Letter from Newton to Henry Oldenburg, dated 26 April 1676

Author: Isaac Newton

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Sir

I am now to return you thanks on a double account, the one for publishing my letter in your last Transactions, the other for motioning to get the Experiment in controversy, tryed before the Royal Society. I could be very desirous, not to say ambitious, to have such a thing done, did I not feare I should be troublesome, & therefore I shall esteem it a great favour if you please to get it done, being apt to think that M^{r} Linus's Friends will not otherwise acquiesce.

Yesterday I reading the two last Philosophical Transactions, had the opportunity to consider M^{r} Boyles uncommon experiment about the incalescence of Gold & quicksilver. I beleive the fingers of many will itch to be at the knowledge of the preparation of such a quicksilver, & for that end some will not be wanting to move for the publishing of it, by urging the good it may do in the world; but in my simple judgment the noble Author since he has thought fit to reveale himself so far does prudently in being reserved in the rest. Not that I think any great excellence in such a quicksilver either for medical or Chymical operations: for it seems to me that the metalline particles with which that quicksilver is impregnated may be grosser than the particles of the quicksilver & be disposed to mix more readily with the gold upon some other account then their subtilty, & then in so mixing, their grossnes may enable <54r> them to give the parts of the gold the greater shock, & so put them into a brisker motion then smaller particles could do: much after the manner that the saline particles wherewith corrosive liquors are impregnated heate many things which they are put to dissolve, whilst the finer parts of common water scarce heat any thing dissolved therein be the dissolution never so quick; & if they do heat any thing; (as quick lime) one may suspect that heat is produced by some saline particles lying hid in the body which the water sets on work upon the body which they could not act on whilst in a dry form. I would compare therefore this impregnated quicksilver to some corrosive liquor (as Aqua fortis) the mercurial part of the one to the watry or flegmatic part of the other, & the metallick particles with which the one is impregnate**{**d**}** to the saline particles with which the other is impregnated, both which I suppose may be of a middle nature between the liquor which they impregnate & the bodies they dissolve & so enter those bodies more freely & by their grossness shake the dissolved particles more strongly then a subtiler agent would do. If this analogy of these two kinds of liquors may be allowed, one may guess at the little use of the one by the indisposition of the other either to medicine or vegetation. But yet because the way by which quicksilver may be so impregnated, has been thought fit to be concealed by others that have known it, & therefore may possibly be an inlet to something more noble, not to be communicated without immense dammage to the world if there should be any verity in the Hermetick writers, therefore I question not but that the great wisdom of the noble Authour will sway him to high silence till he shall be resolved of what consequence the thing may be either by his own experience, or the judgement of some other that throughly understands what he speakes about, that is of a true Hermetic Philosopher, whose judgement (if there be any such) would be more to be regarded in this point then that of all the world beside to the contrary, there being

other things beside the transmutation of metalls (if those great < insertion from the left margin > pretenders bragg not) which none but they understand. Sir because the Author seems desirous of the sense of others in this point, I have been so free as to shoot my bolt: but pray keep this letter private to your self

Your Servant

Is. Newton.

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