

The Adventures of an Unknown Philosopher

Jean Albert Belin *Les aventures du philosophe inconnu, en la recherche et en l'invention de la pierre philosophale. Divisées en quatre livres...* Paris, 1646. Transcribed by Sean Brooks from the translation in British Library MS. Sloane 3641.

The first discourse of philosophy to the unknown philosopher which declares the nature of the stone, its effects, its excellencies with its possibility and essences.

Borellus says this author was one Belinus, an abbot.

My Son,

Many seek the Stone and know not what it is. The definitions which I know they give of it doe furnish me with matter of laughter and compassion. To explain the effects of a thing is not to define it, one must declare the nature which produces those effects. That I may not leave you in this common error, I will let you know in what this essence does consist.

The Philosophical Stone is a substance of the mineral kind, the most perfect that can be having in itself a most perfect mixture of the elements.

That it is a substance of the mineral kind; this is the kind [the genus] of its definition. All the metals and minerals are a substance of this first stage of Nature. But that it is a substance the most perfect which is possible, this is its true difference. All the metals and minerals have their imperfections, by reason of their impurity and indigestion, as also for defaults of tincture and fixation not superabounding: for this cause Sol who is fixed pure and perfectly tinctured above [among] all the metals; but has only enough for himself and has nothing for the others, so that he has not all the perfection possible in the mineral kind, because therein as you will see in my following discourse, one may find such a substance as can communicate fixation, tincture and purity to the others, which gold cannot do having only enough for itself, not having also that subtilty necessary to communicate them, if he should have them, by entering and penetrating the bodies.

You see by this that our Stone is perfectly defined, because this notion agrees with it alone, and distinguishes it from all other substances comprised under the same genus [kind].

From its nature learn its effects, that is that it has power to make all imperfect metal perfect, and cure diseased bodies. Forasmuch as being a substance of the mineral kind, which has a most perfect mixtion of the elements, it has without doubt the virtue to reduce metals to their perfection, which are not imperfect, but by reason of their impurities and indigestions proceeding from an imperfect mixtion of the first elemental qualities: in like manner only by reason of the distemperature of their constitution.

The Stone is therefore a most powerful medicine, both for metals, and for the living. It is this which evidently shows its excellence above all things here below: for if the noblest end be a mark of excellence, the Stone having its end the most perfect among all things purely natural is also most considerable. Man is the prince of this world, and I suppose that every created being is employed in serving him, and according to its capacity contributes to do him good, regarding that as its end. This being so the greatest good to man is the noblest end of the creatures here below: now the greatest good fortune which he is capable of, without reference to grace, is health with riches. From these two as from two fountains, are all the good things derived which he can desire. Riches gives him the means to satisfy all his wishes, with these he may purchase honours and dignities to make his mind contented, he may have all the delicacies wherein the senses do delight, to satiate the appetite: and health does make him taste all these pleasures, in the extent of their power: by consequence the Stone which gives to man both the one and the other, has the most notable end; judge then from thence its excellence and its perfection.

Perhaps these mighty wonders which I with truth attribute to it are the reason that many call in doubt its possibility and esteem it as a mere chimaera, but truly the matching bands of ignorance which cover their eyes, produce in them this unhappy effect, or rather this pride which hinders them from believing what they cannot comprehend. It is not only possible, but very easy to be made by an industrious hand. It is true that being both by Art and Nature; since it is composed by the power of Nature assisted by the industry of the Philosopher, it is not possible if both the one and the other do not concur. One only is unable, both together can do all. Without Art, Nature is too weak, she has her bound in the mineral kind when she has produced Sol, she cannot go beyond it, by reason of the crudity of the air, which hinders the heat sufficient to digest this gold perfectly, so that Sol being the limit of Mother Nature in the

mineral kind, where our Stone holds the noblest rank, its composition is impossible to Nature alone. Neither likewise can it be done only by artifice, since not in this subject matter only, but in whatever it be, man can do nothing if he be not aided by Nature, since his own power extends no further than to assist Nature. You could not clothe the fields with a thousand varieties had not Nature furnished you with proper seed, and if this seed reared up or conducted by your hands did not cooperate with you: all you can do is to assist the seed, to put it into good earth, to supply it with heat in order to stir up its own. So Art alone is unable, as well as Nature only, to make our stone; but both conjointly and together do easily compose it. Experience shows us this every day. If you cultivate not your gardens and your lands, you have nothing which is perfect and by cultivating them you have one part of your desires. Nature provides you matter, and you lend your hands to Nature. The same in our Stone; Nature gives you what you should have, and you should give her what she wants: she gives you what you cannot make, and industry must likewise give to her what does surpass her power, she supplies the mineral power, industry must augment, in the same manner as in your gardens. She gives you the vegetable virtue and leaves to the gardener's industry the power and means to increase it, furnishing him with what he wants: having given you the mineral you ought to have, it belongs to Art to perfect the rest, to multiply the mineral virtue, to put the matter into a convenient place, to give it some external heat in order to stir up and sweetly call forth the internal, and by thus gently using it to render it more powerful. In a word, Art must bring to pass that the mineral nature push forward and the substance in its kind as much as it is possible, so that it be sufficient for itself and for others, that is most abundantly. In this manner Nature helped by industry will perfect our Stone.

Now that this may be done, reason shows it most evidently: if in the mineral kind there be a seed whereby it is produced and multiplied in the entrails of the Earth, why cannot the philosopher do as much having the knowledge of it by his learning, lodging it in a convenient place, and governing it wisely? The labourer easily makes his corn come up, the gardener his herbs and fruits, having the knowledge of their seed, a philosopher has certainly as much in the mineral kind as a simple gardener in the vegetable.

Furthermore a master gardener having the seed of an herb, not only makes an herb from thence, but an herb which produces another herb, being carried on to its perfection, why cannot the philosopher manage the seed of the metallic kind to a degree wherein it may produce not only an herb, I should say a metal, but a metal which should have the power to produce its like, and multiply even to infinity?

Certainly if there be a seed in metals, one must be a fool to affirm that they cannot be multiplied by means thereof. One cannot without ignorance say there is no seed. Can you persuade yourself that gold, the most perfect of bodies is produced without a seed? Since it is multiplied in its mines, and that the multiplication of every species is made by the means of the seed. Know you not if gold were bred without a seed, that it would be imperfect? Each thing that grows and comes without a seed is it not imperfect? But it is true that gold, the most perfect composition of the world, cannot be imperfect; therefore it is produced by a seed: no perfect thing here below is made without a seminal power. There are three kingdoms in the inferior nature; the mineral, the vegetable, and the animal. They are all derived and grow in the same manner, I should say by virtue of their seed: since the great God created the first matter, from which he made the elements, nothing is produced without a seed. They evidently know it as well in the animal kingdom as in the vegetable; the fruit which your gardens bring forth, the dogs and the horses which you see gotten each day hinders each one from doubting. So also they assuredly believe that each of them may be multiplied in their species. You see with your eye the vegetable seed, your imagination lets you know the animal, there is the mineral only which remains unknown. Only the sage and the wise philosophers have the reputation of knowing it, forasmuch as Nature has hid it in the profundity of the Earth, rendering it invisible by the appointment of the great God, who governs all things wisely. Ruling in a manner unknown, thence it comes that they do not do, as they do in other kingdoms, not that it is more hard, did they but know it they would eagerly do in the mineral kingdom that which they do in the vegetable. The gardener engrafts upon a stock what fruit he pleases and the philosopher knowing the seed of the metallic kind, shall if he will, engraft gold on an imperfect body. From a wild stock the gardener will make a lovely apple tree; so the philosopher from a mixed metal of a despicable price, if he will, shall make most precious gold. The labourer makes his grain corn grow up because he knows the seed of that grain; so also shall the philosopher make as much gold as he would, having the knowledge of the seed of gold, making therewith a perfectly digested gold, which shall have the power to change all metals into good gold by its digestion digesting their indigested parts; just as strong and powerful wine shall change water into wine conformably to its strength and power: put a drop of water into a glass of wine, this water shall in an instant be changed into wine; if you could bring this wine up to a greater power, it would change a greater quantity. In the same manner, by bringing the mineral substance up to the supreme degree of digestion it will be able to change the imperfect and undigested bodies into perfection even to infinity, if you can subtilize this virtue unto its perfection, so that one drop may convert an ocean of imperfect metals; as you see in rennet a drop of curdled milk shall convert an ocean of milk into true rennet, even to infinity. If you have any difficulty apprehending this consider that if you have the cacochymia

[an evil digestion], as much nourishment as you shall be able to eat, shall be converted into putrefaction, because the putrefying virtue, (if one may say so), is strongly multiplied in that part. On the contrary if the digesting virtue be abundantly multiplied, it will convert the crude aliments into good substance. As we see in certain creatures who presently digest a great quantity of the most indigested aliments [food]. So the virtue of the Stone is so much multiplied by the conduct of the wise philosopher, that by digesting the imperfect bodies and metals, it of them does make fine gold.

First it produces a substance of the same, the same nature according to the strength of its virtue, and it afterwards produces gold. Take for example, a tree. The seed cast into the ground produces some apple tree which begeth apples. This apple still affords a seed to produce such another tree; until this seed being debilitated in its virtue for want of heat, will produce no more than barren and unfruitful stocks. So the Stone at the beginning being thrown upon a metal, from thence will make a stone which will have the power of making another Stone, until that the last production shall have no more power than to produce Sol, which is a tree without fruit, and an herb without seed. Since you see then every day effects resembling those of our Stone; believing the one does not doubt the other, that the miraculous effects which I attribute to it may not make you deny to the mineral kind which is conceded to the vegetable and the animal. Know that there is a seed, thence judge the possibility of the Stone. Know furthermore that the seed has the same power in the mineral kind as in the two superior ones, and thence you may gather how it can be multiplied: and take not up with the sentiments of such thick skulled and ignoramuses as blame the design of such those who seek the Stone, because they cannot attain to it: the knowledge of it is above their capacity. The man who is accustomed to find fault with what he cannot comprehend, is like the fox in the fable who disliked the grapes which he could not get. As this science has not been given but to the holy and the wise philosophers of whom the number is but small, thence it comes that the greatest part do discommend it. Ignoramuses love not sciences, the grossest spirits get afar from the schools; so does the world find fault with our secret because it is all filled with madmen, it is thought impossible because they love ignorance.

I say much more it is extremely easy, at least it is not so hard to find and make as many arts that are commonly professed. Had not men had the use of glass, who would think it possible? If the way of making paper were not yet known, men would esteem it doubtful; so it is with our Stone; it is not common and therefore thought impossible, or at least very difficult, and yet it is easier to be found and made than pan powder [gunpowder I suppose], glass and other things which common people make with ease. And truly it is not without reason that my sons call it the play of women and children, since a child instructed in the manner of it may do it in sport.

Whence comes it then you will say, that of above a hundred thousand who work therein exactly, with a great deal of pains only one shall succeed? If it be so easy how comes it that after so many years, which they seek it with so much eagerness, two or three only have been made happy with the possession? Whence comes it that so many good wits who astonish men with their subtilities, and by the inventions of notable wonders, have been gravelled in a point which you take to be so easy? If they have pierced the heavens with the sharpness of their understandings how come they so blind upon this?

This at first sight is astonishing yet two or three points being considered, you will have no more to wonder at, first though the Stone be easy, the secret to make it consists of a continual ratiocination whereof very few are capable. Of a thousand you will have a great difficulty to find one who knows how to reason. Ordinary people amuse themselves by learning sciences superficially, slightly skimming [or running] them over and seldom sound the bottom, they busy themselves with little punctilios of wit which are imaginary, leaving the depth of learning there where the truth is. In these punctilios we soon see their end, their wits there finding diversion rather than pains, it is for that reason that there they end their course.

Consider pray how human and divine sciences are nowadays managed in the schools. In the universities they will make treatises of a hundred pages to know whether God made *Ens Rationis* [a logical term], whether he walks in the imaginary spaces, if Galen's figure be good. They propose questions in the air, which only serve to confound paper: and the principle they pass over slightly enough. When from my throne I behold the doctors of these times who call themselves philosophers, I know not whether I should laugh or rather lament. Do they enjoy themselves in physick [that is natural philosophy] to search out Nature's things? Do they examine the wonderful prerogatives of Nature? It is easy for them to give some rustic definition without passing any further because to go further one must reason, one must have one's spirit very attentive, which there are very few who can do. Of a hundred swimmers very few know how to dive. Of a thousand students, very few sound the bottom. One will tell you in two words, physick is a natural science, that its object is the natural body. After that, if one should speak a little more particularly to them; what is this body? Whence comes it? What are its causes and principles? They will be like the poor strollers [or gypsies] and they will speak like blind men of colours: to discourse of these scientifically, one must have a good ratiocination. I say then that the secret of our Stone is very easy in itself, but it is true the men render it impossible because they will not reason. That is to say, it is not hard to mankind, but because they will not be men: this is the

first reason why so few men do make it.

Secondly, to speak ingenuously the truth, if the theory be easy and certain to men, who are men, I say who will reason, the practice as very tedious [troublesome]. One must be bound a year or more to stay by his furnaces, in order to assist the work of Nature: you must take leave of all sort of business and employments, you must keep entirely to yourself, the visit of a friend may be enough to spoil the work in detaining the philosopher at a time when he should not leave it. And then the vessels are of glass, the matter is brittle, if one breaks farewell all hopes, one must begin again. Tell me how many do you know who have so much patience? To captivate himself entirely for a year to look through the hole of a furnace, and do such sort of things, is this proper to man whose spirit aims at liberty?

The third reason is taken from a higher place, lift up your eyes to heaven and there you will find it. I perceive a certain providence above, which wisely disposes and governs all things: which having built the world in so beautiful an order takes care to hinder its ruin and confusion, which without doubt would not fail to happen if every one knew how to make gold. It would change the universe, and turn it topsy turvy; if everyone could make the Stone, gold and silver would be as common as dirt. It would therefore be necessary to establish some other invention to continue trade, for you would not get a dish of milk for a load of gold; their scarceness is that which makes things be esteemed, and the price only maintains commerce: there would be nothing but confusion in the world. God for that reason hinders this secret from being common. And since he sounds even the bottom of our hearts he knows their aims and inclinations; he sees that the greatest part would damn themselves by the knowledge of this secret, for the ill use of it, which yet are saved by being ignorant. It is true that many would fail of working out their salvations, as the great wits of the precedent ages have done. But God sees that knowing our secret, they would do no other thing, they would desire all employments for the knowledge of the Stone has propriety that it thoroughly possesses the soul, and yet high providence ordains them for other designs.

Furthermore, of a thousand who work, and perhaps have the knowledge of it, very few have the requisite intention: this man has no other end than to make himself great, another to enrich his parents, another to take his pleasure, to buy by the force of money a terrestrial paradise. It is for that reason God hinders the success of their work, not seconding the evil intention; he who sets his hand to the work ought to have no other design than to employ the effect of his labour to help the poor, found hospitals, deliver captives, and procure the glory of his God. To undertake it for any other end is to lose his time and labour: and not only the intention ought to good, but the life also holy.

For the reasons above alleged one has need in the practice of the assistance of the most high: but heaven gives no help to the man who is its enemy: one must have a pure and holy heart, divested from the desires of the world, and vowed entirely to God.

Finally if the greatest part of men had certain remedies to exempt themselves from, or cure their distempers they would run into vice? The fear of getting some evil or of dying soon restrains them much more than the fear of God. But having our Stone, they preserve themselves and cure all infirmities, even those which our physicians call incurable.

See here my son, the reasons why, though the Stone be possible and easy, so few have the happiness to make it. I could still give you further reasons, but I well perceive that you doubt not of it, and that you would now hear me discourse about the way to make it. It is that which I propose to do; but since one can do nothing without a subject matter, it will be to the purpose to discourse in the first place about the Matter.

The Second Discourse of the Matter of the Stone

It is at this point that all the world stumbles, know you not that all who work betake themselves to different matters.

Nevertheless [it is true that] the Matter is but one.

God has been willing to imprint his image upon Nature; as he is one, and from this unity three persons are derived, so he willed that matter should be but one, and from this unity there should go forth three kingdoms; the mineral, the vegetable and the animal. There needs but one source to make diverse rivers, one grain of corn, one stock of a vine to obtain many more.

All comes from unity says the divine Plato, and all returns to unity.

It is therefore that the matter has the principles of our rich Stone, being the same as of all the metals, which without doubt is one alone. This unity as in Nature will make more, to make no more than one.

Now this one only Matter though it be common is not known by everyone, everyone carries it with them, and only one of a hundred thousand shall know it: you cannot take a step without finding it in your way, for it is without you as well as within you, and yet the number is very small of those who know it: a million seek it and not one finds it. Some go to seek it among herbs and plants, not understanding what I am going to say; namely that finding in my books that all things have the same principle, which is to be met with everywhere in the heavens as well as on Earth,

in herbs as in animals, in stones as in men, they imagine that it matters not from what place they draw it: they see not that in vegetables it is determined to a different kind from the mineral and that drawing it from a vegetable he should return it again to its first indifference which Art has not yet known how to do; and more than that, if Art could do it, he could not know how to bring it into what kingdom he would. This is the work of Nature, forasmuch as man knows not the proportion of the elements which it received at its nativity. Leave then the herbs to the gardeners to make salads for the poor alchemists.

For the same reason those who take the common elements are grossly deceived, for if they could have the elements in their first purity, it is not in human power to rule them according to their will. It is Nature's prerogative to make the first determination in the kingdoms, after that only, Art may lend a hand, and not before.

Hold it then for a certain maxim that to make the Stone, you must not depart from the mineral kingdom, and that in it you shall meet with your principles: the design of the secret is to advance the metallic nature to its perfection, you then must take that same nature: to make a tree they do not take a dog: to bring up a plant to its perfection, they don't amuse themselves with watering and cultivating stones, they cultivate the plant. If you would carry up the mineral nature to its highest degree of perfection, work then upon the same nature; there you will find the common principle of every creature but already determined to that kind to which you desire to bring it, and therefore only proper for your design. I intend not nevertheless, to assure you that all which is of the metallic kind is proper to afford you this principle. It is the error of many who take gold, silver and other common metals, dissolving them with strong waters, thinking to draw from their entrails this rich seed which has engendered them. They are not in the wrong to think it is there, but they are very much in the wrong to think to pull it thence, by reason of the inseparable union of the mineral principles in the formed metal; seeing that then they are determined; and beside in their production a thousand superfluities are mixed with their principles, which cannot be cast out without incredible pains. I see well that a strong water does dissolve, would you know how? It is by cutting and eating away the metals; these dissolutions are no other than pieces of the metals, and not the seed separated from the parts. But it is ridiculous to take (for example) a piece of a man, an arm or a leg and cast it into the matrix of a woman to beget a man: it is to do the same thing.

2. Know you not that the matter of the Stone ought to be philosophically calcined without the operation? That is to say without mixture with its own proper natural sulphur, how a metal already formed cannot be calcined in that manner.

3. How can you reduce the metals into their first principles their compositions being so hard, and so tenacious? How will you remove the superfluities they have contracted in their birth? I have not yet shown it to any one.

Finally do you not see that the formed metals are baked bread? One cannot make leaven of baked bread.

Leave then the metals also which are in the metallic nature, and boldly betake yourself to the minerals.

But think not nevertheless that they are all proper for this purpose; forasmuch as the greatest part of them have in their production contracted stains, that by the force of Art can never be removed, and the metallic seed is there debilitated, and as it were without vigor.

But among them all seek in one, which is the only necessary; should I speak more clearly? In that you will find the keys of the grand secret, there is the cabinet I hid them in. It is the mine of my wise sons; the metallic seed is there all vigorous; it has not had time to weaken itself, and contract those indelible stains. There the matter is, but truly it is not the Matter. Take well refined steel and open its entrails, and you will there find this second matter of the philosophers so long time, so much sought for, but without well refined steel and well wrought by the hands of a good artist, never think to obtain your end. This mineral is the hidden fountain, if you open it with your steel you would find a water. Do I not yet say enough of it? This water is the mercury of the wise philosophers, this water is the menstruum of the world, this water is all spirit: what do I say? It is body and matter but it also is a soul, it is a sulphur, and not a burning sulphur; it is the bath of the elements, it is in this they are united and married by a secret of Nature, and after determined to the mineral kind. It is the water which wets, and does not wet; the water of life and the water of death, it kills and revives both together, it is hot and it is cold; it is dry and moist; it is a water that serves each one and they see it not, it is a light water which weigheth very heavy; it is a black water, whiter than snow; it is muddy, but it is clear and crystalline, it is stinking, and for all that it refreshes with its sweet smell; truly it is without colour, yet it also is white, black, yellow, red, green and diversified as a border of flowers. It is the water of our sea, the philosophers sail on it prosperously, but the bellows blowers and alchemists are shipwrecked there. Why do they blow upon the sea? The winds are to be feared there. It is a vile water, but it is precious since it is the mother of our gods; the seven planets one unto it their nativity.

To comprehend it remember that God being willing to create the world, created the first matter. It was a pure substance which we may call a quintessence; all Nature was comprised and enclosed in it; it was like a water or like a steam [smoke] loaded with cold and darkness to the end that it might extend itself in continuation, for that reason the divine spirit walking on the waters, made a light appear issuing out of his divine Word, to divide this matter. Of

the purest part he made the heavens, those luminous arches that surround the Earth; and are not different but in greater or lesser purity: he made the inferior world, having divided it into two parts, of the purer he made as it were a quintessence, whence he produced the elements. These young and vigorous elements acting strongly produce vapours, which resolving themselves into a water; this water was then in an indifference to be a plant, a metal or an animal; but by a miraculous turn of hand of Nature, it is as soon made all things; you may consider it well, but not penetrate into it. There it is made a plant, there an animal, and here a mineral; it produces this wonder, casting this water into diverse matrices as an universal seed: in our mineral kind, meeting a matrix convenient to its kind, behold it there determined to a metallic nature; and according to the purity or impurity of the matrix are formed diverse metals, for indeed they differ not in purity, but in greater or less digestion. For Nature in action pushing forwards this seed into the mineral kingdom has no design to make any other metal than gold, and the others are nothing but gold begun. But they become thus by reason of the superfluities which she meets with in the mineral principles and the adjacent contrarities of those things which hinder the carrying up this substance to the heaven of the sun, for as much as Nature never stays in an imperfect body, but against her will, and by her first intention never tends to an imperfect being, or to a less perfect being; as to a middle, to produce her end. But you must carefully mind, that before this metallic seed be enclosed in a metal, Nature has lodged it in a salt, which is our mine, this salt is a true mineral, that is our mine, and if you will work the Stone, you must first know this common salt, known and unknown; you must open its entrails with a well-tempered cuttle-axe, and you shall see our only mercury, and the true matter of our work. After this seek for no more, it is absolutely impossible to speak more clearly; if you understand me not, assuredly believe you are incapable of the secret; if you do understand me, this is all that can be said. You have this water which is our mercury, the only principle of our work, as it is of the metals; having this you have all you ought, take care of yourself to seek for nothing more. Before you have it you must have this salt, this mineral wherein it is enclosed, and steel to draw it forth (understand well this steel) but having once got it, take you great care to mingle nothing with it.

You perhaps will say I contradict myself, because I show in many of my writings that all sort of generation is made by male and female, and here I tell you that our Stone, as also all the metals, are produced by this water only, without putting in any other thing. The objection is not without a foundation, and forces me to tell you a great secret of the Art. Have you never read in my writings that the mercury of the philosophers was this Venus, the hermaphrodite; then it is male as well as female. This water is truly a mercury, it is cold and moist; but it is also sulphur, it is dry and hot both together: as sulphur it is male, as mercury it is female: as sulphur it heats and dries, as mercury it moistens and refreshes itself, that the elements being thus duly altered and mingled may arrive at the circle of the moon if the sulphur be white, or at the heaven of the sun if it be red.

This being so you possess three noble truths; the first that the Stone is possible, the second that its matter is one only thing, and the third that it is water, and the water of our mineral: it remains that I declare to you how it is made.

The Third Discourse of the Way to Make the Philosophical Stone

My son, it is very much to know the matter whereon one ought to work, but that is not enough, if one know not the manner. You know well that a piece of wood is the matter whereof to make a figure, yet you may not know how to make it: to know the matter of which our Stone is composed is a great advantage; but it is useless if one knows not how to manage it. I have shown you one and I will teach you the other.

You must know in the first place, that our water or matter has a body, a soul and a spirit, for as much as our Stone ought to have a fixation, and an abounding tincture either of white, or of red, and also subtilty and fusion, to fix, and tinge and penetrate the metals which one desires to tinge and fix into the sun, or the moon; it must therefore have body, soul and spirit; body to be fixed, and to fix others; a soul to be tinged, and to tinge others; a spirit to the end that having this soul in the body, it may communicate it by penetration, forasmuch as the spirit is the vehicle of the soul, and the middle or medium between the soul and the body, namely the place of both.

This being presupposed, the making our Stone consists in this only that its principles being well prepared, the body does subtilize itself in the spirit, and the spirit fix itself in the fusible body, straightly uniting unto it its soul: for truly this operation is no other than a volatilization, or a circulation of the elements: the body is earth and water, the spirit is water and air, and the soul is air and fire. From whence it comes that the spirit as mediator between the body and soul participating of both, does indissolubly tie and knit them both together by carrying the soul into the body, and penetrating the body.

Take then our refined steel, which is the only agent provided that you understand it well; with it anatomize the mercury, and make him give a body, a soul and a spirit. Make me this body strong, this spirit subtle and penetrating, and this soul powerful. Then subtilize this body in the spirit, fix the spirit in the body, unite the soul by means of the spirit into the same body and you have the secret: there is no need to say any more of it, every indifferent capacity may well apprehend me. Yet since I have promised you entire satisfaction, I am content to speak more particularly, I

say then that our work has four principle degrees whereby it is made perfect for itself and for others. The first is called the preparation, the second corruption, or putrefaction, the third generation and the fourth multiplication; let us speak of them all in order.

Preparation

The philosopher ought to know that there are two preparations of the matter requisite for the making of the Stone, the one is external, the other internal. The external does nothing else but draw forth the mercury from our salt or mineral with our steel, depriving it of its feces, which we call dead earth; in a word, it is the extraction of our true mercury in the form of a shining water like unto a crystal or a beautiful diamond. I intend not here to speak of that, it is easy and without difficulty: I suppose that you have the matter like a crystalline water, and that you draw it from our true mine with the lance [by the means] of fire. I intend to speak of the second which is the interior, and the foundation of the operation; that is to say, to speak more clearly the preparation of the mercury of the philosophers, which consists in extracting the elements mingled in the mineral seed; and in the purgation of them to be again submitted to the virtue of the seed, I should say to the mineral power.

The elements in their mineral coagulation have contracted in the mine a thousand foulnesses, it is requisite to remove them; you must take away the more thick and the more gross terrestriety, which may hinder penetration, you must evaporate the superfluous wateriness which might prejudice the tincture and the vision; you must cast out that airyness which is most subtle and contrary to fixation: you must drive away the fieryness which is too combustible, which spoils the fusion and the tincture itself. Besides in cleansing our mercury from its stains and foulness you ought by a reiterated operation to make it more strong and vigorous and augment the mineral virtue so that being always mistress [superior] it may all the time of working carry up the principles of the work very high.

Take then your mercury become water by virtue of our steel, put it into a vessel, make it vomit; make it show you a little image of the Divinity, from one demand of it three: after it has stayed a philosophical month in the vessel, having these three, strip them of all the accidents prejudicial to the end [the finishing] of our work. Having stripped them, clothe them the better, cover them with the cloak of vigor to resist the rigors of the season which they are to pass through before they are made elixers; disrobe them and then clothe the elements again; see here the preparation, deprive them of their filth and superfluities, clothe them with vigour, to the end that being afterwards to reunite them you make not a conjunction of things unclean and weak, for a perfect and vigorous effect. Now this unclinging and clothing is nothing else but the reiterated distillation of the spirit and the soul: this is to say too much.

Corruption

After you have prepared the elements, you must submit them to the mineral power, to be differently mingled and altered, that according to their diverse mixtures and alterations the mineral virtue may chase away all foreign tinctures. The diverse imperfect colours which are in this subject being drawn out, until you see the crow's head appear, which is a mark of perfect corruption, for Art desires to kindle a true tincture, either of white or of red, by the means of the soul which being air and fire tinged either into white or red, having the whiteness of the air and the redness of fire. Now Art cannot communicate these two tinctures, but after having exterminated the others and arrived at black of the blackest, under which is whiteness, and under the white is red, for you cannot pass from one extreme to another without passing by the middle, nor mount up to the highest step without passing on the lower. Consider then wherein corruption does consist; extinguish the foreign colours by a different alteration and mixture of the elements, make them go into mourning for a sign of death, which shall be to you an assured token of an approaching life. Corrupt boldly to the end you may ingender; this operation is not too dangerous, only take care not too much press the Matter by the * lance [force] of fire; forty days or thereabouts will let you see the issue.

Generation

When you shall see the crow's head, take your cuttle-axe, for you must cut it off and put the dove in its place. To do this you must but circulate the elements, that the earth being made air by means of the water, and by a wise regimen returned into earth the body may subtilize itself. Which is done in the spirit, by which, and in which, the earth being subtilized and passed in its circulation, and by this means the most subtle water being converted into earth, and the foreign colours extinguished there appears in the dry earth either the white or the red; by means of an airy or a fiery heat. It is for this reason I call this part generation, forasmuch as the mineral virtue being made strong and powerful by the progress of the operation begets the perfect tinctures.

Take then my son, the crow's head and by decoction augmenting the fire in some degree take away its blackness; when you shall see that it begins to go away, make the earth by the means of the water convert itself into air and then that it become earth, which having done diverse times, make the air and the fire (the party colours, and foreign tinctures being extinguished) be enkindled in this earth, which is dry, and as a powder impalpable, either red or white; for the Stone which you must make with this powder, could not penetrate the bodys if it had not tincture and subtility.

Multiplication

When you shall have got the powder tinged either into white or red according to the medicine and the ferment, take such a part as you please, and make the air by the means of the water congeal into earth, with the same water, and this oftentimes, which I call to tie and untie, often dissolving and digesting, that the spirit may fix itself in the body; and making it more penetrating and subtile it gives it fusibility and/or inceration. Now by this frequent digestion, the mineral virtue acquires a very great perfection, and the air or else the fire acting by it on the dry earth augments the tincture and the fixation of our Stone may communicate both the one and the other very abundantly to imperfect metals; in a word, it is enough to know that the multiplication is made by the same thing which the composition was made of, and you must still multiply it, until you see your medicine melt without smoking on a red hot iron.

Now my son, have I satisfied you, and would you have any more?

Truly, madame were I not satisfied with so good, so clear, and ample a discourse I should certainly be unsatiable. It forces me to confess that I have nothing more to wish for in this life, than a holy retirement, where I may at leisure thank and praise him who has vouchsafed to favour me with so many blessings.

Your design is praise-worthy, endeavor to fulfill it as soon as shall be possible. I never should have discovered my secret to you, but to make you more wise and incline you wholly to heaven, leaving you nothing upon Earth to wish for. Since that solitude is a means very proper for this end, the choice which you make of it pleases me, and shuts my mouth from saying any more to you. Farewell dear son, I pray to heaven to bless you.

As wisdom did retire, I went to my lodging well contented, ruminating on the means how to pass the rest of my days in some hermitage, with a design to make a companion of my fortune, a partner of my good luck, whom I could not hinder myself from loving notwithstanding diverse diskindnesses which he had done me; but I was hindered from it by a very extraordinary way, for reason which my consideration of him command me to conceal, since I have taken a firm resolution never to speak to anyone in the world, which God does not inspire me to.

See here, sirs, all my adventures in the search of the great work; you may if you please make your benefit of them, without its being necessary to write you any more. Farewell then, and permit me to go into my solitude, to think of nothing more but to die, to live in eternal day, and there to find another Stone, infinitely more rich, and more fortunate.

Petra Autem Erat Christus
But the Stone was Christ.