

43 George Ripley

George Ripley (1415 - 1490) holds a semi-special spot in my alchemical education. He wrote a long alchemical poem to King Edward IV, which I didn't understand, called *The Compound of Alchymy*. But later, George Starkey, an American alchemist writing under the pseudonym Erinaeus Philalathes, explained stanza X in his *Ripley Reviv'd* (1678), and it's in his explanation that I realized what the alchemists were trying to accomplish.

Ripley wrote a lot, and we have many manuscripts. *The Compound* was first printed 120 years after it was written.

“ 1. O Honorable Lord, and most victorious Knight,
With grace and vertue abundantly endewed,
The safegard of England, and maintainer of right;
That God you loveth, indeed he hath well shewed:
Wherefore I trust this land shalbe renewed
With joy and riches, with charitie and peace,
So that olde ranckors new understrewed,
Tempestuous troubles, and wretchednes shall cease.

2. And therefore sith I see by tokens right evident,
That God you guideth, and how that you be vertuous,
Hating sinne, and all such as be insolent,
How that also manslaughter to you is odious,
Upon the judgement also that you be piteous:
Me seemeth ruthe it were but that you should live long;
For of your great fortune you are not presumptuous,
Nor vengeable of spirit to revenge you of each wrong.

3. These considered with others in your most noble State,
Like as God knoweth, and people doo witnes beare,
So entirely me mooveth, that I must algate
Record the same, and therein be no flatterer:
And not that only, but also to write here
Unto your Highnes, humbly to present
Great secrets, which in farre countries I did learne,
And which by grace to me most unworthie are lent.

4. Once to your Lordship such things I did promise,
What time you did commaund to send unto me,
And sith that I wrote it in secret wise,

Unto your grace from the Universitie
Of Lovaine, when God fortun'd me by grace to see
Greater secrets and much more perfite,
Which onely to you I will disclosed to be,
That is the great Elixer both red and white.

5. For like it you to trust that truly I have found,
The perfect way of most secret Alchymie,
Which I will never truly for marke nor for pound
Make common but to you, and that conditionally,
That to youre selfe you shall keepe it full secretly,
And only to use it as may be to Gods pleasure,
Else in time comming to God I should abyee,
For my discovering of his secret treasure.

6. Therefore be you well advised and with good deliberation,
For of this secret shall know no other creature,
But onely you as I make faithfull protestation,
For all the time that herein life I shall endure,
Whereto I will your Lordship me ensure,
To my desire in this my oath for to agree,
Least I to me the wrath of God procure,
For such revealing of his great gift and privitie.

7. If God fortune you by me to win this treasure,
Serve him devowtly with more lawde and thanking,
Praying his Godhead in life that you may so endure,
His gifts of grace, and fortune to use to his pleasing,
Most especially intending over all thing,
To your power and cunning his precepts ten
So to observe, that into no danger your selfe you bring,
But that you in glory may see him hereafter, Amen.

8. And yet moreover I will your Lordship to pardon me,
For openly with pen I will it never it write,
But whensoever you list by practise you shall see,
By mouth also this precious secret, most of delight,
How may be made perfect Elixers both red and white,
Plaine unto your Lordship it shall declared be,
And if it please you, with easie expences and respite,
I will them worke by grace of the Trinitie.

9. But notwithstanding for perill that may befall,
If I dare not here plainely the knotte unbinde,
Yet in my writing I will not be so misticall,

But that by studie the true knowledge you may finde,
How that each thing is multiplied in his kinde,
And how the likenes of bodies metaline be transmutable
I will declare, that if you feele me in your minde,
My writing you shall finde true and no fained fable.

10. As Philosophers in the metheors doe write,
The likenes of bodies metaline be not transmutable,
But after he added these wordes of more delight,
Without they be reduced to their beginning materiable,
Wherefore such bodies within nature be liquiable,
Minerall and metaline may be mercurizate,
Conceive you may this science is not opinionable,
But very true, by Raymond⁸ and others determinate,

11. In the saide booke the Philosophers speake also,
Therein if it please your Highnes for to reade,
Of divers sulphures, and especially of two,
And of two mercuries joyned to them indeed,
Whereby he doth true understanders leade,
To the knowledge of the principle which is onely trew,
Both red, moist, pure, and white, as I have espied,
Which be neverthelesse found but of verie few.

12. And these two things be best, he addeth anone
For him that worketh the Alchymie to take:
Our golde and our silver therewith to make all one,
Wherefore I say who will our pearle and Ruby make,
The said principles looke he not forsake:
For at the beginning, if his principles be true,
And if so be by craft he can them also bake,
In th'end truly his worke he shall not rue.

13. But one great secret right needfull to be knowne,
That though the Philosophers speake plurally,
All is but one thing you may me well trowe,
In kinde which is our base principally,
Whereof doth spring both white and red naturally,
And yet the white must come first out of the red,
Which thing is not wrought manually,
But naturally, craft helping out of our lead.

14. For all the partes of our most precious stone,
As I can prove, be coessentiall and concrete,
Moreover there is no true principle but one,

Full long it was ere I therewith could meete,
Who can reduce him and knoweth his heate,
And onely kinde with kinde can well redresse,
Till filthie originall be clensed from his seate,
He likely is to finde our secrets more and lesse.

15. Therefore worke kinde onely with his owne kinde,
And so your Elements joyne that they not strive.
This poynt also for any beare in minde,
That passive natures you turne into active,
Of water, fire, and winde of earth make blive,
And of the quadrangle make a figure round,
Then have thou the honie of our bee-hive,
One ounce well worth one thousand pound.

16. The principall secret of secrets all,
Is true proportion which may not be behinde,
Wherein I counsell thee be not superficiall,
The true conclusion if you thinke to finde,
Turne earth into water and water into winde,
Therefore make fire and beware of the flood
Of Noah, wherein many men are so blinde,
That by this science they get little good.

17. I counsell you eate and drink temperately,
And beware well that Iposarcha¹¹ come not in place.
Neshe not your wombe by drinking immoderately,
Least you quench naturall heate in little space,
The colour will tell appearing in your face,
Drinke no more therefore than you may eate,
Walke up and downe after an easie pace,
Chafe not your bodie too sore to sweate.

18. With easie fire after moving when you sweate,
Warme your bodie and make it drie againe,
By rivers and fountaines walke after meate,
At morning time visit the high mountaine,
That Phisick so biddeth I read certaine,
So high the mountaines yet doe you not ascend,
But that you may downwardes your way have plaine,
And with your mantle from colde ye you defend.

19. Such labour is wholesome your sweat for to drie
With napkin, and after it see you take no colde,
For grosse humors be purged by sweate kindely,

Use Diacameron then confect with perfect golde,
Hermidocles for watry humors good I holde, Use
Ipericon perforat with milke of tithimall,
And sperma Cæti with red wine, and when you wax olde,
And Goats milke sod with wine nourisheth moysture radicall.

20. But a good Phisition who so intendeth to be,
Our lower Astronomie needeth well to know,
And after that to learne well urine in a glasse to see,
And if it neede to be chafed the fire for to blow,
Then wittily it by divers wayes for to throw
After the cause to make a medicine blive,
Truly telling the infirmities all on a row,
Who this can doe by his Phisick is like to thrive.

21. We have our heaven incorruptible of the quintessence,
Ornate with signes, Elements, and starres bright,
Which moysteth our earth by subtill influence,
And of it a secret sulphure hid from sight,
It fetcheth by vertue of his active might,
Like as the Bee fetcheth honey out of the flower,
Which thing could doe no other worldly wight.
Therefore to God be all glory and honour.

22. And like as yce to water doth relent,
Where it was congealed by violence of colde,
When Phœbus yet shineth with his heate influent,
Even so to water minerall reduced is our golde,
As witnesseth plainely, Albert, Raymond, and
Arnold, By heate and moysture and by craft occasionate,
Which congelation of the spirits, loe now I have tolde,
How our materialls together must be proportionate.

23. At the dyers craft you may learne this science,
Beholding with water how decoction they make
Upon the wad or madder¹⁸ easily and with patience,
Till tinctures doe appeare which then the cloth doth take,
Therein so fixed that they will never forsake
The cloth, for washing after they joynd be,
Even so our tinctures with the water of our lake,
We draw by boyling with the ashes of Hermes tree.

24. Which tinctures when they by craft are made perfite,
So dyeth mettles with colours aye permanent,
After the qualitie of the medicine, red or white,

That never away with anie fire wilbe brent:
To this example if you take good tent,
Unto your purpose the rather you shall winne.
And let your fire be easie, and not too fervent,
Where nature did leave what time you did beginne.

25. First calcine, and after that putrifie,
Dissolve, distill, sublime, descend, and fixe,
With Aqua vitæ oft times both wash and drie,
And make a marriage the bodie and spirite betwixt,
Which thus together naturallie if you can mixe,
In loosing of the bodie the water congeald shalbe,
Then shall the bodie die utterlie of the flixe,
Bleeding and changing his colours, as you shall see.

26. The third day againe to life he shall arise,
And devoure birds, and beasts of the wildernesse,
Crowes, poppingaies, pies, peacocks, and mavois,
The Phœnix, with the Eagle, and the Griffin of fearfulnessse,
The greene Lion, with the red Dragon he shall distresse,
With the white Dragon, and the Antelop, Unicorne & Panther,
With other beasts and birds both more and lesse,
The Basiliske also, which almost each one doth feare.

27. In bus and nibus he shall arise and descend, Up to the
Moone, and sith up to the Sunne, Through the
Ocean sea, which round is withouten end,
Onely shippen within a little glassen tunne;
When he is there come, then is the mastrie wonne:
About which journey, great goods you shall not spend,
And yet you shall be glad that ever it was begunne,
Patiently if you list to your worke attend.

28. For then both bodie and spirite with oyle and water,
Soule, and tincture, one thing both white and red,
After colours variable it containeth, whatsoever men clatter;
Which also is called after he hath once been dead
And is revived, our Markaside, our Magnet, and our lead,
Our Sulphur, our Arsinike, and our true Calx vive,
Our Sunne, our Moone, our ferment and our bread,
Our toad, our Basiliske, our unknowen bodie, our man, our wife.

29. Our bodie thus naturally by craft when he is renovate
Of the first order, is medicine called in our Philosophie;
Which oftentimes againe must be spiritualizate,

The round wheele turning of our Astronomie,
And so to the Elixer of spirits you must come: for why
Till the sonne of the fixed by the sonne of the fixer be overgone,
Elixer of bodies, named it is onely,
And this found secret poynt, deceaveth manie one.

30. This naturall process by helpe of craft thus consummate,
Dissolveth Elixer spirituall in our unctuous humiditie,
Then in Balneo Mare together let them be circulate,
Like new honie or oyle, till perfectly they be thickned.
Then will that medicine heale all infirmitie,
And turne all mettals to Sunne and Moone perfectly,
Thus you shall make the great Elixer, and Aurum potabile,
By the grace and will of God, to whom be all honour and glorie.

Amen. quod George Ripley.

Ripley also made a scroll, depicting the sequence of alchemy:



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