

HEINRICH CORNELIUS AGRIPPA

Occult Virtues

THE OCCULT PHILOSOPHY · NOTEBOOK 2

Sympathies and antipathies in nature



BOOK I · CHAPTERS 13-21

BLUSABOOKS



Occult Virtues, Sympathies and Antipathies

HEINRICH CORNELIUS AGRIPPA · THREE BOOKS OF OCCULT
PHILOSOPHY · BOOK I, CHAPTERS 13–21

Every chapter — four parts

IN AGRIPPA'S WORDS

*the complete chapter, from the Latin
edition of 1533*

IN PLAIN WORDS

what Agrippa actually claims

TERMS

the chapter's concepts explained

HISTORICAL NOTE

*where the idea comes from and what
modern science says*

A historical text, not a manual. This book does not replace medical advice.

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FOREWORD

In the first notebook Agrippa built a model of the world out of four elements — and in the end admitted that they are not enough. The lodestone draws iron, yet no heat or cold explains it. Why does a lion's heart give courage, while a wolf's hide devours a lamb's? Why do some things seek each other out while others flee?

This is the **second notebook** in the series "Agrippa · The Occult Philosophy". It contains **Book I, chapters 13–21** — the teaching on **occult virtues** (*virtutes occultae*): where they come from, what the **spirit of the world** is that carries them, and how they may be recognised. Agrippa offers three paths. The first is **likeness** — like draws like. The second is **sympathy and antipathy** — friendship and enmity between planets, stones, plants and animals. The third is the question of where a power lives: in the whole of a thing or only in one of its parts, in life only or even after death.

These chapters are full of what a Renaissance reader took to be knowledge of nature: Pliny's Natural History, the stone-books of Albertus Magnus, medieval bestiaries and the lore of physicians. Much of it sounds like fable today — and the historical notes say so honestly. Yet this world of "sympathies" is the root from which later grew homeopathy's "like cures like", the "doctrine of signatures", and the first attempts to understand magnetism.

How to read it. Every chapter has four parts. *In Agrippa's words* — the complete chapter, translated from the Latin edition of 1533. *In plain words* — what Agrippa actually claims. *Terms* — the concepts of the chapter; all of them are gathered in the glossary at the end. *Historical note* — where the idea comes from and what modern science says.

This is a book of history, not a manual or medical advice. None of the "remedies" described here should be tried.

In the series "Agrippa · The Occult Philosophy":

1. Magic and the Four Elements — Book I, chapters 1–12
2. Occult Virtues, Sympathies and Antipathies — chapters 13–21
3. The World of the Planets — chapters 22–36
4. Talismans, Fumigations and Rings — chapters 37–48
5. Light, Fascination and Divination — chapters 49–57
6. Dreams, the Soul and the Imagination — chapters 58–68
7. The Power of Words and Letters — chapters 69–74

CHAPTER XIII

WHERE THE HIDDEN POWERS OF THINGS COME FROM

IN AGRIPPA'S WORDS

Everyone knows that the lodestone has a power that draws iron, and that the diamond takes this power away from it. Amber and jet, rubbed and warmed, draw up chaff. The asbestos stone, once kindled, is never or hardly ever put out. The carbuncle shines in the dark. Jasper stanches bleeding. The echeneis stops a ship. Rhubarb drives out bile. The liver of a chameleon, burnt on roof tiles, raises rain and thunder. The heliotrope stone dazzles the sight and makes its bearer invisible. The lyncurius stone takes away illusions of the eyes. Synochitis calls up the shades of the underworld. Anachitis makes images of divine spirits appear. Ennectis, placed under one who sleeps, gives oracles.

There is an Ethiopian herb with which lakes are dried up and everything locked is opened. We read of a herb called **latace**, which the kings of Persia gave to their envoys so that they might have plenty of everything wherever they went. And there is a Spartan or Scythian herb: tasted, or merely held in the mouth, it lets the Scythians hold out twelve days without food or drink.

And Apuleius says he learned from a divine source that **there are many kinds of herbs and stones by which men could gain everlasting life, but men are not permitted to know them**. For those who have only a short time to live long eagerly to live long; the wicked would refrain from no crime if they gained an infinity of time; and they would no longer spare even the gods themselves.

But where these powers come from, no one has discovered. None of those who wrote huge volumes on the properties of things: not Hermes, nor Bochus,

nor Aaron, nor Orpheus, nor Theophrastus, nor Thebit, nor Zenothemis, nor Zoroaster, nor Evax, nor Dioscorides, nor Isaac the Jew, nor Zacharias of Babylon, nor Albertus, nor Arnold. And yet all of them acknowledged what Zacharias writes to Mithridates: **in stones and herbs there is great power, which rules even over the fate of men.**

Where, then, do they come from? Here a higher answer must be sought.

Alexander the Peripatetic, not departing from the senses and from qualities, holds that they come from the elements and their qualities. That might be taken for the truth if these qualities were all of one and the same kind; but the operations of stones are many, and they agree neither in species nor in genus.

Therefore **the Academics, together with Plato**, attribute these powers to the ideas, the forming principles of things. **Avicenna** traces such operations back to the Intelligences, **Hermes** to the stars, **Albertus** to the specific forms of things.

And although these authors seem to contradict one another, **none of them, rightly understood, departs from the truth**, for everything they have said comes together in its effect.

For **God is, first of all, the end and the beginning of all powers.** He gives the seal of the ideas to His servants the Intelligences, who as faithful executors seal the things entrusted to them with the ideal power. These in turn are sealed by the heavens and the stars as instruments, which meanwhile prepare matter to receive those forms which, as Plato says in the *Timaeus*, dwell in the divine majesty and are conveyed downward through the stars. And the Giver of forms distributes them through the ministry of the Intelligences, whom He has set as rulers and guardians over His works, and to whom this authority over the things entrusted to them has been given, **so that all the power of stones, herbs, metals and everything else comes from the Intelligences that govern them.**

So form and power come **first from the ideas, then from the ruling and governing Intelligences, then from the aspects of the heavens that arrange them, and then from the dispositions of the elements that answer to the heavenly influences**, according to which the elements themselves are ordered.

Thus the operation is: **in these lower things, through expressed forms; in the heavens, through arranging powers; in the Intelligences, through mediating principles; in the archetype, through ideas and exemplary forms.** And all of this must necessarily agree in carrying out the effect and power of each thing.

Therefore **in every herb and stone there is a wonderful power and operation, but it is greater in a star;** and beyond that, each thing gains much from the governing Intelligences; but most of all from the Supreme Cause, with which all things mutually and perfectly agree, sounding in their harmonious concord as if forever praising their highest Maker with hymns. Just as the holy children sang in the Chaldean furnace: *Bless the Lord, all things that grow on the earth, and all that move in the waters, all birds of the air, beasts and cattle, together with the children of men.*

Therefore there is no other cause of the necessity of effects than the connection of all things with the First Cause and their correspondence to those divine patterns and eternal ideas, from which each thing has its own fixed place in the archetype, from which it lives and from which it arises. And every power of herbs, stones, metals, animals, words and speech, and of everything that is from God, is planted in them.

Although God gives these powers to lower things through the Intelligences and the heavens, **yet sometimes, passing over these intermediaries or suspending their ministry, He does it directly from Himself,** and then these works are called miracles.

For although the second causes, which Plato and others call servants, act by necessity at the command and in the order of the first cause, and produce their effects by necessity, **yet sometimes God, at His pleasure, so releases or suspends them that they wholly cease from the necessity of that command and order.** And these are God's greatest miracles.

So the fire in the Chaldean furnace did not burn the children. So the sun, at Joshua's command, turned back on its course for the length of a day, and at