

Nicholas Flamel

The Book of Abraham the Jew

Wisdom has various means for making its way into the heart of man. Sometimes a prophet comes forward and speaks. Or a sect of mystics receives the teaching of a philosophy, like rain on a summer evening, gathers it in and spreads it abroad with love. Or it may happen that a charlatan, performing tricks to astonish men, may produce, perhaps without knowing it himself, a ray of real light with his dice and magic mirrors. In the fourteenth century, the pure truth of the masters was transmitted by a book. This book fell into the hands of precisely the man who was destined to receive it; and he, with the help of the text and the hieroglyphic diagrams that taught the transmutation of metals into gold, accomplished the transmutation of his soul, which is a far rarer and more wonderful operation.

Thanks to the amazing book of Abraham the Jew all the Hermetists of the following centuries had the opportunity of admiring an example of a perfect life, that of Nicolas Flamel, the man who received the book. After his death or disappearance many students and alchemists who had devoted their lives to the search for the Philosopher's Stone despaired because they had not in their possession the wonderful book that contained the secret of gold and of eternal life. But their despair was unnecessary. The secret had become alive. The magic formula had become incarnate in the actions of a man. No ingot of virgin gold melted in the crucibles could, in color or purity, attain the beauty of the wise bookseller's pious life. There is nothing legendary about the life of Nicolas Flamel. The Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris contains works copied in his own hand and original works written by him. All the official documents relating to his life have been found: his marriage contract, his deeds of gift, his will. His history rests solidly on those substantial material proofs for which men clamor if they are to believe in obvious things. To this indisputably authentic history, legend has added a few flowers. But in every spot where the flowers of legend grow, underneath there is the solid earth of truth.

Whether Nicolas Flamel was born at Pontoise or somewhere else, a question that historians have argued and investigated with extreme attention, seems to me to be entirely without importance. It is enough to know that towards the middle of the fourteenth century, Flamel was carrying on the trade of a bookseller and had a stall backing on to the columns of Saint-Jacques la Boucherie in Paris. It was not a big stall, for it measured only two feet by two and a half. However, it grew. He bought a house in the old rue de Marivaux and used the ground floor for his business. Copyists and illuminators did their work there. He himself gave a few writing lessons and taught nobles who could only sign their names with a cross. One of the copyists or illuminators acted also as a servant to him.

Nicolas Flamel married Pernelle, a good-looking, intelligent widow, slightly older than himself and the possessor of a little property. Every man meets once in his life the woman with whom he could live in peace and harmony. For Nicolas Flamel, Pernelle was that woman. Over and above her natural qualities, she had another which is still rarer. She was a woman who was capable of keeping a secret all her life without revealing it to anybody in confidence. But the story of Nicolas Flamel is the story of a book for the most part. The secret made its appearance with the book, and neither the death of its possessors nor the lapse of centuries led to the complete discovery of the secret.

Nicolas Flamel had acquired some knowledge of the Hermetic art. The ancient alchemy of the Egyptians and the Greeks that flourished among the Arabs had, thanks to them, penetrated to Christian countries. Nicolas Flamel did not, of course, regard alchemy as a mere vulgar search for the means of making gold. For every exalted mind the finding of the Philosopher's Stone was the finding of the essential secret of Nature, the secret of her unity and her laws, the possession of perfect wisdom. Flamel dreamed of sharing in this wisdom. His ideal was the highest that man could attain. And he knew that it could be realized through a book, for the secret of the Philosopher's Stone had already been found and transcribed in symbolic form. Somewhere it existed. It was in the hands of unknown sages who lived somewhere unknown. But how difficult it was for a small Paris bookseller to get into touch with those sages.

Nothing, really, has changed since the fourteenth century. In our day also many men strive desperately towards an ideal, the path which they know but cannot climb; and they hope to win the magic formula (which will make them new beings) from some miraculous visit or from a book written expressly for them. But for most, the visitor does not come and the book is not written. Yet for Nicolas Flamel the book was written. Perhaps because a bookseller is better situated than other people to receive a unique book; perhaps because the strength of his desire organized events without his knowledge, so that the book

came when it was time. So strong was his desire, that the coming of the book was preceded by a dream, which shows that this wise and well-balanced bookseller had a tendency to mysticism.

Nicolas Flamel dreamed one night that an angel stood before him. The angel, who was radiant and winged like all angels, held a book in his hands and uttered these words, which were to remain in the memory of the hearer: "Look well at this book, Nicholas. At first you will understand nothing in it $\frac{3}{4}$ neither you nor any other man. But one day you will see in it that which no other man will be able to see." Flamel stretched out his hand to receive the present from the angel, and the whole scene disappeared in the golden light of dreams. Sometime after that the dream was partly realized.

One day, when Nicolas Flamel was alone in his shop, an unknown man in need of money appeared with a manuscript to sell. Flamel was no doubt tempted to receive him with disdainful arrogance, as do the booksellers of our day when some poor student offers to sell them part of his library. But the moment he saw the book he recognized it as the book that the angel had held out to him, and he paid two florins for it without bargaining. The book appeared to him indeed resplendent and instinct with divine virtue. It had a very old binding of worked copper, on which were engraved curious diagrams and certain characters, some of which were Greek and others in a language he could not decipher. The leaves of the book were not made of parchment, like those he was accustomed to copy and bind. They were made of the bark of young trees and were covered with very clear writing done with an iron point. These leaves were divided into groups of seven and consisted of three parts separated by a page without writing, but containing a diagram that was quite unintelligible to Flamel. On the first page were written words to the effect that the author of the manuscript was Abraham the Jew $\frac{3}{4}$ prince, priest, Levite, astrologer, and philosopher. Then followed great curses and threats against anyone who set eyes on it unless he was either a priest or a scribe. The mysterious word *maranatha*, which was many times repeated on every page, intensified the awe-inspiring character of the text and diagrams. But most impressive of all was the patined gold of the edges of the book, and the atmosphere of hallowed antiquity that there was about it.

Maranatha! Was he qualified to read this book? Nicolas Flamel considered that being a scribe he might read the book without fear. He felt that the secret of life and of death, the secret of the unity of Nature, the secret of the duty of the wise man, had been concealed behind the symbol of the diagram and formula in the text by an initiate long since dead. He was aware that it is a rigid law for initiates that they must not reveal their knowledge, because if it is good and fruitful for the intelligent, it is bad for ordinary men. As Jesus has clearly expressed it, pearls must not be given as food to swine. Was he qualified to read this book? Nicolas Flamel considered that being a scribe he might read the book without fear. He felt that the secret of life and of death, the secret of the unity of Nature, the secret of the duty of the wise man, had been concealed behind the symbol of the diagram and formula in the text by an initiate long since dead. He was aware that it is a rigid law for initiates that they must not reveal their knowledge, because if it is good and fruitful for the intelligent, it is bad for ordinary men. As Jesus has clearly expressed it, pearls must not be given as food to swine.

He had the pearl in his hands. It was for him to rise in the scale of man in order to be worthy to understand its purity. He must have had in his heart a hymn of thanksgiving to Abraham the Jew, whose name was unknown to him, but who had thought and labored in past centuries and whose wisdom he was now inheriting. He must have pictured him a bald old man with a hooked nose, wearing the wretched robe of his race and wilting in some dark ghetto, in order that the light of his thought might not be lost. And he must have vowed to solve the riddle, to rekindle the light, to be patient and faithful, like the Jew who had died in the flesh but lived eternally in his manuscript.

Nicolas Flamel had studied the art of transmutation. He was in touch with all the learned men of his day. Manuscripts dealing with alchemy have been found, notably that of Almasatus, which were part of his personal library. He had knowledge of the symbols of which the alchemists made habitual use. But those that he saw in the book of Abraham the Jew remained dumb for him. In vain, he copied some of the mysterious pages and set them out in his shop, in the hope that some visitor conversant with the Cabala would help him to solve the problem. He met with nothing but the laughter of skeptics and the ignorance of pseudo-scholars $\frac{3}{4}$ just as he would today if he showed the book of Abraham the Jew either to pretentious occultists or to the scholars at the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres.

Nicholas Flamel's Journey

For twenty-one years, he pondered the hidden meaning of the book. That is really not that long. He is favored among men for whom twenty-one years are enough to enable him to find the key of life. At the end of twenty-one years, Nicolas Flamel had developed in himself sufficient wisdom and strength to hold out against the storm of light involved by the coming of truth to the heart of man. Only then did events

group themselves harmoniously according to his will and allow him to realize his desire. For everything good and great that happens to a man is the result of the co-ordination of his own voluntary effort and a malleable fate.

No one in Paris could help Nicolas Flamel understand the book. Now, this book had been written by a Jew, and part of its text was in ancient Hebrew. The Jews had recently been driven out of France by persecution. Nicolas Flamel knew that many of these Jews had migrated to Spain. In towns such as Malaga and Granada, which were still under the more enlightened dominion of the Arabs, there lived prosperous communities of Jews and flourishing synagogues, in which scholars and doctors were bred. Many Jews from the Christian towns of Spain took advantage of the tolerance extended by the Moorish kings and went to Granada to learn. There they copied Plato and Aristotle $\frac{3}{4}$ forbidden texts in the rest of Europe $\frac{3}{4}$ and returned home to spread abroad the knowledge of the ancients and of the Arab masters. Nicolas Flamel thought that in Spain he might meet some erudite Cabalist who would translate the book of Abraham for him. Travelling was difficult, and without a strong-armed escort, safe passage was nearly impossible for a solitary traveler. Flamel made therefore a vow to St James of Compostela, the patron saint of his parish, to make a pilgrimage. This was also a means of concealing from his neighbors and friends the real purpose of his journey. The wise and faithful Pernelle was the only person who was aware of his real plans. He put on the pilgrim's attire and shell-adorned hat, took the staff, which ensured a certain measure of safety to a traveler in Christian countries, and started off for Galicia. Since he was a prudent man and did not wish to expose the precious manuscript to the risks of travel, he contented himself with taking with him a few carefully copied pages, which he hid in his modest baggage.

Nicolas Flamel has not recounted the adventures that befell him on his journey. Possibly he had none. It may be that adventures happen only to those who want to have them. He has told us merely that he went first to fulfil his vow to St James. Then he wandered about Spain, trying to get into relations with learned Jews. But they were suspicious of Christians, particularly of the French, who had expelled them from their country. Besides, he had not much time. He had to remember Pernelle waiting for him, and his shop, which was being managed only by his servants. To a man of over fifty on his first distant journey, the silent voice of his home makes a powerful appeal every evening.

In discouragement, he started his homeward journey. His way lay through Leon, where he stopped for the night at an inn and happened to sup at the same table as a French merchant from Boulogne, who was travelling on business. This merchant inspired him with confidence and trust, and he whispered a few words to him of his wish to find a learned Jew. By a lucky chance the French merchant was in relations with a certain Maestro Canches, an old man who lived at Leon, immersed in his books. Nothing was easier than to introduce this Maestro Canches to Nicolas Flamel, who decided to make one more attempt before leaving Spain.

One can easily appreciate the depth of the scene when the profane merchant of Boulogne has left them, and the two men are face to face. The gates of the ghetto close. Maestro Canches' only thought is expressed by a few polite words to rid himself as quickly as he can of this French bookseller, who has deliberately dulled the light in his eye and clothed himself in mediocrity (for the prudent traveler passes unnoticed). Flamel speaks, reticently at first. He admires the knowledge of the Jews. Thanks to his trade, he has read a great many books. At last he timidly lets fall a name, which hitherto has aroused not a spark of interest in anyone to whom he has spoken $\frac{3}{4}$ the name of Abraham the Jew, prince, priest, Levite, astrologer and philosopher. Suddenly Flamel sees the eyes of the feeble old man before him light up. Maestro Canches has heard of Abraham the Jew! He was a great master of the wandering race, perhaps the most venerable of all the sages who studied the mysteries of the Cabala, a higher initiate, one of those who rise the higher the better they succeed in remaining unknown. His book existed and disappeared centuries ago. But tradition says it has never been destroyed, that it is passed from hand to hand and that it always reaches the man whose destiny it is to receive it. Maestro Canches has dreamed all his life of finding it. He is very old, close to death, and now the hope that he has almost given up is near realization. The night goes by, and there is a light over the two heads bent over their work. Maestro Canches is translating the Hebrew from the time of Moses. He is explaining symbols that originated in ancient Chaldea. How the years fall from these two men, inspired by their common belief in truth. But the few pages that Flamel had brought are not enough to allow the secret to be revealed. Maestro Canches made up his mind at once to accompany Flamel to Paris, but his extreme age was an obstacle. Furthermore, Jews were not allowed in France. He vowed to rise above his infirmity and convert his religion! For many years now, he had been above all religions. So the two men, united by their indissoluble bond, headed off along the Spanish roads north.

The ways of Nature are mysterious. The nearer Maestro Canches came to the realization of his dream, the more precarious became his health, and the breath of life weakened in him. Oh God! he prayed, grant me the days I need, and that I may cross the threshold of death only when I possess the liberating secret by which darkness becomes light and flesh spirit!

But the prayer was not heard. The inflexible law had appointed the hour of the old man's death. He fell ill at Orleans, and in spite of all Flamel's care, died seven days later. As he had converted and Flamel did not want to be suspected of bringing a Jew into France, he had him piously buried in the church of Sainte-Croix and had masses said in his honor. For he rightly thought that a soul that had striven for so pure an aim and had passed at the moment of its fruition, could not rest in the realm of disembodied spirits.

Flamel continued his journey and reached Paris, where he found Pernelle, his shop, his copyists, and his manuscripts safe and sound. He laid aside his pilgrim's staff. But now everything was changed. It was with a joyous heart that he went his daily journey from house to shop, that he gave writing lessons to illiterates and discussed Hermetic science with the educated. From natural prudence, he continued to feign ignorance, in which he succeeded all the more easily because knowledge was within him. What Maestro Canches had already taught him in deciphering a few pages of the book of Abraham the Jew was sufficient to allow his understanding of the whole book. He spent three years more in searching and in completing his knowledge, but at the end of this period, the transmutation was accomplished. Having learned what materials were necessary to put together beforehand, he followed strictly the method of Abraham the Jew and changed a half-pound of mercury first into silver, and then into virgin gold. And simultaneously, he accomplished the same transmutation in his soul. From his passions, mixed in an invisible crucible, the substance of the eternal spirit emerged.

The Philosopher's Stone

From this point, according to historical records, the little bookseller became rich. He established many low-income houses for the poor, founded free hospitals, and endowed churches. But he did not use his riches to increase his personal comfort or to satisfy his vanity. He altered nothing in his modest life. With Pernelle, who had helped him in his search for the Philosopher's Stone, he devoted his life to helping his fellow men. "Husband and wife lavished succor on the poor, founded hospitals, built or repaired cemeteries, restored the front of Saint Genevieve des Ardens and endowed the institution of the Quinze-Vingts, the blind inmates of which, in memory of this fact, came every year to the church of Saint Jacques la Boucherie to pray for their benefactor, a practice which continued until 1789," wrote historian Louis Figuer.

At the same time that he was learning how to make gold out of any material, he acquired the wisdom of despising it in his heart. Thanks to the book of Abraham the Jew, he had risen above the satisfaction of his senses and the turmoil of his passions. He knew that man attains immortality only through the victory of spirit over matter, by essential purification, by the transmutation of the human into the divine. He devoted the last part of his life to what Christians call the working out of personal salvation. But he attained his object without fasting or asceticism, keeping the unimportant place that destiny had assigned him, continuing to copy manuscripts, buying and selling, in his new shop in the rue Saint-Jacques la Boucherie. For him, there was no more mystery about the Cemetery of the Innocents, which was near his house and under the arcades of which he liked to walk in the evenings. If he had the vaults and monuments restored at his own expense, it was nothing more than compliance with the custom of his time. He knew that the dead who had been laid to rest there were not concerned with stones and inscriptions and that they would return, when their hour came, in different forms, to perfect themselves and die anew. He knew the trifling extent to which he could help them. Yet he had no temptation to divulge the secret that had been entrusted to him through the book, for he was able to measure the lowest degree of virtue necessary for the possession of it, and he knew that the revelation of the secret to an undeveloped soul only increased the imperfection of that soul.

And when he was illuminating a manuscript and putting in with a fine brush a touch of skyblue into the eye of an angel, or of white into a wing, no smile played on his grave face, for he knew that pictures are useful to children; moreover, it is possible that beautiful fantasies which are pictured with love and sincerity may become realities in the dream of death. Though he knew how to make gold, Nicolas Flamel made it only three times in the whole of his life and then, not for himself, for he never changed his way of life; he did it only to mitigate the evils that he saw around him. And this is the single touchstone that convinces that he really attained the state of adept.

This "touchstone" test can be used by everyone and at all times. To distinguish a man's superiority, there is but a single sign: a practical and not an alleged-contempt for riches. However great may be a man's

active virtues or the radiant power of his intelligence, if they are accompanied by the love of money that most eminent men possess, it is certain that they are tainted with baseness. What they create under the hypocritical pretext of good will bear within it the seeds of decay. Unselfishness and innocence alone is creative, and it alone can help to raise man.

Flamel's generous gifts aroused curiosity and even jealousy. It seemed amazing that a poor bookseller should found almshouses and hospitals should build houses with low rents, churches and convents. Rumors reached the ears of the king, Charles VI, who ordered Cramoisi, a member of the Council of State, to investigate the matter. But thanks to Flamél's prudence and reticence, the result of the inquiries was favorable to him.

The rest of Flamél's life passed without special event. It was actually the life of a scholar. He went from his house in the rue de Marivaux to his shop. He walked in the Cemetery of the Innocents, for the imagination of death was pleasant to him. He handled beautiful parchments. He illuminated missals. He paid devout attention to Pernelle as she grew old, and he knew that life holds few better things than the peace of daily work and a calm affection.

The "Death" of Flamél

Pernelle died first; Nicolas Flamél reached the age of eighty. He spent the last years of his life writing books on alchemy. He carefully settled his affairs and planned how he was to be buried: at the end of the nave of Saint Jacques la Boucherie. The tombstone to be laid over his body had already been made. On this stone, in the middle of various figures, there was carved a sun above a key and a closed book. It contains the symbols of his life and can still be seen at his gravesite in the Musée de Cluny in Paris. His death, to which he joyfully looked forward, was as circumspect and as perfect as his life.

As it is equally useful to study men's weaknesses as their finest qualities, we may mark Flamél's weakness. This sage, who attached importance only to the immortality of his soul and despised the ephemeral form of the body, was inspired as he grew old with a strange taste for the sculptural representation of his body and face. Whenever he had a church built, or even restored, he requested the sculptor to represent him, piously kneeling, in a corner of the pediment of the facade. He had himself twice sculptured on an arch in the Cemetery of the Innocents: once as he was in his youth and once old and infirm. When he had a new house built in the rue de Montmorency, on the outskirts of Paris, eleven saints were carved on the front, but a side door was surmounted with a bust of Flamél.

The bones of sages seldom rest in peace in their grave. Perhaps Nicolas Flamél knew this and tried to protect his remains by ordering a tombstone of great weight and by having a religious service held for him twelve times a year. But these precautions were useless. Hardly was Flamél dead when the report of his alchemical powers and of his concealment somewhere of an enormous quantity of gold spread through Paris and the world. Everyone who was seeking the famous projection powder, which turns all substances into gold, came prowling round all the places where he had lived in the hope of finding a minute portion of the precious powder. It was said also that the symbolical figures which he had had sculptured on various monuments gave, for those who could decipher it, the formula of the Philosopher's Stone. There was not a single alchemist but came in pilgrimage to study the sacred science on the stones of Saint-Jacques- la Boucherie, or the Cemetery of the Innocents. The sculptures and inscriptions were broken off under cover of darkness and removed. The cellars of his house were searched and the walls examined.

According to author Albert Poisson, towards the middle of the sixteenth century a man who had a well-known name and good credentials, which were no doubt fictitious, presented himself before the parish board of Saint-Jacques la Boucherie. He said he wished to carry out the vow of a dead friend, a pious alchemist, who, on his deathbed, had given him a sum of money with which to repair Flamél's house. The board accepted the offer. The unknown man had the cellars ransacked under the pretext of strengthening the foundations; wherever he saw a hieroglyph he found some reason for knocking down the wall at that point. Having found nothing, he disappeared, forgetting to pay the workmen. Not long afterwards, a Capuchin friar and a German baron are said to have discovered in the house some stone vials full of a reddish powder ¾ allegedly the projection powder. By the seventeenth century, the various houses which had belonged to Flamél were despoiled of their ornaments and decorations, and there was nothing of them left but the four bare walls.

History of the Book of Abraham the Jew

What had happened to the book of Abraham the Jew ? Nicolas Flamél had bequeathed his papers and library to a nephew named Perrier, who was interested in alchemy and of whom he was very fond. Absolutely nothing is known of Perrier. He no doubt benefited by his uncle's teachings and spent a sage's

life in the munificent obscurity that Flamel prized so dearly, but had not been able altogether to maintain during the last years of his life. For two centuries the precious heritage was handed down from father to son, without anything being heard of it. Traces of it are found again in the reign of Louis XIII. A descendant of Flamel, named Dubois, who must still have possessed a supply of the projection powder, threw off the wise reserve of his ancestor and used the powder to dazzle his contemporaries. In the presence of the King, he changed leaden balls with it into gold. As a result of this experiment, it is known he had many interviews with Cardinal de Richelieu, who wished to extract his secret. Dubois, who possessed the powder but was unable to understand either Flamel's manuscripts or the book of Abraham the Jew, could tell him nothing and was soon imprisoned at Vincennes. It was found that he had committed certain offences in the past, and this enabled Richelieu to get him condemned to death and confiscate his property for his own benefit. At the same time the proctor of the Chitelet, no doubt by order of Richelieu, seized the houses that Flamel had owned and had them searched from top to bottom. About this time, at the church of Saint-Jacques la Boucherie, robbers made their way in during the night, lifted Flamel's tombstone and broke open his coffin. It was after this incident that the rumor spread that the coffin had been found empty, and that it had never contained the body of Flamel, who was supposed to be still alive.

Through whatever means, it is believed Richelieu took possession of the book of Abraham the Jew. He built a laboratory at the Chateau of Rueil, which he often visited to read through the master's manuscripts and to try to interpret the sacred hieroglyphs. But that which a sage like Flamel had been able to understand only after twenty-one years of meditation was not likely to be at once accessible to a politician like Richelieu. Knowledge of the mutations of matter, of life and death, is more complex than the art of planning strategies or administering a kingdom. Richelieu's search gave no good results.

On the death of the cardinal, all traces of the book were lost, or rather, all traces of the text, for the diagrams have often been reproduced. Indeed, the book must have been copied, for it is recorded in the seventeenth century that the author of the *Tresor des Recherches et Antiquites Gauloises* made a journey to Milan to see a copy which belonged to the Seigneur of Cabieres. In any case, the mysterious book has now disappeared. Perhaps a copy or the original itself rests under the dust of some provincial library. And it may be that a wise fate will send it at the proper time to a man who has the patience to ponder it, the knowledge to interpret it, the wisdom not to divulge it too soon.

Is Nicholas Flamel Still Alive?

But the mystery of the story of Flamel, which seemed to have come to an end, was revived in the seventeenth century. Louis XIV sent an archeologist named Paul Lucas on a mission to the East. He was to study antiquities and bring back any inscriptions or documents that could help forward the modest scientific efforts then being made in France. A scholar had in those days to be both a soldier and an adventurer. Paul Lucas united in himself the qualities of a Salomon Reinach and a Casanova. He was captured by Barbary corsairs, who robbed him, according to his own story, of the treasures he had brought from Greece and Palestine. The most valuable contribution that this official emissary made to science is summarized in the story he tells in his *Voyage dans la Turquie*, which he published in 1719. His account enables men of faith to reconstitute part of the history of the book of Abraham the Jew.

The story goes as follows: At Broussa Paul Lucas made the acquaintance of a kind of philosopher, who wore Turkish clothes, spoke almost every known language and, in outward appearance, belonged to the type of man of whom it is said that they "have no age." Thanks to his own cultured presence, Lucas came to know him fairly well, and this is what he learned. This philosopher was a member of a group of seven philosophers, who belonged to no particular country and traveled all over the world, having no other aim than the search for wisdom and their own development. Every twenty years they met at a pre-determined place, which happened that year to be Broussa. According to him, human life ought to have an infinitely longer duration than we admit; the average length should be a thousand years. A man could live a thousand years if he had knowledge of the Philosopher's Stone, which, besides being knowledge of the transmutation of metals, was also knowledge of the Elixir of life. The sages possessed it and kept it for themselves. In the West, there were only a few such sages. Nicolas Flamel had been one of them.

Paul Lucas was astonished that a Turk, whom he had met by chance at Broussa, should be familiar with the story of Flamel. He was still more astonished when the Turk told him how the book of Abraham the Jew had come into Flamel's possession, for hitherto no one had known this.

"Abraham the Jew was a member of our group," the man told him. "He had determined not to lose sight of the descendants of his brothers who had taken refuge in France. He had a desire to see them, and in spite of all we could do to dissuade him he went to Paris. He made the acquaintance there of a rabbi who

was seeking the Philosopher's Stone, and our friend became intimate with the rabbi and was able to explain much to him. But before he left the country the rabbi, by an act of treachery, killed our brother to get possession of his book and papers. The rabbi was arrested, convicted of this and other crimes and burned alive. The persecution of the Jews in France began not long afterwards, and they were expelled from the country. The book of Abraham was sold to Flamel by a Jewish man who did not know its value and was anxious to get rid of it before leaving Paris. Having discovered the Philosopher's Stone, Flamel was able to remain alive in the physical form he possessed at the time of his discovery. Pernelle's and his own funerals and the minute care he bestowed on the arrangements for them had been nothing but clever shams."

But the most amazing thing that Paul Lucas heard was the statement made by the Turk that both Flamel and his wife Pernelle were still alive! Having discovered the Philosopher's Stone, Flamel had been able to remain alive in the physical form he possessed at the time of his discovery. Pernelle's and his own funerals and the minute care he bestowed on the arrangements for them had been nothing but clever shams. He had started out for India, the country of the initiates, where he still lived. The publication of Paul Lucas' book created a great sensation. In the seventeenth century, like today, there lived discerning men who believed that all truth came out of the East and that there were in India adepts who possessed powers infinitely greater than those that science so parsimoniously metes out to us. In fact, this is a belief that has existed at every period in modern human history.

Was Nicolas Flamel one of these adepts? Even if he was, can it reasonably be presumed that he was alive three centuries after his supposed death, by virtue of a deeper study than had yet been made of the life force and the means of prolonging it? Is it relevant to compare with Paul Lucas' story another tradition reported by Abbe Vilain, who says that in the seventeenth century, Flamel visited Monsieur Desalleurs, the French ambassador to the Sublime Porte? Every man, according to his feeling for the miraculous, must come to his own conclusion. I think, myself, that in accordance with the wisdom which he had always shown, Nicolas Flamel, after his discovery of the Philosopher's Stone, would have had no temptation to evade death; for he regarded death merely as the transition to a better state. In obeying, without seeking escape, the ancient and simple law that reduces man to dust when the curve of his life is ended, he gave proof of a wisdom that is none the less beautiful for being widespread.

(*Magicians, Seers, and Mystics* by Reginald Merton)