The atomic weight of hydrogen is not exactly 1, but by careful measurement is found to be 1.0077. Who could imagine that in this slight discrepancy -- which indeed needs some explanation to make intelligible, -- an immense store of possible energy is indicated, which some day, when we have learned how, may become accessible for good or ill to the human race?...

If then the whole of any perceptible portion of matter disappears the energy resulting would be prodigious. When hydrogen is packed into helium, the whole runs not the slightest risk of disappearing. But seven or eight parts in every 10,000 do disappear. The 1.0077 becomes one. And though the disappearing fraction is small, yet the total of which it is a fraction is so gigantic that the result would put all our other sources of energy to shame.

But we have not learned how to pack hydrogen into helium or into any other of the heavier atoms -- as yet. No, not yet. And yet it would appear that it must have been done, some time and somewhere; perhaps in the interior of stars, certainly in ways at present unknown...

And if ever the human race get hold of a means of tapping even a small fraction of the energy contained in the atoms of their own planet, the consequences will be beneficent or destructive according to the state of civilization at that time attained.

-- Sir Oliver Lodge.

1924