

Adam McLean's Study Course on reading alchemical texts



Lesson 18 : Treatise of Mercury and the Philosophers' Stone

In the previous lesson we realised that in order to understand some texts we have to take into account the intentions of the writer. We saw that the style of the text often reveals to us something about the author's stance towards his readership, and thus about what he was hoping to achieve through his writings. As an example let us now look at a work ascribed to George Ripley, his 'Treatise of Mercury and the Philosophers' Stone'. This is contained in *Aurifontina Chymica: or, a collection of fourteen small treatises concerning the first matter of philosophers, for the discovery of their (hitherto so much concealed) Mercury. Which many have studiously endeavoured to hide, but these to make manifest, for the benefit of Mankind in general.* London, 1680.

This text obviously exhibits two of the stylistic devices we described in the last lesson. The author adopts the role of teacher and also attributes his text to an earlier authority. This text is not in the style of known Ripley writings, which date back to the 15th century, some two centuries earlier, (Ripley died in 1490), and is an obvious 17th century contrivance. Knowing this does not denigrate the work or reduce its importance, but it does place it in its proper context.

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A Treatise of Mercury and the Philosophers' Stone.
by Sir George Ripley.

I will, my dearest son, instruct you in this blessed science, which was hid from the wise of old, to whom God was pleased to show so much favour. Know therefore, that our matter is the chief of all things in the Earth, and of least estimation and account, as will hereafter more plainly appear. For if Water incorporate itself with Earth, the Water will be lowest of all, and will (if it be not kept down) with Fire, ascend higher; and thus it may be seen, how Water will be highest and lowest. Yet true it is, that it is of least estimation, for in our Earth and Water, and in that drossy Earth, you may find some very pure and clear, which is our Seed and fifth Essence, and then that foul and dross Earth is good for nothing else, and of no estimation.

Our author immediately establishes himself as the alchemical teacher by addressing his readers as his "dearest Son". He wants us to know that the Philosophers' stone is the chief substance on the earth, and yet is very little considered and written about. He makes an analogy of this to the dual

nature of water - if water is added to earth, then the water sinks down, but if water is added to fire, then it rises up. Thus water is both the highest and lowest of the elements. Continuing the analogy – although some earth is pure and clear and thus is like our seed and quintessence, other earth is foul and of no worth.

But that Water, as I said, is the chief, will appear many ways. Know, son, that without Water we cannot make bread, nor anything else which God hath created in Nature. Hence you may easily perceive, that Water is the first Matter of all things which are born or generated in the world. For certainly it is manifest to you, that nothing grows or receives increase without the four Elements; therefore whatsoever is elemented by virtue of the four Elements, it must of necessity be, that original of all things that are born or grow, should be of Water. Yet ought you not to understand, this before spoken of Water, but of that water which is the Matter of all things, out of which all natural things are produced in their kind. Know therefore, that the first of all Air is engendered of Water; of Air, Fire; of Fire, Earth.

Water, on the other hand, is essential for our life, making bread and other things that God has created. Thus water should be seen as the first material of all created things in the world. It is obvious that nothing grows without the four elements. Everything in the world is elemented by the elements, that is has its spiritual form filled out into substance by the elements. Thus the origin of all things that are born lies in the water. Yet here he speaks rather of water as the first matter of all things, rather than the element water itself. Out of this first matter all natural things are created. Thus it is with the elements themselves. Air is born of Water, then Fire is born of the Air, and finally Earth is born from the Fire.

Now will I more familiarly and friendly discourse with you. I will further manifest this mystery unto you by degrees, lest by too much haste it happen to us according to the Proverb, “That he that makes too much haste, oftentimes comes home too late”. Now therefore that I may satisfy your desire, I will discourse of the first Matter, which philosophers call, the fifth Essence, and many other names they have for it, by which they may the more obscure it. In it for certain are four Elements, pure in their Exaltation. Know therefore, that if you would have the fifth Essence, Man, you must first have Man, and you must have nothing else of that Matter; and see that you observe this well.

He will tell more, but he cautions us as readers not to rush on too fast. He will begin by considering the first Matter, which some alchemists call the fifth Essence, though it is called by a multitude of names in order to keep it secret. In this first matter, this fifth Essence, are contained the four elements in a pure exalted form. You should know that if you wish to have the fifth Essence of Man, you must first have Man, and nothing else of that fifth Essence.

This I say, that if you desire to have the Philosophers Stone, you must of necessity first have the fifth Essence of that same Stone, whether it be Mineral or Vegetative. Join therefore species with species, and gems with gems, and not the one without the other, nor anything contrary, which may be other than the species or proper gems. Beware therefore of all that is not essential. For of bones, stones cannot be made, neither do cranes beget geese; which if you will consider, you will find the profit of it, by the help of the Divine Grace; by the assistance whereof let us father proceed to speak of this blessed Water, which is called the Water of the Sun and Moon, hidden in the concavity of our Earth.

Similarly to have the Philosophers' Stone you must first have the fifth Essence of the stone, whether it be of mineral or vegetable nature. You must take each with its like, a mineral species with its same mineral, gems with gems, and take nothing contrary to each other. Only look for the essential. Stones cannot be made out of bones, geese are not born from cranes. We are to consider this point carefully. With the help of Divine grace he will tell us more about this Blessed Water (this first Matter) which is called the Water of the Sun and Moon that is hidden inside the Earth.

Concerning which Earth know, that all that is generated must of necessity have male and female, from which action and passion arise, without which generation never is. But you will certainly never receive profit from things differing in kinds. Notwithstanding, if you have this Water of the Sun and Moon, it will draw other bodies and humours to its own kind, by the help of the virtue and the heat of the Sun and Moon, and will make them perfect.

We should understand that everything that is born or generated must of necessity have male and female aspects, for without these active and passive parts, nothing can be born. This applies equally to this Earth which we are considering. We will never find anything developing from mixing two different kinds or species. If you have this Water of the Sun and Moon, it will draw towards it other substances of its own kind, and through its internal powers and heat makes these substances perfect.

As an infant in the womb of its mother, decoction of temperate heat helping it, turns the flowers into its nature and kind, that is, into flesh, blood, bones, and life, with the other properties of a living body, of which it is needless to say any more. And hence you may understand, that our water changes itself into a perfect kind, with things of its own kind. For first it will congeal itself into a substance like oil; then it will change that oil, by the means of temperate heat, into gum; and lastly, by the help of the perfect heat of the Sun, into a stone.

The child in the womb through the gentle heat there, converts the flowers or food into growing its flesh, blood and bones and making it come alive. Similarly, we find a parallel with our water which makes itself perfect by changing substances of its own nature. Thus, it first thickens itself into an oily material, then changes that oil through gentle heat into a thick gum, and then through the help of the heat of the sun converts this into a stone.

Now therefore know, that out of one thing you have three, that is oil, gum, and a stone. Know also, that when the Water is turned into oil, then you have a perfect Spirit; when the oil is turned into hard gum, then you have a perfect Spirit and Soul; and when the Spirit and Soul are turned into a stone, then you have a perfect Body, Soul and Spirit together: Which as it is called the Philosophers' Stone and Elixir, and a perfect medicine of Man's body; so also that which is leavened with its genus, and the fifth Essence.

From this one thing, our Water, we have three stages of materials, in the oil, the gum and finally the stone. We should realise that when the water is transformed into the oil, then we have a perfect spirit in this substance. When the oil becomes changed into a gum, then we have the perfect soul and spirit. Finally, with the formation of the stone, we have a perfect body, soul and spirit in one substance. Because it is called the Philosophers' Stone, the Elixir and the perfect medicine for Man, so also is that which is fermented by its special nature is the fifth Essence.

Know, Son, that fifth Essences are divers. One whereof is to human bodies, another to elixir, and to the imperfect bodies of metals. For you must consider, that the generation and growth of metals, is not as the growth of mans body; for a genus agrees with its genus, and a species with its species. Moreover, know that the first matter of man, which begets the flesh, blood, bones and life, is a spermatic humour, which causes generation, through a vital spirit included therein. And when the matter is generated and congealed into a body, extract thence the fifth Essence of that body, wherewith you may nourish the body.

There are many quintessences. One applies to human bodies, another to elixirs, and the imperfect metals. The growing of metals does not happen in exactly the same way as the growth of the human body. Similar things grow in similar ways. The first matter of Man, that is the power that allows the flesh, blood, bones and life force of Man to develop is a spermatic humour, a watery seed, that causes the formation of new life through a living spiritual force that is hidden in it. So when the matter in an alchemical work, grows and congeals into substance, then we should extract the fifth essence from that substance, which we can use to further nourish its growth.

Yet son, will I tell you moreover, that Water, or Matter, or Seed whereof Man is begot, is not the augments of the body. Know, Son, that if the body be fed with its natural food, then its first Matter will be increased. And also the body, (viz.) the first Matter in quality, and the body in quantity. The first Matter is that which is called the fifth Essence. Yet know, son, that the fifth Essence is one thing, and that the Matter of augmentation is another: and, as I said before, the increase of metals, is not like the increase of Man's body.

This Water, Matter or Seed from which man is created, is not that which grows and nourishes the developing body. The first Matter of the body will be increased by the natural food. The first Matter will then grow in quality, while the substance of the body will grow in quantity. This first Matter is the quintessence of that body. We must understand that this quintessence is one thing and the matter of augmentation (the material which grows the body) is another. We must also bear in mind that the growth of metals is not like the growth of mans body.

Although the fifth Essence, which causes the augmentation of the metals, may be a fit medicine for human bodies; as also the fifth Essence, which causes the augmentation of Man's body, may be a fit medicine for the bodies of metals. And therefore, as before is said, the fifth Essence is one thing, and augmentation another. You see therefore for what reason our Water is called, the first Matter and the seed of metal, viz. because of it all metals are generated. Therefore you will have need of it in the beginning, middle, and end, for as much as it is the cause of all generation, because by its congelation, it is turned into all sorts of metals, to wit, into the first Matter of the sorts.

It is, however, true that the quintessence which causes the growth of metals may be a suitable medicine for Man's body, and vice versa, the quintessence that causes the growth of the human body may also act as a medicine for metals. The quintessence is therefore one thing and the growth of the body is another. Thus we can see the reason why our Water is called the first Matter and the seed of metals, because all metals are generated from it. We will need this in the beginning, middle and end, throughout our alchemical work. This is because it is the cause of growth, and by its congealing into a solid form, it can be turned into all kinds of metals, being the first matter of these different sorts of metals.

Thence it is called, the seed of metals, and the water of metallic life, because it affords life and blood to sick and dead metals, and joins in matrimony the Red man and the White woman, that is, the Sun and the Moon. It is called also Virgins' Milk; for as long as it is not joined with the Sun and the Moon; nor with anything else, except only those which are of its own kind, so long it may be called a Virgin. But when it is joined with a male and female, and married with them, then it is no longer a Virgin, because it adheres to them, and becomes one with them to whom it is joined with to generation. But as long as it remains a Virgin, it is called Virgins' Milk, the Blessed Water, and the Water of Life, and by many other names.

For this reason it is called the seed of metals and the water of metallic life as it revives and gives life force to sick and decayed metals. It also joins the Red (solar) man and the White (lunar) woman and marries them together. It can also be seen as the Virgins' milk, being termed this when it is neither joined with the sun or the moon. It remains Virgins' milk while it is only joined to its own substance and not to any other. When it is mixed and joined with a male and female, it sticks to them and become united with those things with which it is joined in order to generate and grow things. In this case it is no longer virgin. As long as it remains by itself and not united with other substances, it keeps itself a virgin and this can still be called, among many names, the Virgins' milk, the Blessed Water, or the Water of Life.

And now, my son, that I may say something of the Philosophers Mercury, know that when you have put thy Water of Life to the Red man, who is our Magnesia, and to the White woman, whose name is Albifica, and they shall all have been gathered together into one, then you have the true Philosophers' Mercury. For after that in this manner all is joined with a Male and Female, then it is called the Philosophers' Mercury, the Philosophers' Water of Life, the blood of Man, his red flesh, his body and bones. Know therefore, that there are many sorts of milk, (viz.) Virgins' Milk, Womans' Milk, and also Mans' Milk. For when first they are joined in one, and she is big, having conceived, then the Infant must be nourished with Milk. But then you may know, that this Milk is not Virgins' Milk, but rather the man and the woman's milk, wherewith it is always to be nourished, till it is grown to that strength, that it may be brought up with stronger and fuller food.

When we mix this Water of Life or Virgins' Milk with the Red man, the Magnesia, and with the White woman, called Albifica, then they unite together to form the Philosophers' Mercury, also known as the Philosophers' Water of Life, Mans' blood, flesh, body and bones. There are many sorts of milk similar to the Virgins' Milk. We find also Women's milk and even Man's milk. These are probably special waters drawn out of substances identified as male and female in nature. When after conception, the woman having conceived becomes great with child, then the growing child needs to be nourished with milk. Our author is here drawing a parallel between the development of a child and the growth of the alchemical metallic substance. The child (and the growing metal) must be nourished with milk, and not now the Virgins' milk but the milk of the woman and the man, as this being a stronger food gives a better and fuller nourishment of the work.

That food which I mean is the leavening of it which gives it form, that it may perform virile work. For until the infant, that is, this our stone, be formed and leavened with its like, the blood of the green Dragon, and the red blood of the Red Dragon, whether it be the white Stone or the red, it will never do a perfect work. Know therefore, son, that the first Water is that Water Rebar, which God

made of Nature, and it is the cause of generation, as I said before. But when after the conjunction which arises from the marriage, it begets the Water of Life, and the Philosophers' Milk, with one of which, or both, you must augment and feed your Stone perpetually.

Our author continues piling on more associations. This nourishing food is the ferment which gives form to the developing substance, so that it can perform manly powerful work itself. For until the developing child or substance of our stone (whether it be the white or the red stone) is fermented with similar substances, that is, with the blood of the Green Dragon and of the Red Dragon, then it will never become perfect enough to perform the transmutatory work. The first water is the Water Rebar which was made from Nature, and is that material which causes the growth and generation of things. This water, after the conjunction of the male and female substances, gives rise to the Water of Life and the Philosophers' Milk, with either of which, or indeed both, we must continually nourish and grow the Stone.

Much more could I say to thee, son, concerning this first Matter, but let this suffice, that setting aside impertinencies of words, we may now, Divine grace favouring of us, proceed to the practice itself of the Philosophic Stone. See therefore, my Son, that you diligently put all these matters (which though they are three things, yet are they but one only) in a glass vessel, and let them quietly putrefy: then put an Alembic upon your vessel, and by distillation draw out all the water, which may be thence distilled. Try this first in Maries' Bath. Then place the vessel in ashes, and make a gentle fire for 12 hours: then take the matter out of the vessel, grind it well by itself, without the foresaid water, then put it again into the vessel with water, and stop the vessel close. Put it in the bath for three days, and the distil the water as before in the bath, and the matter will be more black than before. Do thus three times over, and then grind it no more; but afterwards as often as you distil it, so oft pour Water on the top: but between each distillation give it so much fire for six hours or more, till it become indifferent dry; then pour water on the top again, and dissolve it again in the bath under a blind alembic.

Our author feels he has told us enough about the first Matter and that now, God willing, he will tell us about the practical process of the Philosophers' Stone. We are to put these three things which he has described above (and are actually a single thing) in a glass vessel and let them gently putrefy. Then fit a still head to this flask and distil off all the water that can be distilled from it. You can try this first in a Balneum Marie, a water bath. Then place the flask containing the dry residue into warm ashes over a small fire so it will be heated gently for twelve hours. Then remove the matter from your flask and grind it into a powder and put it back into the flask with the water and seal the flask well. Put the flask back into the warm ash bath for three days, then fit a still head and distil off the water as you did before. The residue in the flask will appear blacker. We suppose we must remove this, grind it as we did earlier, put it back in the flask with the water that was distilled, and place this into the warm ashes again. We are to repeat this three times in all. Afterwards as you distil it dry, place more water into the flask, and continue the distillation. When all the water has distilled out, then keep heating the flask for six hours or more so it becomes very dry, before pouring on the water again. We are now to distil this using a blind alembic, that is, a pelican flask where the spout of the still head (the alembic) re-enters the flask, rather than leading to an external receiving flask. This produces a continuous circulation of the distilled liquid.

Also in every distillation separate the phlegm, by casting away six or seven drops of water in the

beginning of each distillation. And observing this order, cause it to drink its proper Water, till it hath drunk of it seven times its weight which it had at the first. But then it will be of a white colour, and so much whiter, by how much the more of its own water it has drunk. This is white Elixir.

When beginning every distillation we should cast away the first six or seven drops of the watery distillate, removing them from the process by not allowing them to be used in the subsequent distillations. Continue with this till the dry matter in the flask has increased in weight by seven times. Then it will be the white Elixir, and its quality of whiteness will depend on how much of its own water it has drunk.

Moreover, this our Water is called Homogeneal, and by many other names. Besides, know that this Water and Matter generate as well the Red Stone, as the White. Know also, when this first Matter is brought to its complete whiteness, then the end of one, is the beginning of the other; that is, of the Red Stone, which is our Red Magnesia, and Virgins' Brass, as we said at first. Son, see you well understand these words. Our Virgins Brass, is our Gold; yet I do not say, that all Brass is Gold. Also our Brass, is our live Brimstone; but all Brimstone, is not our live Brimstone. Also Quicksilver, is Mercury; but I do not say, that common Quicksilver, is our Silver. As I said before, that Water of Life which is our Seed and first Matter, is our Mercury and our Spirit of Life, which is extracted out of the blessed land of Aethiopia, which is called Magnesia, and by many other names.

This special water is called 'Homogeneal' and many other names. This seems to be a reference to a verse in the *Ripley Scroll*

I shall you tell with plain declaration
Who and what is my generation
Homogenie is my Father
And Magnesia is my Mother.

This water and substance in the flask also create the red stone as well as the white. When the white stone has reached completion and is as white as it can be, then this is its end and yet it is the beginning of making the red stone. Again this echoes the Ripley Scroll where, on the furnace depicted on the first panel of the scroll, is the line "Here is the last of the white stone and the beginning of the red stone". This red stone, is the red magnesia and the Virgins' brass. We are to understand that this Virgin's brass is our gold. Our author is not saying, however, that all brass is gold. He is also telling us that our brass is our living sulphur (brimstone), but not all sulphur is this special living sulphur. In the same way as quicksilver is Mercury, but he does not say that common quicksilver is our silver. He has, however, told us that the water of life which is the seed and the first matter, is our Mercury and spirit of life that was extracted out of the land of Ethiopia, meaning from the dark, black matter in the flask. This is also called Magnesia and is known by many other names.

Besides, my Son, know that there is no perfect generation, without corruption; for corruption causes cleanliness, and cleanliness corruption. Consider therefore, Son, our dying poison, which dyes and is dyed perpetually. And this is our Body, or Soul, and our Spirit, when they are joined together in one, and become one thing, which with its parts arises also out of one thing, besides which there is not any other, neither ever shall be.

Nothing can be generated in the alchemical work without it being broken down through corruption, for this causes it to become cleansed within. The tincture is a poison that tinges, which dies and is

itself dyed. This is our body, soul and spirit joined together in one thing. Its individual parts are from one thing, and there is nothing else in it, nor shall there ever be.

Wherefore, my Son, great folly it is for any one to believe, that any other medicine can be turned into gold or silver; which Medicine will little profit thee of itself, except it be mingled with a body, for then shall it perfect its work according to its form which it is born. For it is never born that it may of it self become a body. Moreover, know that there is as much difference between the first Matter, which is called the Seed of Metals, and the Medicine, as is between the Medicine and Gold. For the Seed will never be the Medicine without Body, neither will the Medicine ever be a Metal without a Body.

It is foolish to believe that any other medicine can be changed into gold or silver. A medicine by itself is of little value until it is mixed with a body and can transmute and perfect this. The medicine itself does not become the perfected material. There is the same vast difference between the first matter or seed of metals and the medicine, as there is between the medicine and gold, because the first matter or seed will not become the medicine without a substance to work on, and the medicine or tincture will never become a pure metal without an imperfect metallic substance to work on.

Much difference also there is between Elixir and the Medicine, as between the Masculine and Feminine Seed, and also an Infant which is generated of those in the Matrix. Now you may see, that the Seed is one thing, and the Infant another, though they be one and the same in kind, one thing, one operation, the Vessel finally one, though it be called by divers names. From a Man and Woman, is an Infant born, when as yet the Man is one thing, and the Woman another, though they be one and the same in kind: which you ought to understand in our Stone.

Our author continues to emphasise that there is the same difference between the elixir and the medicine, as there is between the male and female seed, and the child that is born out of these. Although the seed is one thing and the child another, yet they are at the same time one and the same, working in one operation, in one vessel, even though this is called many names. The child is born from man and woman, yet the man is very different from the woman, even though they are essentially the same. Our author wants us to see this paralleled in the creation of the philosophers' stone.

But what I said before, that corruption is the cause of generation, and of cleanliness, is true. For you must know, that every thing in its first Matter is corrupt and bitter, which corruption and bitterness is called dying poison, which is the cause of Life in all things, as will be sufficiently manifest, if you with right reason do weigh the Natures of things. Consider well, O Son, that when Lucifer the Angel of Pride, first rebelled against God, and prevaricated the Command of the most High, be assured that this was made corrupt, bitter, and harsh to him. No less was the fall and prevarication of our first Parents Adam and Eve, whom death and condemnation followed, made to them corruption and bitterness, and likewise to us in whom the same corruption is propagated.

It is true that corruption is the cause of generation and the development of purity. The first matter of every thing is corrupt and full of bitterness like a poison, but this is itself the cause of life in things. Our author asks us to remember the fall of Lucifer. This was bitter and harsh to God, as was the later fall of Adam and Eve, which lead to their falling into death and condemnation, which we have

inherited. Out of this bitterness came the generations of human beings.

Many more like examples I could recite, if need were. But setting aside these, to come to what is proper to our discourse, consider well, that of all precious fruits which grow out of the Earth, their first Matter is bitter and harsh, as still retaining some footstep of the former corruption and putrefaction, which bitterness, by the means of continual action of natural heat, is with great virtue turned into sweetness. Now therefore, Son, if thou wilt be ingenious, this little will suffice whereby to find out much more, and to perceive my meaning. Consider therefore well, Son, that according to the old proverb, "He who tastes no bitterness, deserves no sweet".

He will not bother to list further similar examples, except that we think on the fact that all the precious fruits that grow on the earth are bitter and harsh in their first matter, since they still contain some remnant of the original corruption and putrefaction. It is this bitterness that is through time and the action of gentle heat converted into sweetness, through the ripening of the fruit. For our author this is a key parallel for the alchemical work. He feels he had said enough about this matter, except to quote the apt proverb - He who does not taste bitterness, does not deserve to taste the sweet.

But now to speak something more of our Brass. Know, that Brass signifies continuance, or continuing Water. But what is farther to be considered in the nature of the name of Brass, you may easily gather from its English Tetragrammate name, that is, its name consisting of four letters, to wit, B.R.A.S. First therefore, by B. is signified the Body of our Work, which is sweet and bitter, our olive and our Brass continuing in its form: by R. is signified the Root of our Work, and the Spring of continuing Radical Humours, which is our Red Tincture, and Red Rose which purifies all in its kind: A. signifies our Father Adam, who was the first man, out of whom was born the first woman Eve; whence you understand, that therein is Male and Female. Know therefore, that our Brass is the beginning of our Work, our Gold and Olive, for it is the first Matter of Metals, as Man is the first Man and Woman. S. signifies the Soul of our Life, and Spirit of Life, which God breathed into Adam, and all the creatures; which Spirit is called the fifth Essence. Moreover, Son, by these four Letters, we may understand the four Elements, without which nothing is generated in Nature. They also signify Sol and Luna, which are the causes of all Life, Generation, and augmentation of all things born in the World. In this name therefore of four letters, consists our whole Work: For our Brass is Male and Female, of which arises he who is called begot.

He moves on to the subject of the brass of the alchemists. Brass here means the continuing water in the alchemical process. He finds a message about its nature and properties in the four letters of its name B, R, A and S. Firstly the letter 'B' signifies the body of the alchemical work, which is both sweet and bitter. 'R' indicates the root of the work, the spring or fount of its radical moisture, which is essentially the red tincture and the red rose of alchemy. By the letter 'A' we are lead to Adam, the first Man from whom was brought forth the first woman. Thus it is both male and female. So by these three letters we see that our alchemical Brass is the beginning of the work, the first matter of the metals, in the same way that Adam is the first man and woman. The final letter 'S' signifies the soul and spirit of life, which God breathed into Adam above all other creatures. This spirit is the fifth essence. We can also find in these four letters the four elements, and also Sol and Luna which are the principles behind the life force, the conception and growth of all things that are created in the world. In these four letters lies the key to the whole alchemical work.

Therefore, Son, take good notice what is signified by our sweet Brass, what is called our Sandiver, or the Salt of our Nitre, or Nitre; what also by the Blood of the Dragon, what Sol and Luna, our Mercury, and our Water of Life, and many other things, concerning which philosophers have spoken darkly, and in riddles. Know therefore, Son, that our first Matter is neither Gold, nor common Silver, nor is it of corrosives, or such like outward things, which denigrators groping in the dark now-a-days do use. Take heed therefore, Son, that by no means you admit any thing contrary in kind, for be assured, that what a man shall have sowed, the same shall he reap. Moreover, know that when our Stone is completed in its proper kind, then it will be a hard Stone, which will not easily be dissolved, yet if you add his Wife to him, he will be dissolved into Oil, which is called Philosophers Oil, incombustible Oil, and by many other names.

We are to consider what the alchemical philosophers have said, often obscurely and in confusing ways, about our brass, which is called our sandiver, the salt of our nitre, or our nitre itself. Sandiver is a substance skimmed off the surface of molten glass during the glass-making process. For some reason this appears occasionally in alchemical texts. (It is unlikely that our author actually means actual sandiver or glass gall here, but is using it in some metaphorical way.) We should also think about what alchemists describe as the Blood of the Lion, Sol and Luna, our Mercury and the Water of Life. Although the alchemists have talked about these substances obscurely, our author assures us that the first Matter is not common gold or silver, nor is it a corrosive, which some mislead people use. We must take care not to use anything contrary to it in nature, because reap what we sow. When the stone has been made then it will be a hard substance which is not easy to dissolve. However, if you add his wife to him he dissolves into the philosophers' oil, also known as the incombustible oil. What he means here by the 'wife of the stone' is not clear, but perhaps it is something seen as a feminine component of the stone, perhaps even the white or lunar stone.

Know therefore, Son, that there are diverse leavenings, as well as corporeal as spiritual, namely, corporeal in quantity, and spiritual in quality. Corporal leavening increase the weight and quantity of the Medicine, yet is not of so great power as the Medicine itself, as is Spiritual leavening, for it only increases the Medicine in quantity, not in virtue: but Spiritual leavening increases it in both. And where the corporeal rules above an hundred, the spiritual above a thousand. Moreover, as long as the Medicine is leavened with the corporeal substance, it is called Elixir.

There are different ferments, both corporeal and spiritual. The corporeal ferment increases the weight and quantity of the Medicine but not its power, whereas the spiritual ferment increases it both in quantity and quality. The corporeal ferment can multiply the Medicine a hundredfold, but the spiritual ferment will increase it by a factor of a thousand. If the Medicine is acted upon by the corporeal ferment it becomes the Elixir.

There is therefore a divers manner of leavening, and a difference between the Medicine, and the Elixir; for the Spiritual is one thing, the Corporal another. Know also, that as long as it is Spiritual leavening, it is liquid Oil and Gum, which cannot conveniently be carried about from one place to another; but when it is Corporal, then it will be a Stone which you may carry about in your pocket. Now therefore you see what is the difference between the Medicine, and the Elixir. nor is the difference less between Elixir, and Gold and Silver, for Gold and Silver are difficult to melt, but Elixir not so, for it easily dissolves at the flame of a Candle: thence you may easily perceive, how various the differences of our composition and temperament are.

There are therefore different methods of fermenting, and a difference between the Medicine and the Elixir. The Medicine multiplied by the spiritual ferment is a liquid oil or gummy material which cannot be easily carried about, but the same Medicine multiplied by the corporeal ferment is in the form of a solid stone which can be placed in ones pocket. Thus we see the difference between the Medicine and the Elixir. There is a similar difference between the Elixir and metallic gold and silver. Though the Elixir might seem solid it is easily melted in the flame of a candle, but gold and silver require great heat in order to melt them.

Lastly, that we may say something concerning their food and drink, know that their food is of airy stones, and their drink is drawn out of two perfect bodies, namely out of the Sun and Moon. The drink that is drawn out of the Sun, is called liquid gold, (or potable, that is, that may be drunk) but that out of the Moon, is called Virgins' Milk.

These Medicines are nourished with airy stones, and their drink is drawn out of Sun and Moon (gold and silver). The drink that it taken from the sun is a liquid form of gold called potable (or drinkable) gold. The drink taken from the moon is called the Virgins' Milk.

Now, Son, we have discoursed plainly enough with thee, if Divine Grace be not wanting to thee. For that drink that is drawn out of the Sun, is Red, but that out of the Moon, is white. And therefore one is called liquid Gold, but the other Virgins Milk, one is Masculine, the other Feminine, though both arises out of one image, and one kind.

Our author feels he has told us sufficient. We need God's grace now to follow the process through. He gives us a last hint saying that the drink drawn from the Sun is red, while that taken from the Moon is white, one is liquid gold the other Virgins' Milk, one masculine the other feminine, though both arise from one thing.

Son, ponder my words, otherwise if you wander in the dark, that evil befalls you from defect of light. See therefore that you be diligent in turning the Philosophic Wheel, that you may make Water out of Earth, Air out of Water, Fire our of Air, and Earth out of Fire, and all this out of one image and root, that is, out of its own proper kind, and natural food wherewith its Life may be cherished without end. He who has understanding, let him understand.

We should consider deeply what he has said, otherwise we will be wandering in the dark without illumination. We should be diligent in turning the philosophical wheel. Here is a reference to George Ripley's diagram of the *Philosophical Wheel*, which when turned makes water out of earth, and so on in a cycling of the elements. This refers perhaps to a line of text on the *Ripley Scroll*, though our author has got the order a bit different.

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The first part of this text presents some theories of alchemy. Firstly he tells us that Water is the primary material, from it we make an oil, then thicken this into a gum and finally into a stone. Next we must realise that the male and female aspects of things must be brought into our alchemical work.

These create a child that grows like water thickening to gum. He then describes the quintessence, which is the seed of metals and the water of metallic life, and moves on to the idea of the Virgin's milk and Red and Green Lions. This is an interesting section to study as it works together many of the allegorical features found in alchemy. The next section of this text purports to be an instruction in a practical process. On a first reading this appears to be a clear description of a practical experiment, but we realise that very little clear laboratory information is being given, certainly not enough on which to base a practical experiment, and the author quickly switches back into a theoretical account. Here he calls on ideas familiar from Ripley's writings. The text continues on to explore alchemical theories, especially concerning the difference between what he identifies as the 'Medicine' and the 'Elixir'.

In his text our author is trying to explain to us some of the key ideas that he has identified in alchemy, such as, the First Matter, the role of Water, the balancing of male and female in the work, the Virgin's Milk, the alchemical Lions, the Medicine for metals and the Elixir. He finds these promoted in the writings of George Ripley, and creates a text drawing upon Ripley's ideas, yet expressed in the terms of late 17th century alchemy. He perhaps feels the need to ground his work by placing at its centre a practical experimental process. This is sandwiched between two sections of alchemical theory. So this is essentially a work expressing alchemical theories of matter. It has moved away from the simple Sulphur-Mercury theory we often find in alchemical texts of the 16th and 17th centuries. Our author perhaps is trying to develop another approach. Towards the end of his text he brings in ideas of 'Our Nitre' and liquid or potable gold, two ideas that were popular in alchemical texts in the 17th century.