

## THAT UNIVERSAL THIRST FOR GOLD

Has Possessed the Human  
Race in All Ages.

"Auri Sacra Fames."—This oft quoted passage is from Virgil's *Aeneid*, book III. Polydorus, son of Priam and Hecuba, was sent by his father with a large quantity of gold, the greater part of the treasure of Troy, to the court of Polymnestor, king of Thrace, for protection. When the death of Priam became known in Thrace, the king seized the gold, killed Polydorus and threw his body into the sea, where it was found on the shore by Hecuba.

By Virgil's account, the body was buried and on the grave grew a myrtle. *Aeneas* on his voyage from Troy to Italy, at the request of Dido, queen of Carthage, related to her the details of the war, the fall of Troy and his subsequent adventures; he told her that while sacrificing to Venus and the gods, he saw a myrtle growing near. While breaking off some branches with which to decorate the altar he found them distilling drops of blood; at the same time he heard groans and a voice which said: "*Aeneas*, why dost thou tear an unhappy wretch? Spare me now that I am in my grave."  
• • for Polydore I am; here an iron crop of darts hath overwhelmed me, transfixed, and over me shot up pointed javelins." "Then, indeed," continues *Aeneas*, "depressed in heart with perplexing fear I was stunned; my hair stood on end and my voice clung to my jaws."

"This Polydore unhappy Priam had formerly sent in secrecy with a great weight of gold, to be brought up by the king of Thrace; when he now began to distrust the arms of Troy and saw the city in close siege bound up, he, as soon as the power of the Trojans was crushed and their fortune gone, espousing Agamemnon's interest and victorious arms, breaks every sacred bond, assassinates Polydore and by violence possesses his gold. Cursed thirst for gold to what dost thou not drive the hearts of men?"

The universal love of gold by men can not be explained by philosophy or science; it seems to be one of those inscrutable mysteries by which we are surrounded that defy solution.

When and why man first began to desire gold cannot be told, but the most ancient of ancient writings show that this sentiment was strongly manifest at the dawn of history, from which we may infer that it is inherent, and coeval with primitive man, and is part of the plan of nature. When we consider how small is the quantity we have been able to have gathered together as compared with other metals and minerals, far more useful and essential, it is not strange that we should be perplexed by the unanswered question. Many authors and historians have been equally puzzled and some have in their writings advanced theories more or less worthy of consideration.

One writer, voicing the opinion of others, says: "The golden nugget glittering amongst the pebbles of the stream caught the eye of the primitive man, who saw in it the image of the sun, the oldest object of worship, and of which gold has ever since continued the symbol."

This is very poetical, but every gold miner knows that gold nuggets never "glitter;" they in no way resemble the sun nor would they convey such an idea to the finder. Even individual crystals sometimes met with in mines, are never brilliant unless burnished by art.

Another writer says that the Persians believe the human love for gold is because of its resemblance to fire, which

they worship. Gold as it is taken from the mine is by no means an object to inspire admiration, and even newly coined gold is not more beautiful than silver fresh from the mint.

"For what reason the highest value is set upon gold," is thus stated by Pliny, (book 33, chapter 19).

"It is because gold is the only substance in nature which suffers no loss by the action of fire, and passes unscathed through conflagrations and the flames of the funeral pile. Nay, even more than this, the oftener gold is subjected to the action of fire the more refined in quality it becomes; indeed, fire is the test of its goodness, as when submitted to intense heat gold ought to assume a similar color and turn red and igneous in appearance."

The subject of gold and its influence on the actions of men is frequently referred to by historians and classical writers, from whose works I have selected a few examples.

"But greedy mortals rummaging her store,  
Dugged from her entrails first the precious ore  
Which next to hell, the prudent Gods had laid:  
And that alluring ill to sight displayed:  
Thus accursed steel, and more accursed gold,  
Gave mischief birth and made that mischief bold  
And double death did writhed man invade,  
By steel assaulted, and by gold betrayed."  
(The Iron Age. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—Dryden's translation)

"When gold was found, the powerful ore  
Saw light and man gaped after glittering store,  
Then wit and beauty were esteemed no more."  
(*Lucretius*, Book V.)

Gold governs all, get that and thou mayst have  
What e'er thy most unbounded wishes crave:  
In short, whoever is of that possessed,  
Has Jove himself inclosed within his chest.

Caius Gracchus, in the year 121 B. C., was killed at his own request by his favorite slave, Epicrates; a reward equal to its weight in gold was offered and paid for his head. There are several versions of this transaction.

Diodorus Siculus says, "After Caius Gracchus was killed by the hand of his own servant, Lucius Vitellius, who had been one of his particular friends, was the first that got his body, and was so far from being troubled at his death that he cut off his head and carried it to his own house, thereby giving a remarkable instance of his cruelty and covetousness, for when Lucius Optimus, the consul, by proclamation promised to reward him that should bring him the head of Gracchus, with the weight of it in gold, Vitellius bored a hole in the neck and drawing out the brains, poured melted lead in the room. Then he brought the head to Optimus and returned with the promised reward."  
(Fragment of book 34.)

By Pliny's account, "The invention of money opened a new field to human avarice by giving rise to usury and the practice of lending money at interest, while the owner passes a life of idleness, and it was with no small advances that, not mere avarice only, but a perfect hunger for gold, became inflamed with a sort of rage for acquiring; to such a degree, in fact, that Septimuleius, the familiar friend of Caius Gracchus, not only cut off his head, upon which a price had been set of its weight in gold, but bringing it to Optimus, poured melted lead into the mouth and so not only was guilty of the crime of parricide, but added to his criminality by cheating the state."  
(Chapter 33-14.)

Describing gold mining, Pliny refers to "an earth, a kind of potter's clay mixed with gravel, 'gangadia' by name, which it is almost impossible to overcome. This earth has to be attacked with iron wedges and hammers; it is generally considered that there is nothing more stubborn in existence except, indeed, the greed for gold which is the most stubborn of all things." • • •

"We must not omit too to observe that gold, for which there is such a mania with all mankind, hardly holds the tenth rank as an object of value, and silver, with which we purchase gold, hardly the twentieth."  
(Book 37, chap. 77.)

"Would that gold could have been banished forever from the earth, accursed by universal report, as some of the most celebrated writers have expressed themselves, reviled by the reproaches of the best of men, and looked upon as discovered only for the ruin of mankind."  
(33-3.)—H. G. Hanks, in *Mining and Engineering Review*.

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
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