

Letter to the True Disciples of Hermes

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Lettre d'un philosophe, sur le secret du grand oeuvre. Ecrite au sujet des instructions qu'Aristée à laissées à son fils, touchant le magistere philosophique. Le nom de l'auteur est en latin dans cet anagramme. Dives sicut ardens, S. Paris, 1688. Translated by Mike Dickman

A Letter to the True Disciples of Hermes, wherein are Six Cardinal Keys of the Secret Philosophy

Were I writing this letter to persuade of the truth of our Philosophy those, who unto themselves imagine it but a vain idea, & pure Paradox, then should I follow the example of the divers of the masters of this art; & I should attempt, basing myself upon the laws, & in the operations of nature, to convince such spirits of their error in demonstrating unto them the solidity of the principles of our science, & should touch but lightly upon such as concerns its practice: but in that my design be wholly other, & that I write but for yourselves, wise Disciples of Hermes, & true Children of the art, my sole aim is to serve you as guide upon this course so difficult to follow. Indeed our practice is a pathway in the sand, whereon must we take the Pole Stare for guide, rather than trust to the vestiges we find imprinted on it. The confusion of trails left on it by a near innumerable host, are so numerous, & one finds there such profusion of divers tracks, leading nearly all unto but some awesome desert, that it is well nigh impossible not to err from the veritable way, that alone those sages favoured by Heaven, have happily been able to extricate, & to recognise.

Such confusion brings to an abrupt halt the child of the art, one at the very start, another in midstream of the Philosophic course, & some few as they approach even to the ending of this arduous route, & descry the first glimmerings of the felicitous term of their enterprise; but perceive not, that the little road, left them for to travel, is the most laborious of all. They know not that those envious of their joy have hollowed ditches, & precipices in the midst of the path, & that unless it be they know the secret byways, whereby the wise sidestep such dangerous pitfalls, they shall miserably lose all advantage gained, at the instant itself, of imagining they had overthrown all obstacle.

I sincerely avow, that the practice of this our art is the thing most difficult in all the world, not as regards its operations, but with regard to the hardships there be, to learn it plainly from the works of the Philosophers: for if on the one hand it is with reason called, child's play; it requires upon the other in those who in it by their labour & study seek the truth, a knowledge most profound of the Principles, & operations of nature throughout the three realms; but the more especially in the realm of the minerals & of metals. 'Tis a grand point to discover the true material, which is the subject of our work; & one must needs to that end pierce the thousand dark veils, wherewith it is enwrapped; one needs must distinguish it by its own proper name, among a million extraordinary names, wherewith the Philosophers have diversely declared it; comprehend its properties in their entirety, & judge all degrees of perfection, art might bestow upon it; know the secret fire of the wise which is the one & sole agent efficient unto the opening, subliming, purifying, & disposing of the material to reduction into water; to which end must one penetrate also unto the divine source of the heavenly water, which operates such solution, animation, & purification of the stone; one must needs by means of a complete solution of the body, whence it springs, be able to convert our metallic water into an oil incombustible & to this end know how to effect the conversion of the elements, & separation, & reunion of the three principles; one must needs learn to make a white Mercury, & a Mercury that is citrine; one needs must know how is such a Mercury fixed, & nourished of its own blood, that it might convert into the fixed sulphur of the Philosopher, that one be not in want of an explication more ample.

As there are in nature three realms, there are also in our art three medicines, which are three different workings in the practice, & which are nonetheless but three different degrees raising our elixir to its final perfection. These crucial operations constituting the three workings are by all Philosophers hid beneath the Key of secrecy, that the sacred mysteries of our divine Philosophy be not disclosed unto the profane; but to you, who are the children of science, & who are capable of understanding the language of the Sages, shall the locks be unloosed, & you shall

have the Keys of the precious treasures of nature, & of art, if that you shall apply your mind entire & wholly to the comprehension of that which I wish for you here to set forth, in terms so easily intelligible, the which is of necessity, for the benefit of such as yourselves who are predestined, to knowledge of these sublime mysteries. I shall place within your hands six Keys with which to enter unto the sanctuary of Philosophy, open all its secret cabinets, & come to intelligence of verities most hidden.

KEY THE FIRST

The first Key is that which lays open the dark prisons, wherein lies captive sulphur; 'tis that which knows how from the body to draw forth semen & which by conjunction of the male, with the female, spirit with body, sulphur with Mercury, forms the Philosophers' Stone. Hermes has made manifest the operation of this first Key in these words. *De cavernis metallorum occultus est, qui Lapis est venerabilis, colore splendidus, mens sublimis, & mare patens* [1]; this stone shines brilliant, contains within it a spirit of sublime origin, & is the Sea of the Wise, wherein they do seek their mysterious fish. The same Philosopher further & more particularly marks the birth of this admirable stone in the words: *Rex ab igne veniet, ac conjugio gaudabit, & occulta patebunt.*[2] A King he is & crowned in glory, taking birth within the fire, & who rejoices in union with the wife that to him is given, & it is this union that lays manifest what theretofore was hid.

Howsobeit, before that I pass on to other subjects, I have a counsel I would give you, the which shall be unto you of no little profit; & that is to point out that the operation of the three workings, having much that is analogous, & many relations the one to the other, the Philosophers wilfully speak concerning them in terms obscure, that those who have not the eyes of a lynx, shall be duped, & lose themselves in this labyrinth, whence it is right difficult to extricate oneself. Indeed as one imagines they are treating of one operation, they are often times speaking of another: take care then lest you be taken in: for it is true, that in each working the wise Artist must needs dissolve the body with the spirit, strike off the crow's head, whiten the black & redden the white; yet is it properly in the first operation, that the wise Artist shall strike off the head of the black dragon, & of the crow. It is thence that art, says Hermes, takes its beginning, *quod ex corvo nascitur, hujus artis est principium.*[3] Consider then that it is by separation of the fumes, black, foul, & malodorous of a black most swarthy, that our astral stone takes form, white, & splendidly radiant, the which in its veins contains the blood of the pelican; it is on this first purification of the stone, & at this lucent whiteness, that the initial Key of the first working comes to its close.

KEY THE SECOND

The second Key dissolves the composite or stone, & initiates the separation of the Elements, in Philosophic manner; such separation of the Elements is achieved solely in the raising of those parts that are subtle, & pure, above those that are crass & earthy. He who is competent to sublime the stone in manner Philosophic, justly merits the title Philosopher, for he knows the fire of the Wise, the which is the unique & sole instrument, capable of operating such sublimation. Never has Philosopher overtly revealed this secret fire, & puissant agent, which performs all the marvels of the art; he that understands not, nor has distinguished it in the characters wherewith I painted it forth in the discourse of Eudoxus & Pyrophilus, should halt here, & unto God make prayer that he illumine him: for knowledge of this great secret is rather a gift of the Heavens, than light acquired by force of reasoning; let him read nonetheless the writings of the Philosophers, meditate thereon, & most especially pray; for no difficulty is there, that shall not be illumined by work, meditation, & prayer.

But that the stone be sublimed, the conversion of the Elements, & extraction of principles, shall prove impossible; & this conversion, which makes of the earth water, of water air, & of air fire, is the sole & one means whereby may be made, & prepared, our Mercury. Apply yourself therefore that you know this secret fire, the which does naturally dissolve the stone, & without violence, & resolves it into water in the great sea of the Wise, by distillation worked by the rays of the sun & the moon. Thus it is that the stone, which according to Hermes, is the vine of the Sages, becomes their wine, whence by the operations of art is produced their rectified *aqua vita*, & vinegar most sharp.

This, the father of our Philosophy, cries out concerning this mystery. *Benedicta aquina forma, quæ Elementa dissolvit.*[4] But by this water most divine, the Elements of the stone can not be dissolved, & no perfect dissolution can there be, 'til completion of a proportionate digestion & putrefaction, whereon concludes the second Key to the first working.

KEY THE THIRD

The third Key comprises in it longer suite of operations, than all the others together; right little have Philosophers spoken of it, for all that the perfection of our Mercury hangs thereon; the most reliable even, such as are Artepheus, Trevisan, & Flamel, have passed over the preparations of our Mercury in silence, & there is hardly a one, who has not supposed, rather than teach, the longest, & most important operations of our practice. Wishing but to lend my hand upon this portion of the way, that you must take, & where for want of light, it is impossible to follow the veritable path, I shall be show myself less laconic than were the Philosophers, concerning this third Key, or shall at very least follow in order that which they have said upon the subject, so confusedly, that short of Heavenly inspiration, or the aid of a faithful friend, one shall, & this without doubt, remain lost in the Maze, powerless to find fortunate issue soever. I am certain, that you who are true children of science, shall derive great satisfaction, from the elucidation of these hidden mysteries, concerning the separation & purification of the principles of our Mercury, the which is effected by a perfect dissolution & glorification of the body from whence it springs, & by the intimate union of the soul with its body whereunto is the spirit the unique link, effecting such conjunction; this then is the intention, & essential gist of all the operations of this key, which finds its term in the generation of a new substance infinitely more noble, than the first.

When from the stone the wise Artist has made to spring forth the fountainhead of living waters, has expressed the resin of the vine of the Wise, & produced their wine, let him mark that within this homogenous substance, appearing in the form of water, are three & divers substances, & the three natural principles of all bodies, salt, & sulphur, & Mercury, the which are the spirit, soul, & body; & albeit they seem pure & perfectly united, much is required still that they be more so; for when by distillation we draw off the water, the which is the soul & spirit, the body remains in the depths of the vessel, as a dead earth, black, & dregs, the which be it said, should not be held in despite; for in our subject, there is no thing which is not good. The Philosopher John Pontanus holds that the superfluities of the stone convert themselves into a veritable essence, that those who claim to separate whatsoever from our stone, understand nothing of Philosophy, & that all that is superfluous, refuse, dregs, & in fine the entire substance of the composite, perfects itself through the activity of our fire. This thesis opens up the eyes of those, who to effect an exact purification of the elements & principles, have convinced themselves they need take only of the subtle, & may discard the dense; but the children of science should not overlook that fire, & sulphur are hid within the earth's core, & that one must needs wash it carefully with its own spirit, for that the balm, the fixed salt, which is the blood of our stone, be thus extracted; herein then lies the essential mystery of this operation, the which shall be accomplished only should you observe an adequate digestion, & slow distillation. Follow therefore, O children of art, the precept given you by the candid Hermes, who in this place says, *oportet autem nos cum hac aquinâ animâ, ut formam sulphuream possideamus, aceto nostro eam miscere, cùm enim compositum solvitur, clavis est restorationis.*[5] Knowing that none are more contrary than fire & water; let the wise Artist nonetheless bring peace between these enemies, who at heart love well each the other. Cosmopolitus has declared this mean in but a few words: *Purgatis ergo rebus, fac ut ignis & aqua amici fiant; quod in terrâ suâ, quæ cum iis ascenderit, facile facient.*[6] Be attentive therefore to this point, moisten often the earth with its own water, & you shall have, that which you seek. Need not the body then be dissolved in water, & the earth penetrated by its humidity, for that it be rendered disposed to generation? In the eyes of the Philosophers the spirit is Eve; the body Adam; let them be conjoined for the propagation of their species. Hermes says this same in other terms: *Aqua namque fortissima est natura, quæ transcendit, et fixam in corpore naturam excitat; hoc est letificat.*[7] Indeed these two substances, which are of the same nature, but of two different sexes, embrace each the other with the selfsame love, & satisfaction as do man & woman, & together imperceptibly rise, leaving behind but few fæces in the base of the vessel; such that soul, spirit, & body, after careful purification, finally appear inseparably united in form nobler, & more perfect, than they had had theretofore, & as different from the original liquid form, as is the Alcohol of a wine perfectly refined, & purified of its salt, from the substance of that wine, whence it is taken; not only is this comparison most apt, but also it affords to the children of science a precise knowledge of the operations of this third Key.

Our water is a living fountainhead, streaming from the stone, by a natural miracle of our Philosophy. *Omnium primò est aqua, quæ exit de hoc lapide.*[8] 'Twas Hermes declared this great truth. And recognised furthermore, that 'tis this water is basis of our art. The Philosophers give it divers names; calling it now wine, now *aqua vitæ*, & now again vinegar, or oil, according to its different degrees of preparation, or the divers effects, of which it is capable. Hosowever that may be, let me warn you that it is properly the vinegar of the wise, & that in the distillation of this divine liquor, occurs the same thing as with that of common vinegar; from this may you draw great instruction; the water & phlegm rise first; the oily substance, in which consists the efficacy of our water, last. And it this substance median between earth, & water, which in the generation of the Philosophic child, performs the function of the male; Hermes brings this to our attention right forcibly with the following words so clear; *unguentum mediocre, quod est ignis, est medium inter fæcem, & aquam.*[9] Not contenting himself with showing these lights unto his disciples, he further explains to them in his emerald table, how they should in this operation proceed. *Seperabis terram ab igne;*

subtile ab spisso suavitur, magno cum ingenio.[10] Mark that you smother not the fires of the earth in the waters of the flood. This separation, or rather extraction must needs be effected with great judgement.

You must thus needs to utterly dissolve the body, for that you might therefrom extract its humidity entire, the which contains this precious sulphur, this balm of nature, & marvellous unguent, without which hope not ever to find in the bottom of your flask that blackness so sought after by the Wise. Reduce the composite entire then unto water, & make of the volatile & the fixed perfect union; such is the precept of Senior, & it merits your attention. *Supremus fumus, says he, ad infimum reduci debet, & divina aqua Rex est de caelo descendens, Reductor animæ ad suum corpus est, quod demùm à morte vivificat.*[11] The balm of life is hid in these despicable fæces, & 'tis these you must lave with the heavenly waters, until that you have removed all blackness, & thence will your waters become animate of this fiery essence, which effects all marvels of our art. Better counsel thereunto, than that of great Trismegistus, can I not give. *Oportet ergo vos ab aqua fumum super-existentem, ab ubguento nigredinem, & à fæce mortem depellere;*[12] & more, the one means to success in this operation, is by that same Philosopher taught, who immediately thereupon adds; & *hoc dissolutione, quo peracto, maximam habemus Philosophiam, & omnium secretorum secretum.*[13]

But that you deceive not yourselves as regards this term *composite*; I shall affirm that the Philosophers have two species of composite. The first is that of nature; whereof I spoke in the first Key: for 'tis nature makes it in a fashion incomprehensible to the artist, who does but to it lend his hand, in the administration of things external, by which means does she bear forth, & produce that admirable composite. The second is the composite of the art; & 'tis the artist does effect the intimate union of the fixed unto the volatile perfectly conjoined, with all prudence he might have acquired from a profound Philosophy; the composite of art is not exactly alike in the second, & third workings, but 'tis nonetheless ever the artist makes it. Geber defines it a mixture of quicksilver & sulphur, that is of the volatile & the fixed, reacting the one upon the other, respectively volatalising, & fixing, the one the other till the state of perfect fixity be achieved. Consider the example of nature, & you shall see that the earth produces no fruit, but that it is penetrated by its humidity, & that the humidity continues sterile; but that it be held, & fixed by the dryness of the earth.

Be assured therefore, that there shall be no goodly success in this our art, but that in the first working, you do purge the serpent born of the alluvium of the earth, bleach these fæces feculent & swart, that therefrom you separate the white sulphur, the *sel armoniac* of the wise, which is their chaste Diana who in the basin shall lave herself. All this mystery is but of the extraction of the fixed salt from our composite in which consists the energy entire of our Mercury. The water, which rises by distillation, carries up with it a portion of this fiery salt; such that the affusion of the water upon the body several times over reiterated, impregnates, fertilises, & fecundates our Mercury, & renders it proper to fixation.; the which is the term of the second working: Finer exposition of which truth can I not find, but in these words of Hermes: *Cum viderem quod aqua sensim crassior, duriorque fieri inciperet, gaudebam; certo enim sciebam, ut invenirem quod quærebam.*[14]

Do you have but right mediocre knowledge of our art, what I have here said shall more than suffice, for that you understand that all operations of this Key, ending the first working, are but to digest, distil, cohobate, dissolve, separate, & conjoin, & this with gentleness, & patience: in this manner shall you have not only a complete *extractio* of the juice of the vine of the wise; but you shall furthermore possess their veritable *aqua vitæ*; & I place you on guard that the more you shall rectify, & the more labour thereon, the more shall it acquire penetration & virtue; the Philosophers named it *aqua vitæ* in that it restores life to metals; but it is more properly called the great moon, by cause of her splendour, with the which does she shine; & they call it also the substance sulphuric, the balsam, gum, viscous humidity, & the vinegar most sharp of the Wise, etc.

Nor is it without reason that the Wise do give to this Mercurial liquor the name of pontic waters, & of vinegar most sharp; its exuberant ponticity being the veritable character of its virtue; and, as I have said, furthermore, that there occurs during its distillation, the same as occurs with vinegar, in that the phlegm & water rise the first, the sulphurous & salty parts rising last; separate the phlegm from the waters, unite the water & fire, the Mercury & sulphur, & you shall at last perceive the black most swart, blanch the crow, & redden the swan.

Since it is to you only that I speak; true Disciples of Hermes, I shall reveal to you a secret, that never you will find in its entirety in the books of the Philosophers. Some are content to say, that of their liquor are made two Mercuries, the one white, & the other red. Flamel more particularly says, that one is to utilise a citrine Mercury, in the imbibitions of the red; & warns the children of the art not to be mistaken upon this point; assuring also that he had been mistaken himself, were it not for the warning of Abraham the Jew. Other Philosophers teach, that the white Mercury is the bath of the moon, & the red the bath of the sun: but none sought clearly to set forth unto the children of science, by what path might these two Mercuries be obtained: if you have well understood me, already you are illumined upon this point. The lunar is the white Mercury, the vinegar most sharp the red; but to better determine these two Mercuries, feed them upon a flesh of their own species, the blood of the slaughtered innocents, which is to

say, the spirits of the bodies, are the bath, wherein the sun & the moon shall bathe.

I have here set forth a great mystery if well you will reflect upon it: those Philosophers who of it do speak, pass lightly o'er this important point: the Cosmopolite spoke of it right spiritually by means of an ingenious allegory, declaring the purification & animation of Mercury: *Hoc fiet, he says, si seni nostro aurum et argentum deglutire dabis, ut ipse consumat illa, et tandem ille, etiam moriturus comburatur.*[15] He concludes & describes the magistry entire in the words: *Cineres ejus spargantur in aquam, coquito eam donec satis est, & habes medicinam curandi lepram.*[16] Nor should you ignore the fact, that our ancient is our Mercury; that this name well suits him, in that he is the first matter of all metals; the same Author says, that he is their water, to which he gives the name of steel, & of lode-stone, & he adds thereto for greater confirmation of that which I have disclosed to you: *Si undicies coit aurum cum eo, emittit suum semen, & debilitatur ferè ad mortem usque; concipit chalybs, & generat filium patre clariorem.*[17] Whereon therefore a great mystery, have I disclosed to you without enigma; this is the secret of the Mercuries twain, the which contain the twin tinctures. Conserve them separately & confound not their species, for fear that they engender a monstrous progeny.

Not only is it that I dilate more intelligibly than any Philosopher before me has done, but also I lay bare all that is most essential in the practice of our art: if you meditate thereon, if you apply yourselves to understanding it well; but, most especially, if you labour on the lights that I have given you, I doubt not but that you shall find that which you seek; & should you not come to such knowledge, by the way I have marked out unto you, certain am I that with great pains only shall you come at your goal, by simple reading of the Philosophers. Do not then despair; but seek out the source of the liquor of the wise, the which contains all that is necessary to the operation; it is hid beneath the stone; strike upon it with the rod of magic fire, & a clear fountain shall thence burst forth; do then as I have shown; prepare the bath of the King with the blood of the Innocents, & you shall have the animate Mercury of the wise, which loses never its virtues, if you but preserve it in a vessel well stopped. There is such sympathy, says Hermes, betwixt purified bodies, & spirits, that they quit each the other never, once that they be joined together; for that such union is like unto to that of the soul with the glorified body, concerning which faith tells us there shall be no further separation, nor death. *Quia spiritus, ablutis corporibus desiderant inesse, habitis autem ipsis, eos vivificant, & in iis habitant.*[18] By which you may see the merit of this precious liquor, unto which have the Philosophers given more than a thousand divers names, it is the *aqua vitæ* of the wise, the water of Diana, the great moon, water of quick silver; it is our Mercury, our incombustible oil, which when cold like unto ice congeals, & in the heat, liquefies like unto butter; Hermes calls it the foliated earth, or earth of leaves; not without great reason; for if you observe it well, you shall see that it is leaved through & through; in a word 'tis the fountain most clear, whereof the Count of Treves makes mention; in fine it is the great Alkahest, which radically dissolves all metals; it is the true & permanent water, which having dissolved them, unites with them inseparably, augmenting both their weight & tincture. Hermes assures us our Mercurial water shall, once that it has been changed into earth, have acquired all virtue, wherewith Philosophers endow it.

KEY THE FOURTH

The fourth key of the art, is the entrance unto the second working; it is that which reduces our water unto earth; there is in this world but this one, unique water, which might by simple cooking be converted into earth; for the Mercury of the wise holds within its core its own proper sulphur, the which does coagulate it. The terrification of spirit is the sole operation of this working; cook therefore with patience; if you know well how to proceed, you shall not be long in awaiting the signs of this coagulation, & if they appear not in due time, then shall they not arise at all; for that is a sign indubitable that you have failed in some essential thing, in the first operation; for to corporify the spirit, which is our Mercury, it must needs be that you have well dissolved the body, wherein is enclosed the sulphur, which brings about coagulation of the Mercury. *Vis ejus integre est, si in terram conversa fuerit.*[19] Earth admirable in its fecundity; promised land of the wise, who knowing how to make fall thereon the heavenly dews, cause it to bring forth fruit of inestimable price. The Cosmopolite well expresses the benefits of this blessed earth. *Qui scit in aquam congelare calido, & spirtum cum eâ jungere, certè rem inveniet millesies pretiosiorum auro, & omni re.*[20] Nothing approaches the merit of this earth, & this spirit perfectly conjoined, in accord with the rules of our art; these are the true Mercury, & true sulphur of the Philosophers, the living male, & female who contain in them the seed, which alone may procreate a son more illustrious yet than his parents. Cultivate therefore & with care this precious earth; water it often of its own humidity, & dry it out as many times, & you shall increase no less its qualities, than its weight, & its fecundity.

KEY THE FIFTH

The fifth key of our work is the fermentation of the stone with the perfect body, to make thereof the medicine of the third order. Concerning the operation of the third working I shall say nothing in particular; but only, that the perfect body is a necessary leaven to our dough: that it is the spirit effects the union of the leaven with the dough, just as does water soak the flour & dissolve the yeast, in the creation of a fermented dough, appropriate to the making of bread. This comparison is right apt, & 'twas Hermes first made it. *Sicut enim pasta sine fermento fermentari non potest; sic cum corpus sublimaveris, mundaveris, & turpitudinem à fæce separaveris; cum conjungere volueris, pone in eis fermentum, & aquam terram confice, ut pasta fiat fermentum.*[21] Concerning fermentation, the Philosopher here reiterates the working in its totality, showing that just as the Mass of dough, becomes in its entirety leaven, by the action of the ferment, which to it is added; so too the sum of the Philosophic confection becomes by this operation a leaven proper to the fermentation of a new substance, & to the multiplication of it unto infinity. If now you well observe how bread is made, you shall find the just proportions, which to observe, between the substances composing your Philosophic dough. Do not then bakers utilise greater quantity of flour, than of leaven, & more yet of water than of flour, & of leaven? The laws of nature are those to be followed in the practice of this our Magistracy. I have given you all necessary instruction upon the principal points; such that it would be superfluous to say more, particularly touching upon the final operations, concerning the which the Philosophers have shown themselves much less reserved, than as to the earlier, which are the fundamentals of their art.

KEY THE SIXTH

The sixth key teaches of the multiplication of the stone, for the reiteration of the same operation, the which does consist but in opening & shutting; dissolving & coagulating; humectation & dessication; whereby are the virtues of the stone augmented unto infinity. Since it has not been my intention to describe the practice of the three medicines in their entirety, but to instruct you simply as to those operations which are most important, as regards the preparation of Mercury, o'er which the Philosophers pass generally in silence, to hide from the profane mysteries, which are but for the wise; I shall tarry no longer upon this point, & say naught further either concerning that which pertains to the projection of the medicine, in that the success you seek depends not on that; I have given extensive instruction only upon the third Key, for that it consists in a long series of operations, the which, albeit simple & natural, require nonetheless a great intelligence of natural law, & of the qualities of our materia, as also a perfect knowledge of chymistry, & of the divers degrees of heat, adapted to such operations.

I have led you by the direct path, & without detour; & if you have marked well the route I have traced to you, certain am I that you shall directly come to the goal, without erring. Know me right willing in my intention, that I have spared you a thousand labours, & as many pains, that I myself should have suffered on this arduous journey, were it not for like aid similar unto that I have given you also in this letter, stemming from a heart sincere, & a tender affection for all veritable children of science. I should be most grieved for you should you, like myself, & knowing already the true materia, pass fifteen years entire upon the work, study, & meditation, & come not to extract from the stone, its precious sap, the which it encloses in its breast, for cause that you know not the secret fire of the wise, which causes to stream forth from this plant to the sight both parched & arid, a water which wets not the hands, & which by magical union with the dry waters of the ocean of the wise, resolves into a viscous water, a mercurial liquor, which is the principle & fundament, & key to our art: transform, separate, & purify the elements, as I have shown you, & you shall have the true Mercury of the Philosophers, the which shall furnish you the fixed sulphur, & medicine universal.

But I place you on guard, that albeit you have knowledge of this secret fire of the wise, yet have you not come entire to the end of the first course. I myself erred several years in the route yet to be traversed, to arrive at the mysterious fountain, wherein the King does bathe, rejuvenate himself, & resume a life new & exempt from all infirmity; you must needs know also to purify, heat, & animate that Royal bath: it was to lend aid in this secret path, I drew out what I had to say upon the third Key, wherein are all its operations to be deduced. Of my heart I hope, that the instructions I have given you, lead you direct to the goal. But bear in well mind O children of science, that knowledge of our Magistracy stems more from the inspiration of Heaven, than from illuminations one might garner of one's own accord. This truth is borne out by all Philosophers: wherefore is it not enough to labour; but pray assiduously; read veridical & authentic texts; & meditate day & night, upon the operations of nature, & upon what conceivably she might do, were she aided by the attentions of our art, & in this way shall you of a certainty succeed in your undertaking.

And this is all I have to say, in this my letter; I had no wish to hold forth at length, such as the subject might

demand; nor have I spoken of aught but what is essential to our art; such that if you know our stone, which is the sole & unique material of our stone, & if you have the intelligence of our fire, which is at once both secret & natural, than do you hold the keys of the art, & you may calcinate our stone, not by a vulgar calcination, the which is achieved by the violence of the fire; but by the calcination Philosophic, the which is natural through & through. Mark also this with the most illumined of the Philosophers, that there is this difference, between vulgar calcination, effected by the force of fire, & natural calcination; that the first destroys the body, & consumes the greater part of its radical humidity; but that the second not only conserves the humidity of the body, it calcinates; but also considerably augments it.

Experience will teach you in practice this great truth; for you shall find indeed, that this Philosophic calcination, which sublimes, & distils the stone as it calcinates, greatly augments its humidity: the reason for this is, that the fiery spirit of the natural fire incarnates in the substances which are to it analogous. Our stone is an astral fire, which harmonises with the natural fire, & which like unto a veritable salamander takes birth, nourishment, & growth from the fire Elementary, to which it is geometrically proportionate.

The Author's Name is in Latin in the following Anagram:

DIVES SICUT ARDENS S....

Footnotes

[1] Tentatively:

From the hidden mine it is,
Which is the venerable Stone,
In colour bright, & lofty minded,
The wide & manifest sea.

[2] Tentatively:

The King from fire shall come,
And in union shall rejoice,
And the hid make manifest.

[3] Tentatively:

For what springs of the crow,
Is the beginning of the art (or, also: the source of skill)

[4] (Very) tentatively:

Blessing in the form of water,
You who dissolve the Elements!

[5] Tentatively:

Let us take from this water its soul
That we might have from it its sulphurous form,
Our vinegar which, when mingled with the composite shall dissolve it,
Which is the Key to restoration.

[6] Tentatively:

Purify therefore the matter,
That flaming fire & water be made friends;
For in their earth,
That which from them ascends,
Is easily achieved.

[7] Tentatively:

For water is powerful
A nature, which transcends,

And fixed into a body rouses nature;
This is joy.

[8] Tentatively:
The water that from this stone streams,
Is of all things the first.

[9] Tentatively:
A median ointment or unguent
Which is fire,
Is midway between the fæces, & the water

[10] Tentatively:
Thou shalt separate the earth from the fire;
And the subtle from the gross suavely,
And with great ingenuity.

[11] Tentatively:
Draw down the smoke from highest to lowest,
And the divine waters, which are the King, shall descend from out of the heavens,
Conduct again their soul into his body,
The which at length out of death shall once more arise.

[12] Tentatively:
It behoves you thus
To draw from the water fumes,
From the balsam its blackness,
And to drive off from the fæces death.

[13] Tentatively:
And, this dissolution having completed,
You shall be hold, the heights of all Philosophy,
And the secret of secrets.

[14] Tentatively:
When I saw that I had made that water,
To commence gradually to thicken, & harden, I rejoiced;
For I knew of a certainty,
I should find that, whereafter I did seek.

[15] Tentatively:
This will be made,
If our ancient be set to drown in silver & gold,
That he himself consume,
And at length also die.

[16] Tentatively:
His ashes strew upon the waters,
And when they are enough cooked
You shall have the medicine that cures leprosy.

[17] Tentatively:
If eleven times he unites with that gold,
Letting fall his seed,
And weakened continuously almost unto death;
He takes unto himself steel,

And conceives a son more renowned than the father.

[18] Tentatively:

For it cannot be, that the spirit,
Longs for & misses the purified corporeal form,
But taking it to itself,
Does animate & inhabit it.

[19] Tentatively:

Its strength be rendered whole,
If it be transformed into earth.

[20] Tentatively:

Who knows to heat coagulated water,
And with it to join its spirit,
Shall surely have found a thing one thousand times more precious than gold,
Or any other thing.

[21] Tentatively:

Just as it is impossible to make dough without yeast;
So to the sublimed body, freed of its earthiness & turpitude;
Let him who wishes to join them,
Place therein the appropriate yeast,
And to it add the water & earth,
That the dough ferment.

[22] Tentatively:

Rich as one desires s...

Anagrammatically this gives SANCTUS DESIDERIUS which is the original Latin name of the saint called in French Saint Didier.