

51 Gabriel Plattes

Relatively unknown person, published a short leaflet with a long title: *A Caveat for Alchymists, or, a Warning to all ingenious Gentlemen, whether Laicks or Clericks, that study for the finding out of the Philosophers Stone; shewing how that they need not to be cheated of their Estates, either by the perswasion of others, or by their own idle conceits.*



“The First Chapter

Whereas I am shortly to demonstrate before the High and Honourable Court of Parliament in *England*, that there is such a thing feisible as the Philosophers Stone; or to speak more properly, an Art in the transmutation of Mettals, which will cause many a thousand men to undo and begger themselves, in the searching for the same: I cannot chuse but to publish these advertisements, for that is a fundamental point in my Religion, to do good to all men, as well enemies as friends: If I could be satisfied, that the publishing thereof, would do more good than hurt; then the world should have it in plain terms, and as plain as an Apothecaries receipt: But in regard that I have often vowed to God Almighty upon my knees, to do the greatest good with it, that my understanding could perswade me unto, I have craved the advice of the Honourable Parliament, for that I have strongly conceived an opinion, that by the well contriving of the use of it, the worlds ill manners may be changed into better: if this can be done, then I should break my vow to God, if I should not do my best endeavours, and therefore I dare not to cheat God Almighty (having obtained this blessed science of his free gift) and go into a corner, and there eat, drink and sleep like a swine, as many have done before me, upon whom this blessed knowledge, hath been unworthily bestowed: but had rather improve it to his glory, if my counsel craved shall so think fit. But howsoever my meaning is to do some considerable good with it howsoever, that is, to make my self a sea-mark, to the end, that no ingenious Gentleman shall from henceforth be undone by the searching for this noble Art, as many have heretofore been.

Therefore my first Caveat shall be to shew, that no man needs to be damnified above the value of 20.s. to try whether he be in a right way to it, or not?

The second Caveat shall be, to shew a way how to try whether any wandring Alchymist, that promiseth golden mountains, know any thing or not?

The third Caveat shall be, to shew how any mans Judgement ought to be grounded by a Concordance of the best books, before he fall to practice?

The fourth Caveat shall be, to shew which are false books, and which are true ones, to the end that every student in this excellent Art may trouble himself with fewer books, till he hath made a Concordance, and hath gathered the same out of the aenigmatical discourses, and hieroglifical figures, wherein this Art is hidden, and never to be found in plain terms, nor written plainly in any receipt.

Well for the first Caveat, that no man needs to be damnified above 20.s. to know whether he be in a right way, or not, let him be pleased to consider, that without *putrefactio unius*, there can be no *generatio alterius*; as in all other sublunary bodies, as well Animals as Vegetables, right so in Minerals and Metals.

Therefore he that cannot take one ounce of the filings of copper, or any other base Mettal, and by an ingenious addition of a Mineral moisture of the same kind, putrefie the same in a few moneths, and make it totally volatil, except a few faeces of no considerable weight, then he is out of the way, and is not to meddle with gold or silver, or any thing of great price: for he shall never obtain his desire (though he spend his whole life, time and estate).

Also he that hath not gathered a Concordance, by reading of books, which cannot be controlled by humane wit, is not fit to begin to practice this noble Art, and not in one part thereof, but in six several parts, which are these that follow.

First, it is clear that he must have a Mineral spirit, before he can dissolve a Mineral body, or else he will work out of kind; and if he think that Quicksilver, which is sold at the Apothecaries shops, is this Mineral spirit, then he is deceived, and will find it to be so; but the truth is, that if nature had not created quicksilver, this Art could never have been found; not that it can be made the Philosophical dissolvent, by any preparation whatsoever, but without it the first dissolvent (for there are three) cannot be gotten: for it only hath power to separate this Mineral spirit, from a crude Mineral, taken from the mine, which the fire hath never touched, and no other thing under heaven can do it else, no more than any creature besides a Bee, can extract hony out of a flower.

Secondly, that he must know the secret of dissolution, which is not by the common way used by Alchymists, but by the way meant by *Bernardus Comes Trevisanus*, where he saith *hujus dissolutionis via paucissimis est nota*: and I know not one Alchymist this day, nor ever did, to whom, if I should have given him the true dissolvent in one hand, which is a ponderous bright water, and the dissolvend in the other hand, which is a powder or filings of mettall: yet he knew not how to dissolve it.

Thirdly, he must know what is meant by the hollow Oak, a comparison not very unfit for the furnace, wherein this secret of dissolution, is to be accomplished.

Fourthly, he must know the reason and manner of refixing his bodies when he hath made them volatil, by this secret way of dissolution.

Fifthly, he must know the secret of projection, which hath beguiled many, when by their great charges, study and labour, they have made the Philosophers Stone, so that they could make no use it. For when it is mingled with the imperfect metals, yea, though prepared philosophically, not vulgarly, yet there is another thing to be done, before the mettall transmuted goeth to the test, or else all is lost: and if any one will not believe me, let him read the books of *Raymundus Lullius*, and he shall finde in three several places, in several books, that after projection, the matter must be put in cineritio, in vasi longo, but he saith also, *non intelligas quod ponas plumbum in cineritio*: for there is something to be separated by the Art of the Philosopher, before the lead come to do its duty, or else all will be gone according to the saying: *totum vertitur in fumum, quicquid ineptus agit*.

Sixthly, he must know the fire and the regiment thereof; and also the nature, which is to be gentle, continual, compassing round about the matter, and not burning it.

And now that I have shewed what an Artist must know, or else all his labour and charge is lost, I wish every man to consider what a hazard he undergoeth, if he meddle without the knowledge of these six secrets, for so much as he may very well faile, though he have them, I mean, though he have the Theorick, yet he may fail in the Practick.

Therefore if any smoak seller, or wandring Alchymist, shall come to any ingenious Gentleman that studieth this Art, though he bring with him a recipe that promiseth golden mountains, and maketh affidivit, I mean that searcheth never so deeply, that he hath done it, or seen it done, which is a common trick amongst wandring Alchymists: believe him not, unless he can satisfie you concerning all the six former mentioned secrets, for, if you do believe him having not that knowledge, I will give my word for him, that he shall cozen you. For there is but *unica via, unica operatio*, to accomplish any work in Alchymie, which is as hard to be found, as the way to heaven in this world, where there are an hundred Religions, or rather an hundred Sects of Religion, wherein the true Religion is smothered and bemisted, even as the way to make the Philosophers Stone is, by the idle conceits of men that are ruled by opinion, more than by knowledge.

As for example, one *Petrus Bonus ferrariensis*, a great learned man, and a Doctor of the chair of an University, wrote a book called *Margarita Pretiosa*, and penned it most admirably, concerning the Philosophers stone, and the way to make it; and when he had done, confessed that he never had made it, yet he guessed indifferent well, but all his directions are not worth a button. I would give an impression of his books away freely, that I had his School-learning, but

as for his knowledge, I would not give two pence: whereby it may be seen how easily wise men may be deceived, and therefore let fools look about them before they attempt this noble science.

Also one *Gaston Dulco Clavens*, a great Champion that quarrelled with all opposers of this sacred Art, and wrote a book which is greatly esteemed by Alchymists, and seemeth very rational to all those which have not the practick, wherein he defendeth the truth of this Art by 32 Arguments and many experiments, which are all false, upon my certain knowledge, and if my purse could speak, it should swear it.

And many others have written upon this subject, which knew nothing but what they had collected out of books, to what end, I know not, unless it were to draw other learned men unto them, thinking to gain some knowledge by their conference.

Also another, whose name I have forgotten (for it is a great while since I read any books) wrote a book intituled *De interitu Alchymie*, which is as foolish as any of the other, unless that when all his hopes were at an end, he thought that some man would have come unto him, and confuted him, by shewing him the experience of it.

Well thus much for false books; now as for true ones, I could name many that could not be written but by those that had made certain trial of the work; but for brevity sake, and to keep this book within the price promised, viz. two pence, I will name onely four, viz. *The Compound of Alchymie*, written by *Georgius Ripheus Anglus*, *The Hieroglyphical Figures of Nicholaus Tilamellus*, whose body lieth buried in Paris: The works of *Raymundus Lullius*; The two books of *Bernardus Comes Trevisanus*. These four men shewed by their actions, that they had the Art of the transmutation of Mettals. For *Georgius Ripheus Anglus* maintained an Army of souldiers at Rhodes against the Turks, at his own charge: *Nicholaus Tilamellus* builded up seven Churches and seven Hospitals at Paris, and endowed them with good revenues, which may be easily proved: *Raymundus Lullius* made gold in the Tower of London, to furnish an Army to go against the Turks: *Bernardus Comes Trevisanus*, recovered his Earldome again, which he had formerly spent in the seeking of this Art. And now me thinks, I hear every one demanding, how shall we do to find out this great secret?

But *Geber*, an Arabian Prince and a famous Philosopher, shall answer in his own words, viz. *non per lectionem librorum, sed per immensam cognitionem, per profundam imaginationem, & per assiduam praxim*: and when all this is done, he concludeth that *est donum Dei Altissimi, qui cui vult, largitur, & subtrahit*.

Well now me thinks I hear the cousening Alchymists saying, what shall we do now, we have no other living? To which I answer, that I would gladly rid the world of cheaters if I could: but if they must needs couzen, then let them trade

with those that have so little love to art, that they cannot afford to read this book to defend themselves, and that will improve the wits of the world very much, so that it may possibly do more good than hurt: for the truth is that the world is unhappy, only for want of wit, which I have demonstrated in a little book lately printed, which sheweth how any Kingdome may live in great plenty, prosperity, health, peace and happiness, and the King and Governours may live in great honour and riches, and not have half so much trouble, as is usual in these times: and if any one shall be cheated, and lay the fault upon me for discovering of cheats in this book, I cannot help it: for he that is willing to do good, must needs do some hurt, unless men were Angels. But in this case I see not but my action is justifiable: for first, I have given every one an antidote against cheating, and if they will not take it, let them be cheated, and then I will shew them a way to recover their losses, by an experiment tried upon my self: for till I was soundly cheated of divers hundred pounds, I thought my self to be a very knowing man: but then I found that I was a fool, and so disdained not to learn wit at any bodies hands that could teach me, whereby I attained a considerable quantity of knowledge, which I will not give or change, for any mans estate whatsoever; but though I sped so well by being cheated, yet I wish all others to take heed, for fear least that their fortunes prove not so good as mine.

The Second Chapter

Whereas I have professed my self to be an Anti-cheator, it behoveth me to discover the several ways whereby the world is so universally cheated by the cosening Alchymists: and therefore though I could discover fourscore cheats, yet at this time I will onely discover four grand ones, and so conclude.

The first shall be to discover the knavery of [Edward] *Kelly*, the grand Impostor of the world, whom the Emperour of *Germany* kept prisoner in a Castle, and maintained him honourably, thinking either by fair means or by foule, to get the Philosophers Stone out of him, who God knows had it not, but made divers cosening projections before great men, which by the report thereof, have caused many to spend all that ever they had; and it cannot be well estimated, how many hundred thousand pounds have been spent in Europe about it, since that time, more than before.

And thus one of his projections was made before three great men sent over by *Q Elizabeth*, to see the truth of the business. He gave order to them to buy a warming panne, which they did accordingly, and brought it to him; he took a pair of compasses, and marked out a round plate in the middle of the cover thereof, and with a round chisel he took out the piece; then he put it in the fire, and when it was red hot, he put a little powder upon it, which flowed all over it, and made it to look like to gold, which is an easie matter to be done: but when he came to fit it to the hole, he had a piece of good gold, taken out of a plate of gold by the compasses, not altered, and this by a trick of Legerdemain, or slight

of hand (a thing common, for I have known a Porter that could have done it) he conveyed into the place, and delivered the warming panne into the hands of the spectators, who brought it into *England*, and the noise thereof made almost all mens ears to tingle, and their fingers to itch, till they were at the business, and raised the price of Alchymie books fearfully. Now if he had meant plain dealing, he would have given them some of his pouder home to their lodging, that they might have done the like again themselves at home, but he neither offered it, neither did they desire it, at which I marvel: for if he had denyed that, as it is like that he would, then the knavery had been presently discovered, so that this false news had not been brought into *England*, whereby many men have received great loss. Some have reported that he clipped out a sheard with a pair of Goldsmiths sheers, and then he took a little more time, and cast one of gold like to it, which is easily done: whethersoever he did, the whole scope of the business argueth cheating, and his meaning was nothing else, but by either of these wayes, to make the spectators to be less suspitious; like to a jugler that foldeth up his sleeves for the like purpose. But admit that he had the true Philosophers Stone, and that the body of a Mettal might be altered by it, and turned into true gold without reduction of it to the first matter, which is altogether impossible: yet he was a detestable villain to publish it in such manner, to the great dammage of so many men as were thereby irritated to undoe themselves, and not to give them some Advertisements, like to these in this book, whereby they might be preserved from undergoing any considerable loss. But the old saying proved true, *qualis vita, finis ita*: he lost his ears in *London* for cheating, when he was a young cousener; and when he was grown too skilfull to be discovered by men, then God Almighty took punishment of him; for he bought as much linnen cloth, pretending to make shirts and other things, as he thought would serve to let him down to the ground out at a window in the Tower of the Castle wherein he was a prisoner; and whether his hold slipped, or the cloth was too short, I could never learn certainly; but it is certain that he fell down and broke his bones and died, and there was an end of him . . .

The third Cheat

An Alchymist travelled with this cheat into many Kingdoms and Countries, and it may be done by one that hath not the Art of Legerdemain, or slight of hand; and thus it was done. He filed a twenty shilling piece of gold into dust, and put it into the bottom of a crucible, or a Goldsmiths melting pot, then he made a thin leaf of wax of a fit breadth, and rammed it down a little hollow in the middle, & with an hot iron sodered it, then he painted it over with a paint hereafter mentioned, and dried it, and painted it again, and thus did till it was like the crucible; and when he wanted mony, he would go to a rich hostess in some City, and take a chamber for a week, and when he had been there a day or two, and had payed royally, the next morning he would be sick, and keep his bed, and when his Hostess came to visit him, he would ask her, if she could help him to a Goldsmith, that would do some business for him, and he would pay him for his

pains very largely, so she was ready, and brought one. He asked him if he could do him one hours work or two presently, the Goldsmith answered him, yes Sir, with all my heart: so he took his purse from under his pillow, and gave him half a crown, and prayed him to buy half an ounce of quicksilver, and bring it to him presently. The Goldsmith did so; then he gave him his key, and prayed him to open his portmantle, and take out a little box and open it, where he found a crucible, and a little Ivory box, filled with the red powder of Vermillion; the Cheater prayed him to weigh out a grain of the red powder, with his gold weights, which he did; then he bid him look well upon the crucible if it were a good one, and not cracked in the carriage; the Goldsmith said it was as sound an one as he had seen, and had a good strong bottom. Then he bid him to put it into the quicksilver, and the grain of red powder, and set it into the fire, and by degrees melt it down. The Goldsmith did so; when it was melted, he bid him set it by to cool, and then break it; then he lay down in his bed, and after a little while, he asked the Goldsmith what he found in the bottom, to which the Goldsmith answered that he found a little lump of gold, as good as ever he saw, so he prayed him to help him to money for it, for his money was almost all spent; that I will, said the Goldsmith presently, and went home, and weighed it, and brought him nineteen shillings in silver, and was desirous to know, how that red powder was made; he said it was an extract out of gold, which he carried with him in his long travels, for ease of carriage, and that there was no other grain in it, or else he would tell it him. So the Goldsmith asked him how much he would have again of his half crown, and he should have all if he please; for he was well enough paid for his work, in seeing that rare piece of Art: no said the Alchymist, take it all, and I thank you too; so the Goldsmith took his leave, with great respect: then he laid down in his bed a little while, and by and by he knocked for his Hostess, who came immediately, and he prayed her to call for a porter; whilst that he wrote a note, she did so. When the porter came, he sent him to his fellow cheater, who lay in the other end of the Town, who presently brought him a letter formally framed betwixt them; upon the reading whereof, he called for his Hostess again, and desired her to fetch the Goldsmith again, she did so; when she brought him, he [the Alchymist] was rising, and grunted and groaned, and told the goldsmith, that though he was not well, yet necessity forced him to go about earnest business, and shewed him the Letter, and prayed him to read it whilst he put on his cloaths, and when the Goldsmith had read it, he said, you see what a strait I am in for twenty pounds, can you furnish me, and to morrow or next day you shall work for me, and pay your self, and I will leave you my box in pawn, which now you know how to make five hundred pounds of it, as well as I? The Goldsmith answered, it shall be done, and went down and told the Hostess all things; and also told her, that the Gentleman was in great distress for twenty pounds, and that he had promised to furnish him instantly, but he had but ten pounds by him; if she pleased to furnish him with the other ten pounds, she should be sure enough to have it with great advantage, for so short a time: for saith he, we shall have his box in pawn and will make bold with twice as much of his powder, as our money comes to; and besides that, he will

pay us royally I warrant you; and all the while I can do the work so well, that I should be glad never to hear of him more. So she agreed, and they brought him up twenty pounds presently, whereupon he delivered them the box, and made a motion to have it sealed up; but at length he said, that because they had furnished him in his necessity, and because he esteemed them to be honest people, in regard of his Host, he would not stay to seal it and so took his leave, and prayed the Goldsmith to be ready within a day or two, to help him to work, but from that day to this, they never saw him. So when he came not again within a week or fortnight, they concluded that some misfortune had happened to him, or that he had taken cold by going abroad so hastily, being not well, and so was dead, for else he would have sent about it before that time, if he were but sick; so they resolved to make use of it and fell to work with great alacrity; but when they could make no gold, their hearts were cold, and they found themselves to be miserably cheated.

The fourth Cheat

This Cheat is described in old Chawcer, in his *Canterbury Tale*; but because everyone hath not that book, I will relate it briefly, and those that would see it more largely described, shall be referred to the said book. And thus it was done: The Cheater took a charcoal about two inches long and one inch thick, and did cleave it through the middle, and made a little concavity in the middle thereof, and put in a little ingot of gold, weighing an ounce, into the middle of it, and glewed it up again, so that it seemed to be nothing, but a very coal. Then before [i.e. in the presence of] the cheated, he put in one ounce of quicksilver into a crucible, and a little red powder with it, and bid the cheated to set it into the fire, and when it began to smoke, oh saith he, I must stir it a little, to mingle the powder with the Mercury, or else we shall have great loss; so he took up a coal from the heap with the tongs, like to his coal which he had prepared, and let it fall out of the tongs by the side of the heap, and dropped down his own coal by it, and took it up in room of the other, and stirred the quicksilver and the powder together with it, and left the coal in the pot, and then bid the cheated to cover the pot with charcoals, and to make a good fire, and after a little space to blow it strongly with a pair of good hand bellows, til it was melted, for he assured him, that the quicksilver would be fixed and turned into gold, by the vertue of that small quantity of powder; which the cheated found by experience, as he verily thought, and so was earnest with the cheater to teach him his Art, but what bargain they made I have forgotten, for it is twenty years since I read *Chawcers* book.

Now whereas I have received the reports of some of these Cheaters in divers manners, yet I am sure that they being wrought according to my prescription, will cheat almost any man that hath not read this book or *Chawcers*, unless a man should happen upon one that knoweth the great work, which is hardly to be found in ten Kingdoms; for he knoweth that none of these things can be done unless they be meer albifications or citrinations, but are nought else but

sophistications and delusions, and will abide no triall, unless it be the eyes of an ignorant man that hath no skill in mettals.

Well now I will adde some more Caveats to fill up my book, and so make a short conclusion.

And first, To sum up all, Let men beware of all books and receipts that teach the multiplication of gold or silver with common quicksilver by way of animation or minera, for they cannot be joyned inseparably by any medium, or means whatsoever.

2. Let all men beware of any books or receipts which teach any dissolutions into clear water like unto gold or silver dissolved in *aqua fortis*, or *aqua regis*, or spirit of salt, made by any way whatsoever, or any dissolution whatsoever, which is not done *cum congelatione spiritus*, according to the manner used in the great work.

3. Let all men take heed of books that teach any operations in vegetable, or animals, be they never so gloriously penned; for it is as possible for a bird to live in the water, or for a fish to live in the air, as for any thing that is not radically mettallical, to live in the lead upon the test.

And lastly, let all men beware of his own conceit of wisdom, for that hath undone many a man in this Art. Therefore let every one take notice that though it be a thousand to one odds, that any seeker shal not obtain his desire, that is because many men being unfit and not quallified sufficiently to take in hand this great business; let these remember what *Salomon*, the wisest of men saith, *into a wicked heart wisdom shall not enter*, and he saith not great wisdom, not much wisdom, but ordinary wisdom; then how can any wicked or foolish man hope to find out this great secret, which being the most sublime knowledge that God hath given to men, requireth the greatest wisdom to accomplish it, that God hath bestowed upon men.

Therefore if any man attempteth this Art, which hath not attained to such a perfection in the knowledge of nature, especially in minerals, that by his own speculation and practice, without the help of books, he can write a rational discourse of either animals, vegetables, or minerals, in such a solid way that no man can contradict it, without shame upon fair tryal, the questions being rightly stated, then his labour and charge is the cause why so many men fail and undo themselves in this Art; for if the search be quallified sufficiently, then it is ten to one odds, that he speedeth . . . I did not write this book with an intent to teach the Art absolutely, but onely to preserve men from undoing themselves foolishly; which if it be well considered of, will be found to be large charity.

