

"The Man Who Made Gold" ¹

I have put the title of this little essay in quotation marks, because it is the title of an amusing fictitious account of a man who made gold by the great Catholic writer Hilaire Belloc. The book is full of funny illustrations with even funnier captions by his friend Gilbert Chesterton. Belloc and Chesterton must have had a wonderful time doing this book together. Belloc probably considered it somewhat of a potboiler, he had an eccentric unmarried daughter to support, but like Mozart, even Belloc's potboilers are masterpieces..

The article is something like a book review. But more exactly, it is a brief retelling of Belloc's story with the insertion of thoughts from St. Louis de Montfort, St. Maximilian Kolbe, myself; and - at the end - the very *funny* true story of a man who actually did make gold. All of this does have a point - actually several points - which will, it is hoped, be obvious by the end of the article.

Making Gold

The desire of man to make gold is an ancient one, and it was especially the preoccupation of the alchemists of the Middle Ages. The Humanist Jacob Bronowski in his *The Ascent of Man*, which was made into a popular TV series a few years ago, writes:

When life was thought to be (and for most people was) solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short, to the alchemists gold represented the one eternal spark in the human body. Gold is the symbol of immortality - but I ought not to say symbol, because in the thought of the alchemists gold was the expression, the embodiment of incorruptibility, in the physical and in the living world together.

So when the alchemists tried to transmute base metals into gold, the transformation that they sought in the fire was from the corruptible to the incorruptible; they were trying to extract the quality of permanence from the everyday. And this was the same as the search for eternal youth: every medicine to fight old age contained gold, metallic gold as an essential ingredient, and the alchemists urged their patrons to drink from gold cups to prolong life. @ ²

St. Louis Marie De Montfort wrote at some length in his *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom* concerning this false wisdom:

A86. Chemistry or Alchemy, that is the science of dissolving and reducing natural bodies to their constituent parts, is even more boastful and more dangerous. This science although real in itself; has fooled and misled very many people, concerning the end they had in view. Personal experience leaves no doubt in my mind that the devil uses it to make people waste their time, and their money, lose grace and even their souls, under the pretext of discovering the philosopher's stone.

ANo other science claims to accomplish greater things, and by more plausible means. It promises the philosopher's stone, that is, a powder which is called 'Powder of projection,' and which when thrown into any molten metal, changes it into pure gold and silver; which restores health, cures the sick, prolongs life and works incalculable wonders which the ignorant accept as divine and miraculous.

AThere is a band of men called 'cabalists' who pose as being very clever in this science, and who guard its secrets so jealously that they would rather give up their lives than their so-called secrets...

AI do not agree that the philosopher's stone is a possibility. The learned Del Rio asserts that it is, and tries to prove it; others deny it. Be that as it may, it is not right, it is even dangerous for a Christian to go in pursuit of it. It is to dishonor Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, in whom are all the treasures of the Wisdom and knowledge of God, all the ties of nature, of grace and glory; it is to disobey the Holy Ghost, who says: *Altiora te ne quaesieris.* (Eccles. III, 22.) 'Seek not the things that are too high for thee.'³

Belloc loved to deflate the pretensions of science. There are little gems on this subject scattered throughout all his writings. This one is from, of all places, his book *Richelieu*:

AThe conquests of physical science were due to minute and extensive observation conducted by vast numbers of men, and therefore, for the most part, by the unintelligent. Science attracted some few men of high culture and some even (much fewer) of strong reasoning power: but in themselves mere observation and comparison, the framing of hypotheses and the testing of them by experiment, need no intellectual qualities above the lowest and are therefore an occupation for those who despise or do not grasp the use of reason. It has even been maintained that the ceaseless practice of exact measurement dulls the brain. At any rate, the business of modern physical science was not attached to, and became more and more divorced from, philosophy - and therefore from theology, which is philosophy's guide.

ABut this, for the most part unintelligent, mass of observation, has led to astounding results. It has transformed the material side of human life. As a consequence, its prestige has risen prodigiously; its methods, conclusions, and much more, the moral atmosphere in which it works has affected every other art, and every other study; notably did it affect the spirit of history in the later nineteenth century.⁴

A perfect illustration of Belloc's analysis is a typical statement of Jacob Bronowski:

A...Physics in the twentieth century is an immortal work. The human imagination working communally has produced no monuments to equal it, not the pyramids, not the *Illiad*, not the ballads, not the cathedrals. The men who made these conceptions one after another are the pioneering heroes of our age. Mendeleev, shuffling his cards; J. J. Thomson, who overturned the Greek belief that the atom is indivisible; Rutherford, who turned it into a planetary system;...⁵

Not the cathedrals...! Of course what this great immortal work led to was the atomic bomb. But Belloc's masterpiece of satire on claims like those of Bronowski has to be his *The Man Who Made Gold*.



Mr. Lexington dealing faithfully with the poor little electron.

Atom Splitting

But before getting into Belloc's plot, let me first give a little background.

Around 400 B.C. the Greek philosopher Democritus proposed the first atomic theory, that all nature was composed of assemblages of tiny particles he called *atoms*, a Greek word meaning indivisible. The modern atomic theory began in 1897 when J. J. Thomson at the Cavendish Laboratory of the University of Cambridge in England, discovered that the atom itself was made up of still tinier particles carrying a negative charge of electricity which he called electrons. Thomson was succeeded at the Cavendish by Rutherford ⁶ who in 1911 discovered a more massive particle, which carried a positive charge of electricity and which he called a proton. Rutherford then proposed his planetary model of the atom. The proton was in the center like the sun in our solar system, with the electron revolving around it like a planet. In hydrogen there would be one proton in the center with one electron circling it, all the way up to

uranium with 92 protons in the center and with 92 electrons circling it.

Then in 1919 Rutherford achieved the alchemists dream, the transmutation of elements. The Curies had discovered radioactive uranium in 1902 which gives off alpha particles, that is two helium protons. By bombarding nitrogen which has atomic number seven, with these particles, one proton stuck in the nucleus transmuting it into oxygen, which has atomic number eight, while the other proton bounced off to become hydrogen, which has atomic number one. Rutherford then wrote a book entitled *Modern Alchemy* describing his success, and claiming that it was now only a matter of time until some base metal would be transmuted into gold.

And Now for the Plot

It is here that Belloc's marvelous satire begins. The real life Rutherford has become the fictitious Professor Lexington, and he is trying to get one of his students to turn in his assigned paper on the transmutation of the elements. The student has become a devil worshiper at Cambridge, the MIT of England



Reconciliation of Religion and Science.

The devil-worshipping student asks Satan to help him to deal with Lexington. He is kneeling on a *prie-dieu* with the *Cabala* open in front of him. Suddenly there appears on his *prie-dieu* the ~~A~~philosopher's

stone!" It is a small cylinder about the size of a candy bar that looks like it is made of granulated brown sugar. When an angry Lexington arrives the student puts a small amount of lead in an oven, and while it is melting he breaks off a tiny fragment of the stone, and reducing it to powder between his fingers, drops it on the molten lead which slowly turns into pure gold. He then turns the stone over to Lexington in lieu of his term paper. To celebrate his victory he takes a larger dose of opium than usual, and is found dead the next morning. The University authorities hush up his death, as they used to do in similar cases when we were living in Cambridge next to Harvard University.

A Tangent

Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson was the Catholic chaplain at Cambridge, and in 1907 he wrote his marvelous and prophetic *The Lord of the World* to show how the obsession with technology was actually preparing the way for the reign of Antichrist. His volors (airplanes) could deliver the Beninsheim bomb which could destroy an entire city. Monsignor Benson actually predicted the atomic bomb!

He had discovered that the students while studying science, were at the same time delving into the occult, playing with Ouija boards and the like, at great danger to their souls. So he wrote as a companion to *The Lord of the World* another book entitled *The Necromancers*, as a warning against the dangers of occultism. It is a Faust-like story in which a student dabbling in the occult becomes possessed by the devil. He is rescued from Satan by the girl he loves, but at the cost of her life.

I can't believe that the devil was not behind the development of the atomic bomb! Much of what passes for "science" today in the field of physics, would be better classified as superstition. For example, Hawking's: *the universe just popped into existence by a quantum mechanical fluctuation in the void!*



*“Thus what is popularly but inaccurately termed
'an explosion' is in reality a return to
stable equilibrium.”*

Roscoe's "Introduction to Modern Physics"

Back to the Plot

Now that he is in possession of his dead student's philosopher's stone, Lexington is now the man who made gold, but he is also the man who could wreck the economy of the whole world. Through a set of humorous circumstances, he is forced to let three men in on his secret. So we now have Chesterton and Belloc's four standard villains in many of their humorous works - a scientist, a banker, a big business man and a politician. But Lexington in trying to find out what the cylinder is made of, passes a charge of electricity through it, and it blows up, leaving not a trace.

Lexington realizes he is the most wanted man in the world, a man who can make gold, but who can also wreck the world's economy. And though he has destroyed the magic cylinder, he convinces himself that it is only a matter of time before he is able to make gold once more.

Sensing that he is in great danger, he goes into hiding but after many hair-raising adventures is finally caught. He confesses to one of his confederates (the big business man) that the magic cylinder is gone, and he does not know how to make another one, but it is only a matter of time before he can replicate the feat and make gold again. This confederate concocts a story that Lexington has had a nervous breakdown, an all too common occurrence at the University, and has imagined that he made gold, but is now completely cured.

The Masons and the Jews

The four men realizing that, as Lexington assures them, it is only a matter of time before it is done anyway, decide this time to be prepared when it actually happens. In typical Masonic fashion they plan an international agency headquartered in Geneva called *Bureau International pour le Controle de l'Or*, or the B.I.C.O. for short. Lexington, of course, has the laboratory, and the others, pieces of the pie appropriate to their specialty, allotting themselves gigantic salaries, villas on the lake, etc. Belloc concludes:

I fear I might weary my readers were I to prolong the list, gratifying though it would be to show what a united front the English daily Press can present to the world in matters affecting the welfare of the country.

The *Trombone* began with words which jarred somewhat on our native modesty. Only the Empire, it said, could produce men like Sir Charles Lexington and Lord Taylor [the banker]. It regretted the presence of any foreigners at all on any of the Committees, and prophesied that in all that counted the B.I.C.O. would be run from London. It was devoutly thankful that no position of trust had fallen to others than Germans and Englishmen, though it admitted the strength of the financial committee where Lord Taylor would be supported by M. de Caen from France, Herr von Kuhn from the Reich, Señor Coheño as

Spanish Delegate Signor Cuneo as Italian; and it was gratifying to note that the important interests of the Soviet Republic with its production of gold in the Urals would be unofficially but effectively represented by Commissar Kahn.@⁷

I hope the reader got Belloc's final joke:

M. de Caen
Herr von Kuhn
Señor Coheño
Signor Cuneo
Commissar Kahn

All the names are variations of the Jewish name **Cohen!** Belloc and Chesterton well knew the truth of St. Maximilian Kolbe's penetrating insight: **A**Free-Masonry, nevertheless, is not - as many of its initiates think - autonomous in its action; it is on the contrary dominated and maneuvered cleverly by a coterie of Jews,=by the lords of international finance who wish to realize their millenaristic dream of power and proud domination of the world.@⁸

The Punch Line

In 1941 it finally happened. Rutherford\Lexington was right; it was only a matter of time. Professor Bainbridge of, at all places, Harvard University, bombarding mercury which has atomic number 80, knocked an electron out of orbit thus transmuting it into gold, which has atomic number 79, and at tremendous expense produced about an ounce of gold. There was only one catch – **the gold was radio-active!** In other words it would have burned a hole in Professor Bainbridge's pocket, and right through Bainbridge as well. I have looked this up in several physics books, and it is usually mentioned in about two lines in a footnote, without comment, and without even the hint of a smile.

But God the Father Who created all things, has a wonderful sense of humor, and St. Louis Marie De Montfort was more right than he knew.

References

1. This article first appeared in *From the Houstop*s in the Fall of 1999. Saint Benedict Center, 95 Martin Rd., Richmond, NH, 03470.
2. Jacob Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man*, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1973, p.138.

3. St. Louis Marie De Montfort, *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, translated from the French by the Montfort Fathers in England, Burleigh Press, Bristol, 1949, pp.46,47.
4. Hilaire Belloc, *Richelieu, A Study*, J.B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, 1934, p.23.
5. Bronowski, Op. cit .pp.349,351.
6. In the small world department, there is buried in our little cemetery at Still River, a very dear friend of St. Benedict Center, Bernard Lewis, a convert from Judaism, who had been Rutherford's Alab boy@ at the Cavendish.
7. Hilaire Belloc, *The Man Who Made Gold*, Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1934, pp.295,296.
8. *The Collected Writings of Maximillian Kolbe*, III, p.256; cited in Pancheri, Francesco Saverio, O.F.M., *Maximillian Kolbe, un saint pour notre temps*, translated from the French by T.M.S., Editions Lethellieux, Paris, 1985, pp.86,87.
