

Pontanus - Epistle on the mineral fire

This was first printed in Latin in 1600, and a number of editions were issued during the 17th century. This short text seems to have been of especial interest to English alchemists. This translation was transcribed from *Cheiragogia Heliana. A manuduction to the philosopher's magical gold... To which is added...Zoroaster's cave; or, an intellectuall echo, &c. Together with the famous Catholic epistle of John Pontanus upon the minerall fire. By Geo. Thor. Astromagus.* London 1659.

John Pontanus upon The mineral Fire; and the Great Elixir, commonly called The Philosophers Stone.

I John Pontanus have travelled over many regions, that I might learn something that was certain concerning the philosophers stone; and, compassing almost the whole world, met with none but impostors, false deceivers, and no philosophers: But studying always, doubting much, and casting every way, at length I found the truth: But when I knew the matter, I erred two hundred times before I found the true matter, with the operation, and practice upon it. First, I fell to putrefie the matter nine months together, and found nothing: I put it in St. Mary's Bath for a certain time, and erred in that, as before. Then for three months I put it to a fire of Calcination, and wrought amisse: all manner of Distillations, and Sublimations, such as the Philosophers, as Geber, Archelaus, and almost all the rest, say, or seem to say, should be used, I practised; and found nothing still. Then again I tried to perfect the subject of the whole alchymical art, all the wayes that can be imagined; by baths, by dungs, by ashes, and a multiplicity of other fires, which are yet found in the philosophers books; and yet for all that I found no good. Wherefore, for three years continued, I studied the philosophers' books, but chiefly the works of Hermes alone, whose shorter words comprehend the whole stone; although he speaks obscurely of the Superior, and Inferior, of the Heaven, and of the Earth. The first instrument therefore that brings the matter to its Esse in the first, second and third work, is not the fire of the bath, nor of dung, nor ashes, nor of the other heats which the philosophers have in their books. What therefore is that fire that perfects the whole work from the beginning to the end? Certainly the philosophers have always concealed it; but I being moved with piety, and kindness to men, will declare it to you, together with the complement of the whole work. It is then the philosophers' stone, but is called by various names, and thou shalt find it hard to know: For it is watery, airy, fiery and earthy; phlegmatic, choleric and melancholy; it is sulphureous, and is likewise argent vive: and has many superfluities in it: all which, by the living God, are turned into a true essence, our fire mediating: And he that separates any thing from the subject thinking that necessary, knows nothing in philosophy; because whatever is superfluous, unclean, foul or feculent, finally the whole substance of the subject is perfected to a spiritual body fixed, by mediation of our fire. And this the Philosophers never revealed, and therefore few come at the art, thinking there is some such superfluous nature to be removed. And now we are to draw out the properties of our fire, and try, whether according to the manner that I have said, it be so fitted to our matter, that it may be transmuted by it, since that fire burns not the matter, separates nothing from it, parts not the pure from the impure (as all philosophers say) but turns the whole subject to purity: It does not sublime as Geber make his sublimations and as Arnoldus, and others speaking of sublimation and distillation, such as are perfected in a short time.

It is mineral, it is equal, it is continual, it vapours not away unless it be stirred up too much; it also partakes of sulphur, and is taken from somewhere else than from the matter; it pulls down all, dissolves and congeales, and calcines: the invention of it is artificial: it is a compendium without cost, or with very little; and that fire is of a moderate ignition, because with a remiss fire the whole work is perfected, and all the right sublimations made. Whosoever should read Geber, and all the rest, if they should live an hundred thousand years, would not be able to comprehend it, because that fire is found only by profound imagination; and then it may be comprehended in the books, and not before. The error therefore of this art, is, not to find the Fire, which turns the whole matter into the true Stone of the Philosophers. Take it then for thy study; for if I had found this fire at first, I had not erred two hundred times in my practice upon the matter: wherefore I wonder not, that so many, and great wits, have not come at the work. They err, have erred, and will err still, because the Philosophers have not set down the proper agent; one only excepted, Artepheus by name, but he speaks for himself; and if I had not read Artepheus and heard him what he said, I had never attained the perfect work. But this is the practice. Take it, bruise it, and bring it down diligently by natural contrition, and put it to the fire, and know the proportion of your fire, namely that it is to be no stronger than only to excite the matter, and in a short time even that fire without any opposition of hands, will certainly complete the whole work; for it will putrefy, corrupt, generate, and perfect, and make it to appear in their times the three

principal colours, black, white and red. And by mediation of our fire, the medicine will be multiplied if it be joined with crude matter, not only in quantity, but also in virtue. Therefore with all thy power look after thy fire, and thou mayst prosper in thy work, because it does the whole work, and is the key of the philosophers which they never discovered. But thou shalt come to know it by a right, profound thinking upon the properties of the fire set down before, and no otherways. This I writ out of piety, and that I may satisfy thee finally; The fire is not transmuted with the matter, because it is not of the matter, as I told you before. This much I had in mind to say, and admonish the prudent, that they spend not their money to no purpose, but that they should know what they are to look for, and so they may attain to the truth and no other way.