

The Knight, Death, and the Devil

The Perfection at which the awakened soul gazes is a magnet, drawing him toward itself. It means effort, faithfulness, courage, and sometimes grim encounters if he is to respond to that attraction and move towards it along the narrow track which leads up and out from the dark valleys of the mind.

I think as I write this of Durer's wonderful drawing of the *Knight, Death, and the Devil*: the Knight of the Spirit on his strong and well kept horse—human nature, treated as it ought to be, and used as it ought to be—riding up a dark rocky defile. Beside him travels Death, a horrible, doddering figure of decay, saying, "All things perish—time is passing—we are all getting older—is this effort really worth while?" On his flank is a yet more hideous fellow-pilgrim: the ugly, perverse, violent element of our mixed human nature, all our animal part, our evil impulses, nagging at him too.

In one way or another, we all hear those two voices from time to time; with their discouragements and sneers, their unworthy invitations, their cynical comments and vile suggestions. "Don't forget me, I am your future," says Death. "Don't forget me," says animal man, "I am your undying past." But the Knight of the Spirit does not look at them. He has had his hand-to-hand struggle farther back; and on his lance is impaled the horrid creature, his own special devil, which he has slain.

Now he is absorbed in the contemplation of something beyond the picture, something far more real than the nightmarish landscape through which he must travel; and because of that, he rides steadily forth from that lower world and its phantasies to the Eternal World and its realities. He looks at that



Albrecht Dürer

Knight, Death, and the Devil

which he loves, not at that which he hates, and so he goes safely out of the defile into the open; where he will join the great army of God.

There we see the spiritual life as humanity is called to live it; based on the deep conviction that the Good, the Holy, is the Real, and the only thing that matters, fed and supported by the steadfast contemplation of the Holy and the Real—which is also the Beautiful and the Sane—and expressed in deliberate willed movements towards it, a sturdy faithful refusal to look at that which distracts us from it. Always looking the same way, and always moving the same way: in spite of obstacles, discouragements, mockery and fatigue. "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts find no rest save in thee." But we must be willing to undertake the journey, whatever it may cost.

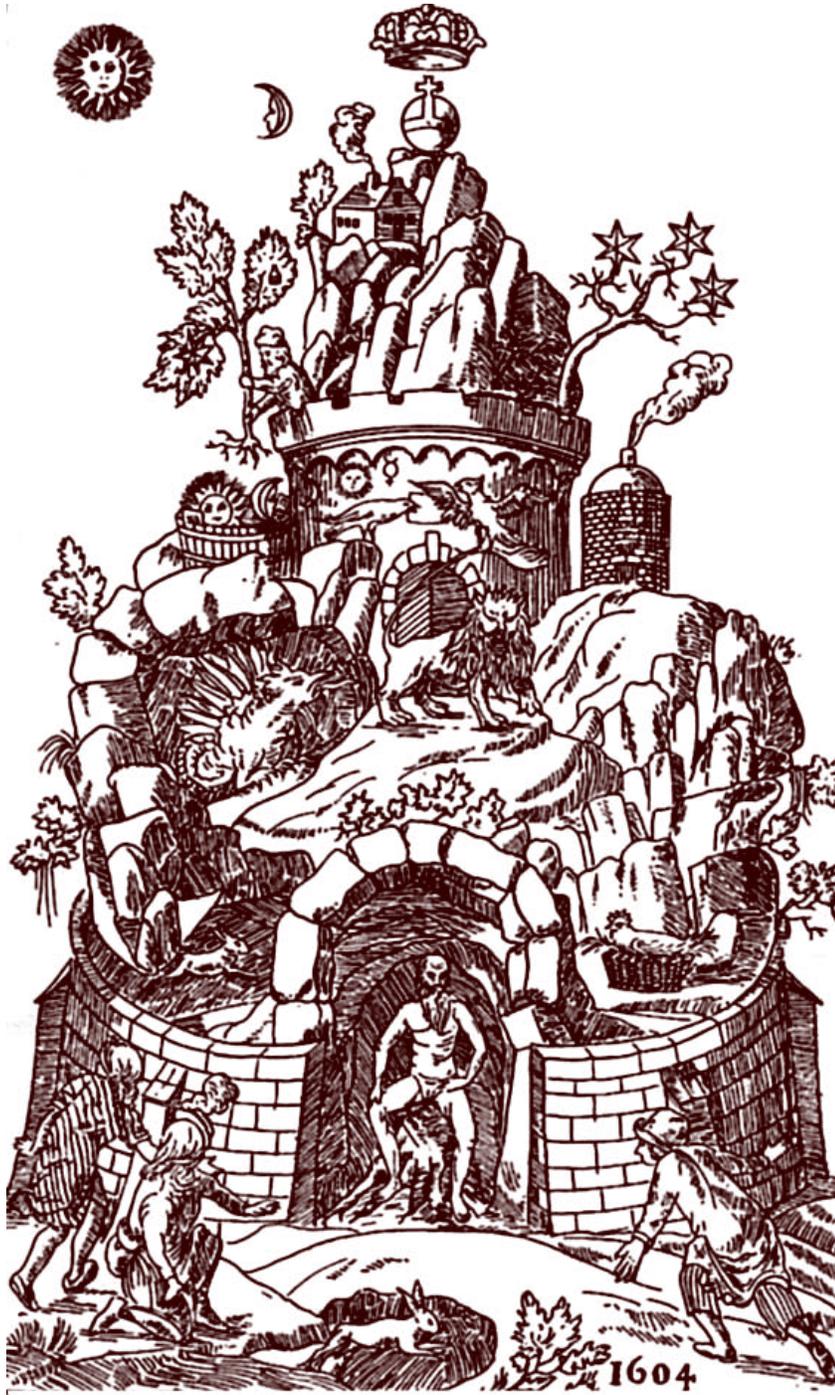
Passage taken from *The Spiritual Life* by Evelyn Underhill.
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RELIGION AND ART

The Mountain of Initiation

The art makes him a lord, not a servant.
Do not make hast, stay of the right tract,
So thou wilt have much profit and much joy.

The art is just, true and certain to the
Man who fear God and is assiduous,
And behaves rightly towards all natures.



If God grants many things in thy life,
Give plentifully to the poor,
Be faithful and silent about the art,

For this surely is God's will,
Keep truth and faith, think of me,
So thou wilt be free from all evil.

MONS PHILOSOPHORUM

MONS PHILOSOPHORUM

The soul of men everywhere was lost through a fall, and the health of the body suffered through a fall. Salvation came to the human soul through IEHOVA, Jesus Christ. The bodily health is brought back through a thing not good to look at. It is hidden in this painting, the highest treasure in this world, in which is the highest medicine and the greatest parts of the riches of nature, given to us by the Lord IEHOVA. It is called *Pator Metallorum*, well known to the philosopher sitting in front of the mountain-cave, easy to obtain for anybody. But the sophists in their sophistic garb, tapping on the walls, recognize him not. At the right is to be seen *Lepus*, representing the art of chemistry, marvelously white, the secrets of which with fire's heat are being explored. To the left one can see freely what the right *Clavis artis* is; one cannot be too subtle with it, like a hen hatching a chicken. In the midst of the mountain, before the door stands a courageous Lion in all its pride, whose noble blood the monster-dragon is going to shed; throwing him into a deep grave, out of it comes forth a black raven, then called *Ianua artis*, out of that comes *Aquila alba*. Even the crystal refined in the furnace will quickly show you on inspection *Servum fugitivum*, a wonder-child to many artists. The one effecting this all is *Principium laboris*. On the right hand in the barrel are *Sol* and *Luna*, the intelligence of the firmament. The Senior plants in it *Rad*, *Rubeam* and *albam*. Now you proceed with constancy and *Arbor artis* appears to you, with its blossoms it announces now *Lapidem Philosophorum*. Over all, the crown of the glory, ruling over all treasures.

Be diligent, peaceful, constant and pious, pray that God may help thee. And if thou attain, never forget the poor. Then thou wilt praise God with the legion of the angels, now and forever.

Both the illustration on the preceding page and the above retyped facsimile of text appeared in the *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians of the 16th & 17th Centuries*, published in Altona, Germany in 1785. The original German text, was in the form of thirty rhyming couplets.

The illustration has been identified as the work of Basilius Valentinus, a sixteenth-century alchemist who had depicted in a series of sketches the central themes from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parsifal*. As such, it purports to depict the knights (in unknighthly attire!) Parsifal, Gawain, and Feirifis, the three heroes of the tale, standing before the Hermitage of Treverezent, the aged and wise Guardian of the secrets of the Grail.

The various figures on the path up the mountain represent the disciplines and trials confronting a knight searching for Grail Initiation. A hare, signifying both alchemy and the fleeting, inconsistent thoughts of the neophyte, skitters at the base of the philosophical mountain. Various stages in the alchemical process of transformation are symbol-

ized by the different animal forms. A large fat hen broods on a nest of eggs to designate the warmth and will power which must be brought to the development of the picture-building imagination, so that thought can become as substantial as external objects and take on a new clarity of form and permanence.

The principle effecting this entire transformative process is *work*, better known to students of the Rosicrucian teachings as *service*. The whole realm of feelings, the sympathies and antipathies, represented by the lion, must be mastered. The unleashed instincts, impulses, and desires, (the dragon) must be slain, though the dragon's power now subserves the higher Self. Material consciousness (moon and sun in the confining barrel) is ultimately transcended, the aspirant applying the art of wisdom, purity, and humility to gain the crown of glory signifying mastery over the physical world and his lower nature. Possession of the philosopher's stone, or golden wedding garment, is thereby signified. The molten sea has successfully been poured. □