

## *The Keys Of Basilius*

*Greetings. The explanations of the famous keys are all too briefly spoken of here in the context of a seminar that revealed the work of Valentine, Newton, Flamel, Philalethes, Paracelsus, de Violette, Bacstrom, and countless others. It is offered here as an alternative to the series found on the Alchemy Website:*



The first key



The second key



The third key



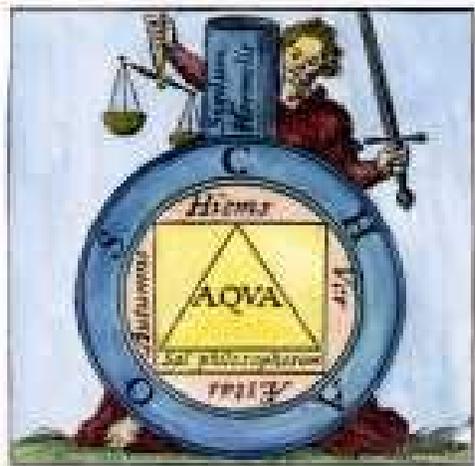
The fourth key



The fifth key



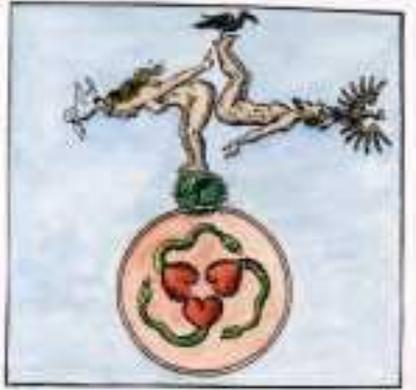
The sixth key



The seventh key



The eighth key



The ninth key



The tenth key



The eleventh key



The twelfth key

While at the link the tablets are laid out in an order as was presented by Valentine, modern research has revealed another numerical sequence, as shown on this page.

*Yes will now explain the significance of the pictures of Basilius Valentinus and he will also answer questions about yesterdays practice.*

*In this seminar I think you will have a certain amount of knowledge and you will birth certain light concerning the alchemical kingdom. I think that we have given free information, it's time on earth to make secrets of alchemy free. We need to initiate. We have come to bring you this light from a source that doesn't belong to us only, and we have come by love. And I'd like to thank personally each of you. Transmit this knowledge and this love, and light. Because when you love others you deposit a seed in their hearts, and it fecundates the philosophical stone. This philosophical stone is the heart. There is no other path.*

*Just very rapidly I will explain the Basil Valentine pictures.*



1st-

Here are the 2 first agents that you will work on. Here is the antimony, the fire. Conjunction of both and it's the preparation of the two first agents.



2<sup>nd</sup> -

Here is the dragon, antimony. It gives the Regulus where you can see the antimony here and the 2 natures. Since the antimony Regulus is said - kind of frolics.



3<sup>rd</sup> -

This is purification of mercury by fire washing. This is the snake mercury and here is the cock, and we have the double mercury, the animated mercury.



4<sup>th</sup> -

This is feeding, the Red Lion with the blood of the Green Dragon. The green Lion you know what it is, it's the crude antimony. And the Red Lion is the Regulus.



5<sup>th</sup> -

This is the development of the seed of the philosophical sulfur. You see here Vulcan, the heat, the Red Lion which is gold. This is mercury animated, it has 7 flowers - 7 Eagles.



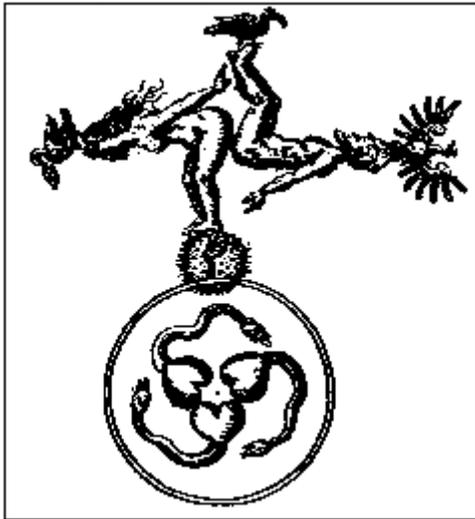
6<sup>th</sup> -

When you get this Red powder the philosophical sulfur, you join it to the mercury (animated). This is the conjunction of earth and sky.



7<sup>th</sup> -

This is development of putrefaction, substances become black and colored.



8<sup>th</sup> -

This is the crow beneath and this is the phoenix.

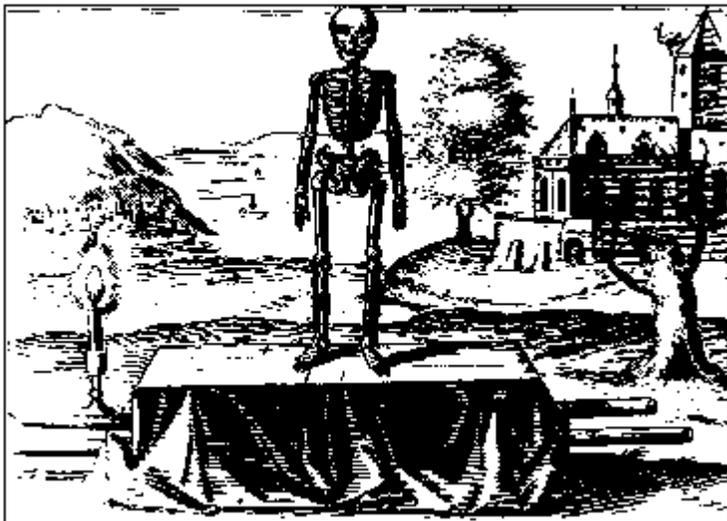


9<sup>th</sup> -

Green Lion eating the Mercury

Funny that this coloring was issued as a

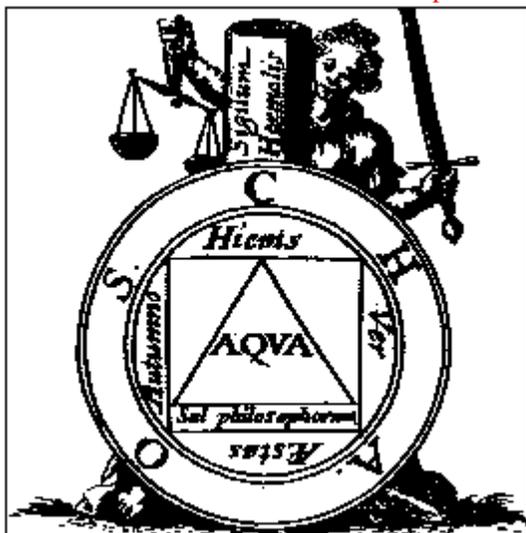
This is the flowering of the 2 stones after multiplication. This is the Red Lion and he's eating the mercury. It means that to multiply the stone this red powder must be put again in mercury (animated). There are 2 stones - Red and White.

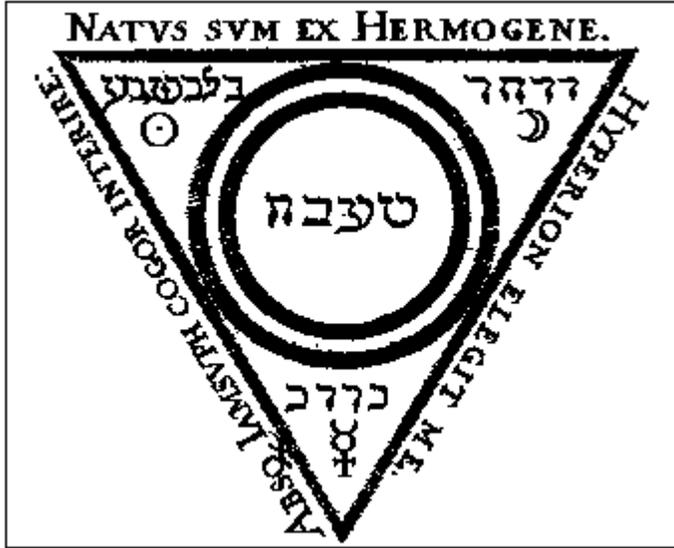


10<sup>th</sup> -

This is making the precious flask. You put the philosophical stone with gold, it remains two hours and it gives a glass that gives the transmutation powder.

There is no time to explain the details. You can see there's a lot of details on these pictures. You probably can find them O.K.? I don't know. This will be a personal job for you.

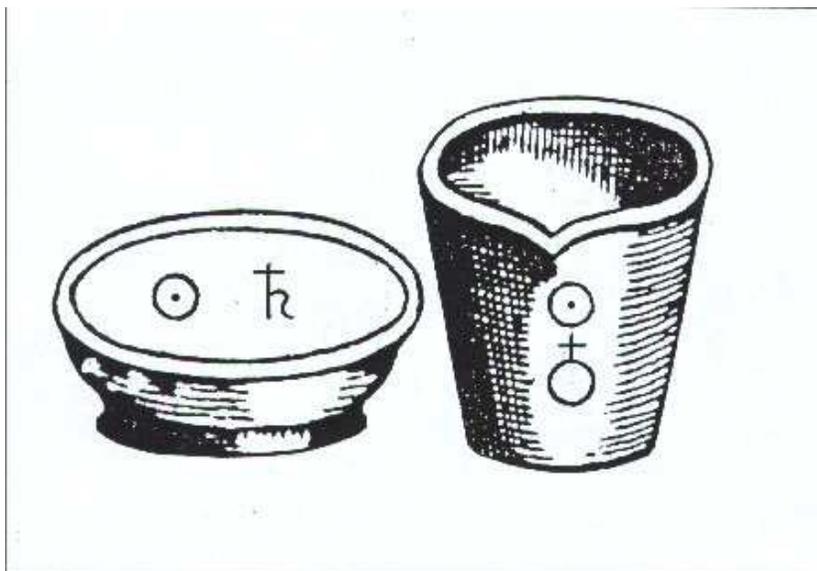




*TWELVE KEYS  
Rubellus Explanation*

*Key 1*





*A King on the left side and a Queen on the right standing in an open landscape. The King holds a sceptre in his right hand and the Queen holds a three-blossomed flower in her right hand and a peacock feather fan in her left. In front of*

the King a wolf or jumps over a triangular crucible placed on a basin of fire. In front of the Queen, and old man with a scythe and crippled leg (a Saturn figure) steps across a fire on which a vessel (Cupel) is being heated.

Mr. Canseliet in French edition, "Les Douze Clefs De la Philosophie", comment the first figure as following:

«The King and the Queen of the Work, that is, the gold and the philosophical silver, spagyrically designated by the wolf and the great metallic button on the cupel.

This and the crucible in the middle of the flames, indicate clearly the dry way, in which represents a great place the secret fire...»

Albert Poisson in his book *Théories & Symboles Des Alchimistes*, p 87 says:

«The gold and the purified silver constitute the remote stone matter. The Sulphur is extracted from gold, the Mercury from silver, being the closer matter.»

Report us now to the text of First Key in its more essential parts:

«Everything that is obtained from the mines has its value unless, indeed, it is adulterated.»

«Let the diadem of the King be of pure gold and let the Queen that is united to him in wedlock be chaste and immaculate.»

«Let my friend know that no impure or spotted things useful form our purpose. For there is nothing in their leprous nature capable of advancing the interest of our Art. There is much more likelihood of that which is in itself good being spoiled by that which is impure. Everything that is obtained from mines has its value, unless, indeed, it is adulterated. Adulteration, however, spoils its goodness and its efficacy.»

«As the physician purges and cleanses the inward parts of the body and removes all unhealthy matter by means of his medicines, so our metallic substances must be purified and refined of all foreign matter in order to ensure the success of our task. Therefore, our Masters requires a pure, immaculate body that is untainted with any foreign admixture, which admixture is the leprosy of our metals.»

«Let the diadem of the King be of pure gold and let the Queen that is united to him in wedlock be chaste and immaculate.»

«If you would operate by means of our bodies, take a fierce grey wolf, which though on account of its name it be subject to the sway of warlike Mars, is by birth the offspring of ancient Saturn, and found in the valleys and mountains of the world, where he roams about savage with hunger. Cast to him the body of the King, and when he has devoured it, burn him entirely to ashes in a great fire. By this process the King will be liberate; and when it been performed thrice the Lion has overcome the wolf, and will find nothing more to eat in him. Thus our Body has been rendered fit for first stage of our work.»

«The King travels through six regions in the heavenly firmament, and in the seven he fixes his abode.»

Having in account that the commentator says and also Albert Poisson in reference of the figures of woodcut, everything would take us to conclude that the King represents the gold that will be purified by the Wolf and the Queen the silver also it purified by Saturn on the cupel, as one can see for the metallic button. This purification process of the two noble metals was very usual in that time.

This is a possible interpretation which to the first view, it seems the most appropriate and for a long time we accept it but with reservation.

If you read carefully the text of this first key, you will see that the Master does not make any reference to the purification of the Queen. He refers, just, to the King's purification and of there our doubt.

Never accept willing the comments of the translator and commentator, (French edition) author of several books about our Art, that we respected to much, because they are not agree with the text and we find very strange that he did not make that repair.

Later, we acquire Basil Valentine's last published book, "Le Dernier Testament" (The Will and Last Testament). As the title indicates, probably, it will have been one of the last ones, Master's book and perhaps that, one of the most generous and clear.

In referred book, we confirmed our reservation because the Master describes in clear language some of the keys of his book "The Twelve Keys" that, in the original, as we saw, are described in symbolic language.

Let us see, then, what the Master says on the First Key, in p 215 (French edition):

«The First Key teaches to seek, if you want, your seed in a being or metallic substance that is the gold...»

The purification of the gold is made so that it is beaten well slim and very thin, then, molten and melted three times for the antimony, that after the King melted with antimony steady in the bottom, be recast before to be blown with very strong fire and then, purified by Saturn.

*Then, you will find the most splendid, more beautiful and highly more brilliant gold that one can want, similar to the clear radiance of the Sun and very pleasant aspect...»*

*The text is clear and it does not place to any doubts. Only the King and just the King it is purified by the antimony or grey Wolf (the wolf jumping over the crucible) and, then, gone by the Cupel by means of Saturn (the old with a crippled leg with a scythe), having a cupel under with a metallic button of purified gold as shows the illustration. As Key text refers, Saturn it is the seventh city in the Celestial firmament (seventh alchemic planet). The Wolf, represent symbolically the antimony and Saturn the lead.*

*Now I ask yours: Why in the figure of First Key the King and Queen they are together if in the text the Queen has not any role?*

*«Let the diadem of the King be of pure gold and let the Queen that is united to him in wedlock be chaste and immaculate.»*

*Where in part of the text he said that the Queen is united to the King when and how? Nowhere.*

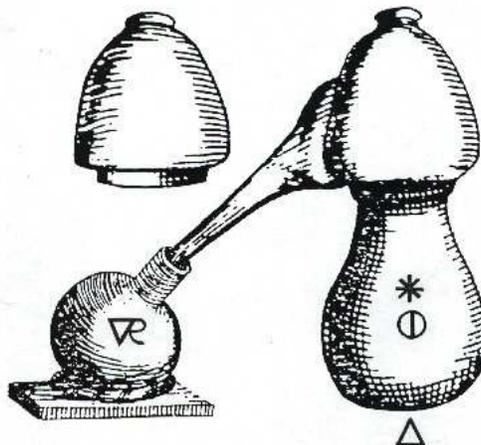
*Only the King is purified three times (the three flowers) by antimony in a crucible and after by lead in the Cupel as you can read in text.*

### *Second Key*



BASIL VALENTINE

SECOND KEY





This key refers to the preparation of the King's bathing, that is, to the preparation of solar star solvent water. In the second key woodcut, a nude winged and crowned young man can be seen, to stand on a pair of wings, seizing two caducei, in the two combatants' middle (fencers) that combats.

On the right combatant's sword a Serpent is coiled and of the one of the left an eagle is landed. On of the winged youth's crown it is the mercury spagyric symbol. We see, still, on each side, between him and the combatants, on the right side the Sun and on the left side the Moon.

The comment to the second key is the following (French edition Mr. Canseliet's comments):

«Expressive image of the Bride of the Great Work, substituting it a young man nude, winged and crowned, young mercury and small king, as attest it the two caduceus where the stick gave place to the sovereign sceptre. He was born of the sun and of the philosophers' moon because they are debate the two fencers and, thanks to these, he wins in beauty, in purity, what loses with the heterogeneous faeces in volatility. This is that express the great abandoned wings and extended on the soil.»

In agreement with the illustration and according to the comment, the symbolism doesn't seem us difficult to interpret: the philosophical mercury (young winged man) it is obtained by the solvent action on the first matter of the resulting water of the two champions' fight (two chemical opposite substances) one fix and penetrating (snake) and the other volatile (eagle). This water is also the bathing of the Sun and of the Moon.

Let us see, now, what says the text of second key in its essential part:

«In the same way our bridal pair, Apollo and Diana, are arrayed in splendid attire, and their heads and bodies are washed with various kinds of water, some strong, some weak, but not one of them exactly another, and each designed for its own special purpose.

But you should notice that the King and his spouse must be quite naked when they are joined together. They must be stripped of all their glorious apparel, and must lie down together in the same state of nakedness in which they were born that their seed may not spoiled by being mixed with any foreign matter.

Let me tell you, in conclusion, that the bath in which the bridegroom is placed, must consist of two hostile kinds of matter, that purge and rectify each other by means of a continued struggle. For it is not good for the Eagle to built her nest on the summit of the Alps, because her young ones are thus in great danger of being frowned to death by intense cold that prevails there.

But if you add to the Eagle the icy Dragon that has long had its habitation upon the rocks, and has crawled forth from the caverns of the earth, and place both over the fire, it will elicit from the icy Dragon a fiery spirit, which, by means of it great heat, will consume the wings of the Eagle, and prepare a perspiring bath of so extraordinary a degree of heat that the snow will melt upon the summit of the mountains, and become a water, with the invigorating mineral bath may be prepare, and fortune, health, life, and strength restored to the King.»

If you read carefully the text excerpt, you will verify that, in the beginning, the Master refers to the engagement of Apollo and Diana and the waters with that should be washed the bridegroom.

Already in the end, he says that invigorating water of bridegroom mineral bath may be wisely prepared by two fencers.

It is more than evident that he changes completely of speech refers to the bridegroom bathing and not to the engagement of Apollo and Diana. He finishes advising that the mineral bathing is prepared so that it gives to the King the fortune and health.

This is in agreement with the first key, because as we saw, the described purification refers, just to the King, that is to the gold.

Finally, Basil Valentine tells, as the water will be prepared for the king bathing:

«But if you add to the Eagle the icy Dragon that has long had its habitation upon the rocks, and has crawled forth from the caverns of the earth, and place both over the fire, it will elicit from the icy Dragon a fiery spirit, which, by means of its great heat, will consume the wings of the Eagle, and prepare a perspiring bath of so extraordinary a degree of heat that the snow will melt upon the summit of the mountains, and become a water, with the invigorating mineral bath may be prepared, and fortune, health, life, and strength restored to the King.»

Transposing this for spagyric language, the Serpent represents the nitre and the Eagle the ammonium salt. Therefore, the referred water will be prepared by the hot reaction in a Pyrex glass retort, with tubulure, of two contrary chemical substances, one fix (nitre) and the other volatile (ammonium salt), both very well known from the antiquity for the alchemists.

When these substances mixed in proportions "ana" (equal parts) and pour it by successive fractions into the retort, they enter in contact for the caloric action supplied by a stove with controlled temperature with bathing of sand, a violent chemical reaction will be produced, that will make to distil for the beak of the retort a sudorific water that it has the property of dissolve the gold or King, known by royal water.

We don't want to leave of notice, all those that for curiosity or confirm what we said, they want to prepare this solvent water for the method indicated by the Master in this key, that abstain from doing it if they don't have laboratory experience and not know the indispensable "hand work", otherwise, they would be exposed to a great danger.

The retort can explode because the inner pressure excess caused by the fast expansion of the gases. After the chemical reaction start between the two belligerent (salts) it is uncontrollable and it would break immediately the retort, provoking you serious burns.

The technique to observe, I as we already said, it is pour of every time for the tubulure of the retort small successive amounts of matter and to place the cover immediately.

Nevertheless, it continues to verify a divergence between the text of this key and its pictorial symbolism.

The second key illustration shows us symbolically which the necessary chemical substances to the preparation of this solvent water, as well as the goal this purpose: the obtaining and purification of the philosophical mercury. But we already know it and in the text it was very clear, that the purpose of this water is the King's bathing (dissolution), with view to the extraction of its mercury, of its salt and, mainly, of its alchemic sulphur.

Let us see, now, which Basil Valentine says in the "Le Dernier Testament" (Will and Last Testament) in the second key, p 216, French edition:

«**The Second Key.** To notice my friend and take this thing to chest as very important for your work, so that you dispose your bathing correctly so that anything it is increased that is not necessary, so that to noble seed of the gold doesn't deteriorate for any annoyance or heterogeneity susceptible of destroying this seed, which being destroyed, it will be impossible to returns it the good state.

Therefore, take caution and careful to the teaching of the precedent key and which the matter that you shall take for the bathing composed of the suitable water for the King that shall be died there and his destroyed external form, so that his pure soul can come out immaculate.

For this design, it is necessary that you serve of the Dragon and of the Eagle that are not another thing that the nitre and the ammonium salt of the which, after its union, it shall be made a royal water, as I will teaching, in the end the "hand work", when I describe the particularity of the gold and, well like this, the one of the other metals.

However, you need know that such solution is not enough so that the King has still some intention of letting to leave his soul outside of its fixed body, as you can try...

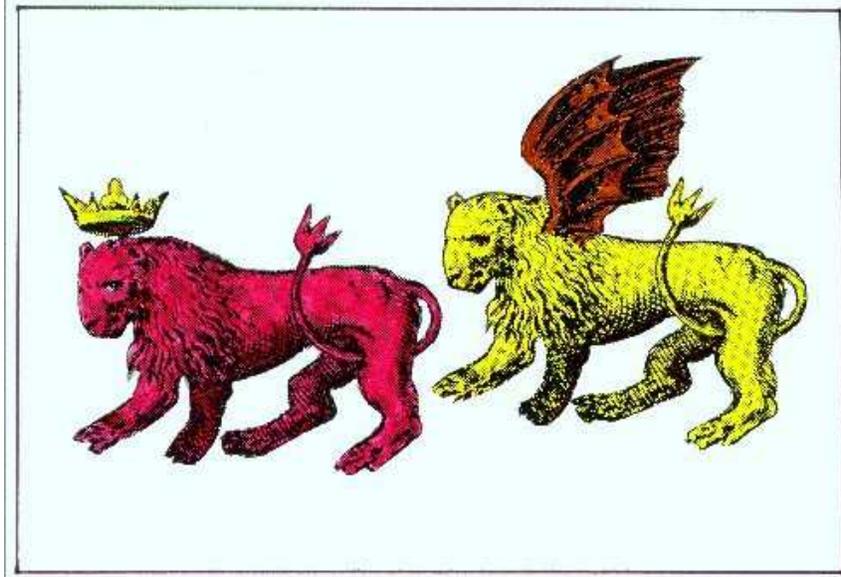
As soon as your gold is dissolved in referred water and be reduced to yellow and beautiful oil, leaves it, then, in a very close vase to digest one day and one night in moderate bathing-maria; if there are dregs separate it and pour the pure and clean solution in a cucurbit or in another vase and it adapts it a chapter and recipient well closed.

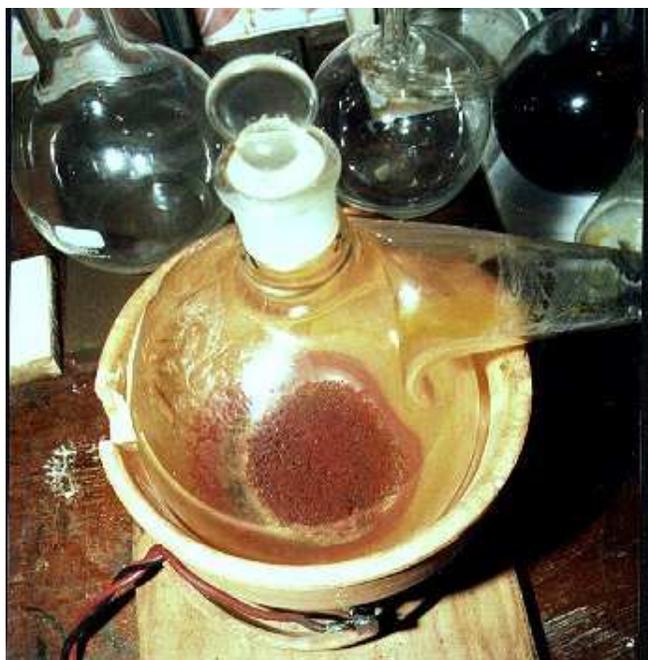
Digest and distil this solution in the sand, not very hot, mixed again and shaking the vase where it is the gold and the water from time to time and repeat this three times. Now, distil the whole humidity for the bathing-maria and you will find in the bottom of the alembic a powder of gold that you will place in an open vase on the fire of sand, for the space of one hour, until that the whole humidity evaporate.»

As you can see in Basil Valentine "Le Dernier Testament" text the "nude winged young man" that symbolises the Mercury in the illustration he has not any role in this key.

*Third Key*

)) CLEF.III.





«A winged dragon with coiled tail and pointed tongue stands in landscape with high mountains in the background. On the left behind the dragon, a wolf or fox, runs off holding a bird (possibly a hen) in its mouth and is attacked by a cockerel riding on its back.»

Canseliet comments to the third Key in French edition:

«The dragon is the origin of the two natures, aqueous and igneous and it is the base of the combat that they surrender that, he occupies the whole first plan of this composition. Of it is born directly the fox chosen by Basil Valentine, in a physical analogy that underlines, according to us, this curious fact that the name of the astute quadruped is of the feminine kind in all the Aryan languages.»

The text of the Third Key is the following, in its more essential part:

«But no such triumph can take place unless the King imparts great strength and potency to his water and tinges it with his own colour, that thereby he may be consumed and become invisible, and then again recover his visible form, with a diminution of this simple essence, and a development of this perfection.»

«This Tincture is the Rose of our Masters, of purple hue, called also the red blood of the Dragon...»

Let us see now the text of the third key, just as it is described in the "Le Dernier Testament" p 219, French edition:

«**The Third Key.** Take, then of the good nitre spirit, one part and of the spirit of the common salt, three parts; pour these two spirits together in a Cucurbit moderate hot, on the powder of the gold above described, then, adapt a Chapter and the recipient closed well, in the suitable manner; then, having moved and agitated several times your gold, as previously it was done in the sand and reiterating the distillation the more better, you will see that the gold becomes, of times at times, more volatile and that, finally, it will distil and it will come to the from top.

Because, for a repetition and distillation of all your gold, the solidity and fixity of its body separates and it divides in all its members, which are undone this way one with the other and restored, so open that the gold attenuated leaves after that, to go its soul to private judge...

But you observe that, after this work finish, it is necessary that you separate carefully and assiduously your gold that distilled all the saline spirits, for distillation in bathing-maria, the more moderately that it is possible, so that it doesn't distil anything of the colour of the gold and that doesn't suffer reduction.

Then, with prudence and judgement, take your gold or the crystals of gold from you where separated the water and place them on a suitable small mud porringer to reverberate, place it in the oven and you give, firstly, a slowly and moderate fire for one hour until that everything that there is of corrosive is removed entirely, then, you will have a powder of gold of a beautiful colour purple, so subtle and beautiful that is good of seeing.

Put in a clean matrass this gold powder and pour into the recent spirit of common salt, which, previously, have been reduced to a great sweetness, following the order in which I will instruct you in my "hand work". Close the matrass and place it in the moderate heat, because, like this, the sweetened spirit of salt it cannot more dissolve and to break

the powder of gold as it had done before, so much more than its corrosiveness and acrimony were it reduced by the spirit of wine that caused it this great sweetness.

Leave the matrass on this non-violent heat, until that the spirit of salt is dyed of a colour of a sovereign degree, beautiful, transparent and red as rubies. Removes gently, for inclination, the coloured spirit and it pour it again so many times on your gold that the spirit is dyed more.

Then, it places in a alembic the whole coloured spirit and separates the whole humidity in bathing-maria with moderate heat and in the bottom of the alembic will find the sulphur of the gold powder, beautiful, delicate and subtle, of great merit and value, a matter with which we can, by means of a fast and short procedure, to dye the silver in its higher perfection...»

What does it can understand, then, what the Master tells us in these three keys?

In the first key, he teaches to purify the gold or Sun by means of the antimony; in second, the preparation of the royal water for the King's bathing, with view to its dissolution and, in the third, the extraction of the alchemic sulphur of the gold.

If well you noticed in the text of the third key, the Master recommends to dissolve the gold in a royal water composed of three parts of spirit of salt and one part of nitre spirit.

Curiously after some year centuries, at present, it water is made of some way.

We already said as we prepare the royal water with the nitre spirit and of the ammonium salt.

In this key, the representation pictorial agrees with the description of the text because the sulphur of the gold, before its fixation, was volatile, for have flowed by the beak of the alembic with the respective water. Thus, the winged Dragon represents, and very well, the volatile and the fix. In our opinion this isn't the suitable manner for this symbolical meaning.

For us two Lions one yellow volatile and the other purple that represents the fix gold Sulphur should represent the suitable manner to the King symbolical meaning.

Alquimically, the philosophical stone or universal medicine is constituted for three very well known beginnings: Sulphur, Mercury and Salt.

So, these three beginnings should be extracted from gold vitriol (gold trichloride).

In the end of the operations of the third key you are obtained, just, a subtle powder, dry and incombustible, of colour purple, that is, as we already said, the gold sulphur. They lack, therefore, more two beginnings, the mercury and the salt. To extract of the gold these two beginnings it would be necessary a great amount of vitriol (salt) of gold, what would be impracticable, given the high price of the noble metal.

That, the Master says in "Le Dernier Testament":

«An so it cannot this whole to find any humidity in the gold that is aqueous, if this be not reduced in vitriol, but this would be an useless work, of inexhaustible expense.»

«But I exhort my disciples, because that the nature left it a shorter way of the to keep and to proceed now, fearing that they don't hurry to extract the mercury of the gold, when it have been reduced in the destruction and own ruin of him, what was not practised by the old ones, because that is against-nature.»

It is evident that this process is against-nature as the Master charitably affirms, that, it finishes here the explanation of the text of the Twelve Keys here, for afterwards, indicate the way for the extraction of the three beginnings starting from the Roman vitriol.

«But you observe, above all, that this universal spirit (mercury) find itself in another metals, although, however, find itself parallelly and more effective incomparably in the spirit of a certain mineral, from where it can be extracted and prepared with very less work and expense...»

«And, therefore, the star of gold doesn't only meet in the gold, in such a way that only for the addition of the mercury spirit and of the golden sulphur, the philosophical stone may be made...»

«So that now I satisfy the rest of my promise and refer more than in my twelve keys said and that they contain, you know that any philosopher is not entirely forced to work on the metal of the gold...»

«For now, at this time, it is necessary that you learn that such soul or golden sulphur, such salt and spirit meets stronger and virtuous in Mars and Venus and, well like this, in the vitriol, as well as Mars and Venus been able to reconduct as for retrogradation in very virtuous and effective vitriol, in which metallic vitriol meets now under a sky all the three beginnings, to know, mercury, sulphur and salt and, each one of them it can particularly to extract and to obtain with little work and time, as you will understand, when does you, presently, a brief narration of a mineral vitriol that meets in Hungary, beautiful and of high degree.»

Basil Valentine sends us for a canonical native Mars and Venus vitriol, existent in Hungary, which one can also find, with relative easiness, in our country (Portugal), in the small lakes, near the pyrites mines and of chalcopyrite. In this natural vitriol, they also find these three beginnings.

«However, a such great dignity didn't never go granted to any other metal or mineral as advantageously as to the vitriol that is the philosophers' stone of which were made so much mentions...Therefore that the ancients had this mineral hidden to the last point and they hid it to its own children, what did with much precaution.»

«Because the best than it was shown as more probable and approved by my experience, is it who is extracted and it collected in Hungary, which is of a high colour degree, in anything different from the one of a beautiful blue sapphire colour and it has little of humidity in itself and little of noxious mineral quality...»

It is more that evident that the Master suggest us to make this work by vitriol distillation because the gold price. So, for us, alchemists, the remaining Keys have not any practical alchemical interest because the Master teaches us in clear language the modus operandi of vitriol work.

Now the main question: why the some Keys not agree with the text and with Mr.Canseliet comments?

The answer is in the 12 Keys of Basil Valentine. This work was first published in Ein kurtz summarischer Tractat, von dem grossem Stein der Uralten....Eisleben, 1599 without illustrations and again at Leipzing in 1602 with some woodcuts of 12 Keys.

Basil Valentine's book was published without illustrations and later someone in the 1602 edition put the illustrations in the book adapted at his own alchemical interpretation, which in our opinion, it not was the better.

Rubellus Petrinus

## Notes on the 'Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine'

By Adam McLean. First published in the Hermetic Journal 1987.

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### Notes on the 'Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine'

Adam McLean

The 'Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine' is recognised as one of the most important and influential of alchemical works. It was first published in 1599 as a text only piece but achieved its widest distribution as part of a compendium the *Tripus Aureus* (Golden Tripod) edited by Michael Maier and published by Lucas Jennis at Frankfurt in 1618. This was later included in the more massive compendium *Musæum Hermeticum* also published by Jennis in 1625.

The earliest edition did not have any illustrative plates but Lucas Jennis provided twelve engraved plates (probably by Merian), one for each of the 'keys'. These plates obviously drew on the allegorical descriptive imagery of the text, but added a coherence to the symbolism. The text is obscure, and teases the reader with paradox and riddling allegory in the best traditions of alchemical material of that period,

"The twofold fiery male must be fed with a snowy swan, and then they must mutually slay each other and restore each other to life; and the air of the imprisoned fiery male will occupy three of the four quarters of the world, and make up three parts of the imprisoned fiery male, that the death-song of the swans may be distinctly heard; then the swan roasted will become food for the King, and the fiery King will be siezed with great love for the Queen, and will take his fill of delight in embracing her, until they both vanish and coalesce into one body."

However, I believe that it was the addition of the twelve emblematic figures that made the work more approachable and led to it becoming a popular and influential work. Indeed sometimes these twelve emblems are themselves referred to as the 'Keys' of Valentine.

I will not attempt in this short article to analyse the text and its relationship to the emblems, however, I would like to present some notes that may help others to penetrate this rich and complex mass of symbolism. Often in attempting to grasp within our thought the ideas illustrated by the images or sense with our feelings the symbolic patterns that are worked into such esoteric documents, we can get lost and discouraged if we merely jump headlong into the mass of symbolism. We need some esoteric tools (in computer terms, a disassembler) to unravel the code and label some of the more obvious structural elements. Once we have an entry point into the esoteric code we can work this into meditative exercises that slowly reveal the spiritual essence woven into the allegorical emblematic structure.

Readers of this Journal will be aware that my approach to such sequences of emblems is to see them as a whole entity, rather than as individual emblems. It is my belief, confirmed by my experience of working with such emblem structures, that the designers of such emblem systems worked various patterns into the symbolism of the whole sequence, so that echoes, pairings, inversions, mirrorings of symbols occur across the individual emblems. Often I

find that an emblem system seems to have (at least one) underlying geometric pattern and when the emblems are arranged in this pattern much of the confusing fog of symbolism will dissipate and the sequence begins to take on a coherent form. Thus my work with the *Rosarium* series, the *Crowning of Nature*, the Mylius engravings, the *Lambspring*, and other such sequences.

As part of a long term project to produce a compendium of such emblem systems, I have been working with the Basil Valentine Keys, and decided to include this article as notes on some work in progress rather than a final polished interpretation. It may be useful for others to follow up these indications and see where they lead.

At this point in my investigations it is not entirely clear which of the possible geometric arrangements of the twelve emblems will lead to the deepest penetration of their symbolic subject matter. There may indeed be a number of simultaneously valid arrangements, so I will confine my remarks here to the appearance of triple symbolism in the emblem sequence as a whole.

Those who have read my commentary to the Mylius Engravings will find there (on page 104) that I identified an elaborate sevenfoldness (22 sets of 7 interlinked symbols in all) in the 28 Mylius engravings. These engravings were published in Mylius' *Philosophica Reformata* in 1622, and a number of these emblems are obviously derived from the *Twelve Keys* and indeed from the symbolic material in the extended poem *The Twelve Gates* of George Ripley.

The particular grouping of symbols I will explore here is not a sevenfold one but the appearance of symbols across the whole series of emblems in sets of three. This will provide some insights into the inner geometry of the *Twelve Keys*. I have provided here all twelve of the illustrations so that the reader can follow this threefold mapping of symbols.

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| 3 Roses   | 1 5 12  |
| 3 Lions   | 5 11 12 |
| 3 Hearts  | 5 9 11  |
| 3 Flasks  | 5 6 7   |
| 3 Classical Gods<br>[Saturn-Neptune-Mars]                   | 1 6 11  |
| 3 Male/Female groups dominant                               | 1 6 9   |
| 3 Snakes  | 2 9 12  |
| 3 Wielded swords  | 2 8 11  |
| 3 Furnaces  | 1 6 12  |
| 3 Angel winged figures                                      | 2 5 8   |
| 3 Circles   | 7 9 10  |
| 3 Arrows  | 3 5 8   |
| 3 Animals devouring   | 3 11 12 |
| 3 Sceptres  | 1 6 8   |
| 3 where birds play a major role<br>[cocks-crows-four birds] | 3 8 9   |

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| 3 where birds play minor role<br>[bird on sword-peacock weathervane-swan] | 2 4 6   |
| 3 Crowned creatures<br>[snake-cockerel-lion]                              | 2 3 5   |
| 3 Tools/instruments held by men<br>[bellows-flask-tongs]                  | 5 6 12  |
| 3 Objects held by women<br>[flower-heart with sun & moon]                 | 1 5 11  |
| 3 Sun-Moon-Mercury symbols  | 2 10 12 |

I hope this list may encourage the reader to seek for other triplicities in the symbols, or indeed to find some other way of approaching and making comprehensible this complex net of symbols.

The *Hermetic Museum* reprinting of the *Twelve Keys* included a short appendix emphasising the threefold aspects involved in the practice of the twelve 'keys.' Here an especial emphasis is placed on interpreting the alchemical work through the Paracelsian doctrine of the 'Three Principles' – Salt, Sulphur and Mercury, and an emblem is given to further draw our attention to the importance of the number three in the work.



The flask contains the triangle and the three serpents of the three Alchemical Principles surrounding the double mercurial dragon – both in its winged-ethereal (volatile and spiritual) aspect and in its earthly-bodily (fixed and material) form.

It may be interesting to view the triple appearance of the symbols in the Twelve Keys as mirroring :-  
a salt, contractive, restricting, crystallising tendency,

a sulphurous, expansive, radiating, dissolving tendency,

and a mercurial, flowing, interweaving, dynamic equilibrium of forces, always seeking to balance the opposing energetics of the salt and sulphur in any outer phenomenon or inner experience.