

# THE TRUEST AND MOST NOBLE SECRET

THE REVEREND TEACHER AND PREBYTER:  
*JODUCUS GREVERUS*

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Translated from Latin by: *Patricia Tahl*

To the honour of the holy and undivided Trinity, and of blessed Mother Mary, ever virgin, to console the pious, help the poor, and direct philosophers, I, Jody Grever, presbyter and least of Philosophers, with great error, expense and labour and passing of my life in the quest, not despairing of Divine grace and mercy, strengthened by the help of God himself start to describe to you the true and perfect work, not in parts, nor in ambiguous and obscure words, for He who alone has the power to pass on and impart this most secret art to whom He will, has given it to me of his goodness.

Therefore, to the glory of Him who has given so much to me, an unworthy sinner, I celebrate and proclaim with all my power those whom he has called and chosen to these wonderful mysteries of Philosophy, and I shall make the matter plain in proper order, without learned obfuscation, in speech clear and open but nevertheless confirming to the methods and customs of the Philosophers.

I know well enough that no one can seize this knowledge for himself unless God confers it on him. Who alone makes plain the darkness of this mystery, or darkens its clarity, for none can understand the plainest things if not illuminated by God, nor can he follow the most obscure if God does not lighten them. However, I adjure all of you who have my writings, not to communicate them to the unworthy,

or the greedy, or those who are unkind to their neighbours, or oppress them, such as tyrannous men, the unjust, adulterers, the weak, and those whose God is their belly. Place your trust, therefore, in the Lord God Creator of all and work in fear of him, using what you have to hand according to what I have written, and awaiting the blessing of our heavenly Lord.

First of all, O best beloved, you should know that our art imitates nature; and where nature produces plants and trees by herself, which the gardener then increases, by sowing their seeds, or grafting their twigs, so she generates metals in the depths of the mountains of the earth, which the artificer increases by grafting or sowing them in the proper soil or a suitable stock. What you must know above all is what the seeds of gold and silver are, what their soil, and what their stock. We tell you. Therefore, that Sol and Luna contain their own seeds in themselves, that Saturn, Jupiter, Mars and Venus are their stocks, and the proper soil for all of them is Mercury; it is the stable foundation to which you should direct your whole attention, accommodating the appearance of the one so that is suitable for the nature of the other, because God the author of nature wishes us to understand and perfect this area of philosophy by this sort of contemplation; by means of these writings we communicate it to the worthy and the chosen, so that I and others with me may offer perpetual praise and glory to God, giving due thanks for his grace.

Just as the Philosophers, therefore, when contemplating the works of nature, are accustomed to seek the likeness of the Stone in plants, animals, trees, eggs, foetuses, the joining of masculine and feminine and an almost infinite number of the same sort of things, so we too pave the way to a clearer understanding of this particular operation,

we follow nature's tracks and choose thence the true and necessary adaptations.

However, even if this is a special operation, nevertheless there is truth in it, so that anyone who looks deeply into the causes of things, is close to observation of the great triumphal Stone in certain truth and power. By the aforementioned simile I have already indeed shown the wise what is the material that should be taken to start the work with; and that I may further uncover it to your eyes, I say that just as a man comes from a man, an ass from an ass, a hen from a hen's egg, and corn from corn, so everything is made from its likeness, gold from gold, and silver from silver.

You will therefore understand from this what material you should take and bring into the work; here you should also know that a man cannot always be produced from any man, nor a dog from any dog nor a plant from any plant of its own species; for a boy of twelve years old, or a person of either sex who is languishing in sickness will not bring forth a human foetus from their mutual intercourse; neither will a pup a dog, nor young or rotten plants a (new) plant. But a mature and healthy man and a woman who is similarly mature and strong will procreate a human foetus; likewise other animals after their own kind and ripe seed from mature plants. Therefore we say that as farmers carefully select the seeds of fruits, plants and trees, and do not take them unless they are ripe, and do the same when they take the strongest shoots from the trees for grafting, so in this way you will be able to judge what you take for this business.

For common gold does not enter into the work, nor common Mercury, nor vulgar silver, nor any other common thing, but rather philosophical things; what you may take these to be is clearly shown from the

aforesaid. However, what has been said of the seeds must also be said of the soil, for not all soils are suitable for this or that plant, as Virgil himself warns us in the Georgics, and as we see farmers and gardeners always observing. You must therefore look, O best beloved, and see that the soil is suitable for growing the seeds of Sol or Luna, for if you choose foolishly, you will miserably lose your seed, your labours and your expense.

Seeds and soil must therefore be chosen with great care, and the chosen soil must be cultivated in the same way as the earth of the fields and gardens is cultivated, with ploughing or digging, manuring, harrowing, watering, and all that sort of thing. Geber and the workers in this divine task call choosing and culturing the seeds and the soil preparation, and without it one cannot have either Sol or Luna of the Philosophers, nor can one find a clear way in to the secrets of this great art.

Moreover, common gold is very impure, contaminated by admixture with other metals, sick, diseased, and therefore sterile, and so is common silver, while on the contrary Sol and Luna of the Philosophers are very pure, not besmirched by the addition of any foreign mixture, healthy, strong and abounding in reproductive seed. Common earth is also uncultivated and unploughed, but the Philosophers' earth is cultivated by fire-breathing bulls, as it says in the fable of the Golden Fleece.

And so, O best beloved, find out the true meaning of my words, and understand that the Philosophers are like farmers and gardeners, who first choose certain seeds and having selected them do not sow them in common earth, nor in uncultivated fields, but in garden ridges, and once they have sown them they commit them to the heat of the Sun and

the goodness of earth and sky, and await their due fruition after a suitable time. The Philosophers employ similar reasoning, for before they begin to work they must decide to take in hand vulgar gold and silver, whether sick or healthy; for if they are found to be sick, the right medicine will render them healthy as necessary, which is the preparation itself. This doctored gold, healthy and purified, is the Philosophers' Sol, and the same is to be understood of Luna.

However, when you have philosophical Sol and Luna, like good seeds the soil must be cleansed of its dirt and useless weeds, and improved by careful cultivation; and in this improved earth you must sow the aforesaid seed of Sol and Luna, and commit them to continuous heat and the goodness of earth and sky; nothing radical will happen before the right time, but you must wait for the ripe fruits after the leaves and flowers.

From this it is clear that even if the Philosopher takes vulgar gold, silver, or Mercury, he does not bring them into the work until he has raised them from common earth to the grade of a medicine. There are some who wrap these things up in great obscurity, and throw the Philosopher's soul into great doubt, all of which you will be able to resolve if you observe the general rule that I give: - nothing must enter the medicated work without the proper preparation, whose ability is to make medicines of common substances. And so nothing filthy, nor diseased, nor uncultivated should enter our work; before the work itself we may take the sick, the filthy and the uncultivated

So the Philosopher should take the material given by nature, prepare it properly, choose and cultivate the proper soil, then put in the seed and apply the correct continuous heat. It is, however, Nature's part to rot and dissolve the seed placed in the ground, make

roots, draw up the dryness of earth, produce shoots, leaves and flowers in succession, conceive, perfect and ripen the seed. Having reached this stage nature comes to a stop, and goes no further unless stirred by the Philosopher, who must know how to make nature progress by certain correct signs, not by false opinions.

Now when he sees that the fruit is exactly ripe, he must not delay, but at once collect the mature seeds of the fruit, separated from any excess matter they may have and immediately fresh soil must be cultivated, and when it has been well tilled, he puts the seeds in it, and applies continuous heat as before, whereupon nature again takes up her task, finishes the work and little by little multiplies perennial fruit and seed.

From this consideration it arises as a conclusion that natural things require different lengths of time to complete their generations, for certain plants grow and mature in about a year, trees mature more quickly, others more slowly. So it is with metals, some ripen quickly, others are slower.

Furthermore, just as we see farmers at once disturb and cover the seeds by harrowing, and bind the grafts inserted in stocks with wax or clay, which are not tree-like by nature, but are helpful intermediaries, (making sure) that the sap of the stock enters the graft only, so in this work a certain clay or wax must be taken that forbids the juice of the earth to exhale, and contains it within; moreover farmers customarily bind this wax with straw so that the onslaught of rain and wind may not tear out the inserted graft from the stock at the joint. So we do in our work such things as we observe in the everyday world, and if you consider this carefully, you will be easily freed from many errors, and pursue the work to its desired end.

But let us dally no more, but come to the practice in its proper order; and let us first speak of the tools and materials requisite for this work, then of the preparations, next of the seeds and the ripening, and finally of the repetition of the sowing, which is the complement of the work.

#### THE TOOLS FOR THIS TASK

The tools required for this task are as follows: - I. A subliming furnace. 2. A digesting furnace which can also be an athanor and be used for ashes or sand. 3. A cupel or jar for ashes or sand. 4. Sieved ashes or sand. 5. A subliming jar. 6. Six or seven small subliming aludels. 7. Clay shaken with horse-dung. 8. A oblong piece of iron curved at one end into a spatula. 9. Bellows. 10. Tongs for lighted coals. II. Coals. 12. A round glass cucurbit. 13. Some crucibles. 14. Cupels or shallow dishes made of bone ash. 15. An anvil. 16. A hammer.

The materials are lead, antimony, gold, silver, bronze, quicksilver Also yellow wax, vitriol, sal nitrum, alum, quicklime, bronze, glass, a urinal with a wooden spatula. And so the total number of tools and materials comprises the number four times seven, which is a mystery. The athanor furnace is almost the same as the subliming furnace, except that a cupel containing ashes or sand is placed on it, and in this is placed the round glass cucurbit with the material, and it is closed from above with an empty cupel, so that no draught nor air can touch the glass.

## PREPARATION OF THE MATERIALS: GOLD FIRST

Choose fresh gold for this task that has not been used by the craftsman for many operations, but has come recently from the mine and has not been much worked, of the best color, about twenty-four carats, or nearly; and the best of this sort is that which is found in small pieces in the ground, as if cooked and semi-liquified. If you can have this, no other preparation for the work is necessary beyond hammering it into the thinnest flakes.

But if you cannot get it, take gold from Hungarian florins, and purge it, or have it purged by melting it into a regulus with antimony, as the workers who make gold-leaf do, for antimony has the property of purifying gold from all superfluities. If perchance you do not know the purification by antimony, you can cement it by heating for twenty-four hours, reduce it to a mass, and hammer it into the thinnest flakes.

In order to give you a complete account, however, we shall describe to you the method of purifying gold with antimony, which is as follows: Take one ounce of gold, or any reasonable quantity, and five times as much antimony as gold, and put the gold and the antimony in a crucible, and place it on burning coals, and allow it to flux for an hour, or half an hour, then take an implement of iron or brass shaped like a pyramid and hollow within, very smooth inside and heated by the fire, and grease the interior with wax or a candle and after you have taken the gold and the antimony off the heat, pour it from the crucible into this funnel, and by striking the bottom of the funnel gently, the gold



will fall down separately. Then allow it to cool and invert the funnel, and take out the pyramidal mass from the funnel. Its apex will contain the regulus of gold, which is separated from the rest of the material by hitting it just below the apex, and keep the regulus of gold aside.

Now take the mass of antimony and add to it one third of its weight of fresh antimony and liquify in the crucible again and pour again into the funnel, separate this regulus in its turn, if there is any, and add it to the previously separated regulus. You can do it a third time, if necessary, or not, as you will know from the amount of second regulus (obtained); if it very little, leave it. Keep this aside also, and proceed with the reguli in this manner:-

Take a piece of tile made of tile-bricks, like those that used to be on the roofs of the towers of ancient churches, and make a small hole in it to hold your reguli. Place it in a dry spot, and surround it with coals, putting the reguli in the hole, then light the coals and allow the antimony to exhale from the reguli in smoke; when the fuming ceases, cover it carefully with coals, and blow on it from above with a bellows until you can see no spot or speck on your gold, but it is beautiful and greens like grass in the fire; this usually happens in two or three hours.

Having then taken out the piece of brick with the gold that was purged in it, quench it in clear urine, and so your gold will be perfectly cleansed, and ready, so that it can be hammered into the finest sheets, which are to be kept wrapped in paper till the proper time. If you can find a sufficient quantity of fine gold-leaf among the druggists or painters, that may be used as pure gold, needing no further preparation. If they have enough pure silver-leaf, do the

same; if not, purify it as follows.

#### PREPARATION OF SILVER

Like gold, the best silver has come fresh from the mine, and has not been much worked by the craftsman, but has been cupelled with lead in a dish or cupel. If, however, you do not have such silver, take what you have, and if you suspect that copper is mixed with it, or any other impurity, purify in the cupel with two or three times its weight of black lead, until it is cleansed of all impurity. Then make fine sheets of it, and keep pure in clean paper until it is needed.

#### PREPARATION OF MERCURY

You should choose argent vive which has not been made by artifice from lead or any other metal, but has come from its own mineral, such as mountain cinnabar or marcasite. However, you should prepare such mercury for our work like this:-

Take a pound of it, three ounces of vitriol, three ounces of quicklime, yellow wax one pound, and grind the vitriol, sal nitrum, alum, and quicklime in a mortar and mix them. Then place the wax in a glass urinal, the bottom of which has been luted with clay mixed and sieved with horse dung, and put the urinal in a dish containing sand on a small furnace, and subject it to heat, gentle at first, so that the glass does not break from sudden heat, until the wax melts.

Meantime, shake up the mercury in a glass dish with the aforesaid substances, in order to mix them thoroughly, having poured in a little acid from strong wine. When the wax in the urinal has melted,

add the mercury with the aforementioned powders little, and heat in the wax for three hours over a medium heat, constantly stirring and turning with a wooden spatula.

When the three hours are up, let it cool in the urinal, and make a hole in the wax with a clean rod before it hardens, and this is how you keep your Mercury, well prepared for this work and ready to have Sol and Luna sown in it.

#### PREPARATION OF ANTIMONY (*The Uniting Medium*)

Prepare the antimony, which enters into this work as a tie between two substances, by subliming in this way.:-

Take a pound of it, and grind to a powder in a mortar, then place in a subliming jar, and place upon it an aludel with a hole in the side; this aludel must be open both at the wider part and at the narrower, and so must the rest of the aludels.

Now apply firm clay mixed with horse dung to the joints, and join all six aludels in a row like this, so that the lower narrower part enters the wider upper part from beneath, all the joints having been firmly luted. However, the last aludel should have a smaller hole than the others, as big as a finger, no wider, that can easily be closed by a dry wooden plug.

When the joints have dried, put this subliming tower on your furnace, and secure it with a strong lute, so that it does not wobble to and fro, and leave four holes around it to let out the smoke from the furnace, then light the coals in the furnace, and stoke up the fire by stages, until the powdered antimony liquefies; this you will know for certain if you put an iron spatula obliquely into the subliming jar through the lateral hole in the lowest aludel.

When you feel that the powdered antimony in the jar has liquefied, then constantly turn and move the antimony with your iron spatula, applying a strong fire beneath it, until the bottom of the sublimatory jar that is in the furnace reddens. Continue the heating and the stirring of the antimony until you feel that all the antimony has sublimed and no more is coming off.

You can be sure of this if upon opening the stopper of the topmost aludel you see no fumes exhaling from the opening. Then reduce the heat gradually and carefully put a moist cloth round the joint of the lowest aludel, and when the joint has absorbed the moisture remove the lute from all the aludels carefully, and collect the white sulphur of antimony from them which has sublimed on to their sides like a white flour. This sulphur is wonderfully effective in our work, for it is the friend of Mercury, Sol and Luna, the bond of body and spirit, the marriage of spirit and soul; it is, I say, the vehicle of the tincture and the wax that holds in the vital sap of the stock, so that it flows only into the graft you have inserted into it.

Collect this sulphur carefully, therefore, and keep it like precious treasure; by its use you will attain the desired end of your work. And so we complete our discourse on the preparation of all the materials necessary and sufficient for this precious secret work, nor have we altered the order of what we have said. Now it remains to speak of the sowing.

#### PUTTING THE SEEDS IN THE GROUND

Beloved worker, you have already completed a great part of your

task; it remains for you to prepare your ground for putrefaction, so that it may give the desired fruit, twofold, threefold, a hundredfold and a thousandfold, for unless a grain of corn is thrown into the soil and dies, it will bear no fruit.

In the name of the holy and undivided Trinity, therefore, take an ounce of your gold leaf, or whatever reasonable quantity you wish, and four times that amount of the well-cultivated earth that is in the glass urinal, covered by a bee-hive. If, however, you are poor and cannot obtain so much gold, then take the weight mentioned of silver-leaf and six times the amount of cultivated earth.

So divide whichever luminary you have into pieces, and add it to the aforesaid earth in a cold crucible, stirring continually with your fingers, or a wooden or glass pestle until all the flakes are mixed with our earth. Then have ready another clean crucible, put it on burning coals, and when it begins to glow take it off the fire and place it in a safe place between two or three bricks, so that it cannot easily be overturned, and have ready a clean glass dish with pure water in it, and then throw your flakes mingled with earth on to the hot crucible. Stop up your mouth so as not to breathe the fumes of the earth, and stir the flakes with a wooden stick, so that they enter the earth, which usually occurs quickly, and when the earth has taken them up, which you will know because there are no more lumps or globules under your stick, immediately pour it into the dish of pure cold water, and thus you have sown your seed in your earth.

The Philosophers commonly call this mixture "amalgam", which is the same as saying "softened", because the hard seed of gold or silver is softened in your earth. This mixture must, however, be washed

and rubbed with the purest water and the whitest purest salt until no further blackness appears in it, and the water that enters and leaves it is clear. Then dry the moisture adhering to it with a clean cloth. This then is the beginning of the work, which Philosophers have unworthily tried to conceal by calling it by many different names, such as our bronze, earth of magnesia, the whole composition, etc. Now we proceed to the harrowing.

#### HARROWING THE SOWN FIELD

You must recognize, O best beloved, that this part of the operation is called impregnation by some Philosophers, and the perpetual disposition by others; but we do not fear to call it harrowing, following our simile at the beginning. For just as the sown field is turned over by harrowing, and its larger clods broken up, so that the seeds which have been sown in it are covered, so in our work, our Mercurial earth, which has accepted the seeds of whichever luminary it may be, is ground and turned over, and the seeds are wholly hidden in it.

So when you have sown your field, that is to say, made your amalgam, and washed and dried it, then take the white flour of sublimed antimony, and sprinkle a little of it on the amalgam on a flat piece of marble, and grind the whole until the said amalgam has taken up the white antimony. When you have done this, add more of the said white antimony, and again grind them together until it takes up no more of the white sulphur of antimony. This is the sign intended to show that the harrowing is finished.

Collect your amalgam now ready for impregnation, and carefully

place it in a round glass vessel, which is large enough for your sown and harrowed earth to occupy one third of it, leaving two thirds empty. Then close the opening of your round vessel with a clever lute made from white of egg, brick dust and quicklime, spread on a cloth moistened with egg-white. Allow it to dry, and you will have the perfect Philosophers' Egg, which fulfills the saying of the Philosophers. In one vessel only, one stone, one digestion. But this belongs to the business of ripening, of which it is now time to speak.

#### GROWTH OF THE SEED

Philosophers employing the simile of an egg, as we did that of the sowing of plants, taught that the first state of the egg was putrefaction, and this they extended, not only to the formation of the chick in the egg, but to its hatching; and appended feeding to hatching. We, employing a simile that is clearer to the intellect, speak of these things differently, like this: We see that the seeds of plants do not rot entirely, nor are they completely mixed with earth, but softened and moistened by the wet juice of the earth, first they put out a shoot, then a tuft grows, and umbels come forth, soon it flowers, then sets seed, which finally ripens; so we are of the opinion that the same stages must be observed in this task, and we advise you to adjust the heat each month, so to say.

For when you have closed the Philosophic egg, and you can still see the snowy whiteness of the earth over everything, I warn you that you ought to use the gentlest heat of March. Now by the application of this heat, that snowy white turns into a greyish or cinder color,

which indicates that the shoot risen from the earth has begun to grow, and that April's influence has arrived. Then the risen shoot grows by degrees in May's heat and power, and leaves and twigs increase together.

Then afterwards with the heat of June it puts forth shoots and umbels and swells them; from these come flowers in burning July. In the heat of August it forms and joins up the seeds, which are ripened partly in the same month, but mostly by the heat present in September.

I am sure that the regulation of the heat is plain to any diligent man from what I have already said, but so that the crasser may also be catered for, we make it clear by laying it out in order a little more openly.

When you have closed your Philosophical egg, you will have the oven of your athanor ready with a dish of glass and copper, about six or seven finger-breadths deep. In this put a layer of fresh horse-dung or softest hay, two fingers deep, or a little more, upon which you are to place your glass egg. Pack it round with dung or hay carefully, so that it cannot move, but do not pack any higher than the depth of the material in the round vessel.

If you observe that the glass does not stand firmly enough, do not be ashamed to make a circular piece from a plank, and to make a hole in it of the size that will best fit the glass. In another part of it, away from the middle, make another finger-sized hole, through which you will be able to pour water as often as necessary. Then put the plank on the dung surrounding the round vessel, so that part of the vessel appears through the middle of the hole, and place two or three pieces of brick on the plank, so that it is held firmly.



When you have done this, pour in as much clear water as will cover the surface of the plank no deeper than the thickness of a reed. Then close your oven with the closure of the athanor, and put a gentle heat underneath that warms as much as the water-bath or horse-dung, as much as feels like the touch of a hot needle, but always without boiling. This you must watch carefully, frequently removing and replacing the cover of the athanor.

Continue this heat of early Spring, or the first grade, or the month of March, for seven days and nights, taking the precaution that when you see the water evaporate with the continual and gentle heat you immediately put a funnel in the hole in the plank, and again pour in warm water, or even cold water, so that the water does not begin to boil from neglect.

When the required number of days has elapsed, take out the round vessel, and see whether the original color has yet turned from white to dark cinder color, or black diluted with white, and put it back in its place before it gets cold. Be careful that your hand is not very cold when it touches the vessel, otherwise it will break.

If you see the color I have spoken of, rejoice, for you have supplied the correct color, and you are looking at the true sign that the seed has already germinated. Do you not see that all shoots are yellow when they first burst from the earth? You must also know, direct investigator of so great a secret, that in this work nothing equals observing with great care the color and the amount of moisture; these are the two things that lead the worker without error from the beginning to the end of the task.

It is for this reason that Geber orders the worker carefully to fix in his mind the peculiarities of each digestion, and to inquire

what causes them. But this will not help the stiff-necked worker, nor the greedy, nor the weak, nor any who is enmeshed in the vanities of this world. If the sign does not appear before your eyes, continue the same degree of heating for four more ordinary days, and then look at it again, and replace it again if the signs do not yet appear, and do this every four days until the signs we have told you of do appear.

During this digestion a certain mercury-like vapour ascends from the earth like a cloud and will stick to the sides of the upper empty part of your egg. This you are to leave intact until you have learnt from its meaning what to do next. Do you not see a sown field giving off many and various vapours both before and after germination? (Do you not see) how some of them are turned into rain and water the field again and supply useful nourishment to the shoots, while others disappear into the air and carry nothing useful to the shoots? Consider carefully, therefore, what is to be done here, and do not rashly convert these exhalations into rain that turns back of its own accord and waters your field.

When you have plain evidence that your seeds have germinated you will know that March has gone and that it is the beginning of the mild Spring of April, and that you should replace the color that hardly differs from that of March with great care, without boiling the water on the dung, so that the shoot born of the seed begins to grow, and strengthen. The sign that the shoot is sprouting is a more plentiful exhalation of moisture, and a change in the aforesaid color into a dark one, with a scarcely noticeable redness. You are to expect the appearance of this sign on the seventh or eighth day after you have begun to apply the heat of early Spring. And you are to

maintain such a regimen during these two intervals of time that the germination of the seed by putrefaction and the sprouting of the shoot by application of a digestive heat are both accomplished.

#### GROWTH OF THE SHOOT

With the end of early Spring, we come to late Spring, when the shoot has already become a plant, begins to raise its twigs, and shows its proper green color. You are therefore to imitate Maytime by applying the greatest heat that water is capable of, without boiling, however, but with the shiver of boiling; this you are to continue until the following signs appear.

First the material shows a dull reddish color on the side, almost black, neither black, nor red, nor brown, but what you will recognize as a mixture of all these. Secondly there is the dryness of the earth, from which you will see if you have properly judged the quantity of the previous exhalations. For if you have clearly seen that there are fewer exhalations with this heat, and that those which are already adhering to the sides of your vessel are not increasing, but remain the same in quantity, you may judge that your earth is dry.

Upon seeing the signs mentioned, you will immediately understand that your shoot has developed and grown and become firm with the hardness proper for grass or reeds. Remember however, son, in case the Philosophers' method of speaking should deceive you, that we are not describing multiplication, but the development of the shoot; for there is no multiplication of the shoot until after the multiplied seed has been sown afresh. Development of the shoot occurs before the seed can multiply in it. Have you not considered the progress of all natural things?

Where have you seen the individual member of any species multiply before its seed has germinated, sprouted, and divided into its parts? And put forth stems, and umbels or clusters, which flower at length, and seeds and fruit are formed from the flowers, and when formed ripen under the influence of the right heat? Are not these many seeds formed from one seed, and when they have ripened properly must you not collect them, cleanse them of their husks, remove their chaff, take them from their shells, and then sow them again, and wait for ripening through the same steps of growth as nature put them through before, and then do you not expect the first multiplication, and finally see and have the first multiplication of the individual?

O fools, what madness! Will you dismiss reason and the works of nature and follow the irrational fantasies of your brain? Does not Geber tell us that all the actions of nature have their predetermined time, and that that which produces an effect is limited to a greater or lesser extent? But indeed, if you are so lacking in reason and intelligence that you cannot understand these things from nature herself and her workings, leave off this most secret art, and flee to the countryman's plough handle and plough, or at least learn from them by imitating nature's ways.

For you indeed, my son, initiated into the study of Philosophy, have already long understood our words where we have not written clearly or intelligibly enough; we have hidden nothing but two things, which no philosopher has ever dared to write openly of, because they are only passed on privitely to sons of the doctrine. And when we learned them privitely from a very vernerable priest advanced in age, we were sworn and bound by oath never to betray them to anyone in

writing, and we were shown the place in the writings of Calid the Philosopher where he attempted to describe them, but God forbade him. The desired effect of this hidden art is obtained from these two things and in no other way.

Therefore, my son, when you labor to follow our words, which are perfectly true, and in no way ambiguous, proceed along this royal road that we have shown you in such a way that you deserve to understand and look upon these two things by the inspiration of God, as if someone had told you in secret. For if your heart is truly righteous and open to Him, He will bring these two matters to you at the right time, as He did me, an unworthy priest: I will pass them on to you privately, like a father leaving a bequest to his son. From the beginning of the work, therefore, remember those two things, which are only passed on by those to whom God the creator has granted a natural death; and mindful of this, proceed carefully, in great fear of God and reverence of nature, exalting your material step by step, so that your shoot may grow, and be brought from its white color to a red one, and your earth be duly dried.

Soon you will hasten to the end of late Spring and turn all the clouds that were in vapor form into rain so that they water your gold, lest the growing plants die from too much dryness. For four ordinary days after the rain maintain the same degree of heat on the watered earth in your egg in the bath on the dung, and note carefully how much vapor ascends again and of what kind it is.

On the fifth day, however, have ready clean sieved cinders in a new jar, about the same amount as there was dung in the bath, and place three or four folds of wet cloth around the joint that joins the dish to the oven of the athanor to loosen the adherent lute more

easily, and when it has softened, take the whole warm bath out of the oven, and immediately put in your dish of sieved cinders. Join it carefully as before to the walls of the furnace with a suitable lute, and apply a heat like that of June, or the second grade, having the cinders well warmed, but not sufficiently hot as to burn your hand if you touch them.

While the glass is still warm from the bath and when the cinders are hot, place it on the hot cinders, so that there is three fingers depth of well compacted cinders beneath the bottom, and pack it round about with compacted cinders to the depth of its contents, or a little more; so early summer has its beginning, and the heat making the new shoots glad requires skillful management. Be careful that the heat of the cinders is the same day and night, so that they do not burn your hand if you touch them, as we have said, nor should the bottom of the dish ever become glowing hot from the fire.

This is the heat of hottest June, of which Maria the prophetess and the Turba Philosophorum speak, saying Digest with a slow fire, that is like the heat of hottest June. And when you have regulated the heat like this for four to seven ordinary days, you should know that your crop is now at the stage where twigs come from shoots, and umbels and clusters from grass, plants and other kinds of vegetable.

The signs by which you will know that the umbels or twigs are being produced are these:- The red that was previously blackish becomes a clearer red, appearing before the blackness is covered by redness, and very little vapor ascends from the earth. Remember, however, to observe the aforesaid rule that you should not convert your clouds into rain until you see that no more ascend from your earth, and that those that have already risen increase no further. Then

you must continue the heat for no more than two days, then convert your clouds into rain that will water your field, so that it may bear fruit in due season.

#### APPEARANCE OF FLOWERS AND FORMATION OF SEEDS

My son, let us give thanks to God the ruler of nature, for already our seed has produced a shoot, increased, grown, and brought forth umbels and clusters. Let us give Him thanks for at His nod our clouds have arisen and given timely rain that has made our field more fruitful. Let us give Him thanks, for the harvesting of the first seed is near, and the vintage approaches. For the field bristles with awns, stalks and ears as if armed with steel, and will soon yield the expected heaps of corn, and the vine has given clusters that will soon be turned into flowers and grapes.

O my son, give thanks to God who has deigned to bestow such wonderful secrets upon us. But I tell you, my son, that unless you follow the light of nature, and him who has shown you those two matters, you are close to error and straying. For what we have just called the conversion of clouds into rain, the ancient Philosophers called the tail of the dragon, and some said it meant multiplication and others the addition of fresh Mercury, not having studied the works of nature correctly.

Some have called our earth water, and when they told us to water our earth frequently, and even submerge it, they did not well understand that this watering must be done by the natural exhalations of the earth, and not by the addition of foreign waters; nor, although all the Philosophers cried it aloud, did they understand their words,

Be careful not to submerge our earth, lest the seeds perish in the flood.

Therefore, my son, you should be careful, and follow the lead of nature in all things, and when you have seen a clearer red colour as the sure sign of the fourth stage when the ears emerge, as we said, apply the same heat, or a little more, for the next four to seven days and nights, so that attractive flowers swell out from the ears and umbels, and show to what species they belong. For the sure sign of those flowers will be a red mineral colour, showing a metallic brilliance, and the vapours that previously ascended in quantity will be much diminished.

Consider, my son, have you ever seen a flower of the field that did not bear witness to its genus and species? Is not the rose known by its flowers, and the eyebright by its? Therefore, will not a metallic red signify the flower of a metal, and promise that a metal is to come? Of course.

This is the sign of early summer, producing both flowers from ears, and new ears from growing stems, and with the continued heat of July, the seed-forming operation, moving and setting in order, brings flowers to perfection.

Come then, my son, when you see the flowers of plants and vegetables, they are a sure sign of fruits and seed to come, according to the course of nature (for we do not speak of monsters); raise (the heat) to that of a fine August, and after your metallic flowers you may be sure of seeing the seed of metals and minerals; but do not increase the heat much, only to that appropriate to the beginning of August.

When you have seen the flowers of your crop appear, apply the same



heat with the cinders for three days and nights, and convert whatever vapors you see ascend into rain, but not so copiously as to destroy the flowers before the seeds have formed. On the fourth day have clean washed sieved sand ready, heat it on a gentle fire, and having taken the cinders out of the dish in the oven of your athanor, put this sand into it, not too hot, and into this place your glass vessel, not cold, but as hot as the sand, and surround it with sand to the depth of its contents, and have three fingers' depth of sand beneath it.

Having done this, heat the sand for one week, or until you see the red of your material shine golden yellow, with very little or no vapour rising. When you see this, give thanks to God with hands raised to Heaven that late summer has given its fruit, and that your seeds are furnished with stems, the two signs of this being, as we have said, very little exhalation of vapor, and an almost golden yellow color in your material. But if some moist vapors still arise, do not be concerned. Do you not know that when fruit and seeds are formed, they are not to be plucked at once, but that one must await their ripening, which perfects them? Do not the figs formed in one year ripen in the next? Do not grapes, formed in June, or sometimes May, finally ripen in the month of September? Therefore restrain the hastiness of your desire, my son, and do break off the work before it is perfectly ripe. Be patient and magnanimous, and await the determined time.

#### COLLECTION OF THE SEED

Behold, my dearest son, your longed-for harvest approaches. Be

glad and give immortal thanks to immortal God, who allowed us to understand these things, and directed my words to true and open speech on the matter. And you, my son, adore Him as a suppliant, so that when you begin the work, He may consent to show you those two hidden matters, so that you too, a student of this exalted philosophy, may be worthy to come to the precious banquets of this secret feast, and be able to pluck the golden apples of the Hesperides in the garden of Tantalus, having first, as the fables warn us, put the watchful dragon to sleep.

But since the garden is surrounded by a solid wall, how will you enter? How will you recognize the tree that bears the golden apples? How will you pluck them? O my dearest son, do you not see that the garden has been made on a high and barren mountain, whose bottom part is ever loud with the warring powers of discordant winds, where a kind of insatiable chaos nurtures the perpetual fight of heat and cold, and the middle part contains red and black dragons, that war continually with the insatiable chaos and the winds, and when the fury of the red dragons has been increased by the stimulation of contrary winds, they perish in their own heat, and chaos receives their corpse?

Nor does the eternal battle ever cease, for once the red dragons have died, black ones succeed them, that blaze up and take fire with their fury, and when they die like the red dragons, others at once follow, as we said. And this battle never finishes, for chaos and the winds never cease, nor do the black dragons ever lack issue.

The lord and guardian of the mountain, conquering the offspring of the black dragons, enters the middle of the mountain at certain times. The mountain peak appears in three different ways during a single year, for in winter it blazes up like Mount Etna with hot sparks, in

spring, the fire being first extinguished, it is flooded with stagnant hot waters and reedy marshes. In summer, when the hot waters have been completely absorbed, there are warm ashes here, which are sometimes so hot that you might believe they are being burned by winter's fire. In autumn the ashes in their turn disappear, and fine sand, very hot, sometimes to red heat, takes their place, which I take to be the remains, or at least the base, of those hot stagnant waters of spring.

It is in this mountain, my son, that I think you will see the royal gardens of the Hesperides, where there are golden and silver roses, and golden and silver oranges, bearing their fruit each year. However, the way to this garden is difficult, to enter more difficult still and to pluck the golden and silver apples by far the most difficult of all.

For the mountain's practice is to admit no one except in the cold of winter. Approach therefore in winter time, and do not shiver in the cold, for you will hardly be able to bear the heat of the fire that is at the entrance to the garden. On the summit of the mountain you will also see a high tower guarding the garden, with two ramparts that are all ablaze. You must be willing to enter the garden, especially to tame the bulls breathing fire through their nostrils, and pass through the fiery ramparts. It may be achieved with great labour and loss of time. It is certainly such a great task that you will not be able to pass before the end of winter. Moreover, danger from the flames of the huge fires and the heat threatens greatly.

At this entrance are to be acquired the medicines that Medea gave to Jason when he tried to enter the garden in former times. But if,

dear son, you cannot find this medicine, work diligently to find a way to pass unharmed through the fortifications mentioned, for if you pass them by without going through them, you will never be able to enter the garden.

But I was seized by great lust and desire for the garden, and when I saw that I could not pass through the flames unscathed, I was unwilling to leave, expecting someone to come who would tell me how to pass, or that perhaps the heat of the fire would lessen. Now nobody came to me, and by and by winter ended at the entrance, and behold, suddenly there was a great commotion in the tower, and the flames began to diminish, and shortly afterwards they were extinguished, and the tower and the ramparts were partly swallowed up. When this occurred, at that very moment when the tower stood still, I ran towards the garden, somewhat astonished at what I had seen happening.

When I had got near the garden I was prevented from entering it by hot stagnant waters everywhere, for the garden was in the middle of the hot stagnant waters, surrounded by a hard transparent wall, and the garden and the waters themselves were surrounded by a brick wall. However, I saw three narrow steps in a footpath, whereby there was hope of access, so I began to follow it without delay, and the brick wall opened for me. When I was on the first step a certain evil-smelling and offensive rottenness forced me to delay.

The heat was also conducive to putrefaction, nevertheless, when I finally overcame it, it gave access to the second and third steps, upon each of which something occurred to hinder me; but when I began to think I was near the garden, the mountain was suddenly shaken by a tremor, the waters were swallowed up, and a deep ditch around the

brick wall was left, the bottom of which was seething all over with hot ashes. Three lines of channels were around the garden in the middle of the ashes, of different heats, so that the one nearest the garden was much hotter than the others. I struggled, however, until I reached the bank of the third channel, when the mountain was again shaken by a tremor, and covered in a dark layer of ashes, then hot sand appeared in their place, surrounding the garden on all sides in a single heap.

At this I began to have great hope that the end of my toil was near, and it soon happened, for as I was looking from the heap at the beautiful flowers in the garden, I saw many wonderful things, of which it is not proper to speak, and I was astonished and fell into such a stupor that an old man who had entered the garden could scarcely rescue me from it. I also saw that he had seven keys in his hand, with which I thought he then opened the locks of the doors, while I stood amazed on the mound.

This venerable old man then led me to a tree of golden apples, near which a dragon that had been recently killed lay dead, and the golden apples were stained with his blood. My soul burned with desire to pluck the golden apples. The old man, recognized this, looked at me calmly and said. Lay aside, my son, the enticements of earthly desires, for these fruits are given only to those of divine disposition. At his words I shook all over, for I had not heard such a voice before, and at it I became as it were changed, and it seemed to me that I understood many more things.

His appearance also seemed to me to change to something else august and terrible, and I recognized him as the lord of the garden, not the gardener. Suddenly I was greatly afraid that my rashness in thinking that I could ever furtively enter the garden of so great a lord

would be punished. But while I was anxiously turning these things over in my mind, held by fear, desire and hope, he put out his hand and plucked some golden apples, and looked at me and the apples by turns said, This is the garden of good fortune and wisdom that we planted for the delight of men; to keep out wild beasts we surround it by a strong wall; and when we saw that men sought it by fraud and guile, we allowed no intelligent beings to enter, unless they were the just, pure, honest and good whor we had attracted ourself; and if we judge them to be constant we bring them here after many labours, and send them gently away, enriched by gifts of this kind.

So saying he gave me the apples that he had plucked, which I, falling down before him, took up with as much reverence and respect as I could, and hid in my bosom, rejoicing. And while I was preparing to render him the thanks that I felt in my soul, he said, This is not the end, my son, but follow me, and he led me into a workshop where the golden apples that required to be cleaned of the blood of the dragon had been washed and purified; he took a certain white sparkling powder from a wooden box and gave me some, saying, This is the powder that cleanses all stains, and revives the dead, go, and hide it secretly, purify the besmirched (apples) with fire and this powder, cultivate your earth, and sow the purified (seed) and it will grow, and your earth will yield you much fruit.

With these words he disappeared from my sight. I was amazed and astonished and when I had come to my senses I thought I had been roused from a dream, and tired and weary as if from a long journey and much labour, I fell into bed, and it would all have seemed like a dream to me, except that I held the golden apples and the powder in my hand, and remembered all that had been said so exactly. But :

whether I truly entered the garden, or whether I was carried thither in a vision, or whether I saw it in a dream, blessed be His name for ever Who saw fit to open to me the great mysteries of nature, and did not withhold His gifts from me, an unworthy sinner. Praised, blessed and exalted be Father Son and Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever, Amen.

#### CONCLUSION

You have, my son, the whole process of our work, without any abridgement or any superfluity, rendered in an accomplished style of narration. Prepare your heart, therefore, that you may find favour in the sight of God, for it is the gift of God, partaking of the mystery of the oneness of the Holy Trinity. O most famous science, that is the theater of universal nature, and its anatomy, earthly astrology, argument for the omnipotence of God, testimony to the resurrection of the dead, example of the remission of sins, infallible foreshadowing of the judgement to come, and mirror of eternal blessedness.

There is no undertaking more excellent than this, seeing that it contains and embraces all the sciences, and is itself contained by none of them. To you, ineffable Majesty, be given everlasting thanks praise and benediction, for You have not hidden your favours from me, You have revealed to me the mysteries of this secret art, therefore, blessed by Your name for eternal ages. Amen.

The foolish man will not recognize it, nor the simpleton understand it, *Sugar to the Parrot, hay to the Cow.*

END