulsive and impossible to receive

did I find this and similar phraseology even twenty years ago, that I passed it over unread, whenever the word *Virgin Sophia* warned me of the mental *impasse*. And to reduce their import to anything of an allegorical figure of speech was as impossible as to understand it literally. But I had learned from previous gains in Boehme's inexhaustible treasury of light that all he affirms to be a fact must be accepted as such, and not mistaken for any theoretic fancy of his own; so I was fain to let this tangle of nonsense (as it seemed) lie quiet in the mind till the Giver of all Good gave me any ray of intelligence about it; for I knew well that pulling hard at such knots only tightens them more inextricably. Such waiting for *unspoken* instruction, earnestly desired, is seldom disappointed. It was granted to me at length *as I believe*; but by a very gradual process. Thoughts of the ubiquity of the Lord Christ, and the *individualised* Christ in regenerate men and women in whom Christ is formed, gave me the first help; then the saying, "Where the Word is, there is also the Virgin, or Wisdom of God; for the Word is in the Wisdom, and the one is not without the other, or else the Eternity would be divided."—(*Threefold Life*, chap. 6, par. 78.)

In the *Third Apology*, Text 2, par. 35, Boehme speaks of "In the Jesu, viz., in God's Love and Wisdom," I was further helped to fasten together a few ties of thought bearing upon the puzzle by what I read of the *Akasa* of the Eastern Adepts, of an invisible substance in our lower atmosphere which—by force of long exercised concentration of will—these Adepts frame into objects of external vision, nay, into tangible existence, and in connection with this the words of Jesus came to mind, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamore tree, be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea, and it should obey you."—(*Luke* xvii., ver. 6.) I could see that by this faith an attractive force of *desire* was indicated, the desire of a vegetable soul—but yet a soul—and that when the human soul was rebuked for lacking that faith, such energy of *will* and *desire* for creating their objects must have been man's original endowment. Then followed thought of how mentally we do still create, and that Boehme tells us that *all* substantiality, all creating, even God's, was by imagination: "all things are arisen through the Divine imagination, and do yet stand in such a birth" (*Epistle* 6, par. 78); and I began to see what the Wisdom was *relatively to the Word*, and how exactly true are the words of *Proverbs* viii. from verse 22 to 31, that as an infinitely purer analogue of our *Akasa*, "the Wisdom is God's manifestation and the Holy Spirit's corporeity, the body of the Holy Trinity; and this whole Name in one Eternal substance, manifesteth itself through the Wisdom."—(*Third Apology*, Text 3, par. 43.)

And as the *Akasa* is passive to the will of the Adept, and Eternal substance is to the outgoing Fiat of the Word, so we know in all generation is the feminine nature to the masculine, and in this sense would the Wisdom, while united to the human soul, be truly its wife and helpmeet; the fire and light tincture then united in Adam forming thus holy substantiality; which, as has been already explained, "faded" when the imagination of the first Adam fixed upon grosser objects. Until this perished *substance* was brought back into the human race the restoration of the Divine Image was impossible. J. G. Gichtel is in his letters (written between the years 1668 and 1701) a very emphatic witness to all Boehme had previously taught on this obscure theme, and as they have no published English edition, I think quotations from them will here be serviceable.

"I have been," he says, "driven to dig so much deeper in my soul, till at last, in the innermost ground, I found God's kingdom and the image of God which was lost in Adam." . . . "Sophia is a regenerate Christian's new spiritual body which can stand in the fire, and what the strong, gross,

earthly bones are to the gross body, that Sophia is to the Divine Image in the new man—viz., strength, power, and might to fulfil the will of God.” . . . “Sophia must be born from our two inward fires. The mystery is very great! as soon as we surrender our natural will of selfhood so that we become one will-spirit with God, then immediately the original *Ens* which faded away in Adam begins to stir in our soul.” . . . “Only when you have obtained the victory will you understand what Christ is in us, namely, that He is the second Adam with both tinctures, the right bridegroom and husband of the Virgin and widow, and sweet bride and wife to the unmarried man, whom I have called Sophia.” . . . “From this you can understand what true praying is, viz., to bring forth with Sophia, the wife of our youth (*Malachi* ii. ver. 14), Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and *Wisdom*, which is done by the will and desire. But the will is spiritual, a spirit as subtle as a nothing, and therefore it cannot work without a body.” . . . “Therefore Christ teaches the new birth, without which we cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Now in the regeneration Sophia is our helpmeet, for Christ has restored the two tinctures which were by the craft of the devil severed in the first Adam into a male and a female, making them one again—viz., a virginal manhood.”

Now as to the Wisdom or Virgin Sophia, as Gichtel designates her, being as universal a potency as the Word, and at the same time to individual human beings an individualised entity, however strange it may be to our usual conceptions, the oneness of the Lord Jesus Christ with the *Christ formed* in every regenerate soul, might prepare us to accept the idea. It is in fact necessarily involved in the Scriptural doctrine of Christ as Boehme words it, “getting a form” in us: Christ being alike “*the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 *Cor.* chap. i., ver. 24); but a vagueness of thought has accompanied this belief as to the formation of a new *creature*, and the mind naturally recoils from any such definite image as Boehme and other mystics repeatedly present. If Boehme is to be believed as a trustworthy witness, this very important part of his teaching must be accepted. And truly did he say when labouring to place it within reach of other minds, “here again we need an angel’s tongue; for the mind ever asketh *how* and *where*; for when the Deep is spoken of, which is without comprehension or number, the mind always understandeth some corporeal thing. But when I speak of the Virgin of the Wisdom of God I mean not a thing that is confined or circumscribed in a place, as also when I speak of the Number Three, but I mean the whole Deep of the Deity without end and measure. But every divine creature [as are the angels and souls of men] have the Virgin of the Wisdom of God as an image in the *Light of Life*, understand in the substantiality of the Spirit, wherein is the Number Three, dwelling in itself.”—(*Threefold Life of Man*, chap 5., pars. 55, 56, and 57.)

“*In an image*,” that is the special affront to reason, only reconciled to as much of holy mysteries as *Theology* can sanction. But Boehme insists upon that “unauthorised” idea, “She is the *substantiality* of the Spirit, which the Spirit of God putteth on us a garment, whereby he manifesteth himself, or else his form would not be known; for she is the Spirit’s corporeity, and though she is not a corporeal palpable substance like us men, yet she is substantial and visible.”—(*Ibid.*, par. 50.)

Gichtel testifies emphatically to her visibility thus: “My beloved helpmeet looked down upon my childish shyness with mercy, and in 1673, as I was praying at mid-day after the appearance first of a black cloud, then of a white one, opening before me, she appeared to me in the form of a Virgin, and assured my creaturely being mouth to mouth that she would sustain me, reminded me of all the promises of Jesus Christ, and put His faith into my heart, and thus armed me against all the assaults of the devil.” Boehme is



eloquent, though evidently cautious, in his disclosures to the same effect, so soon as "the soul be freed of the evil beast *then* it hath the open gate in its beloved image, in which Christ hath opened Himself with the Divine love fire. And then is the Union already there, the bride cheereth her bridegroom, viz., the Noble Virgin in the love of Christ being awakened again, which taketh the soul, its loving bridegroom and man, into her arms of the divine desire, and what is there done I have no pen to write it with; it is more than human or natural to write that."—(*Apology* 3, *Text* 2, *pars.* 50-51.)

Yet much more than natural at once to accept such reports! Nevertheless the records of all great saints in every age tell of visions such as Gichtel's; among Roman Catholics they are received as the appearance of the Virgin Mary, and while adoring her and offering petitions to her, unconsciously they worship that Eternal and Divine Virgin whom the Word brought back to our race when it "was made flesh and dwelt among us."

(To be Continued in next Number.)

## Thoughts on Genesis.\*

By F. M. Van Helmont.

### CHAPTER I.

Verse 1. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

Verse 1. "In the head, ÆLOHIM created the heavens and the earth."

#### The Explication.

THE glorious Creator, one and many, being the same in all (who therefore is called Ælohim, in the plural number) contained within Himself the world to be created, lying hid in its spiritual seed. When, therefore, the time of its production was come, He conceived it IN THE HEAD, or central principle of the mind, by thought or thinking: and by this means constituted something separate from Himself, now subsisting and acting of itself. The world thus created—in resemblance of its original, Ælohim—consisted of many heavens (as many as there are stars) as the ruling and governing part, and one only earth as the passive and subjective part; but yet, with this reserve, that a superior government over all the rest was at last to arise from the centre, because it is necessary that all things should be reduced to unity.

#### Annotations.

*In the beginning.*—*Bereschit* is derived from *Rosch*, "a head," and properly ought to be translated IN THE HEAD: whence an ancient Greek interpreter renders it ἐν κεφαλῇ, in *Capitulo*. It is commonly taken to signify the beginning, before which there was nothing save God alone. But we are to know that though indeed this visible world sometime did not exist, yet that before it there was a spiritual world in Ælohim, out of which this world—which is the object of our senses—was born in due time. For not only *Jehovah*, but Ælohim also, have been for ever; and what this Ælohim is shall be declared presently.

Now, if any one would with due profoundness of thought meditate the sound and force of the Hebrew letters, he would meet with notions of great weight. For, as is explained in the Hebrew alphabet of nature, the figures of the letters, and their tone of sounding do indicate the natures of things. **ב** **ר** and **א** (*B*, *R*, and *Aleph*) are the three first letters in *Bereschit*, as well

\* "Some Premeditate and Considerate Thoughts upon the Four First Chapters of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis." Delivered by Fanciscus Mercurius van Helmont. Translated from the Latin copy printed at Amsterdam, 1697. London, printed Anno 1701.



as in *Bara*, which are the two first words of the Holy Scripture. *B*, we find, is the element or first trial of infants opening their lips. *R* is a letter which infants have not, but youths only as they grow up to maturity: for it requires a peculiar motion of the tongue, both strong and tremulous. It imports, therefore, a proper and strong progress of a thing from its beginning to generation. *N* with the Hebrews signifies "thousand," importing the infinite number of seeds. What concerns *W* and *T* or *S* and *T*, which are the next following letters in *Bereschit* 'tis known that *Esch* signifies "fire," and *Isch* "a man," both which import the active virtue of the head, or principle of productions. And lastly, *Tau*, by its very sound represents a kind of discharging and final execution. Many such like observations might be made, which would be of no small import to make out the true meaning of words, yet because these are matters of profound research, we shall the more sparingly make use of them at this time. With this beginning, *Genesis*, the first words of the Gospel of John do correspond, *In the beginning was the word (Logos)* whereof we shall have occasion to speak elsewhere.

*Created (Bara).*—Most are of opinion that this signifies "He produced out of nothing," but the Septuagint renders it *ἐποίησεν*, "he made," whence some would conclude that the world was made of some eternal matter, which the ancients called the *Chaos*. But this opinion is justly disapproved, though in the meantime it cannot of right be said that the word *Bara* signifies "creating out of nothing;" neither can any instance of this signification be produced save this of the text before us, which is the matter in question. Sure it is that in this very chapter, verse 27, God is said to have *created man*, and that *male and female*; whereas man was not made out of *nothing*, but out of *Adamah*, chap. ii., verse 2. And Eve taken out of Adam, chap. ii., verse 22-23. And again, in the 1st chap., verse 21, *And God created great whales (Taninim)* where we meet with the same word, *Bara*; and yet these whales (*Taninim*), or great fishes, are implied to have been produced out of the waters, as the earth brought forth the beasts of the earth, verse 24. Wherefore it appears that *creation out of nothing* hath no foundation in Holy Scripture, but rather in common tradition, and may be allowed of in a good sense, though, as commonly taken, it be not without error. True, indeed, is it, that neither *Chaos* nor *Atoms*, nor any other material principle, was co-eternal with God, out of which the world was made; but withal it is false that the world in a proper sense was made out of nothing as out of a subject matter, since it is a proposition of eternal truth that *nothing is made out of nothing*. Wherefore it will be more proper to say with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. ii., verse 3, that *visibles were made of invisibles*; that is, that the seeds of this corporeal world lay hid after an ideal or spiritual manner in the superior world of *Ælohim* Himself, which at last were hatched and produced to outward perception. But yet, according to exact propriety, man only was the son of *Ælohim*, as is signified to us at the end of our Saviour's genealogy in the Gospel of St. Luke: Where, as Seth is called the son of Adam, so is Adam called the son of God, as having, according to Moses, alone been created in the image of *Ælohim* Himself; for in man all other things are contained, in and with him they fell, and shall be glorified; and man also must be the head of the world, put in subjection under Him, even the Messias, who alone of all and above all creatures ascended to *Ælohim*, yea, who Himself is *Ælohim*, and who makes that we also by His power and virtue shall be advanced to *Ælohim*. Moreover, the things which were produced by *Ælohim* out of seeds, whereas before they were in Him, now subsist by themselves and are left to themselves, being endued with an active and spontaneous power, so that they can either advance and go on, or recoil and fall, as we find that the whole world fell in Adam. But whether or

no *Ælohim* produced any other worlds, the brothers of this, which were not involved in Adam's fall, is a matter of more profound inquiry, and the determination of it is foreign to the business before me.

*God* in the Hebrew is *Ælohim*, which alone, of all the names which are attributed to God, is made use of by Moses in the History of the Creation, or 1st chapter of *Genesis*; whereas, in the 2nd and 3rd chapter he useth *Fehovah Ælohim*; and in the 4th chapter, *Fehovah* only; all which was not so set down without reason and reference to a mystery, though not sufficiently weighed by interpreters. But of this we shall speak more largely in the sequel.

At present we shall search out the meaning of the word *Ælohim*. Some translate it "Gods," as expressing plurality, and suppose the mystery of the Trinity to be intimated by it, which explication is not to be despised, seeing that spirit, soul, and body, which are found in the creature, are in a more eminent manner in God also. Yet in this place by the word *Ælohim* is to be understood the Divine virtue or power which is one and the same in many, and therefore in the Hebrew is everywhere expressed in the plural number, and by it is chiefly meant and intended the *Creator*, or *Executor* and *Effector*, as it were the right hand, or sitting at the right hand of *Fehovah*, who is the same in all; though indeed He hath more peculiarly accommodated Himself unto us, by bestowing upon us His Son whom He hath begotten, that by His means even we also, who in some respects are called the sons of God, might be brought home to our Father which is in Heaven. *El* imports virtue or strength, for *ℵ* (as hath been said) signifies *Infiniteness* or *Multitude*. *℥*, or *L*, is a letter formed with a topping eminence in writing, and in pronouncing is framed by an elevation of the tongue, and is not easily uttered by little children, because it requires strength of the tongue, and therefore signifies high virtue or power, and accordingly is the common termination of the names of angels, as Michael, Gabriel, &c. *O* is the highest sound, and therefore *Cholem* is placed on the top of the letter. As for *℥*, *He*, it is and denotes "respiration, breath, life, vegetation or growth, fruitfulness, the air, and heavenly influence," and therefore was vouchsafed to Abram and his wife Sarai, Gen. xvii., verses 5 and 15, so that from thenceforth he was no more to be called Abram but Abraham, and she no longer Sarai but Sarah; and according to what is there added this change was to signify to him that God had appointed him to be the father of many nations. Whence it appears that *O*, *H*, hold forth to us a sublime, exalted life, fruitfulness, and vegetation or growth. But as for *I*, the same hath a sharp or shrill sound, and signifies the strong life that produceth the manly member; as on the other hand *M* denotes "a mother, the womb, and the multiplicity of births," for by its compressed and stifled sound, from a shut mouth (as appears in the pronouncing of this letter) the conception of births is plainly represented to us. From all which we understand that *Ælohim* is the *Creator*, who by His most exalted infinitely diffused vital, vegetant, and generating virtue, conceived all things from eternal seeds hidden in Himself, and at length produced and sent forth the same out of Himself into multiplicity and distinction, and comprised the same under the *Messiah*, who also, inasmuch as He is glorified and sits at the right hand of *Fehovah*, doth by His power govern all things that are comprised or comprehended under Him, and, according to a most wise order, doth as far as may be purify and exalt them by the Spirit of God, till after the consummation of all things He deliver up the kingdom to the Father of whom He received it.

*Heaven* (or rather *heavens*), as the Hebrew word *Schamajim* signifies; for there be many heavens, even as many as there be stars, every one of them having its own orb, or peculiar heaven, though indeed the heaven of

heavens do comprehend them all. The number, indeed, of these heavens is exceeding great, because the perfection of things increaseth to infinity, and for that one orb is often governed and enclosed by another. The Hebrew word is compounded of two words, signifying "fire and water," that is, of *Esch*, "fire," and *Majim*, "water," which intimates thus much to us that the power of activity and passiveness, of heat and cold, of male and female, of soul and body, are contained in the heavens. The *heaven*, or heavenly, is that which rules, and is subtil; the earth is that which is ruled, and gross. All things, before the Fall, were more heavenly and transparent than earthly and opaque; yet not so, but that there was some earth in heaven (for otherwise there could have been no Fall), but it was not the exceeding or prevailing part. Moreover, the heaven is also called the firmament or expanse, verse 8, of which we shall have occasion to speak there.

*And the Earth.*—The word that is rendered earth here is *Aretz*, and must be rightly distinguished from *Adamah*, whence Adam was formed. Though these two be not sufficiently distinguished by interpreters, we ought also to make a distinction between it and *Sade*, "the field," of which see chap. iii., verse 1, and chap. ii., verse 5. *Aretz*, therefore, is opposed to heaven, and denotes that darkness or opacity that is in things, which when it predominates doth make things bodily, and covers them with a bark or shell into which the heavenly seeds are thrust down, and whence they must be again exalted. But yet in Heaven also there is a kind of celestial earth; and the earth also is not without something of Heaven. So that these two, Heaven and Earth, are opposed as the superior and inferior, the centre and circumference. And like as the rays from the circumference flow to the centre, where they are concentrated, so, on the other hand, in the centre is contained the concentrate virtue of the whole circle or circumference, which when it is exalted by the continual influences of Heaven and the rays of the stars, and hath attained its full vigour, at length exerts itself again, and dilates itself throughout the whole circumference, and then, by its power, comprehends all things reduced into unity. And this is that one root from whence at last a multiplicity of fruits shall spring.

### Notes, New Books, &c.

Received from Thos. M. Johnson, "The Platonist," Vols. I. and II.—"The New Illumination," by Ed. Maitland. London: Redway.—From John Thomson, 107 North Street, Glasgow, Reprint of "Molino's Spiritual Guide," 2s. 6d.; and in Cyclostyle MS., "The Wars of David," &c., by Jane Lead; 5s.—the latter a great improvement on his former MS.

"The Epistles of Jacob Boehme," as Vol. I. of Boehme's Works, with Introduction by a D.D. of Glasgow University, we have now ready, 6s. post free. All desiring a copy must write soon, as the greater portion are sold.

Received from B.L.M. (Edinburgh), "Boehme Extract" for next month. Will B.L.M. send address?—T. M. Johnson, Osceola, U.S., promises "Notes on the Mystics" for early Number.

Very substantial aid from two Friends (who paid for cost of advertising in various papers), is gratefully acknowledged.

MADAME GUION.—I have since heard from Lausanne regarding the fragment relating to Madame Guion's last years in September number of *Light and Life*. My informant cannot speak positively as to the name of the author of this manuscript, but states that it came to his father, Mr. A—, along with other works relating to the interior life, from the persons who reprinted Madame Guion's works at Lausanne in 1790, and the memoirs may have emanated from M. Gaudin, or M. Dutoit, or the Pastor Ballif, but his father's feeble health and impaired memory will not now permit of an exact recollection.—T. W. D.