

Gold is uniquely interdisciplinary among the 92 chemical elements. It is the oldest metal used by man, and its many beautiful works of art have survived millennia in an uncorroded state. It has therefore attracted the greed of man and woman, and innumerable wars and crimes have been committed in its name. I could only find Virgil's phrase from the *Aeneid* to express it all succinctly. It can be translated either as 'the unholy hunger' or the 'the sacred yearning' for gold, as *sacra* has these two meanings. Famen became 'famine'.

The subject is a vast one, and my Editorial began historically with the metal's antiquity and the 'Lesson of King Midas' whose greed should have been a warning. 'Gold rushes and gold museums' followed and then I wrote a paragraph about the 'adjective' gold, representing the best, the most glamorous, from the Golden Calf to the Gold Credit Card. 'Gold in the Bible' and Newton and Boyle's desire for gold were subsequent mini-essays not forgetting Fritz Haber's more recent alchemical dream to extract gold riches from sea water to pay for Germany's Versailles reparations.

I was amazed about the strange facts, fables and fantasies about gold which I discovered during my lengthy research reading. Toulouse-Lautrec dusted gold powder on an 1893 lithograph of Miss Loie Fuller to imply the shifting light on the dancer. Similar gold dust is an ingredient of 'Danziger Goldwasser', proclaimed as a potent digestive. Tiny particles of gold were said to have been ejected from Mount Erebus, the Antarctic Volcano, and some placer gold, when viewed under the scanning electron microscope, was found to resemble the structure of the common bacterium *Pedomicrobium*.

More fantastic is the fable of Megasthenes, who tells of the gold digging ants, now interpreted as Tibetan miners. But of all gold fantasies, El Dorado is the most famous. It originated in Columbus' missions for 'gospel and gold' and it received notoriety in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1657) and Voltaire's *Candide* (written in 1758). Many serious explorers, including Sir Walter Raleigh, searched for it in 1595, far and wide. Their voyages opened up much of the unknown areas of the Americas. A gold-clad skeleton of a pre-Inca nobleman was reported in 1991 and thus finished my tale of El Dorado (Spanish for the 'Gilded One').

I concluded the Editorial by paying tribute to two famous mining engineers: Agricola, the author of *De re metallica* first published in 1556, and its translator, Herbert Hoover, (31st President of the USA). He and his scholarly wife made the first book ever devoted to any technology, mining, generally available. It included of course gold mining, and I reproduced a 16th century illustration of it in my text.