

Isaac Newton, Natural Philosopher and Alchemist

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Abstract.- This brief article analyzes the personality of Sir Isaac Newton, egocentric, anchorite and above all alchemist. Precisely, the superposition of this "defects", associated to a brilliant mind, led Isaac Newton to be an original and extraordinary precursor in all the History of Physics.

1.- Some Oversights in the History

Without any doubt, Isaac Newton in conjunction with Galileo Galilei and Albert Einstein are the top three brightest stars in the firmament of Physics. But it is also true that Isaac Newton - the man - was one of the most controversial, intriguing and egocentric personalities in the History of Physics.

It is an undeniable fact that the support of all scientific development is always based on achievements by predecessors which were subsequently extended, refined and even replaced. Thus in the time of Newton to develop his Mechanics (Newton 1687) - now known as Dynamics - he used the well established kinematics law of the free fall of the bodies made by Galileo Galilei. This fundamental contribution is often hidden by laying aside the dismissive fable of the "fall of the apple..."

After establishing his principles of terrestrial dynamics and advancing in the development of the Theory of Gravitation, Galileo's terrestrial experiences were extrapolated pointing to the heavens. In his vision, where Newton expresses an alliance between the earth and heavens, he made a magisterial move. Combining two kinematics regularities as the Law of the Free Fall toward the centre of the Earth, with the established Kepler Third Law (Kepler 1621) was totally irrational for those times. The invention of a Universal Law of mutual attraction at distance exerted by the mere presence of massive bodies was based on strong scientific foundations and a powerful method of mathematical calculus of his invention (Gamow 1,962). Moreover, this generalization was an audacity of such magnitude that it could only be created and designed by a mind inspired by the mandates of the World Perfection in harmony with the Great Work. But these extravagant "forces at distances" without any true connection between bodies were dark, almost magical, and contradicted the principles of the rationalist era supported by Descartes.

2.- The other Newton

The patrimony of the personal library of Newton was formed by Treatises and manuscripts where he recorded all his observations. Surprisingly, a substantial part of his manuscripts are texts with notes related to alchemy. His labor as a consummate alchemist not only was reduced to mystical and philosophical

speculations, but was based on observations in his own laboratory, which occupied an important time in his life. They are hundreds of thousands (Dobbs 1975) and some say more than a million words (Westfall 1984) and mysterious symbols recorded in his notes as an alchemist for hundreds of hours of work with the atanor on, wrapped in very aggressive vapors, gases of sulfur, mercury and many other strange spirits that escape from their hot vessels or boiled in their retorts or distilled in alambics... His stories as alchemist - while not unknown - generally tend to be neglected or hidden, as all stories given as undesirable. When people are famous, it is usual for a prudent silence to be guarded, it is what is customary for these "troubling transgressions". If some arts for being suspicious or because annoying, are silenced, this creates the evils of incompleteness that formal history often has.

As nature always offers the same repertory in all of its branches, we can infer that Newton obeyed, and had a vision inspired by the Sentences II, III, VII and VIII of the Emerald Table to reach the Celestial Dynamics. The confirmation and accuracy of the Theory of Universal Gravitation was an earliest, genial and unprecedented anticipation. His Laws of Gravitation that date from more than 300 years are still valid with astonishing accuracy for all non-relativistic astronomical observations. So, what would have been the history of a Newton without any relation to the Alchemy? Evidently his terrestrial dynamics would be complete as it is. However, it is very likely that he would not have come to his theory and laws of the universal gravity. In this case, only about half of his glory would be consummated. On the other hand, what would have been of a Newton, devoted entirely to the Alchemy? Unquestionably, an unknown person.

3.-Emerald Table

Attributed to Hermes Trismegistus although the real author is uncertain. Because it comes from a language that belong to the forms of hermeneutics, its translation of the ancient Latin is expressed in different ways

I.- What I say is true, no lies, and it is the sum of the true.

II.- That which is below is like what is above, and what is above is like that which is bellow, to accomplish the miracle of the Unit.

III.- Thus, as all things have been and come from a single one, so all things have been born are the image of that unique common being.

IV.- Its Father is the Sun, and its Mother is the Moon. The wind blows in its belly. Its nurse is the Earth.

V.- You will find here the key to the Perfection of the whole world.

VI.- Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross, but be cautious in the work.

VII.- Ascends from the earth to the Heaven, and descends to earth again.

VIII.- You will combine the forces that are up with the forces from below. If you can perform this, you will have the glory of the entire world and the darkness shall depart from you.

IX.- This has the virtue, more than virtue itself, because it controls all the subtle things that penetrate all things solid.

X.- Thus, the whole World has been created, and all the portents they are here. Thence, I am called Hermes Trismegistus, because I have the Three Parts of Universal Philosophy. All I had to say about the functioning of the Sun is over...

References

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