

The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart (1631)

Chapter 11: The Pilgrim Came among the Philosophers

Then my interpreter addressed me: "Now I shall lead you among the philosophers whose task it is to discover the means of correcting all human deficiencies and to show the essence of true wisdom." "God grant that I shall at last learn something certain," said I. "Of course you will," he replied; "for these are men who know the truth of everything, without whose knowledge neither heaven manifests itself nor does the abyss hide anything; they guide human life nobly to virtue, enlighten communities and countries, and have God for their friend; for their wisdom penetrates His secrets." "Let us hurry, please," I urged; "let us go among them as quickly as possible." But when he brought me among these men, and I saw a crowd of these oldsters with their strange antics, I stood as if petrified. For there Bion sat still, Anacharsis strolled about, Thales flew, Hesiod plowed, Plato chased ideas in the air, Homer sang, Aristotle disputed, Pythagoras kept still, Epimenides slept, Archimedes tried to push the earth away, Solon was composing laws and Galen prescriptions, Euclid was measuring the hall, Cleobulus was peering into the future, Periander was defining duties, Pittacus was waging war, Bias was begging, Epictetus was serving, Seneca, sitting among tons of gold, was extolling poverty, Socrates was confiding to everybody that he knew nothing, Xenophon, on the contrary, was promising to teach everything to everybody, Diogenes, peering out of his barrel, was deriding all passersby, Timon was cursing all, Democritus was laughing at it all, Heraclitus, on the contrary, was weeping, Zeno was fasting, Epicurus was feasting, while Anaxarchus was holding forth that all these things were only apparent, not real. Moreover, there was a flock of smaller philosophical fry, each of whom was doing something extraordinary; but I neither remember nor care to recount it all. Observing it all, I said: "Are these, then, the wise men, the light

of the world? Alas! Alas! I had hoped for better things! For these act like peasants in a tavern: they all howl, and each to a different tune." "You are a dunce," my interpreter retorted, "you do not understand such mysteries." Hearing that there were mysteries, I began to scrutinize the crowd meticulously, while my interpreter began to explain them to me. Straightway a man (called Paul of Tarsus) in a philosopher's garb, approached me and whispered into my ear: "If any man among you thinks he is wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise. For the wisdom of the world is but foolishness with God. For it is written: The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise that they are futile." Perceiving that what my eyes have seen and my ears have heard agreed with this speech, I willingly acquiesced and said: "Let us go elsewhere." My interpreter scolded me for being such a fool, saying that when I might learn something among the wise, I ran away from them. But I pressed on in silence.

He came among the grammarians

We then entered a lecture room full of young and old, who, with pointers in their hands, were engaged in drawing letters, dashes, and dots; whenever any of them wrote or pronounced his formula differently from the rest, they either ridiculed or scolded him. Moreover, they hung some words on the wall and disputed as to what belonged to which; then they composed, separated, or transposed them variously. I looked at this for a while, but seeing nothing in it, I said: "These are but childish trivialities. Let us go elsewhere."

Among the rhetoricians

Thereupon we entered another hall where many were gathered with brushes in their hands, discussing how words, either written or escaping from the mouth into the air, could be painted green, red, black, white, or any other color desired. I inquired what the purpose of this procedure. "This is done in order that the hearer's brain may be colored in different ways," my interpreter replied. "Are these disguises intended to bring out truth or falsehood?" I continued. "Either one," he answered. "Then there is as much fraud and falsehood as truth and benefit in it," I remarked, and went out.

Among the poets

We then entered another place; and behold! a crowd of spry-looking adolescents weighing syllables in scales and arranging them in feet, meanwhile rejoicing over their work and skipping about. I was amazed and inquired what it all meant. "Of all literary arts," my interpreter explained, "this one is the most skillful and gay." "But what is it?" I inquired. "Whatever cannot be managed by simple coloring of the words," he answered, "is accomplished by this folding process." Noticing that those who were learning this art of word-folding consulted certain books, I also glanced into them and read their titles: *De Culice*, *De Passere*, *De Lesbia*, *De Priapo*, *De arte amandi*, *Metamorphoses*, *Encomia*, *Satirae*, or in a word, farces, poems, comedies, and all kinds of other frivolities. This made me somehow loathe the whole thing. Especially when I perceived that whenever anyone flattered those syllable-mongers, they expended all their art on his adulation; but whenever anyone displeased them, they showered him with sarcasms. Thus the art was used for nothing but flattery or defamation. Discerning what passionate folk they were, I gladly hurried away from them.

Among the dialecticians

Entering another building, we found that lenses for glasses were ground and sold there. I inquired what they were. *Notiones secundae*, they told me. Whoever possessed them could see not only the exterior of things, but to their very core; especially could one look into another's brain and scrutinize his mind. Many people came to buy these glasses, and the masters taught them how to put them on and, if need be, to readjust them. There were special master glass-grinders who had their workshops in obscure nooks; but they did not make the glasses identical. One made them large, another small; one round, another polygonal. Each praised his own wares and tried to attract buyers, while among themselves they quarreled perpetually and heckled each other. Some buyers purchased glasses from each of the makers, and put them all on; others selected and used only one pair. Thereupon some complained that even so they could not penetrate as deeply as they had been told, while others claimed that they could, and pointed to each other beyond the mind and all reason. But I noticed that not a few of these latter, venturing

to step out, stumbled over boulders and stumps and fell into ditches, of which, as I had remarked before, the place was full. "How does it happen," I asked, "that although everything may be seen through the glasses, these people do not avoid the obstacles?" I was told that it was not the fault of the glasses, but of the people who did not know how to use them. The masters added, moreover, that it was not sufficient to possess the glasses of dialectic, but that the eyes must be cleared with the bright eye-salve of physics and mathematics. Therefore, they advised the buyers to repair to the other halls and to have their eyesight improved. Accordingly, they went, one here, another there. Thereupon, I said to my guides: "Let us follow as well." We did not go, however, until at the prompting of Mr. Searchall I had procured and put on several pairs of these glasses. It is true that I seemed able to discern somewhat more than before, and that a particular thing could be seen from several points of view. But still I insisted that we proceed to the place where I could try the eye-salve of which they had spoken.

Among the natural scientists

So we went, and they led me to a certain square in the center of which I saw a large, wide-spreading tree bearing diversely-shaped leaves and various fruit (all in hard shells); they called it Nature. A large number of philosophers had gathered around, examining it and explaining to each other what the name of each branch, leaf, or fruit was. "These, I hear, are learning the names of these things," I said, "but I do not perceive that they apprehend their real being." "Not everyone is able to do that," my interpreter answered; "nevertheless, watch these men here." I saw some of them break off the branches and open the leaves and the shell, and finding the nut, cracking it with such a force that they well-nigh broke their teeth: but they claimed to have broken the shells; then picking over the crushed mass, they boasted to have discovered the kernel, and surreptitiously showed it to a select few among the company. But when I diligently scrutinized the procedure, I perceived plainly that although they had indeed broken the outer husk and the integument, the inner hard shell, containing the kernel, remained whole. Being thus aware of their immodest boasts and

futile toil (for some of them had lost their sight and broken their teeth) I suggested that we go elsewhere.

Among the metaphysicians

Thereupon we entered another hall; and lo! it was full of philosophical gentlemen who were examining cows, asses, wolves, serpents, and various other beasts, birds, reptiles, as well as wood, stone, water, fire, clouds, stars, planets, and indeed even the angels; thereupon they held disputations among themselves as to how each creature could be deprived of its distinctive characteristics so that all might become alike. They first divested them of their form, then of their substance, and finally of all their "accidents", until nothing but the "being" remained. Then they quarreled whether all these things were one and the same; or whether they were all good; or whether they really were what they appeared to be, and about many other similar questions. Some of those observing them expressed their amazement at the surpassing keenness of the human wit that was able to fathom the essence of all things and to divest all corporeal beings of their corporeality; indeed, I myself began to be fascinated by these subtleties. Just then, however, a man stepped out, crying that all these studies were but fantasies, and exhorted all to abandon them. Thereupon some were indeed drawn after him; but others rose up and condemned them as heretics, accusing them of wishing to deprive philosophy of its highest art and, as it were, of decapitating knowledge. Having listened sufficiently to these wranglings, I went away.

CHAPTER XII: THE PILGRIM EXAMINES ALCHEMY

Thereupon Mr. Ubiquitous remarked: "Now come along, for I shall take you to a place where you will find the highest peak of human ingenuity, and show you an occupation so delightful that anyone who has once turned to it is never again willing to abandon it as long as he lives, because of the charm

and delight which it affords his mind." I begged him not to delay in showing me. Thereupon he led me down into some cellars where I saw several rows of fireplaces, small ovens, kettles, and glass instruments, all shining brightly. Men tending the fires were gathering and piling on brushwood and blowing into it, or again extinguishing it, filling and pouring something from one glass into another. "Who are these folk, and what are they doing?" I asked. "They are the most ingenious of philosophers," my interpreter answered, "effecting instantly what the celestial sun with its heat can effect in the bowels of the earth only after a considerable number of years: they transform various metals into their highest category, namely, gold." "But for what purpose," I asked, "since iron and other metals are of more frequent use than gold?" "What a dunce you are!" he exclaimed, "don't you know that gold is the most precious of metals, and that he who has gold need fear no poverty?"

Lapis philosophicus

"Besides, that which has the potency to change metals into gold possesses other most astounding properties: for instance, it can preserve human health to the end of life, and ward off death for two or three hundred years. In fact, if men knew how to use it, they could make themselves immortal. For this stone is nothing less than the seed of life, the kernel and the quintessence of the universe, from which all animals, plants, metals, and the very elements derive their being." I was affrighted, hearing such astounding news, and asked: "Are these people, then, immortal?" "Not all are so fortunate as to discover the stone," he answered, "and those who find it do not always know how to use it effectively." "If I had the stone," I remarked, "I would take care to use it in such a way as to keep death away, and would procure plenty of gold for myself and others. But where is the stone to be found?" "It is prepared here," he answered. "In these small kettles?" I exclaimed. "Yes."

The mishaps of the alchemists

Full of curiosity, I walked about scrutinizing everything to learn what and how the thing was done; but I observed that not all fared equally. The fire of one was not hot enough: his mixture did not reach the boiling point. Another had too intense a fire, and his glass retorts cracked and something puffed

out. As he explained it, the nitrogen had escaped; and he wept. Another, while pouring the liquid, spilled it or mixed it wrongly. Another burned his eyes out, and was thus unable to supervise the calcination and the fixation: or bleared his sight with smoke to such an extent that before he cleared his eyes the nitrogen escaped. Some died of asphyxiation from the smoke. But for the greatest part they did not have enough coal in their bags and were obliged to run about to borrow it elsewhere, while in the meantime their concoction cooled off and was utterly ruined. This was of very frequent, in fact of almost constant, occurrence. Although they did not tolerate anyone among themselves save such as possessed full bags, yet these seemed to have a way of drying up very rapidly, and soon grew empty: they were obliged either to suspend their operations or to run away to borrow.

After watching them, I said: "I see a good many here toil vain; but perceive none who succeeds in getting the stone. I also see that these people boil and burn both their gold and their lives, and often squander and burn both; but where are those with the heaps of gold and immortality?" "Naturally, they do not reveal themselves to you," my interpreter answered, "nor would I advise them so to do. Such a priceless thing must be kept secret. For if one of the rulers learned of such a man, he would immediately demand his surrender and the poor fellow would become no better than a prisoner for life; consequently, them must keep themselves in hiding."

Then I observed some of the scorched ones gather together, and turning my ear toward them, I heard them discuss the causes of their failures. One blamed the philosophers for their too involved description of the art; another lamented the brittleness of the glass implements; a third complained of an untimely and inauspicious aspect of the planets; a fourth was disgruntled with the earthly impurities of the mercury; a fifth complained of lack of capital. In short, there were so many causes of failure that I saw that they were at a loss to know how to mend their art. Thus when they left one after another, I left also.

CHAPTER XIII: THE PILGRIM OBSERVES THE ROSICRUCIANS

Fama fraternitatis, anno 1612 latine ac germanice edita

Then I heard in the square the blare of a trumpet, and turning back I perceived a rider on horseback, calling the philosophers together. When a crowd of them gathered about him from all sides, he began to harangue them in five languages about the imperfections of the liberal arts and of philosophy generally. He announced that certain famous men, impelled by God, had ascertained and corrected all such imperfections, and restored the wisdom of mankind to the same degree of perfection which it had had in paradise before the Fall. To make gold, he said, is the least among hundreds of their accomplishments: for all nature stands naked and uncovered before them and they are able to transfer at pleasure the form of any creature to another. They know the languages of all nations, and are aware of all that is taking place everywhere in the world, including the New World, and are able to discourse among themselves even though they be thousands of miles apart. They also possess the stone, with which they are able to heal perfectly all kinds of diseases, and to impart long life. Thus, for example, their president, Hugo Alverda, had attained the age of five hundred and sixty-two years, and his colleagues not much less. And although they have kept themselves hidden for so many hundreds of years, during which time seven of them devoted themselves to the improvement of philosophy, they have now, at last, brought it all to perfection. Moreover, knowing that the reformation of the whole world is about to begin, they wish no longer to keep themselves in hiding, but announce quickly their willingness to share their priceless secrets with anyone whom they should recognize as being worthy. If any such makes himself known to them, be he of whatever language or nationality, they will learn of it, and no one will be left without a kindly answer. However, if any unworthy person should apply from motives of avarice or idle curiosity, such a person will not be able to learn anything about them.

Varia de fama judicium

Having finished his speech, the herald disappeared; looking about me at the learned, I saw them well-nigh terrified by the news. Gradually they began to put their heads together and to express their judgement about the matter, some in whispers, others aloud. Joining a group here and there, I listened: some were exceedingly glad, hardly knowing how to contain themselves for joy. They pitied their ancestors whose age had afforded them nothing comparable, and considered themselves blessed to be so freely offered a perfect philosophy: to know everything infallibly, to possess everything in abundance, and to live several hundred years without sickness or grey hairs – all to be had by anyone desiring it! They kept on repeating: “Happy, thrice happy, is our age!” Hearing these words, I myself began to rejoice, indulging in the hope of sharing, God willing, the blessings upon which the others were counting. But I saw others buried in deep thought, greatly perplexed what to think of the news. They wished it were true, but the matter appeared to them dubious and surpassing human reason. Others openly rejected it, declaring it to be a fraud and a deceit. “If these men have lived for so many centuries,” they said, “why have they not revealed themselves sooner? If they are so sure of their cause, why do they not step out freely into the light, instead of squeaking like bats out of some obscure nook? Philosophy is well enough established and needs no reformation; should we allow it to be snatched out of our hands, we shall be left without any.” Others even heaped terrible scoffing and abuse upon them, denouncing them as diviners, sorcerers, and demons incarnate.

Fraternitatem ambientes

In short, the whole square was filled with clamor, and almost all burned with the desire to reach the fraternity. Therefore, not a few of them wrote their supplications, some secretly, others openly, and sent them off, full of joy in anticipation of being received into the fraternity. But I perceived that after the supplications had gone to every conceivable nook, all were returned unanswered. Then their joyful hope was turned into grief: besides, they had to endure jeers of the sceptics. Some wrote another petition, and then a second, a third or even more, begging and imploring, in the name of all the Muses and in the most affecting manner, that the fraternity decline not a

mind a thirst for knowledge. Some, impatient of delay, personally undertook the journey from one end of the world to the other, but lamented their misfortune in not being able to find those happy folk. Some ascribed the reason for their failure to their own unworthiness, others to the ill-will of the fraternity. Consequently, some fell into despair, while others tortured themselves by persisting in their endeavor to discover ever new ways of ascertaining the group's whereabouts, until I myself grew weary of waiting for the final outcome.

Continuatio

Then a trumpet blared again: when many ran out to find out what the sound imported, I joined them also. I saw a man setting up a booth, inviting the bystanders to examine and to buy his most wonderful mysteries; he claimed to have taken them from the treasures of the new philosophy, and assured all desirous of the secret wisdom would find satisfaction therein. Then many rejoiced that the holy Brotherhood of the Rose had openly and liberally shared its treasures and approaching, bought the wares. All articles put up for sale were enclosed in painted boxes, bearing attractive inscriptions such as: Good Guide to the Large and the Small Cosmos; A Harmony of the Two Worlds; The Christian Cabala; The Case of Nature; The Castle of Primordial Matter; The Divin Magic; The General Tri-Trinity; The Triumphal Pyramid; Hallelujah; and so forth. But the buyers were forbidden to open the boxes. For the efficacy of the secret wisdom was said to be so powerful that it operated by penetration, and would evaporate if the box were opened. Nevertheless, some of the more inquisitive could not refrain from opening their boxes and found them entirely empty! Thereupon, they showed them to others, who also opened their boxes and likewise found nothing. Then they raised a cry of "Fraud! Fraud!" and assaulted the dealer with fury. He attempted to pacify them by saying that the most secret part of the mystery consisted in the fact that these things were invisible to all save the sons of science; and since barely one out of a thousand possessed the proper qualifications, he, the dealer, was not to blame for it.

Eventus famae

The buyers for the greatest part were pacified thereby; in the meantime the dealer packed up his wares, while the spectators dispersed in very different humors, one here, another there. But whether or not anyone had discovered the new mysteries, I have hitherto been unable to learn. This only I know; that thereafter everything quieted down and those who had been formerly running and rushing about the most, were found sitting in obscure corners with their mouths shut. Either they had been (as some thought) admitted to the mysteries upon an oath that they keep them secret; or (as it appeared to me observing them from under my glasses) were ashamed of their blasted hopes and misspent effort. Thus everything passed and quieted down as clouds disperse after a rainless storm. I said to my companions: "Are all these things, then, an utter failure? Oh, my disappointed hopes! Hearing such boastful promises, I expected to find a profitable pasture for my mind." My interpreter answered: "Who knows but it might yet materialize? Perhaps they know their hour when and to whom to reveal themselves." "Should I wait for such an event, when I have not seen a single instance of success among so many thousands of men more learned than I am? I do not care to gape any longer: let us go away," I said.