

A SHORT TRACT,
OR
PHILOSOPHICAL SUMMARY

by **NICHOLAS FLAMELL**

HE that would understand the whole subject of metals, and how they are transmuted one into another, ought first to find an answer to the question, from what substance they spring, and how they are formed in their ores. For this purpose he must observe the changes that are continually going forward in the mineral veins of the earth. Hence they may be made subject to transmutation outside of their ores if they are first made spiritual, so that they may be reduced to their sulphur and mercury, which is performed by Nature. Now all metals have been formed out of sulphur and quicksilver, which are the seeds of all metals, the one representing the male, and the other the female principle. These two varieties of seed are, of course, composed of elementary substances; the sulphur, or male seed, being nothing but fire and air (*i.e.*; *good* sulphur, resembling fire, free from the mutable properties of metals, and not that common sulphur which is not a metallic substance at all); while the quicksilver, or female seed, is nothing but earth and water. These two seeds were figuratively represented by the ancient Sages under the forms of two dragons, or serpents, one of which had wings, while the other had none. The wingless dragon is sulphur, because it never flies away from the fire. The winged serpent is quicksilver, which is borne away through the air (the female seed, which is composed of water and earth)—because in a certain degree it flies away or evaporates. Now, if these two seeds, separated one from another, are united spermatically by triumphant Nature, in the book of Mercury, the first mother of metals, the Sages call the substance that results, the flying dragon, because this dragon, being kindled with its fire, in its flight pours abroad into the air fire and a poisonous vapour. The same happens to mercury, which, if placed in a vessel over an ordinary fire, has its internal, hidden fire kindled; and then you may see how the outward vegetable fire kindles the inward natural fire of mercury. You will notice that it exhales into the air a certain poisonous fume or vapour, the stench of which is such as to prove that it is nothing but the head of the dragon which is leaving Babylon in great haste, even the philosophical Babylon which is encompassed by a double or treble vessel.

Other Sages have likened this Mercury to a flying Lion, because the Lion devours other animals, and refreshes and strengthens himself at will with the blood of all animals except those which have power to resist his rage—and because mercury, too, is known to deprive other metals of their specific form, and to absorb and incorporate them. Gold and silver, however, are strong enough to resist its violence; although it is well-known that mercury, when exposed to an exceptional degree of heat, devours and swallows even these two metals. Yet neither of them is changed into the nature of the mercury, howbeit, they are enclosed in its womb; for gold and silver are more permanent and more perfect than crude mercury, this being an imperfect metal, notwithstanding that there is in it the substance of perfection. Common gold, which is a perfect metal, and silver, and all the imperfect metals, are developed out of mercury. For this reason, the ancient Sages have called it the Mother of the Metals, and hence, being itself a metal, it must contain a two-fold metallic substance, namely, the inner substance of the Moon, and that of the Sun (which is unlike the other). Of these two substances mercury is formed, and they are cherished in its body in the form of

spiritual essences. Now, as soon as Nature has formed that mercury of these two spirits, she strives to transmute them into a perfect bodily form; and therefore, when those two spirits have grown up, and their two varieties of seed awake, they desire to assume their own proper bodies; and then the Mother, mercury, must die, and having died a natural death, can never be quickened any more into that which it was previously.

Vainglorious and arrogant Alchemists have obscurely hinted that perfect and imperfect bodies must be transmuted into fluid mercury, but this assertion is only a trap for the unwary. It is true that mercury consumes imperfect metals, like lead and tin, and thus increases in quantity; but, by doing so, it loses its perfection, and is no longer the mercury that it was before. If, indeed, it could be so mortified by a chemical process as to shut out all hope of its ever quickening itself again, it would be changed into something else, as happens with cinnabar, or in sublimate. But, when it is coagulated by a chemical process, whether by a swift or a slow method, its two bodies do not assume a permanent form. By the natural process this coagulation is indeed successfully carried out; and thus we never find a vein of lead, for instance, which does not contain a few permanent grains, at least, of gold and silver. The first coagulation of mercury is lead, which is most suitable for fixing it, and bringing it to perfection. For lead is never without some fixed grain of gold and silver, which are imparted to it by Nature for the purpose of multiplication and development, as I myself have experienced, and am able to testify. So long as it is in its mercury, and not separated from its mineral, it can continue to increase its substance from the substance of its mercury. But if this fixed grain is taken away, and severed from its mercury (or the mineral in which it is found), it can no longer gain in size. It is with this grain as with the green fruit that is formed on a tree when the blossom has been shed. If it is plucked off before it is ripe, it can come to nothing. If it is left on the tree, it is nourished and increased by the sap and the juice of the parent stem, and thus gradually attains to its proper size, and to maturity. But, until ripeness has been attained, the fruit continues to attract to itself the sap and juice of the tree, that is to say, so long as the connection with the parent tree is not severed.

Almost the same thing happens with gold. Such a grain attracts to itself the mercury of the lead, and incessantly "fixes" it into its own mercury, whereby it grows and gradually increases in size. The mercury of perfect or imperfect metals is the parent tree, and the grain (of gold) can be nourished with nothing but this mercury. But as soon as you sever the connection with the parent mercury, that growth of the grain must immediately come to an end; it is as though the unripe fruit had been plucked from the tree: you would vainly endeavour to restore the vital connexion. When you have once removed an unripe pear or apple from its native branch, it would be foolish indeed to join it to the tree once more, and expect it to ripen. Instead of growing, it will gradually shrivel up, and become smaller. The same thing may be observed in the case of the metals. For if any one were to take common metallic gold and silver, and tried to resolve those metals into mercury, he would be doing a very foolish thing. It is a result which cannot be brought about by any chemical process, however subtle and ingenious, just as fruit which has once been plucked in an unripe state can never again be vitally joined to the parent tree. It has, indeed, been well said by the Sages that if gold and silver be joined together through their proper mercury, they have power to render all other (imperfect) metals perfect. But these Sages did not speak of common gold and silver, which must always remain what they are, can never become anything else, and certainly cannot aid the development of other metals. It is fruit that has been plucked before the time, and therefore is dead and withered. No, the *living* fruit (the real living gold and silver) we must seek *on the tree*; for only there can it grow, and increase in size, according to the possibilities of its nature. This tree we must transplant, without gathering its fruit, into a better and richer soil, and to a sunnier spot. Then its fruit will receive more nourishment in a single day than it was wont to receive in a hundred years, while it was still in its former sterile soil.

I wish you to understand that Mercury, which is a most excellent tree, and contains silver and gold in an indissoluble form, must be taken and transplanted into a soil that is nearer to the Sun (*i.e.*, in this case, gold), where it may flourish exceedingly, and be abundantly watered. Where it was planted before, it was so shaken and weakened by the wind and the frost, that but little fruit could be expected from it. So there it remained a long time, and bore no fruit.

But in the garden of the Sages, the *Sun* sheds its genial influence both morning and evening, day and night, unceasingly. There our *tree* is watered with the rarest dew, and the fruit which hangs upon the trees swells and ripens and expands, from day to day. It never withers, but makes more progress in one year than it did in a thousand years in its former sterile situation. Or, to drop metaphor, let the mercury be taken, and warmed day and night in an alembic over a gentle fire. Yet it should not be a coal or a wood fire, but a clear and pellucid heat, like that of the *Sun* itself—a gentle and even warmth. Growing fruit must not be exposed to too much heat, or else it is withered, and shrivelled up, and is never brought to perfection. It must have a genial warmth, and be supported by a moderate moisture in the tree, if it is to flourish and expand. For heat and moisture are the food of all earthly things, both animal, vegetable, and mineral. Ordinary coal or wood fires are too violent for our purpose, and give no nourishment like the heat of the Sun which preserves all bodies through its natural influences. For this reason the Sages use none but this natural fire, not because it is made by the Sages, but because it is made by Nature—Nature, that creates all things, whether they be animal, vegetable, or mineral, and warms them, each at its own proper degree.

Therefore, I will not say that man by his art can make natural things; but I do say that human art can impart greater perfection to that which Nature makes. For this purpose the ancient Sages have had but one object in view, namely, to produce from the moon and the true mother mercury, the mercury of the philosophers, which in its operation is much more potent than natural mercury, and is useful for working upon simple, perfect, imperfect, cold, and warm metals. Now, the Philosophical Stone is good for perfect and imperfect metals, and soon restores and brings them to perfection without any diminution, addition, or real change of any kind. For, apart from perfecting them, it leaves them in the state in which they were before. I do not say that the Sages combine common gold, silver, and mercury for this purpose: this is the method only of ignorant charlatans, who thereby hope to prepare the mercury of the Sages; but they never succeed in producing this, the real first substance of the Stone. If they would obtain it they must go to the seventh mountain, where there is no plain, and from its height they must look down upon the sixth, which they will behold at a great distance. On the summit of that mountain they will find the glorious Regal Herb, which some Sages call a mineral, some a vegetable. The bones they must leave, and only extract its pure juice, which will enable them to do the better part of the work. This is the true and subtle mercury of the philosophers which you must take. Now, first it prepares the white tincture, and then the red. For the Sun and Moon are prepared by the same method, and yield the red and white tincture, respectively, and the preparation is so simple that it might be seen to by a woman while she works at her spindle—just as she might set a hen on some eggs, without washing them first, and without any other trouble but that of turning the eggs every day that the chickens may break the shells all the sooner. In like manner, you must not wash your mercury, but only put it with its like (which is fire) into ashes (corresponding to the straw), into one glass vessel (which is the nest), in a suitable alembic (which is the house). If you do this there will come out a chicken, that will deliver you with its blood from all diseases, and feed you with its flesh, and clothe you with its feathers, and shelter you from the cold. Therefore, I pray and beseech the Creator of all things to grant His grace to all faithful Alchemists, that they may find the chicken, which, through God's unspeakable goodness and mercy, has now been vouchsafed to me. I have written this tract for your sakes, to encourage

you, and point out to you the right way: I hope and trust that my words will enable you to understand more fully the works of other Sages. Farewell!

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