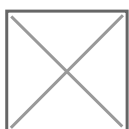


54 John French

We recently read some blogs here "translated by J.F.M.D." This is John French, M.D., Paracelcian physician and huge fan of alchemy. He translated a number of important alchemical works from Latin into English which drove British alchemy to great heights. French is admired by those who will develop early chemistry, like Robert Boyle.



What follows is his preface to his English translation of *The Divine Pymander*, Ficino's Italian translation from the Greek.

“ [John French] To the Reader

This Book may justly challenge the first place for antiquity, from all the Books in the World, being written some hundreds of years before *Moses* his time, as I shall endeavor to make good. The Original (as far as is known to us) is Arabick, and several Translations thereof have been published, as *Greek, Latine, French, Dutch, &c.* but never *English* before. It is pity the Learned Translator had not lived, and received himself, the honor, and thanks due to him from *Englishmen*; for his good will to, and pains for them, in translating a Book of such infinite worth, out of the Original, into their Mother-tongue.

Concerning the Author of the Book it self, Four things are considerable, viz. His Name, Learning, Countrey, and Time. 1. The name by which he was commonly stiled is, *Hermes Trismegistus, i.e. Mercurius ter Maximus*, or, The thrice greatest Intelligencer. And well might he be called *Hermes*, for he was the first Intelligencer in the World (as we read of) that communicated Knowledg to the sons of Men, by Writing, or Engraving. He was called *Ter Maximus*, for some Reasons, which I shall afterwards mention. 2. His Learning will appear, as by his Works; so by the right understanding the Reason of his Name. 3. For his Countrey, he was King of Egypt. 4. For his Time, it is not without much Controversie, betwixt those that write of this Divine, ancient Author, what time he lived in. Some say he lived after *Moses* his time, giving this slender Reason for it, viz. Because he was named *Ter Maximus*; for being preferred (according to the *Egyptian* Customs) being chief Philosopher, to be chief of the Priesthood; and from thence, to be chief in Government, or King. But if this be all their ground, you must excuse my dissent from them, and that for this reason, Because according to the most learned of his followers, he was called *Ter*

Maximus; for having perfect, and exact Knowledg of all things contained in the World; which things he divided into Three Kingdoms (as he calls them), viz. *Mineral, Vegetable, Animal*; which Three, he did excel in the right understanding of; also, because he attained to, and transmitted to Posterity (although in an *Ænigmatical* and obscure stile) the Knowledge of the Quintessence of the whole Universe (which Universe, as I said before, he divided into Three Parts) otherwise called, The great Elixir of the Philosophers; which is the Receptacle of all Celestial and Terrestrial Vertues; which Secret, many ignorantly deny, many have chargeably sought after, yet few, but some, yea, and Englishmen, [marginal note: "*Ripley, Bacon, Norton, &c.*"] have happily found. The Description of this great Treasure, is said to be found ingraved upon a *Smaragdine* Table, in the Valley of [H]ebron, after the Flood. So that the Reason before alleaged to prove this Author to live after Moses, seems invalid; neither doth it any way appear, that he lived in Moses his time, although it be the opinion of some, as of *John Functius*, who saith in his Chronology, That he lived Twenty one yeers before the Law was given by *Moses* in the Wilderness: But the Reasons that he, and others, give are far weaker then those that I shall give, for his living before *Moses* his time. My reasons for that are these; First, because it is received amongst the Ancients, that he was the first that invented the Art of communicating Knowledg to the World, by Writing or Engraving. Now if so, then in all probability he was before Moses; for it is said of *Moses* that he was from his childehood skilled in all the *Egyptian Learning*, which could not well have been without the help of Literature, which we never read of any before that invented by *Hermes*. Secondly, He is said by himself, to be the son of *Saturn*, and by others to be Scribe of *Saturn*. Now *Saturn* according to Historians, lived in the time of Sarug, *Abrahams* great Grand-Father. I shall but take in *Suidas* his judgment, and so rest satisfied that he did not live onely before, but long before *Moses*: His words are these, *Credo Mercurium Trismegistum sapientem Egyptium floruisse ante Pharaonem*.

In this Book, though so very old, is contained more true knowledg of God and Nature, then in all the Books in the World besides, I except onely Sacred Writ: And they that shall judiciously read it, and rightly understand it, may well be excused from reading many Books; the Authors of which pretend so much to the knowledg of the Creator and Creation. If God ever appeared in any man, he appeared in him, as it appears by this Book. That a man who had not the benefit of his Ancestors knowledg, being as I said before, the first inventer of the Art of Communicating Knowledg to Posterity by writing, should be so high a Divine, and so deep a Philosopher, seems to be a thing more of God, then of Man; and therefore it was the opinion of some, that he came from Heaven, not born upon Earth. There is contained in this Book, that true Philosophy, without which, it is impossible ever to attain to the height and exactness of Piety and Religion. According to this Philosophy, I call him a Philosopher that shall learn and study the things that are, and how they are ordered and governed, and by whom, and for what cause, or to what end; and he that doth so, will acknowledg thanks to,

and admire the Omnipotent Creator, Preserver, and Director of all these things. And he that shall be thus truly thankful, may truly be called Pious and Religious; and he that is Religious, shall more and more, know where, and what the Truth is: And learning that, he shall yet be more and more Religious.

The glory and splendor of Philosophy is an endeavoring to understand the chief Good, as the Fountain of all Good: Now how can we come neer to, or finde out the Fountain, but by making use of the Streams as a conduct to it? The operations of Nature are Streams running from the Fountain of Good, which is God. I am not of the ignorant and foolish opinion of those that say, the greatest Philosophers are the greatest Atheists; as if to know the Works of God, and to understand his goings forth in the Way of Nature, must necessitate a man to deny God. The Scripture disapproves of this as a sottish tenet, and experience contradicts it: For behold! Here is the greatest Philosopher, and therefore the greatest Divine.

Read understandingly this ensuing Book (and for thy help, thou mayest make use of that voluminous Commentary written upon it [marginal note: "Hannibal Rosseli Calabar"] then it will speak more for its Author, then can be spoken by any man, at least by me.

Thine in the love of the Truth,

J[ohn] F[rench]

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