

The Ingenious Blackmailer

by Ambrose Bierce

An Inventor went to a King and was granted an audience, when the following conversation ensued:

Inventor.--"May it please your Majesty, I have invented a rifle that discharges lightning."

King.--"Ah, you wish to sell me the secret."

Inventor.--"Yes; it will enable your army to overrun any nation that is accessible."

King.--"In order to get any good of my outlay for your invention, I must make a war, and do so as soon as I can arm my troops--before your secret is discovered by foreign nations. How much do you want?"

Inventor.--"One million dollars."

King.--"And how much will it cost to make the change of arms?"

Inventor.--"Fifty millions."

King.--"And the war will Cost--?"

Inventor.--"But consider the glory and the spoils!"

King.--"Exactly. But if I am not seeking these advantages? What if I decline to purchase?"

Inventor.--"There is no economy in that. Though a patriot, I am poor; if my own country will not patronise me, I must seek a market elsewhere."

King (to Prime Minister).--"Take this blackmailer and cut off his head."