

THE TRUE METHOD OF CONFECTING THE STONE OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

A LETTER TO HIS RELIGIOUS SUPERIOR BY:
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Translated from Latin by: *Madeline Wright*

There are two principles governing this art. The first thing to note is that this substance, which has been written about by all the philosophers of antiquity, is living silver of the wise. It is known by other names; gold, medicine, the philosophers' stone, the elixir, and countless other names, as will be clearly understood in the discussion that follows. Moreover, this physical medicine is called gold, as Geber explains: "The thing that converts and transforms natural metals into true gold is gold". And so he correctly says that "what makes gold, is gold; but philosophic medicine makes this, therefore, etc." And it should be noted that there are fundamentally two principia of this substance, namely matter and agent. As one of the philosophers explains, the matter is living silver and sulphur- or arsenic, which is the same thing. Take this well into account, reverend father, since-as the philosophers say-living silver is not the principium of this substance, either in its own nature or in the nature to which its own mineral has reduced it. It is the principium only in the nature of which it is brought by artifice. The same is true of sulphur and whatever sulphur is combined with. The reason is that no one has found anything in silver minerals or in any other minerals that can become living silver in its own nature, or that can become sulphur alone. Much less has anyone found any single thing separate from these, residing in its own mineral and its own nature. This living silver and sulphur, as I have already told you and explained to you, has never been dealt with anywhere in its entirety. It has been produced or deduced as a specific aqueous nature, extremely subtle,

clear, bright and pleasing, known to the Philosophers as living silver. It has also been produced as a specific earthly nature, which is known as sulphur made by artifice. The philosophers kept it marvellously hidden, wanting it to remain secret. They wrote of it in their books in fragmentary passages and only rarely. And so, reverend father, I plan to have nothing to do with the subject of this artifice. Therefore you will not be able to do any experiments, nor would it be a good idea for you to have someone else do experiments. For one thing, it would take a great deal of space to tell you everything you would need for this particular artifice. It is time-consuming, expensive, extremely difficult, and very dangerous for those who do not have much experience.

It is important to note that the philosophers said that this living silver and this sulphur were one and the same substance. "In fact, it is such a substance that it is only one substance, issuing from one substance, as I have explained elsewhere." The proof that it is one substance is that they sometimes call living silver sulphur, and sulphur living silver, as well as both at the same time: living silver and sulphur. All the philosophers, in many specific passages, say that it constitutes one substance. Lucas says: "Have no doubt that the basis of this art, for which so many have laid down their lives, is one single thing." And Diomedes says: "We make use of a truly awesome nature, since a nature can only be added to in its own nature. Do not introduce anything foreign to it." And Bocosen says: "Be careful not to introduce anything foreign, for our art has no need of more than one substance, as Geber has noted above." And Astanus says: "There is only one nature than can overcome all things." Similarly, Pythagoras says: "Though the substance is known by many names, its true name remains one and the same." The philosophers have made many comments like these; it would take too much space to list them all. They are all designed to show and to prove that there is only one substance on which nature can exercise its action in this operation. This substance, as I have explained above,

is the living silver and sulphur that I have pointed out. But someone may ask why, if there is only one such substance, the philosophers have called it by so many names and compared it to so many other things. There are many reasons for this. Diomedes says: "They did this because they are so foolish and ignorant that they did not recognize the substance." Similarly, Morienus says: "These hateful men piled up names and misled later generations. They even call themselves hateful, since they hate for anyone but themselves to profit from this knowledge." Similarly, Pythagoras says: "They have given this substance various names, because of the excellence of its nature." Bonellus says: "They multiply the names, because in the operation of this substance appears every color that can be imagined. So they divide up its names according to the different colors. All the elements are contained in the work itself; therefore they gave the substance the name of each element in it." Since there are four elements in the substance, Orpholeus says: "According to my teaching, remember that you must mix together pure, crude, unmixed, and direct elements over the fire. Do not allow the fire to get too intense before the elements are conjoined and bound to each other. Therefore elements that are cooked over a slow fire are most prized and most ready to be turned into other natures." That is Orpholeus' comment. Also, the philosopher says: "Convert the elements, and you will find what you are looking for. To convert the elements, as another writer says, is to make what is moist dry, what is dry moist, and what is fleeting fixed. Then you have the four elements that are in this single substance, which are visibly manifest and can be extracted naturally. Therefore the philosophers call it water, the four bodies, and the four natures." Hermes says: "This water is celestial in nature, causing the separation of the elements that exist in bodily objects near it. Then it compounds them once again

and reduces them to a unity." Nimidus says: "This perfect compound is made of all four elements. But the multiplication of names has been a cause of error for men who work with unworthy materials--for example, salts, alum, urine, dung, human blood, sulphur, living silver occurring in nature, in marchasitis, and in many other things. They do not even know that nothing can be found in a substance that is not already there, as Geber says. They do not understand what the philosophers have said in their writings using simile and metaphor. They think that their art is beyond all price and so inviolably secret that it must never be revealed to anyone!" The philosophers have said so many things about this water or this substance that it would take too long to relate them. Therefore you have the material principia of this substance, or the material cause, which is called the medicine of the philosophers: living silver and sulphur. What remains to be discovered is the agent cause. What acts on this matter or moves it to corruption is the heat that is the instrument moving it to putrefaction. There is no other agent in the world. This is what Alphidius the philosopher said: "My sons, understand that the agent substance in the entire world is this one thing--heat. Without heat there is no movement or action. The very root of the disposition of matter is heat, though there are many degrees of heat or fire. One must determine which fire is present, and in which degree. The present fire is undoubtedly the fire of heat from horse dung. It should be cooked in the kind of fire which I will describe to you. It keeps itself concealed in moist horse dung, which is the fire of the wise, both moist and dark. It is warm in the first degree and moist in the second. All the philosophers spoke about this heat metaphorically and with many errors. They likened it to the heat of the sun and the natural heat of a healthy person." Mesig says: "The substance congeals in the heat of the sun. And so fools who use different

kinds of fire are misled. They do not understand the words of the philosophers, since they do not know that the generation and procreation of natural things can only take place at a very moderate and even heat, never an excessive one."

Method of mixing

Now that we have seen the natural principia of this substance, we turn to the method of mixing or conceiving them. It must be noted that the material principia of this substance, which nature uses for its action in a marvellous operation, are living silver and sulphur, as has been pointed out. Each of these is of the strongest composition and most uniform substance. They are so closely joined in the smallest parts that no part can be loosed from another when they are resolved. On the contrary, whatever part runs forth is resolved because of the unity of form which the parts have each to the other even in the smallest fragments. They are resolved by the even, agent heat in their own nature, according to the requirements of their essence. It is important to notice that the sulphur and living silver is converted to an earthly nature, and that from both the earthly natures a very fine smoke resolves out and is multiplied by the heat in the vessel. And this double smoke is the matter of metals or medicines, or the components of the philosophers' stone. It is converted into the nature of this same earth by smoke and moderate heat in the vessel of its decoction. Then it takes on a certain fixity, which makes it possible for the water flowing through the vessel to destroy its porousness. And so it becomes viscous throughout, and all the elements, each in its own natural proportion, arrive at a unity. They mix together even in the smallest particles until they achieve a uniform mixture. This is done through successive decoction, every day, at the most moderate heat in a vessel, until the particles thicken and harden. Then they are medicines, or metals, or the philosophers' stone. So

Morienus says: "The disposition of the wise and the transformation of natures is the remarkable mixture of these natures by means of the hot, cold, moist, dry, and subtle dispositions." That is the only argument of the wise. Note the entry, submersion, fixity, connection, thickening, conjunction, joining, composition, and mixture, since when these are combined in order all other things are mixed together. According to Democritus, all these things are one and the same. There is a mixture of things that can be mixed, that is, of elements: for these are the first principia of every single thing that is mixed. We cannot know either the manifest or the hidden nature of anything that is mixed unless we know how to mix or compound those elements. Hermes says: "Children of the wise, understand the science of the four elements, which follows its own reasoning in a sort of hidden revelation. The hidden revelation of the elements means nothing unless it is compounded, which cannot come about as long as it is passing through its various colors." Note that this takes place in the smallest--that is, indivisible--particles. For the smallest particle is the one that is indivisible. If it can be further divided, it cannot be the smallest. So it is clear that the mixture of elements takes place in the smallest particles of a body--namely, the indivisible particles. For an element consists of the smallest, simple particles of a body.

Concerning the effects of the principia

Next I shall set forth the effects of these principia, namely living silver and sulphur. As proof of them, one should take into account that there are several degrees in the operation of this substance. Lucas says in the Turba: "It does not need several substances, but only one, and that one substance can be changed into another nature in each single degree of any work.

The kinds of degrees correspond to the various proportions of elements that can be mixed and that come forth in the operation." The philosophers named each operation in each degree according to the order it attains in nature and in its process of generation. They called the first degree of operation iron or Mars; the second copper or Venus; the third, lead or Saturn; the fourth, tin or Jupiter; the fifth, silver or the Moon; and the sixth, the Sun or gold. Metaphorically, they gave countless other names to these metals, all in order to keep the knowledge secret. These, in so far as they are generated from the same first principia--that is, from a single first matter, which is living silver and sulphur--are rightly named the effects of those principia, living silver and sulphur. The philosophers have defined each of them separately and specifically according to their various properties. Each is dealt with separately because each has a different composition and generation in the process of creation or production. One should note that the philosophers sometimes give the name of iron or lead to the substance they know as their specific gold, and so on with the others. Also, conversely, they call gold iron or lead, and so on with the others. And this is true in various respects, since the resolution and corruption of one thing is the generation or cause of another. To that extent, the effect resides in its cause. So they were able to say that gold is lead, and so on with the rest. You can see how men who work with natural metals, calcining, dissolving, and congealing them, made their mistake. They believed that they were making philosophic medicine from these metals, because the philosophers say that gold can be brought out of iron, lead, and the rest. Also because the substance they call gold or the medicine of gold is produced from the resolution or corruption of other metals. For all the metals mentioned above are generated and corrupted in this very operation, and the specific gold

of each is generated from them. So they were able to say that iron and the rest are gold, since the cause is in a way its own effect. For these reasons the other metals can exchange their names back and forth, in so far as the corruption of one is the generation of another. It should be noted that the philosophers call all these metals living silver and sulphur, because they all come into being from those two. And the philosophers called these processes of generation of metals complexions. They are all unbalanced compared with gold. They said that only the complexion or perfection of gold is balanced. And they looked for only one complexion or generation among all of them, namely the balanced one, the one belonging to gold. Johanninus wrote about it: "The elemental mixture is only this one, for its body remains intact even when it is modified." Note that he speaks about moderation of the four natures--heat, cold, moisture, and dryness. When no one of these natures is greater than any other, the body is rightly called balanced. What is true of one is true of the others. And it is also rightly called intact, that is, sound, and pure of every cause of corruption. Note that tin and lead meet these standards. It is itself gold or the medicine of gold. Geber says: "Tin is the purest lead. Its two components, living silver and sulphur, have a quality of fixity and thickness. It is not a matter of quantity, since it surpasses living silver when it is mixed." Hermes and the Sons of the Philosophers say: "There are seven bodies whose first mode of generation is not gold, but the intention of nature, since nature always seeks and moves toward what is best, noblest, and most perfect. It is first in nobility and worth. Its chief and king is gold, which earth cannot corrupt nor fire burn nor water alter. That is because its complexion is tempered and its nature is stable in heat, cold, moisture, and dryness. There is no excess or defect in it. And so the philosophers exalted and magnified it, saying: "Gold

has the same place among bodies or metals that the Sun has among the stars." We must still determine the principia of artifice of the substance we are seeking. Note that they are called principia of artifice even though they occur in nature, because nature can only operate through their aid and artifice. They are the methods of operation. Only by their agency can the substance we are seeking be generated and brought to actual existence. The first method is sublimation, the second descension, the third distillation, the fourth calcination, the fifth solution, the sixth congelation, the seventh fixation, and the eighth iteration. And there are countless others like these. These methods seem different, but they are all really the same. Once the philosophers were looking at matter which was in a vessel, caught the heat of the sun and exhaled or evaporated in the form of a very fine smoke. So it rose to the top of the vessel. They called this ascension or sublimation. Afterward, they saw the material which had risen descend to the bottom of the vessel and called it distillation or descension. When they saw the matter thicken, turn black, and give off a fetid smell, they called it putrefaction. Much later, they saw the black or dark color fade, and a paleness like that of ash take over. This they called incineration or whitening. Morienus says: "The entire teaching is nothing but extraction of water from earth and pouring water back to earth until it putrifies. And when the earth is putrified from the water, and later everything is purified with the help of the instigator, the entire teaching is complete. When they saw the earth mixed with water, and then saw the water gradually decrease and the earth increase as slow decoction proceeds, they all pronounced that ceration had taken place." The philosopher says: " The earth is cerated with water, drinks it in, and then dries in slow decoction by the heat of the sun. Then the entire matter turns to earth." Again, he says: "It is complete if it has been changed

into earth." They saw that the entire matter arrived at a kind of dissipation, and that it somehow was reduced to a solid substance. Since it no longer flowed but stayed still and firm, they said that it was in perfect congelation. Plato says: "Dissolve the stone, and then congeal it with great care, as you have been instructed. Then you have almost the entire teaching." In another passage, he says: "Take the stone, put it in a vessel, and roast it over a slow fire until it breaks apart. Then cook it in the heat of the sun until it congeals. Then you will know that the entire teaching is nothing but how to make a solution of substances and a perfect and natural congelation." He also says: "Dissolve, congeal, and then you will understand the entire teaching." The philosophers saw the matter perfectly congealed and thickened, so that it could never again turn to liquid or smoke by any means. They said that it was truly fixed, because they saw that the same congelation and thickening, or fusion, had come to perfect desiccation and whitening by a long decoction over heat. This whiteness was purer than any other; and they called it perfect calcination. When they saw that the matter had come to a stable heat and had turned countless different colors, which can only happen in resolution of the matter, they called it solution. In such resolution, elements cease to be continuous. They are both active and passive alternately. So the philosophers call these elements mates. And the fools who believe that physical medicine can be created from any substance are grievously wrong. The philosophers say that the alchemical sons who put their trust in all their dissolutions, sublimations, conjunctions, separations, congelations, preparations, grindings (contritions), and other such processes are obstinate in their errors. And let us hear no more from those who preach that there is any use or place in this operation for any other gold than ours; any other water than ours (which is also called extremely sour vinegar); any other dissolution

and congelation than ours, which is made over a slow fire; any other putrefaction than ours; any other volatile substance than ours, whether a spirit or anything besides our own living silver and sulphur; any other alum or salt than ours, which in its whiteness is called the Flower of white salt. And let us hear no more about any other egg or any other human blood than ours, or anything else extracted from any vegetable matter, or human being, or brute beast. It is always possible to make an error in that regard, since our stone has as many names as it has substances. Let everyone hear what so many philosophers have said: nothing but a human being can be produced by a human being. And the same is true of animal and vegetable creatures. Many have made false application of their knowledge, to the point that they themselves are deservedly known as fakers. And let all those who believe that our work can be accomplished with the dust of the brute basilisk be silent. Perhaps they have been misled by philosophers who said that our stone smells like the air coming from a tomb. So perhaps that is why they chose the basilisk, which reportedly has a fetid stench. If, on the other hand, you find that our substance is being properly nourished, like an embryo in the womb (as some of the philosophers say), this is because it has been decocted over moderate heat. The length of time is not the reason. The substance congeals at a moderate temperature; when someone claims that it takes its nourishment from eggs, you will see, etc. Note that the entire teaching and intention of the philosophers is simply to divide, purify, and unite. Again, entire perfection is nothing other than perfect solution and congelation. Note that the entire procedure consists of fire and heat. Entire perfection is simply this--to convert the elements. The entire procedure is simply to cook, roast, fit onto thin tablets, file, cut with scissors, trim, putrify, incinerate, water, separate, divide, purify, whiten, redden, dissolve, shred, wax, mix, heat, pluck,

sift, irrigate, moisten, weaken, absorb, starve, dehydrate, boil, mince, pour, cut with a fiery sword, pound with a hammer, separate the soul from the body, pour through, convert body to spirit and spirit to body, mate, impregnate, sublimate, fix, descend, calcine, dissolve, corrupt, and coagulate. This is all. There is nothing more, save to distill it in fiery heat in a cucurbit and alembic. All this is kept as a great secret of the art, as the following verses show:

The five substances are one, in only one vessel, and only one boiling:

There is only this one recipe for this one substance.

This is the philosophers' general rule: that a moist substance can thicken only if there has first been an exhalation of very fine particles from it. Also, its thicker particles must first have become finer. This takes place when the moist is stronger than the dry in composition or mixture, and there is a genuine mixture of dry and moist, so that the moist is tempered by the dry, and the dry by the moist. This can only be done by mixing together the viscous, moist part and the fine, earthy part in their smallest particles until the moist and dry are completely homogenized. The resolution or exhalation of the fine, vaporous particles or fumes cannot be done all at once, but only gradually and over a long period of time. The cause or reason for this is that the substance of the principia is uniform. The resolution of excess moisture from them must not be done too fast, since the moist and the dry are scarcely separate. The mixture between them is strong. There is one continual, even cause of the thickening or composition of the metals, because of the strong union of the viscous, moist part and the fine, vaporous part.

The End