

Aula lucis, or, The House of Light.

Thomas Vaughan

Aula lucis, or, The House of Light: A discourse written in the year 1651... London, Printed by William Leake, 1652.
This transcription has been made from the A.E. Waite edition of the works of Thomas Vaughan, rather than from the original edition.

Aula Lucis Thomas Vaughan

To Seleucus Abantiades

What you are I need not tell you: what I am you know already. Our Acquaintance began with my childhood, and now you see what you have purchased. I can partly refer my inclinations to yourself, and those only which I derive from the contemplative order; for the rest are beside your influence. I present you with the fruits of them, that you may see my light has water to play withal. Hence it is that I move in the sphere of generation and fall short of that test of Heraclitus: "Dry light is best soul." I need not expound this to you, for you are in the centre and see it. Howsoever, you may excuse me if I prefer conceptions to fancies. I could never affect anything that was barren, for sterility and love are inconsistent. Give me a knowledge that is fertile in performances, for theories without their effects are but nothings in the dress of things. How true this is you can tell me. If I but recite what is your own you must not therefore undervalue it, being in some sense a sacrifice; for men have nothing to give but what they receive. Suffer me then at the present to stand your censer and exhale that incense which your own hands have put in. I dare not say this is revelation, not can I boast with the prodigious artist you read of that I have lived three years "in the realm of light." It is enough that I have light, as the King of Persia had his Bride of the Sun; and truly, I think it happiness to have seen that candle lodged which our fathers judged to be wandering light, a light seeking habitation. But I grow absurd. I speak as if I would instruct you. Now — methinks — you ask me: Who reads this? It is I, Sir, that read the tactics here to Hannibal and teach him to break rocks with *vinacre*. I am indeed somewhat pedantic in this but the liberty you are still pleased to allow me has carried me beyond my cue. It is trespass you know that's very ordinary with me and some junior colleagues. Not can I omit those verses which you have been sometimes pleased to apply to this forwardness of mine.

Such was the steed in Grecian poets famed,
Proud Cyllarus, by Spartan Pollux tamed;
Such courses bore to fight the god of Thrace
And such Achilles, was thy warlike race.

It is my opinion, Sir, that truth cannot be urged with too much spirit, so that I have not sinned here as to the thing itself, for the danger's only in your person. I am afraid my boldness has been such I may be thought to fall short of that reverence which I owe you. This is indeed which I dare call a sin, and I am so far from it that it is my private wonder how I came to think of it. Suffer me then to be impertinent for once and give me leave to repent of an humour which I am confident you place not among my faults but among your own indulgences.

Your humble servant
S.N.
From Heliopolis, 1651

To the Present Readers

It will be questioned perhaps by the envious to what purpose these sheets are prostituted, and especially that drug wrapped in them — the Philosopher's Stone. To these it is answered by Solomon in *Ecclesiastes* III,5: "There is a time to cast away stones." And truly — I must confess — I cast away this Stone, for I misplace it. I contribute that to the fabric which the builders in all ages have refused. But less I seem to act *sine proposito*, I must tell you I do it not for this generation, for they are as far from fire as the author is from smoke. Understand me if you can, for I have told you an honest truth. I write books, as the old Roman planted trees, for the glory of God and the benefit of

posterity. It is my design to make over my reputation to a better age, for in this I would not enjoy it, because I know not any from whom I would receive it. And here you see how ambitious I am grown; but if you judge the humour amiss tell me not of it, less I should laugh at you. I look indeed a step further than your lives, and if you think I may die before you I would have you know it is the way to go beyond you.

To be short — if you attempt this discourse, you do it without my advice, for it is not fitted to your fortunes. There is a white magic this book is enchanted withal: it is an adventure for *Knights of the Sun*, and the errants of this time may not finish it? I speak this to the university Quixotes, and to those only who are ill-disposed as well as undisciplined. There is among them a generation of wasps, things that will fight though never provoked. These buckle on their logic as proof, but it fares with them as with the famous Don: they mistake a basin for a helmet. For mine own part I am no reformer. I can well enough tolerate their positions, for they do not trouble mine. What I write is no rule for them, but is a legacy deferred to posterity; for the future times, wearied with the vanities of the present, will perhaps seek after the truth and gladly entertain it. Thus you will see what readers I have predestined for myself; but if any present Mastix fastens on this discourse I wish him not to traduce it, less I should whip him for it. This is advice, which if be well observed, it is possible I may communicate more of this nature. I may stand up like a Pharos in a dark night and hold out that lamp which Philaethes has overcast with that envious phrase of the Rabbis. "Ofttimes the silence of wisdom."

AULA LUCIS

I have resolved with myself to discourse of Light, the powder of projection, and to deliver it over to the hands of posterity, a practice certainly very ancient and first used by those who were primordially wise. It was used then for charity, not for pomp, the designs of those authors having nothing in them of glory but much of benefit. It was not their intention to brag that they themselves did see but to lead those who in some sense were blind and did not see.

To effect this they proceeded not as some modern barbarians do — by clamorous, malicious disputes. A calm instruction was proposed and, that being once rejected, was never afterwards urged, so different and remote a path from the schoolroom did they walk in; and verily they might well do it, for their principles being once resisted they could not inflict a greater punishment on their adversaries than to conceal them. Had their doctrine been such as the universities profess now their silence indeed had been a virtue; but their positions were not mere noise and notion. They were most deep experimental secrets, and those of infinite use and benefit. Such a tradition then as theirs may wear the style of the noble Verulam and is most justly called a Tradition of the Lamp. But I observe that in their delivery of mysteries they have, as in all things else, imitated Nature, who dispenses not her light without her shadows. They have provided a veil for their art, not so much for obscurity as ornament: and yet I cannot deny that some of them have rather buried the truth than dressed it. For my own part, I shall observe a middle way, neither too obscure nor too open, but such as may serve posterity and add some splendor to the science itself.

And now, whosoever you are that in times to come shall cast your eyes on this book, if you are corrupted with the common philosophy, do not presently rage and take up the pen in defiance of what is here written. It may be you have studied these three questions *pro forma* and quick you are to dispute. But have you concocted the whole body of philosophy? Have you made Nature the only business of your life? And have you arrived at last to an infallible experimental knowledge? If none of these things, upon what foundation do you build? It is mere quackering to oppose the dead and such perhaps as your betters do not attempt in your own time of life. But as one said: that advantage breeds baseness. So some may insult because their adversary is out of the way, and tell me with that friendly stoic: "Dost you not hear this, Amphiatius, you who are hidden under the earth."

If any such tares spring above ground, when I am under it, I have already looked upon them as an idle, contemptible bundle. I have prepared them a convenient destiny and by my present scorn annihilated their future malice. It is a better and more serious generation I would service, a generation that seeks Nature in the simplicity thereof and follows her not only with the tongue but with the hand. If you are such then as this character speaks, let me advise you not to despair. Give me leave also to affirm to you, and that on my soul, that the consequences and treasures of this art are such and so great that your best and highest wishes fall short of them. Read then with diligence what I shall write, and to your diligence add patience, to your patience hope; for these are neither fables nor follies.

For thee old stores of fame and power I steal,

And holy springs audaciously unseal.

I tell you a truth as ancient as the fundamentals of the world. Now, less my preface should exceed in relation to the discourse itself, which must be but short, I will quit this preliminary, that I may bring thee within doors; and here will I show you the throne of light and the crystalline court thereof.

Light originally had no other birth than manifestation, for it was not made but discovered. It is properly the life of

everything, and it is that which acts in all particulars; but the communion thereof with First Matter was celebrated by a general contract before any particulars were made. The matter of itself was a passive thin substance but apt to retain light, as smoke is to retain flame. After impregnation it was condensed to a crystalline moisture, unctuous and fiery, of nature hermaphroditic, and this in a double sense, in relation to a double centre — celestial and terrestrial. From the terrestrial center proceeded the earthly Venus, which is fiery and masculine, and the earthly Mercury, which is watery and feminine. These two are one against the other. From the celestial center proceeded two living images, namely, a white and a red light; and the white light settled in the water but the red went into the earth. Hence you may gather some infallible signs, whereby you may direct yourselves in the knowledge of the Matter and in the operation itself, when the Matter is known. For if you have the true sperm and know withal how to prepare it—which cannot be without our secret fire — you shall find that the matter no sooner feels the philosophical heat but the white light will lift himself above the water, and there will he swim in his glorious blue vestment like the heavens.

But that I may speak something more concerning the chaos itself, I must tell you it is not rainwater nor dew, but it is a subtle mineral moisture, a water so extremely thin and spiritual, with such a transcendent, incredible brightness, there is not in all Nature any liquor like unto itself. In plain terms, it is the middle substance of the wise men's Mercury, a water that is coagulable and which may be hardened by a proper heat into stones and metals. Hence it was that the philosophers called it their Stone, or if it be lawful for me to reveal that which the devil out of envy would not discover to Illardus, I say they called it a Stone, to the end that no man might know what it was they called so. For there is nothing in the world so remote from the complexion of a stone, for it is water and no stone. Now what water it is I have told you already, and for your better instruction I shall tell you more. It is a water made by Nature, not extracted by the hands of man. Nor is it mere water but a spermatic, viscous composition of water, earth, air and fire. All these four natures unite in one crystalline, coagulable mass, in the form or appearance of water; and therefore I told you it was a water made by Nature. But if you ask me how Nature may be said to make any such water, I shall instruct you by an example that's obvious. Earth and water are the only materials whereupon Nature works, for these two, being passive, are compassed about with the active superior bodies, namely, with the air, heaven, sun and stars. Thus do they stand in the very fire, at least under the beams and ejaculations thereof so that the earth is subject to a continual torrefaction and the water to a continual coction. Hence it comes to pass that we are perpetually overcast, with clouds, and this by a physical extraction or sublimation of water, which Nature herself distills and rains down upon the earth. Now this water, through of a different complexion from the philosopher's mineral water, yet has it many circumstances that well deserve our observation. I shall not insist long upon any: I will only give you one or two instances and then return to my subject. First of all then, you are to consider that Nature distills not beyond the body, as the chemist does in the recipient. She draws the water up from the earth, and to the same earth does she return it; and hence it is that she generates by circular and reasonable imbibitions. Secondly, you must observe that she prepares her moisture before she imbibes the body therewith, and that by a most admirable preparation. Her method in this point is very obvious and open to all the world, so that if men were not blind I would not need to speak of it. Her water — we see — she rarefies into clouds, and by this means does she rack and tender-stretch the body, so that all the parts thereof are exposed to a searching, spiritual purgatory of wind and fire. For her wind passes quite through the clouds and cleanses them; and when they are well cleansed then comes Nature in with her fire and fixes it in *ente jure sapphirico*.

But this is not all. There are other circumstances, which Nature uses above ground in order to fecundate her vegetables. And now I would speak of her subterranean preparations, in order to mother her minerals: but that it is not lawful for me, as it was for the poet — "To discover things hidden in deep earth and fire." However, I shall not fail to tell you a considerable truth, whosoever you are that studies this difficult science. The preparation of our animal and mineral sperm- -I speak of the true preparation — is a secret upon which God has laid His seal, and you will not find it in books, for it was never entirely written. Your best course is to consider the way of Nature, for there it may be found, but not without reiterated, deep and searching meditations. If this attempt fails, you must pray for it, not that I hold it an easy or a common thing to attain to revelations, for we have none in England; but God may discover it to you by some ordinary and natural means. In a word, if you can not attain to it in this life, yet shall you know it in your own body, when you are past knowing of it in this subject. But because I will not deprive you of help which I may lawfully communicate, I tell you that our preparation is a purgation. Yet do not we purge by common and ridiculous sublimate or the more foolish filtrations, but by a secret, tangible, natural fire. He that knows this fire, and how to wash with it, knows the key of our Art, even our hidden Saturn, and the stupendous, infernal lavatory of Nature. Much more could I say concerning this fire and the proprieties thereof, it being one of the highest mysteries of the creation, a subject without question wherein I might be voluminous, and all the way mysterious, for it relates to the greatest effects of magic, being the first male of the Mercury and almost his mother. Consider then the generation of our Mercury and how he is made, for here lies the ground of all our secrets. It is

plain that outwardly we see nothing but what is gross — for example, earth, water, metals, stones and, among the better creatures, man himself. All these things have a lumpish, ineffectual exterior, but inwardly they are full of a subtle, vital luminosity, impregnated with fire. This vitality Nature makes use of in generations, wherefore we call it the sperm. For instance, we know the body of man is not his sperm, but the sperm is a subtle extraction taken out of his body. Even so in the great world, the body or fabric itself is not the seed. It is not earth, air, fire or water; for these four — if they were put together — would be still four bodies of different forms and complexions. The seed then, or first matter, is a certain vitality extracted from these four, for each of them contributes from its every center a thin, slimy substance; and of their several slimes Nature makes the sperm by an ineffable union and mixture. This mixture and composition of slimy principles is that mass which we call the first matter. It is the minera of man, whereof God made him: in a double image did He make him in the day that he became a living soul. Hence a famous artist, speaking of the creation of Adam and alluding to the first matter, delivers himself in these terms: "From the limosity of the elements did God create Adam, namely, from the limosity of earth, water, air and fire; and He gave unto him life from the Sun of the Holy Spirit, and from light, clarity and the light of the world." Have a care then that you mistake not any specified body for the sperm. Beware of quicksilver, antimony and all the metals — have nothing to do with ought that is extracted from metals. Beware of salts, vitriols and every minor mineral. Beware of animals and vegetables, and of everything that is particular, or takes place in the *classis* of any known species. The first matter is a miraculous substance, one of which you may affirm contraries without inconvenience. It is very weak and yet most strong. It is excessively soft and yet there is nothing so hard. It is one and all, spirit and body, fixed and volatile, male and female, visible and invisible, burns and burns not. It is water and wets not; it is earth that runs and air that stands still. In a word, it is Mercury, the laughter of fools and the wonder of the wise, nor has God made anything that is like him. He is born in the world, but was extant before the world. Hence that excellent riddle which he has somewhere proposed of himself: "I dwell" — saith he — "in the mountains and in the plains, a father before I was a son. I generated my mother, and my mother, carrying me in her womb, generated me, having no use for a nurse."

This is that substance which at present is the child of the sun and moon; but originally both his parents came out of his belly. He is placed between two fires, and therefore is ever restless. He grows out of the earth as all vegetables do, and in the darkest night that is receives a light from the stars, and retains it. He is attractive at the first because of his horrible emptiness, and what he draws down is a prisoner forever. He has in him a thick fire, by which he captivates the thin and he is both artist and matter to himself. In his first appearance he is neither earth nor water, neither solid nor fluid, but a substance without all form but what is universal. He is visible but of no certain color, for chameleon-like puts on all colors. Nothing in the world has the same figure as him. When he is purged from his accidents, he is a water colored with fire, deep to the sight and — as it were — swollen; and he has something in him that resembles a commotion. In a vaporous heat he opens his belly and discovers an azure heaven he hides a little sun, a most powerful red fire, sparkling like a carbuncle, which is the red gold of the wise men. These are the treasures of our sealed fountain, and though many desire them yet none enters here but he that knows the key, and withal how to use it. In the bottom of this well lies an old dragon, stretched long and fast asleep. Awake her if you can, and make her drink; for by this means she will recover her youth and be serviceable to you forever. In a word, separate the eagle from the green lion; then clip his wings, and you have performed a miracle. But these, you will say, are blind terms, and no man knows what to make of them. True indeed, but they are such as are received from the philosophers. Howsoever, that I may deal plainly with you, the eagle is the water, for it is volatile and flies up in clouds, as an eagle does; but I speak not of any common water whatsoever. The green lion is the body, or magical earth, with which you must clip the wings of the eagle; that is to say, you must fix her, so that she may fly no more. By this we understand the opening and shutting of the chaos, and that cannot be done without our proper key- -I mean our secret fire, wherein consists the whole mystery of the preparation. Our fire then is a natural fire; it is vaporous, subtle and piercing. It is that which works all in all, if we look on physical digestion; nor is there an thing in the world that answers to the stomach and performs the effects thereof but this one thing. It is a substance of propriety solar and therefore sulphurous. It is prepared, as the philosophers tell us, from the old dragon and in plain terms it is the fume of Mercury—not crude, but cocted. This fume utterly destroys the first form of gold, introducing a second and more noble one. By Mercury I understand not quicksilver but Saturn philosophical, which devours the Moon and keeps her always in his belly. By gold I mean our spermatic, green gold — not the adored lump, which is dead and ineffectual. It would be well for the students of this noble Art if they resolved on some general positions before they attempted the books of the philosophers. For example, let them take along with them these few truths, and they will serve them for so many rules whereby they may censure and examine their authors. First, that the first matter of the Stone is the very same with the first matter of all things; secondly, that in this matter all the essential principles or ingredients of the Elixir are already shut up by Nature, and that we must not presume to add anything to this matter but what we have formerly drawn out of it; for the Stone excludes all extractions but what is distilled

immediately from its own crystalline, universal minera; thirdly and lastly, that the philosophers have their peculiar secret metals, quite different from the metals of the vulgar, for where they name Mercury they mind not quicksilver, where Saturn not lead, where Venus and Mars not copper and iron, and where Sol or Luna not gold or silver. This Stone verily is not made of common gold and silver, but it is made, as one delivers it, "of gold and silver that are reputed base, that stink and withal smell sweetly; of green, living gold and silver to be found everywhere but known to very few." Away then with those mountebanks who tell you of antimony, salts, vitriols, marcasites, or any mineral whatsoever. Away also with such authors as prescribe or practice upon any of these bodies. You may be sure they were mere cheats and wrote only to gain a reputation of knowledge. There are indeed some uncharitable but knowing Christians who stick not to lead the blind out of his way. These are full of elaborate, studied deceits, and one of them who pretends to the Spirit of God has at the same mouth vented a slippery spirit, namely, that the Stone cannot be opened through all the grounds — as he calls them — under seven years. Truly I am of the opinion that he never knew the Stone in this natural world; but how well acquainted he was with the tinctures in the spiritual world I will not determine. I must confess many brave and sublime truths have fallen from his pen; but when he descends from his inspirations and stoops to a physical practice, he is quite beside the butt.

I have ever admired the royal Gerber, whose religion — if you question — I can produce it is these few words: "The sublime, blessed and glorious God of natures." This is the title and the style he always bestows upon God, and it is enough to prove him no atheist. He, I say, has so freely and in truth so plainly discussed this secret that had he not mixed his many impertinences with it he had directly prostituted the mysteries. What I speak is apparent to all knowing artists, and hence it is that most masters have so honored this Arabian that in their books he is commonly called *Magister Magistrorum*. We are indeed more beholden to this prince — who did not know Christ — than to many professed Christians, for they have not only concealed the truth but they have published falsities and mere inconsistencies therewith. They have studiously and of mere purpose deceived the world, without any respect of their credit or conscience. It is a great question who was most envious, the devil in his *Recipe* to our Oxford doctor of Arnoldus in his *Accipe* to the King of Aragon. I know well enough what that gentleman *de Villa Nova* prescribes, and I know withal his instructions are so difficult that Count Trevor, when he was adept *suo modo*, could not understand them, For he has written most egregious nonsense, and this by endeavoring to confute greater mysteries than he did apprehend. Now, if any man thinks me too bold for censuring so great an artist as Arnoldus was, I am not so empty but I can reason for myself. I charge him not with want of knowledge but what of charity — a point wherein even the possessors of the Philosopher's Stone are commonly poor. I speak this because I pity the distractions of our modern alchemists, though Philaethes laughs in his sleeve and, like a young colt, kicks at that name.

For my own part I advise no man to attempt this Art without a master, for though you know the Matter yet are you far short of the Medicine. This is a truth you may be confident of, and if you will not believe my text, take it upon Raymund Lully's experience. He knew the Matter, it being the first thing his master taught him. Then he practiced upon it, in his own phrase, after many and multifarious roads, but all to no purpose. He had the Cabinet but not the Key. At last he found himself to be — what many doctors are — a confident quack, a broiler and nothing more — as it appears by his subsequent confession. "The Masters assure us in their goodness that the Great Work is one of solution and congelation, the same being performed by the circulatory way; but though ignorance hereupon many who were sound in scholarship have been deceived regarding the mastery. In their excess of confidence they assumed themselves to be proficient in the form and mode of circulation, and it is not our intent to conceal that we ourselves were of those who were stricken in this respect. With such presumption and temerity we took our understanding of this science for granted, yet we grasped it in no wise, till we came to be taught of the spirit by the mediation of Master Arnold de Villa Nova, who effectually imparted it unto us out of his great bounty."

Thus he; and now I shall advise the chemist to set a watch at his lips because of some invisible gentlemen that overhear. I myself have known some men to affirm they had seen and done such things which God and Nature cannot do, according to the present laws of creation. But had my young friend Eugenius Philaethes been present he would have laughed without mercy. Take heed then what you say, less you make sport for the wise, for they are something like the immortals:

"Laughter unquenchable arose among the blessed gods."

Many men there are who think it ordinary to be instructed in these secrets, but in this they are confidently mistaken. He must be a known, true friend, a friend of years, not of days; not a complemental thing, whose action is all hypocrite; not a severe dissembler, who gives you fair words but — if once tried — his heart is so far from his promises that, like a fly in a box, is scarce a part of his body. Raymund Lully has in a certain place delivered himself handsomely in relation to the practice, and this for his friend's sake. But how rigid then was he *in scriptis*. His disciple — if he could understand him — was to be accountable to him in the use of the mystery; and therefore he tells him plainly that he did it "by way of load only, looking for restitution at the judgment day." We must not expect

then to be instructed because we are acquainted, and verily acquaintance with such persons is a thing not common. In ordinary favors it is supposed that men should deserve them before they receive them; but in this thing — which is a benefit incomparable — it falls out otherwise. We look for present discoveries; we believe the philosophers will teach us and in plain terms tell us all their Art; but we know not wherefore they should be so kind to us. Such impudent hopes have no more reason in them than if I should spend a compliment on a rich gentleman and then expect he should make me his heir in lieu of my phrase, and so pass his estate upon me. This is very absurd, but nothing more common; though I know there is another sort of well-wishers, but they are most miserable, for they cast about to fool those men whom they know to be wiser than themselves. But in this point the philosophers need no instructions. They can act many parts, and he that plots to over-reach them takes a course to break before he sets up. It remains then that we bestow our attempts on their books, and here we must consider the two universal natures, light and matter.

Matter — as I have formerly intimated — is the house of light. Here he dwells and builds for himself, and, to speak truth, he takes up his lodging in sight of all the world? When he first enters it, it is glorious, transparent room, a crystal castle, and he lives like a familiar in diamonds. He has then the liberty to look out at the windows; his love is all in his sight: I mean that liquid Venus which lures him in; but this continues not very long? He is busy — as all lovers are—and labors for a closer union, insinuates and conveys himself into the very substance of his love, so that his heat and action stir up her moist essences, by whose means he becomes an absolute prisoner. For at last the earth grows over him out of the water, so that he is quite shut up in darkness; and this is the secret of the eternal God, which He has been pleased to reveal to some of His servants, though mortal man was never worthy of it? I wish it were lawful for me to enlarge myself in this point for religion's sake, but it is not safe for convenient that all ears should hear even the mysteries of religion. This leprous earth — for such it is, if it be not purged — is the toad that eats up the eagle, or spirit, of which there is frequent mention in the philosopher's books. In this earth also have many of the wise men seated that tincture which we commonly call darkness. Truly they may as well bestow it on the water or the air, for it appears not in any one element but either in all four or else in two, and this last was that which deceived them. Now, the water has no blackness at all but a majestic, large clarity. The earth likewise, in her own nature, is a glorious crystallized body, bright as the heavens. The air also excels both these in complexion, for he has in him a most strange, inexpressible whiteness and serenity. As for the fire it is outwardly red and shining — like a jacinth — but inwardly in the spirit white as milk.

Now, if we put all these substances together, through purged and celified, yet when they stir and work for generation the black color overspreads them all — and such a black — so deep and horrid — that no common darkness can be compared to it. I desire to know then how this tincture arises, for the root of every other color is known. It is to be observed that in the separation of the elements this blackness appears nowhere but in that element which is under the fire; and this only while you are drawing out the fire — for the fire being separated the body is white. It is plain then that darkness belongs to the fire, for in truth fire is the manual of it; and this is one of the greatest mysteries, both in Divinity and philosophy. But those that would rightly understand it should first learn the difference between fire and light.

Trismegistus, in his vision of the creation, did first see a pleasing, gladsome light, but interminated. Afterwards appeared a horrible sad darkness, and this moved downwards, descending from the eye of the light, as if a cloud should come from the sun. This darkness — saith he — was condensed into a certain water, but not without a mournful, inexpressible voice or sound, as the vapors of the elements are resolved by thunder. After this — saith that great philosopher — the Holy Word came out of the light and did get upon the water, and out of the water He made all things. Let it be your study then — who would know all things — to seek out this secret water, which hath in itself all things. This is the physical and famous Pythagorean cube, which surprises all forms, and holds them prisoners. "If anywise," said my Capnion, "a form implanted in this ground remain thereon; if it enters therein and does abide in such solid receptacle, being laid up therein as in a material foundation; it is not received at random nor indifferently but permanently and specially, becoming inseparable and incommunicable, as something added to the soil, made subject to time and to place, and deprived — so to speak of its liberty in the bondage of matter."

The consequences of this prison, which sometimes are sad, and the steps that lead to it, are most elegantly expressed in the oracles. "A steep descent extends beneath the earth, leading seven ways by stages and beneath which is the throne of a horrible necessity."

In a word, all things in the world — as well events as substances — flow out of this well. Hence come our fortunes and our misfortunes, our riches and our poverty, and this according to the scales of the Supreme Agent, in his dispensations of light and darkness. We see there is a certain face of light in all those things which are very dear or very precious to us. For example, in beauty, gold, silver, pearls, and in everything that is pleasant or carries with it any opinion of happiness — in all such things I say there is inherent a certain secret, concomitant lustre, and while they last the possessors also are subject to a clearness and serenity of mind. On the contrary, in all adversity there is

a certain corroding, heavy sadness, for the spirit grieves because he is eclipsed and overcast with darkness. We know well enough that poverty is but obscurity, and certainly in all disasters there is a kind of cloud or something that answers to it. In people that are very unfortunate this darkness has a character, and especially in the forehead there lies a notable judgment; but there are few who can read in such books. Of this Vergil — who was a great poet but a greater philosopher — was not ignorant, for describing Marcellus in the Elysian fields he makes his sad countenance an argument of his short life.

Aeneas here beheld, of form divine:
A godlike youth in glittering armor shine,
With great Marcellus keeping equal pace:
But gloomy were his eyes, dejected was his face.
He saw, and wondering ask'd his airy guide
What and of whence was he who pressed the hero's side;
His son: or one of his illustrious name;
How like the former and almost the same.
Observe the crowd that compass him around:
All gaze and all admire, and raise a shouting sound.
But hovering mists around his brows are spread
And night with sable shades involves his head.

But these are things that ought not to be publicly discussed, and therefore I shall omit them. He that desires to be happy let him look after light, for it is the cause of happiness, both temporal and eternal. In the house thereof it may be found, and the house is not far off nor hard to find, for the light walks in before us and is the guide to his own habitation. It is the light that forms the gold and the ruby, the adamant and the silver, and he is the artist that shapes all things. He that has him has the mint of Nature and a treasure altogether inexhaustible. He is blessed with the elect substance of heaven and earth, and in the opinion of the *Turba* "deserves to be called blessed and is raised above the circle of the earth." Nor indeed without reason, for Nature herself dictates to us and tells us that our happiness consists in light. Hence it is that we naturally love the light and rejoice in it, as a thing agreeable and beneficial to us. On the contrary, we fear the darkness and are surprised in it with a certain horror and a timorous expectation of some hurt that may befall us. It is light then that we must look after, but of itself it is so thin and spiritual we cannot lay hands upon it and make it our possession. We cannot confine it to any one place, that it may no more rise and set with the sun. We cannot shut it up in a cabinet, that we may use it when we please, and in the dark night see a glorious illustration. We must look then for the mansion of light — that oily, ethereal substance that retains it — for by this means we may circumscribe and confine it. We may impart and communicate it to what bodies we please, give the basest things a most precious lustre and a complexion as lasting as the sun. This is that mystery which the philosophers have delivered hereunto in most envious and obscure terms; and though I do not arrogate to myself a greater knowledge than some of them had, yet I do affirm — and that knowingly — that this secret was never communicated to the world in a discourse so plain and positive as this is. It is true this script is short, and the body of magic has no proportion to these few lines. To write of it at large and discover its three scenes — elemental, celestial and spiritual — was sometimes the design of one that was able to perform? But he — and it was every the fortune of truth to be so served — was not only opposed but abused by a barbarous, malicious ignorant one. I should think that gentleman did set up for Bartholomew Fair — he has such contrivances in his *Second Lash*. The tutor dedicates to his pupil, and the same pupil versifies in commendation of his tutor? Here was a claw; there was never any so reciprocal: surely Rosinante and Dapple might learn of these two. But this is stuff to stop our noses at: let us leave it for Cambridge, whence it first came.

The coagulation of our water and the solution of our earth are the two greatest and most difficult operations of the Art, for these two are contrary keys: the water opens and the earth shuts. Be sure then to add nothing to the subject but what is of its own nature, for when it is prepared it is all-sufficient. He coagulates himself and dissolves himself, and passes all the color — and this by virtue of its own inward sulphur or fire, which wants nothing but excitation, or, to speak plainly, a simple, natural coction. Everybody knows how to boil water in fire; but if they knew how to boil fire in water their physic would reach beyond the kitchen. Study then and despair not; but study no curiosities. It is a plain, straight path that Nature walks in; and I call God to witness that I write not this to amaze men; but I write that which I know to be certainly true.

This is all I think fit to communicate at this time, neither had this fallen from me but that it was a command imposed by my superiors. They that desire experimental knowledge may study it as a sure guide; but he that rests at his lips and puts not his philosophy into his hands needs not these instructions. *Wit's Commonwealth* or a *Book of Apothegms* may serve his turn. I prescribe not here for any but such as look after these principles; and they must give me leave to inform them, if they be not perfect masters of the art. I am one that gives and takes, and this to

avoid contentions. I can suffer the schoolman to follow his own placets, so long as he does not hinder me to follow mine. In a word, I can tolerate men's errors and pity them. I can propound the truth, and if it be not followed, it is satisfaction to me that what I did was well done.

A Postscript to the Reader

This small discourse was no sooner finished — though by command — but the same authorities recalled their commission; and now being somewhat transformed I must — as some mysteriously have done — live a tree. Yet the wise know that groves have their wood nymphs, and I remember I have read of an image whose Hic fodias placed the substance in the shadow. To be plain, I am silenced, and though it be in my power to speak, yet I have laws as to this subject which I must not transgress. I have chosen therefore to oppose my present freedom to my future necessity, and to speak something at this time which I must never publicly speak hereafter. There is no defect in ought that I have written, if I but tell you one thing which the philosophers have omitted. It is that which some authors have called "the Vessel of Nature and the Green Vessel of Saturn"; and Miriam calls it the Vessel of Hermes. A menstrous substance it is; and — to speak the very truth — it is the matrix of Nature, wherein you must place the universal sperm as soon as it appears beyond its body. The heat of this matrix is sulphurous, and it is that which coagulates the sperm; but common fire — though it be most exactly regulated — will never do it; and in this opinion see that you be not deceived. This matrix is the life of the sperm, for it preserves and thickens it; but beyond the matrix it takes cold and dies, and nothing effectual can be generated thereof. In a word, without this matrix you will never coagulate the matter nor bring it to a mineral complexion. And herein also there is a certain measure to be observed, without which you will miscarry in the practice. Of this natural vessel speaks Miriam in the following words: "The key of the science is in all bodies, but owing to the shortness of life and the length of the work the Stoics concealed this one only thing. They discovered tinging elements, leaving instructions thereon, and these also the philosophers continue to teach, save only concerning the Vessel of Hermes, because the same is Divine, a thing hidden from the Gentiles by the wisdom of God; and those who are ignorant of it know not the regimen of truth for want of the Hermetic Vessel."

In the proportion and regimen of this thing which they call their vessel, and sometimes their fire, consists all the secret. And verily the performances thereof are so admirable and so speedy they are almost incredible. Had I known this at first it had not been with me as it has been; but every event has its time, and so had I. This one thing — to lay aside other reasons — does not only persuade but convince me that this Art was originally revealed to man. For this I am sure of — that man of himself could not possibly think of it; for it is invisible. It is removed from the eye, and this out of a certain reverence; and if by chance it comes into sight it withdraws again naturally. For it is the secret of Nature, even that which the philosophers call "the first copulation." This is enough to a wise artist; at least it is all I intend to publish. And now, reader, farewell.