

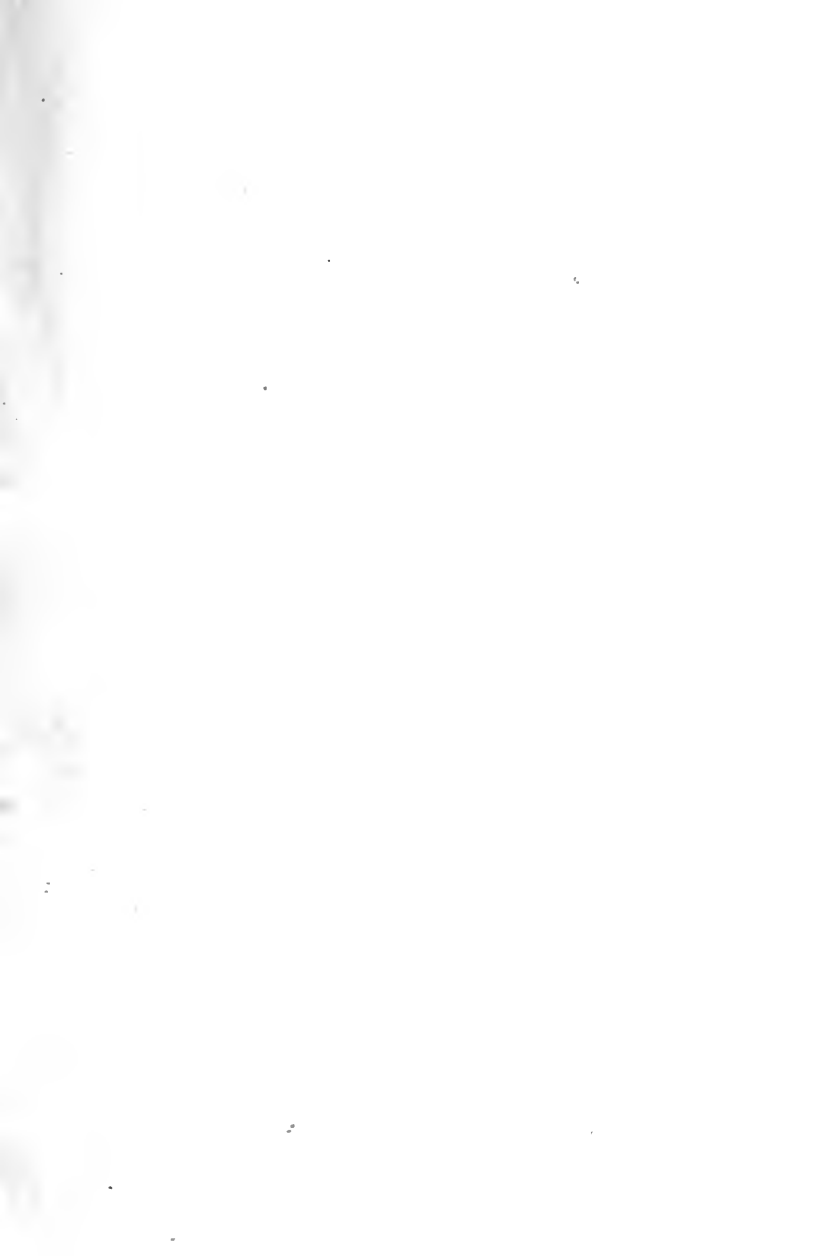
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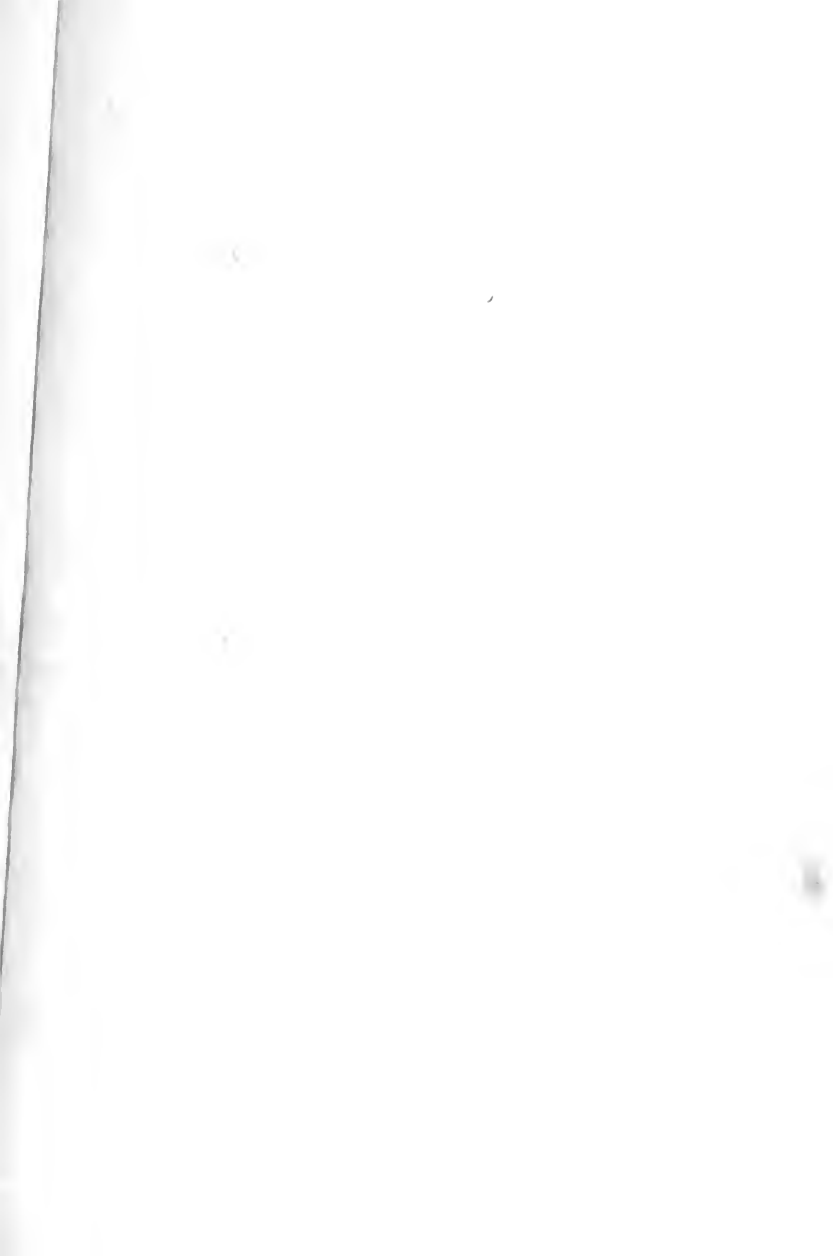
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THE  
GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

VOL. I.



THE

# GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

BY

ALFRED WILLIAM BENN

*Εὐρηκέναι μὲν οὖν τινὰς τῶν ἀρχαίων καὶ μακαρίων φιλοσόφων  
τὸ ἀληθὲς δεῖ νομίζειν· τίνες δὲ οἱ τυχόντες μάλιστα καὶ πῶς ἂν  
καὶ ἡμῖν σύνεσις περὶ τούτων γένοιτο ἐπισκέψασθαι προσήκει*

PLOTINUS

*Quamquam ab his philosophiam et omnes ingenuas disciplinas  
habemus : sed tamen est aliquid quod nobis non liceat, liceat illis*

CICERO

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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TO

J. B. B.





## P R E F A C E.



A CONSIDERABLE portion of the present work, comprising the whole of the first volume and the first two chapters of the second, is reprinted with corrections and additions from the *Westminster Review*. The last chapter of the second volume has already appeared under a slightly different title in *Mind* for January and April 1882. The chapters entitled, 'The Sceptics and Eclectics,' 'The Religious Revival,' and 'The Spiritualism of Plotinus,' are now published for the first time.

The subject of Greek philosophy is so vast that, in England at least, it has become customary to deal with it in detached portions rather than as a connected whole. This method has its advantages, but it has also its drawbacks. The critic who singles out some one thinker for special study is apt to exaggerate the importance of his hero and to credit him with the origination of principles which were really borrowed from his predecessors. Moreover, the appearance of a new idea can only be made intelligible by tracing the previous tendencies which it either continues, combines, or contradicts. In a word, the history of philosophy has itself a philosophy which requires that we should go beyond particular phenomena and view them as variously related parts of a single system.

The history of Greek philosophy, whether conceived in this comprehensive sense or as an erudite investigation into matters of detail, is a province which the Germans have made peculiarly their own; and, among German scholars, Dr. Zeller is the one who has treated it with most success. My obligations to his great work are sufficiently shown by the copious references to it which occur throughout the following pages. It is in those instances—and they are, unfortunately, very numerous—where our knowledge of particular philosophers and of their opinions rests on fragmentary or second-hand information, that I have found his assistance most valuable. This has especially been the case with reference to the pre-Socratic schools, the minor successors of Socrates, the earlier Stoics, the Sceptics, and the later Pythagoreans. I must, however, guard against the supposition that my work is, in any respect, a popularisation or abridgment of Zeller's. To popularise Zeller would, indeed, be an impertinence, for nothing can be more luminous and interesting than his style and general mode of exposition. Nor am I playing the part of a finder to a large telescope; for my point of view by no means coincides with that of the learned German historian. Thus, while my limits have obliged me to be content with a very summary treatment of many topics which he has discussed at length, there are others, and those, in my opinion, not the least important, to which he has given less space than will be found allotted to them here. On several questions, also, I have ventured to controvert his opinions, notably with reference to the Sophists, Socrates, Aristotle, and Plotinus. My general way of looking at the Greeks and their philosophy also differs from his. And the reasons which have led me to follow an independent course in this respect involve consider-

ations of such interest and importance, that I shall take the liberty of specifying them in some detail.

Stated briefly, Zeller's theory of ancient thought is that the Greeks originally lived in harmony with Nature; that the bond was broken by philosophy and particularly by the philosophy of Socrates; that the discord imperfectly overcome by Plato and Aristotle revealed itself once more in the unreconciled, self-concentrated subjectivity of the later schools; that this hopeless estrangement, after reaching its climax in the mysticism of the Neo-Platonists, led to the complete collapse of independent speculation; and that the creation of a new consciousness by the advent of Christianity and of the Germanic races was necessary in order to the successful resumption of scientific enquiry. Zeller was formerly a Hegelian, and it seems to me that he still retains far too much of the Hegelian formalism in his historical constructions. The well-worked antithesis between object and subject, even after being revised in a positivist sense, is totally inadequate to the burden laid on it by this theory; and if we want really to understand the causes which first hampered, then arrested, and finally paralysed Greek philosophy, we must seek for them in a more concrete order of considerations. Zeller, with perfect justice, attributes the failure of Plato and Aristotle to their defective observation of Nature and their habit of regarding the logical combinations of ideas derived from the common use of words as an adequate representative of the relations obtaining among things in themselves. But it seems an extremely strained and artificial explanation to say that their shortcomings in this respect were due to a confusion of the objective and the subjective, consequent on the imperfect separation of the Greek mind from Nature—a confusion, it is

added, which only the advent of a new religion and a new race could overcome.<sup>1</sup> It is unfair to make Hellenism as a whole responsible for fallacies which might easily be paralleled in the works of modern metaphysicians; and the unfairness will become still more evident when we remember that, after enjoying the benefit of Christianity and Germanism for a thousand years, the modern world had still to take its first lessons in patience of observation, in accuracy of reasoning, and in sobriety of expression from such men as Thucydides and Hippocrates, Polybius, Archimêdes and Hipparchus. Even had the Greeks as a nation been less keen to distinguish between illusion and reality than their successors up to the sixteenth century—a supposition notoriously the reverse of true—it would still have to be explained why Plato and Aristotle, with their prodigious intellects, went much further astray than their predecessors in the study of Nature. And this Zeller's method does not explain at all.

Again, I think that Zeller quite misconceives the relation between Greek philosophy and Greek life when he attributes the intellectual decline of the post-Aristotelian period, in part at least, to the simultaneous ruin of public spirit and political independence. The degeneracy of poetry and art, of eloquence and history, may perhaps be accounted for in this way, but not the relaxation of philosophical activity. On the contrary, the disappearance of political interests was of all conditions the most favourable to speculation, as witness the Ionians, Democritus, and Aristotle. Had the independence and power of the great city-republics been prolonged much further, it is probable—as the example of the Sophists and Socrates seems to show—that philosophy would have become

<sup>1</sup> *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, III., a, pp. 5 f.

still more absorbingly moral and practical than it actually became in the Stoic, Epicurean, and Sceptical schools. And theoretical studies did, in fact, receive a great impulse from the Macedonian conquest, a large fund of intellectual energy being diverted from public affairs to the pursuit of knowledge, only it took the direction of positive science rather than of general speculation.<sup>1</sup>

The cause which first arrested and finally destroyed the free movement of Greek thought was not any intrinsic limitation or corruption of the Greek genius, but the ever-increasing preponderance of two interests, both tending, although in different ways and different degrees, to strengthen the principle of authority and to enfeeble the principle of reason. One was the theological interest, the other was the scholastic interest. The former was the more conspicuous and the more mischievous of the two. From the persecution of Anaxagoras to the prohibition of philosophical teaching by Justinian, we may trace the rise and spread of a reaction towards superstition, sometimes advancing and sometimes receding, but, on the whole, gaining ground from age to age, until from the noontide splendour of Pericles we pass to that long night which stretches in almost impenetrable darkness down to the red and stormy daybreak of the Crusades. And it was a reaction which extended through all classes, including the philosophers themselves. It seems to me that where the Athenian school, from Socrates on, fall short of their predecessors, as in some points they unquestionably do, their inferiority is largely due to this cause. Its influence is very perceptible in weakening the speculative energies of those

<sup>1</sup> If I remember rightly, Polybius makes the same observation, but I cannot recall the exact reference.

who stand at the greatest distance from the popular beliefs. It was because dislike for theology occupied so large a place in the thoughts of Epicurus and his disciples, that they valued science only as a refutation of its teaching, instead of regarding it simply as an obstacle to be removed from the path of enquiry. More than this ; they became infected with the spirit of that against which they fought, and their absolute indifference to truth was the shadow which it cast on their minds.

The theological interest and the scholastic interest, though not necessarily associated, have, as already observed, a point of contact in their common exaltation of authority. Thus, for our present purpose they may be classified under the more general notion of traditionalism. By this term I understand a disposition to accept as true opinions received either by the mass of mankind or by the best accredited teachers, and to throw these opinions into a form adapted for easy transmission to others. In this sense, traditionalism is Janus-faced, looking on one side to the past and on the other to the future. Now philosophy could only gain general acceptance by becoming a tradition. For a long time the Greek thinkers busied themselves almost exclusively with the discovery of truth, remaining comparatively indifferent to its diffusion. As Plato says, they went their own way without caring whether they took us along with them or not.<sup>1</sup> And it was at this period that the most valuable speculative ideas were first originated. At last a strong desire arose among the higher classes to profit by the results of the new learning, and a class of men came into existence whose profession was to gratify this desire. But the Sophists, as they were called,

<sup>1</sup> *Sophist*, 243, A.

soon found that lessons in the art of life were more highly appreciated and more liberally rewarded than lessons in the constitution of Nature. Accordingly, with the facile ingenuity of Greeks, they set to work proving, first that Nature could not be known, and finally that there was no such thing as Nature at all. The real philosophers were driven to secure their position by a change of front. They became teachers themselves, disguising their lessons, however, under the form of a search after truth undertaken conjointly with their friends, who, of course, were not expected to pay for the privilege of giving their assistance, and giving it for so admirable a purpose. In this co-operative system, the person who led the conversation was particularly careful to show that his conclusions followed directly from the admissions of his interlocutors, being, so to speak, latent in their minds, and only needing a little obstetric assistance on his part to bring them into the light of day. And the better to rivet their attention, he chose for the subject of discussion questions of human interest, or else, when the conversation turned to physical phenomena, he led the way towards a teleological or aesthetical interpretation of their meaning.

Thus, where Zeller says that the Greek philosophers confounded the objective with the subjective because they were still imperfectly separated from Nature, we seem to have come on a less ambitious but more intelligible explanation of the facts, and one capable of being stated with as much generality as his. Not only among the Greeks but everywhere, culture is more or less antagonistic to originality, and the diffusion to the enlargement of knowledge. Thought is like water ; when spread over a wider surface it is apt to become stagnant and shallow. When ideas could only live on the condition of

being communicated to a large circle of listeners, they were necessarily adapted to the taste and lowered to the comprehension of relatively vulgar minds. And not only so, but the habit of taking their opinions and prejudices as the starting-point of every enquiry frequently led to the investment of those opinions and prejudices with the formal sanction of a philosophical demonstration. It was held that education consisted less in the acquisition of new truth than in the elevation to clearer consciousness of truths which had all along been dimly perceived.

To the criticism and systematisation of common language and common opinion succeeded the more laborious criticism and systematisation of philosophical theories. Such an enormous amount of labour was demanded for the task of working up the materials amassed by Greek thought during the period of its creative originality, and accommodating them to the popular belief, that not much could be done in the way of adding to their extent. Nor was this all. Among the most valuable ideas of the earlier thinkers were those which stood in most striking opposition to the evidence of the senses. As such they were excluded from the system which had for its object the reorganisation of philosophy on the basis of general consent. Thus not only did thought tend to become stationary, but it even abandoned some of the ground which had been formerly won.

Not that the vitality of Hellenic reason gave way simultaneously at every point. The same independent spirit, the same imaginative vigour which had carried physical speculation to such splendid conquests during the first two centuries of its existence were manifested with equal effect when the energies previously devoted to Nature as a whole concentrated



themselves on the study of conduct and belief. It was thus that Socrates could claim the whole field of human life for scientific treatment, and create the method by which it has ever since been most successfully studied. It was thus that Plato could analyse and ideally reconstruct all practices, institutions, and beliefs. It was thus that Aristotle, while definitely arresting the progress of research, could still complete the method and create the language through which the results of new research have been established, recognised, and communicated ever since. It was thus that the Stoics advanced from paradox to paradox until they succeeded in co-ordinating morality for all time by reference to the three fundamental ideas of personal conscience, individual obligation, and universal humanity. And not only were dialectics and ethics at first animated by the same enterprising spirit as speculative physics, but their very existence as recognised studies must be ascribed to its decay, to the revolution through which philosophy, from being purely theoretical, became social and didactic. While in some directions thought was made stationary and even retrogressive by the very process of its diffusion, in other directions this diffusion was the cause of its more complete development. Finally, ethics and logic were reduced to a scholastic routine, and progress continued to be made only in the positive sciences, until, here also, it was brought to an end by the triumph of superstition and barbarism combined.

If the cessation of speculative activity among the Greeks needs to be accounted for by something more definite than phrases about the objective and the subjective, so also does its resumption among the nations of modern Europe. This may be explained by two different circumstances—the disap-

pearance of the obstacles which had long opposed themselves to the free exercise of reason, and the stimulus given to enquiry by the Copernican astronomy. After spreading over the whole basin of the Mediterranean, Hellenic culture had next to repair the ravages of the barbarians, and, chiefly under the form of Christianity, to make itself accepted by the new nationalities which had risen on the ruins of the Roman empire. So arduous a task was sufficient to engross, during many centuries, the entire intellectual energies of Western Europe. At last the extreme limits of diffusion were provisionally reached, and thought once more became available for the discovery of new truth. Simultaneously with this consummation, the great supernaturalist reaction, having also reached its extreme limits, had so far subsided, that Nature could once more be studied on scientific principles, with less freedom, indeed, than in old Ionia, but still with tolerable security against the vengeance of interested or fanatical opponents. And at the very same conjuncture it was shown by the accumulated observations of many ages that the conception of the universe on which the accepted philosophy rested must be replaced by one of a directly opposite description. I must confess that in this vast revolution the relation between the objective and the subjective, as reconstituted by Christianity and the Germanic genius, does not seem to me to have played a very prominent part.

If Zeller's semi-Hegelian theory of history does scant justice to the variety and complexity of causes determining the evolution of philosophy, it also draws away attention from the ultimate elements, the matter, in an Aristotelian sense, of which that evolution consists. By this I mean the development of particular ideas as distinguished from the

systems into which they enter as component parts. Often the formation of a system depends on an accidental combination of circumstances, and therefore cannot be brought under any particular law of progress, while the ideas out of which it is constructed exhibit a perfectly regular advance on the form under which they last appeared. Others, again, are characterised by a remarkable fixity which enables them to persist unchanged through the most varied combinations and the most protracted intervals of time. But when each system is regarded as, so to speak, an organic individual, the complete and harmonious expression of some one phase of thought, and the entire series of systems as succeeding one another in strict logical order according to some simple law of evolution, there will be a certain tendency to regard the particular elements of each as determined by the character of the whole to which they belong, rather than by their intrinsic nature and antecedent history. And I think it is owing to this limitation of view that Zeller has not illustrated, so fully as could be desired, the subtler references by which the different schools of philosophy are connected with one another and also with the literature of their own and other times.

An interesting example of the process on which I have just touched is offered by the reappearance and further elaboration of some most important Greek ideas in modern philosophy. In the concluding chapter of this work I have attempted to indicate the chief lines along which such a transmission may be traced. The subject is one which has hitherto been unduly neglected. No critic would be justified in describing the speculative movement of the nineteenth century without constant reference to the metaphysicians and

moralists of the two preceding centuries. Yet the dependence of those thinkers on the schools of antiquity is hardly less intimate than our dependence on Spinoza and Hume. Nevertheless, in no work that I am acquainted with has this circumstance been used to elucidate the course pursued by modern thought ; indeed, I may say that the persistence of Hellenic ideas down to the most recent times has not been fully recognised by any scholar except Prof. Teichmüller, who has particularly devoted his attention to the history of conceptions as distinguished from the history of systems.

The introduction of Teichmüller's name affords me an opportunity for mentioning that my attention was not directed to his brilliant researches into various questions connected with Greek philosophy, and more particularly with the systems of Plato and Aristotle, until it was too late for me to profit by them in the present work. I allude more particularly to his *Studien zur Geschichte der Begriffe* (Berlin, 1874), and to his recently published *Literarische Fehden im vierten Jahrhundert vor Chr.* (Breslau, 1881). The chief points of the former work are, that Plato was really a pantheist or monist, not, as is commonly believed and as I have myself taken for granted, a dualist ; that, as a consequence of the suppression of individuality which characterises his system, he did not really accept or teach the doctrine of personal immortality, although he wished that the mass of the people should believe it ; that Plato no more attributed a transcendent existence to his ideas than did Aristotle to his substantial forms ; and that in putting an opposite interpretation on his old master's theory, Aristotle is guilty of gross misrepresentation. The most important point of the *Literarische Fehden* is that Aristotle published his *Ethics*

while Plato was still alive and engaged in the composition of his *Laws*, and that certain passages in the latter work, of which one relates to free-will and the other to the unity of virtue (861, A ff. and 962 ff.) were intended as a reply to Aristotle's well-known criticisms on the Platonic theory of ethics.

I have been necessarily brief in my statement of Teichmüller's theses ; and to judge of them apart from the facts and arguments by which they are supported in the two very interesting volumes above named would be in the highest degree unfair. I feel bound, however, to mention the chief reasons which make me hesitate to accept his conclusions. It seems to me, then, that although Plato was moving in the direction of pantheism—as I have myself pointed out in more than one passage of this work—he never actually reached it. For (i.) he does not, like Plotinus, attempt to deduce his material from his ideal principle, but only blends without reconciling them in the world of sensible experience. (ii.) In opposing the perishable nature of the individual (or rather the particular) to the eternal nature of the universal, he is going on the facts of experience rather than on any necessary opposition between the two, and on experience of material or sensible objects rather than of immaterial souls ; while, even as regards material objects, the heavenly bodies, to which he attributes everlasting duration, constitute such a sweeping exception to his rule as entirely to destroy its applicability. (iii.) Plato's multiplied and elaborate arguments for the immortality of the soul would be superfluous were his only object to prove that the soul, like everything else, contains an eternal element. (iv.) The Pythagorean theory that the soul is a harmony, which Plato rejects, would

have been perfectly compatible with the ideal and impersonal immortality which Teichmüller supposes him to have taught ; for while the particular harmony perishes, the general laws of harmony remain. (v.) Teichmüller does not dispose satisfactorily of Plato's crowning argument that the idea of life is as inseparable from the soul as heat from fire or cold from snow. He says (*op. cit.*, p. 134) that, on this principle, the individual soul may still perish, just as particular portions of fire are extinguished and particular portions of snow are melted. Yes, but portions of fire do not grow cold, nor portions of snow hot, which and which alone would offer an analogy to the extinction of a soul.

I agree, however, with Teichmüller that the doctrines of reminiscence and metempsychosis have a purely mythical significance, and I should have expressed my views on the subject with more definiteness and decision had I known that his authority might be quoted in their support. I think that Plato was in a transition state from the Oriental to what afterwards became the Christian theory of retribution. In the one he found an allegorical illustration of his metaphysics, in the other a very serious sanction for his ethics. He felt their incompatibility, but was not prepared to undertake such a complete reconstruction of his system as would have been necessitated by altogether denying the pre-existence of the soul. Of such vacillation Plato's later Dialogues offer, I think, sufficient evidence. For example, the Matter of the *Timæus* seems to be a revised version of the Other or principle of division and change, which has already figured as a pure idea, in which capacity it must necessarily be opposed to matter. At the same time, I must observe that, from my point of view, it is enough if Plato inculcated the doctrine of a future life as

an important element of his religious system. And that he did so inculcate it Teichmüller fully admits.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I think Teichmüller has proved this much, that it was written before Aristotle had read the *Laws* or knew of its existence. But this does not prove that he wrote it during Plato's lifetime, since the *Laws* was not published until after Plato's death, possibly not until several years after. And, published or not, Aristotle may very well have remained ignorant of its existence until his return to Athens, which, according to the tradition, took place about 336 B.C. Teichmüller does, indeed, suppose that Aristotle spent some time in Athens between his flight from Mitylênê and his engagement as tutor to Alexander (*Literarische Fehden*, p. 261). But this theory, besides its purely conjectural character, would still allow the possibility of Aristotle's having remained unacquainted with the *Laws* up to the age of forty. And it is obvious that the passages which Teichmüller interprets as replies to Aristotle's criticisms admit of more than one alternative explanation. They may have originated in doubts and difficulties which spontaneously suggested themselves to Plato in the course of his independent reflections; or, granting that there is a polemic reference, it may have been provoked by some other critic, or by the spoken criticisms of Aristotle himself. For the supposition that Aristotle wrote his *Ethics* at the early age of thirty-two or thirty-three seems to me so improbable that we should not accept it except under pressure of the strongest evidence. That a work of such matured thought and observation should have been produced by so young a man is, so far as I know, a phenomenon unparalleled in the

<sup>1</sup> See especially the interesting note on the subject in his recent work, *Die wirkliche und die scheinbare Welt*, Vorrede, pp. x. ff

history of literature. And to this we must add the further circumstance that the Greek mind was not particularly remarkable for precocity in any field except war and statesmanship. We do, indeed, find instances of comparatively juvenile authorship, but none, I believe, of a Greek writer, whether poet, historian, or philosopher, who reached the full maturity of his powers before a considerably advanced period of middle age. That the *Ethics* is very imperfect I fully admit, and have expressly maintained against its numerous admirers in the course of this work. But, although imperfect, it is not crude. It contains as good a discussion of the subject undertaken as Aristotle was ever capable of giving, and its limitations are not those of an unripe intellect, but of an intellect at all times comparatively unsuited for the treatment of practical problems, and narrowed still further by the requirements of an elaborate speculative system. Now to work out this system must have demanded considerably more labour and independent thought than one can suppose even an Aristotle to have found time for before thirty-three; while the experience of life shown in the *Ethics* is such as study, so far from supplying, would, on the contrary, have delayed. Moreover, the *Rhetoric*, which was confessedly written before the *Ethics*, exhibits the same qualities in about an equal degree, and therefore, on Teichmüller's theory, testifies to a still more extraordinary precocity. And there is the further circumstance that while Aristotle is known to have begun his public career as a teacher of rhetoric, his earliest productions seem to have been of a rather diffuse and declamatory character, quite opposed to the severe concision which marks the style both of the *Rhetoric* and of the *Ethics*. In addition to these general considerations, one may mention that in a



well-known passage of the *Ethics*, referring to a question of logical method (I., iv.), Plato is spoken of in the imperfect tense, which would seem to imply that he was no longer living when it was written. Speaking from memory, I should even be inclined to doubt whether the mention of a living writer by name at all is consistent with Aristotle's standard of literary etiquette.

These are difficulties which Teichmüller has, no doubt, fully weighed and put aside as not sufficiently strong to invalidate his conclusions. I have stated them in order to show that enough can be said for the old view to justify the republication of what was written on the assumption of its unquestionable truth. Moreover, researches conducted with so much skill and learning as those of Teichmüller demand some public acknowledgment in a work like the present, even when the results are such that the writer cannot see his way to accepting them as satisfactorily made out. There are many English scholars more competent than I am to discuss the whole question at issue. Perhaps these lines may induce some of them to give it the attention which it merits, but which, in England at least, it does not seem to have as yet received.

My obligations to other writers have been acknowledged throughout this work, so far as I was conscious of them, and so far as they could be defined by reference to specific points. I take the present opportunity for mentioning in a more general way the valuable assistance which I have derived from Schwegler's *Geschichte der Griechischen Philosophie*, Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus*, and Dühring's *Geschichte der Philosophie*. The parallel between Socrates, Giordano Bruno, and Spinoza was probably suggested to me

by Dühring, as also were some points in my characterisation of Aristotle. As my view of the position occupied by Lucretius with respect to religion and philosophy differs in many important points from that of Prof. Sellar, it is the more incumbent on me to state that, but for a perusal of Prof. Sellar's eloquent and sympathetic chapters on the great Epicurean poet, my own estimate of his genius would certainly not have been written in its present form and would probably not have been written at all.

On the whole, I am afraid that my acquaintance with the modern literature of the subject will be found rather limited for an undertaking like the present. But I do not think that wider reading in that direction would have much furthered the object I had in view. That object has been to exhibit the principal ideas of Greek philosophy in the closest possible connexion with the characters of their authors, with each other, with their developments in modern speculation, with the parallel tendencies of literature and art, with the history of religion, of physical science, and of civilisation as a whole. To interpret all things by a system of universal references is the method of philosophy; when applied to a series of events this method is the philosophy of history; when the events are ideas, it is the philosophy of philosophy itself.

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Page 15, line 26. Xenophanes, *Fragm.* 19 and 21, ed. Mullach.

Page 41, line 25. Diogenes Laert., IX., 34. The words 'in the Eastern countries where he had travelled,' are a conjectural addition, but they seem justified by the context.

Page 43, line 11. Plutarch, *Pericles*, iv.

Page 65. For the story of Glaucus, see Herodotus VI., lxxvii.

Page 77, line 21. Plato, *Protag.*, 315, D.

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Page 294, line 7. For Plato's preference of practice to contemplation, see *Repub.*, 496, E.

# THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### EARLY GREEK THOUGHT.

#### I.

DURING the two centuries that ended with the close of the Peloponnesian war, a single race, weak numerically, and weakened still further by political disunion, simultaneously developed all the highest human faculties to an extent possibly rivalled but certainly not surpassed by the collective efforts of that vastly greater population which now wields the accumulated resources of modern Europe. This race, while maintaining a precarious foothold on the shores of the Mediterranean by repeated prodigies of courage and genius, contributed a new element to civilisation which has been the main-spring of all subsequent progress, but which, as it expanded into wider circles and encountered an increasing resistance from without, unavoidably lost some of the enormous elasticity that characterised its earliest and most concentrated reaction. It was the just boast of the Greek that to Asiatic refinement and Thracian valour he joined a disinterested thirst for knowledge unshared by his neighbours on either side.<sup>1</sup> And if a contemporary of Pericles could have foreseen all that would be thought, and said, and done during

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Rep.* IV., 435, E; Aristotle, *Pol.* VII., 1327, b., 29.

the next twenty-three centuries of this world's existence, at no period during that long lapse of ages, not even among the kindred Italian race, could he have found a competitor to contest with Hellas the olive crown of a nobler Olympia, the guerdon due to a unique combination of supreme excellence in every variety of intellectual exercise, in strategy, diplomacy, statesmanship ; in mathematical science, architecture, plastic art, and poetry ; in the severe fidelity of the historian whose paramount object is to relate facts as they have occurred, and the dexterous windings of the advocate whose interest leads him to evade or to disguise them ; in the far-reaching meditations of the lonely thinker grappling with the enigmas of his own soul, and the fervid eloquence by which a multitude on whose decision hang great issues is inspired, directed, or controlled. He would not, it is true, have found any single Greek to pit against the athletes of the Renaissance ; there were none who displayed that universal genius so characteristic of the greatest Tuscan artists such as Lionardo and Michael Angelo ; nor, to take a much narrower range, did a single Greek writer whose compositions have come down to us excel, or even attempt to excel, in poetry and prose alike. But our imaginary prophet might have observed that such versatility better befitted a sophist like Hippias or an adventurer like Critias than an earnest master of the Pheidian type. He might have quoted Pindar's sarcasm about highly educated persons who have an infinity of tastes and bring none of them to perfection ;<sup>1</sup> holding, as Plato did in the next generation, that one man can only do one thing well, he might have added that the heroes of modern art would have done much nobler work had they concentrated their powers on a single task instead of attempting half a dozen and leaving most of them incomplete.

This careful restriction of individual effort to a single

<sup>1</sup> *Nem.* III. 40-42. (Donaldson.)

province involved no dispersion or incoherence in the results achieved. The highest workers were all animated by a common spirit. Each represented some one aspect of the glory and greatness participated in by all. Nor was the collective consciousness, the uniting sympathy, limited to a single sphere. It rose, by a graduated series, from the city community, through the Dorian or Ionian stock with which they claimed more immediate kinship, to the Panhellenic race, the whole of humanity, and the divine fatherhood of Zeus, until it rested in that all-embracing nature which Pindar knew as the one mother of gods and men.<sup>1</sup>

We may, perhaps, find some suggestion of this combined distinctness and comprehensiveness in the aspect and configuration of Greece itself; in its manifold varieties of soil, and climate, and scenery, and productions; in the exquisite clearness with which the features of its landscape are defined; and the admirable development of coast-line by which all parts of its territory, while preserving their political independence, were brought into safe and speedy communication with one another. The industrial and commercial habits of the people, necessitating a well-marked division of labour and a regulated distribution of commodities, gave a further impulse in the same direction.

But what afforded the most valuable education in this sense was their system of free government, involving, as it did, the supremacy of an impersonal law, the subdivision of public authority among a number of magistrates, and the assignment to each of certain carefully defined functions which he was forbidden to exceed; together with the living interest felt by each citizen in the welfare of the whole state, and that conception of it as a whole composed of various parts, which is impossible where all the public powers are collected in a single hand.

A people so endowed were the natural creators of philo-

<sup>1</sup> *Nem.* VI. *sub in.*

sophy. There came a time when the harmonious universality of the Hellenic genius sought for its counterpart and completion in a theory of the external world. And there came a time, also, when the decay of political interests left a large fund of intellectual energy, accustomed to work under certain conditions, with the desire to realise those conditions in an ideal sphere. Such is the most general significance we can attach to that memorable series of speculations on the nature of things which, beginning in Ionia, was carried by the Greek colonists to Italy and Sicily, whence, after receiving important additions and modifications, the stream of thought flowed back into the old country, where it was directed into an entirely new channel by the practical genius of Athens. Thales and his successors down to Democritus were not exactly what we should call philosophers, in any sense of the word that would include a Locke or a Hume, and exclude a Boyle or a Black; for their speculations never went beyond the confines of the material universe; they did not even suspect the existence of those ethical and dialectical problems which long constituted the sole object of philosophical discussion, and have continued since the time when they were first mooted to be regarded as its most peculiar province. Nor yet can we look on them altogether or chiefly as men of science, for their paramount purpose was to gather up the whole of knowledge under a single principle; and they sought to realise this purpose, not by observation and experiment, but by the power of thought alone. It would, perhaps, be truest to say that from their point of view philosophy and science were still undifferentiated, and that knowledge as a universal synthesis was not yet divorced from special investigations into particular orders of phenomena. Here, as elsewhere, advancing reason tends to reunite studies which have been provisionally separated, and we must look to our own contemporaries—to our Tyndalls and Thomsons, our Helmholtzes and Zöllners—as furnishing the fittest parallel to

Anaximander and Empedocles, Leucippus and Diogenes of Apollonia.

It has been the fashion in certain quarters to look down on these early thinkers—to depreciate the value of their speculations because they were thinkers, because, as we have already noticed, they reached their most important conclusions by thinking, the means of truly scientific observation not being within their reach. Nevertheless, they performed services to humanity comparable for value with the legislation of Solon and Cleisthenes, or the victories of Marathon and Salamis; while their creative imagination was not inferior to that of the great lyric and dramatic poets, the great architects and sculptors, whose contemporaries they were. They first taught men to distinguish between the realities of nature and the illusions of sense; they discovered or divined the indestructibility of matter and its atomic constitution; they taught that space is infinite, a conception so far from being self-evident that it transcended the capacity of Aristotle to grasp; they held that the seemingly eternal universe was brought into its present form by the operation of mechanical forces which will also effect its dissolution; confronted by the seeming permanence and solidity of our planet, with the innumerable varieties of life to be found on its surface, they declared that all things had arisen by differentiation<sup>1</sup> from a homogeneous attenuated vapour; while one of them went so far as to surmise that man is descended from an aquatic animal. But higher still than these fragmentary glimpses and anticipations of a theory which still awaits confirmation from experience, we must place their central doctrine, that the universe is a cosmos, an ordered whole governed by number and law, not a blind conflict of semi-conscious agents, or a theatre for the arbitrary interference of partial, jealous,

<sup>1</sup> The word differentiation (*ἐτεροίωσις*) seems to have been first used by Diogenes Apolloniates. *Simpl. Phys.* fol. 326 ff., quoted by Ritter and Preller, *Hist. Phil.*, p. 126 (6th ed.)

and vindictive gods ; that its changes are determined, if at all, by an immanent unchanging reason ; and that those celestial luminaries which had drawn to themselves in every age the unquestioning worship of all mankind were, in truth, nothing more than fiery masses of inanimate matter. Thus, even if the early Greek thinkers were not scientific, they first made science possible by substituting for a theory of the universe which is its direct negation, one that methodised observation has increasingly tended to confirm. The garland of poetic praise woven by Lucretius for his adored master should have been dedicated to them, and to them alone. His noble enthusiasm was really inspired by their lessons, not by the wearisome trifling of a moralist who knew little and cared less about those studies in which the whole soul of his Roman disciple was absorbed.

When the power and value of these primitive speculations can no longer be denied, their originality is sometimes questioned by the systematic detractors of everything Hellenic. Thales and the rest, we are told, simply borrowed their theories without acknowledgment from a storehouse of Oriental wisdom on which the Greeks are supposed to have drawn as freely as Coleridge drew on German philosophy. Sometimes each system is affiliated to one of the great Asiatic religions ; sometimes they are all traced back to the schools of Hindostan. It is natural that no two critics should agree, when the rival explanations are based on nothing stronger than superficial analogies and accidental coincidences. Dr. Zeller in his wonderfully learned, clear, and sagacious work on Greek philosophy, has carefully sifted some of the hypotheses referred to, and shown how destitute they are of internal or external evidence, and how utterly they fail to account for the facts. The oldest and best authorities, Plato and Aristotle, knew nothing about such a derivation of Greek thought from Eastern sources. Isocrates does, indeed, mention that Pythagoras borrowed his philosophy



from Egypt, but Isocrates did not even pretend to be a truthful narrator. No Greek of the early period except those regularly domiciled in Susa seems to have been acquainted with any language but his own. Few travelled very far into Asia, and of those few, only one or two were philosophers. Democritus, who visited more foreign countries than any man of his time, speaks only of having discussed mathematical problems with the wise men whom he encountered; and even in mathematics he was at least their equal.<sup>1</sup> It was precisely at the greatest distance from Asia, in Italy and Sicily, that the systems arose which seem to have most analogy with Asiatic modes of thought. Can we suppose that the traders of those times were in any way qualified to transport the speculations of Confucius and the Vedas to such a distance from their native homes? With far better reason might one expect a German merchant to carry a knowledge of Kant's philosophy from Königsberg to Canton. But a more convincing argument than any is to show that Greek philosophy in its historical evolution exhibits a perfectly natural and spontaneous progress from simpler to more complex forms, and that system grew out of system by a strictly logical process of extension, analysis, and combination. This is what, chiefly under the guidance of Zeller, we shall now attempt to do.

## II.

Thales, of Miletus, an Ionian geometrician and astronomer, about whose age considerable uncertainty prevails, but who seems to have flourished towards the close of the seventh century before our era, is by general consent regarded as the father of Greek physical philosophy. Others before him had attempted to account for the world's origin, but none like him had traced it back to a purely natural beginning. According to Thales all things have come from water. That

<sup>1</sup> Ritter and Preller, p. 112.

the earth is entirely enclosed by water above and below as well as all round was perhaps a common notion among the Western Asiatics. It was certainly believed by the Hebrews, as we learn from the accounts of the creation and the flood contained in Genesis. The Milesian thinker showed his originality by generalising still further and declaring that not only did water surround all things, but that all things were derived from it as their first cause and substance, that water was, so to speak, the material absolute. Never have more pregnant words been spoken ; they acted like a ferment on the Greek mind ; they were the grain whence grew a tree that has overshadowed the whole earth. At one stroke they substituted a comparatively scientific, because a verifiable principle for the confused fancies of mythologising poets. Not that Thales was an atheist, or an agnostic, or anything of that sort. On the contrary, he is reported to have said that all things were full of gods ; and the report sounds credible enough. Most probably the saying was a protest against the popular limitation of divine agencies to certain special occasions and favoured localities. A true thinker seeks above all for consistency and continuity. He will more readily accept a perpetual stream of creative energy than a series of arbitrary and isolated interferences with the course of Nature. For the rest, Thales made no attempt to explain how water came to be transformed into other substances, nor is it likely that the necessity of such an explanation had ever occurred to him. We may suspect that he and others after him were not capable of distinguishing very clearly between such notions as space, time, cause, substance, and limit. It is almost as difficult for us to enter into the thoughts of these primitive philosophers as it would have been for them to comprehend processes of reasoning already familiar to Plato and Aristotle. Possibly the forms under which we arrange our conceptions may become equally obsolete at a more advanced stage of intellectual evolution, and our sharp distinctions may prove to be not

less artificial than the confused identifications which they have superseded.

The next great forward step in speculation was taken by Anaximander, another Milesian, also of distinguished attainments in mathematics and astronomy. We have seen that to Thales water, the all-embracing element, became, as such, the first cause of all things, the absolute principle of existence. His successor adopted the same general point of view, but looked out from it with a more penetrating gaze. Beyond water lay something else which he called the Infinite. He did not mean the empty abstraction which has stalked about in modern times under that ill-omened name, nor yet did he mean infinite space, but something richer and more concrete than either; a storehouse of materials whence the waste of existence could be perpetually made good. The growth and decay of individual forms involve a ceaseless drain on Nature, and the deficiency must be supplied by a corresponding influx from without. For, be it observed that, although the Greek thinkers were at this period well aware that nothing can come from nothing, they had not yet grasped the complementary truth inalienably wedded to it by Lucretius in one immortal couplet, that nothing can return to nothing; and Kant is quite mistaken when he treats the two as historically inseparable. Common experience forces the one on our attention much sooner than the other. Our incomings are very strictly measured out and accounted for without difficulty, while it is hard to tell what becomes of all our expenditure, physical and economical. Yet, although the indestructibility of matter was a conception which had not yet dawned on Anaximander, he seems to have been feeling his way towards the recognition of a circulatory movement pervading all Nature. Everything, he says, must at last be reabsorbed in the Infinite as a punishment for the sin of its separate existence.<sup>1</sup> Some may find in this sentiment a note of Oriental

<sup>1</sup> Ritter and Preller, p. 8.

mysticism. Rather does its very sadness illustrate the healthy vitality of Greek feeling, to which absorption seemed like the punishment of a crime against the absolute, and not, as to so many Asiatics, the crown and consummation of spiritual perfection. Be this as it may, a doctrine which identified the death of the whole world with its reabsorption into a higher reality would soon suggest the idea that its component parts vanish only to reappear in new combinations.

Anaximander's system was succeeded by a number of others which cannot be arranged according to any order of linear progression. Such arrangements are, indeed, false in principle. Intellectual life, like every other life, is a product of manifold conditions, and their varied combinations are certain to issue in a corresponding multiplicity of effects. Anaximenes, a fellow-townsmen of Anaximander, followed most closely in the footsteps of the master. Attempting, as it would appear, to mediate between his two predecessors, he chose air for a primal element. Air is more omnipresent than water, which, as well as earth, is enclosed within its plastic sphere. On the other hand, it is more tangible and concrete than the Infinite, or may even be substituted for that conception by supposing it to extend as far as thought can reach. As before, cosmogony grows out of cosmography; the enclosing element is the parent of those embraced within it.

Speculation now leaves its Asiatic cradle and travels with the Greek colonists to new homes in Italy and Sicily, where new modes of thought were fostered by a new environment. A name, round which mythical accretions have gathered so thickly that the original nucleus of fact almost defies definition, first claims our attention. Aristotle, as is well known, avoids mentioning Pythagoras, and always speaks of the Pythagoreans when he is discussing the opinions held by a certain Italian school. Their doctrine, whoever originated it, was that all things are made out of number. Brandis regards Pythagoreanism as an entirely original effort of speculation,

standing apart from the main current of Hellenic thought, and to be studied without reference to Ionian philosophy. Zeller, with more plausibility, treats it as an outgrowth of Anaximander's system. In that system the finite and the infinite remained opposed to one another as unreconciled moments of thought. Number, according to the Greek arithmeticians, was a synthesis of the two, and therefore superior to either. To a Pythagorean the finite and the infinite were only one among several antithetical couples, such as odd and even, light and darkness, male and female, and, above all, the one and the many whence every number after unity is formed. The tendency to search for antitheses everywhere, and to manufacture them where they do not exist, became ere long an actual disease of the Greek mind. A Thucydides could no more have dispensed with this cumbrous mechanism than a ropedancer could get on without his balancing pole; and many a schoolboy has been sorely puzzled by the fantastic contortions which Italiote reflection imposed for a time on Athenian oratory.

Returning to our more immediate subject, we must observe that the Pythagoreans did not maintain, in anticipation of modern quantitative science, that all things are determined by number, but that all things are numbers, or are made out of numbers, two propositions not easily distinguished by unpractised thinkers. Numbers, in a word, were to them precisely what water had been to Thales, what air was to Anaximenes, the absolute principle of existence; only with them the idea of a limit, the leading inspiration of Greek thought, had reached a higher degree of abstraction. Number was, as it were, the exterior limit of the finite, and the interior limit of the infinite. Add to this that mathematical studies, cultivated in Egypt and Phoenicia for their practical utility alone, were being pursued in Hellas with ever-increasing ardour for the sake of their own delightfulness, for the intellectual discipline that they supplied—a discipline even

more valuable than than now, and for the insight which they bestowed, or were believed to bestow, into the secret constitution of Nature ; and that the more complicated arithmetical operations were habitually conducted with the aid of geometrical diagrams, thus suggesting the possibility of applying a similar treatment to every order of relations. Consider the lively emotions excited among an intelligent people at a time when multiplication and division, squaring and cubing, the rule of three, the construction and equivalence of figures, with all their manifold applications to industry, commerce, fine art, and tactics, were just as strange and wonderful as electrical phenomena are to us ; consider also the magical influence still commonly attributed to particular numbers, and the intense eagerness to obtain exact numerical statements, even when they are of no practical value, exhibited by all who are thrown back on primitive ways of living, as, for example, in Alpine travelling, or on board an Atlantic steamer, and we shall cease to wonder that a mere form of thought, a lifeless abstraction, should once have been regarded as the solution of every problem, the cause of all existence ; or that these speculations were more than once revived in after ages, and perished only with Greek philosophy itself.

We have not here to examine the scientific achievements of Pythagoras and his school ; they belong to the history of science, not to that of pure thought, and therefore lie outside the present discussion. Something, however, must be said of Pythagoreanism as a scheme of moral, religious, and social reform. Alone among the pre-Socratic systems, it undertook to furnish a rule of conduct as well as a theory of being. Yet, as Zeller has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> it was only an apparent anomaly, for the ethical teaching of the Pythagoreans was not based on their physical theories, except in so far as a deep reverence for law and order was common to both.

<sup>1</sup> *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, I. p. 401 (3rd ed.)

Perhaps, also, the separation of soul and body, with the ascription of a higher dignity to the former, which was a distinctive tenet of the school, may be paralleled with the position given to number as a kind of spiritual power creating and controlling the world of sense. So also political power was to be entrusted to an aristocracy trained in every noble accomplishment, and fitted for exercising authority over others by self-discipline, by mutual fidelity, and by habitual obedience to a rule of right. Nevertheless, we must look, with Zeller, for the true source of Pythagoreanism as a moral movement in that great wave of religious enthusiasm which swept over Hellas during the sixth century before Christ, intimately associated with the importation of Apollo-worship from Lycia, with the concentration of spiritual authority in the oracular shrine of Delphi, and the political predominance of the Dorian race, those Normans of the ancient world. Legend has thrown this connexion into a poetical form by making Pythagoras the son of Apollo; and the Samian sage, although himself an Ionian, chose the Dorian cities of Southern Italy as a favourable field for his new teaching, just as Calvinism found a readier acceptance in the advanced posts of the Teutonic race than among the people whence its founder sprang. Perhaps the nearest parallel, although on a far more extensive scale, for the religious movement of which we are speaking, is the spectacle offered by mediaeval Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of our era, when a series of great Popes had concentrated all spiritual power in their own hands, and were sending forth army after army of Crusaders to the East; when all Western Europe had awakened to the consciousness of its common Christianity, and each individual was thrilled by a sense of the tremendous alternatives committed to his choice; when the Dominican and Franciscan orders were founded; when Gothic architecture and Florentine painting arose; when the Troubadours and Minnesängers were pour-

ing out their notes of scornful or tender passion, and the love of the sexes had become a sentiment as lofty and enduring as the devotion of friend to friend had been in Greece of old. The bloom of Greek religious enthusiasm was more exquisite and evanescent than that of feudal Catholicism; inferior in pure spirituality and of more restricted significance as a factor in the evolution of humanity, it at least remained free from the ecclesiastical tyranny, the murderous fanaticism, and the unlovely superstitions of mediaeval faith. But polytheism under any form was fatally incapable of coping with the new spirit of enquiry awakened by philosophy, and the old myths, with their naturalistic crudities, could not long satisfy the reason and conscience of thinkers who had learned in another school to seek everywhere for a central unity of control, and to bow their imaginations before the passionless perfection of eternal law.

### III.

Such a thinker was Xenophanes, of Colophon. Driven, like Pythagoras, from his native city by civil discords, he spent the greater part of an unusually protracted life wandering through the Greek colonies of Sicily and Southern Italy, and reciting his own verses, not always, as it would appear, to a very attentive audience. Elea, an Italiote city, seems to have been his favourite resort, and the school of philosophy which he founded there has immortalised the name of this otherwise obscure Phocæan settlement. Enough remains of his verses to show with what terrible strength of sarcasm he assailed the popular religion of Hellas. 'Homer and Hesiod,' he exclaims, 'have attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among men—theft, adultery, and mutual deception.'<sup>1</sup> Nor is Xenophanes content with attacking

<sup>1</sup> Ritter and Preller, p. 54.



these unedifying stories, he strikes at the anthropomorphic conceptions which lay at their root. 'Mortals think that the gods have senses, and a voice and a body like their own. The negroes fancy that their deities are black-skinned and snub-nosed, the Thracians give theirs fair hair and blue eyes; if horses or lions had hands and could paint, they too would make gods in their own image.'<sup>1</sup> It was, he declared, as impious to believe in the birth of a god as to believe in the possibility of his death. The current polytheism was equally false. 'There is one Supreme God among gods and men, unlike mortals both in mind and body.'<sup>2</sup> There can be only one God, for God is Omnipotent, so that there must be none to dispute his will. He must also be perfectly homogeneous, shaped like a sphere, seeing, hearing, and thinking with every part alike, never moving from place to place, but governing all things by an effortless exercise of thought. Had such daring heresies been promulgated in democratic Athens, their author would probably have soon found himself and his works handed over to the tender mercies of the Eleven. Happily at Elea, and in most other Greek states, the gods were left to take care of themselves.

Xenophanes does not seem to have been ever molested on account of his religious opinions. He complains bitterly enough that people preferred fiction to philosophy, that uneducated athletes engrossed far too much popular admiration, that he, Xenophanes, was not sufficiently appreciated; but of theological intolerance, so far as our information goes, he says not one single word. It will easily be conceived that the rapid progress of Greek speculation was singularly favoured by such unbounded freedom of thought and speech. The views just set forth have often been regarded as a step towards spiritualistic monotheism, and so, considered in the light of subsequent developments, they unquestionably were. Still, looking at the matter from another aspect, we may say

<sup>1</sup> Ritter and Preller, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*

that Xenophanes, when he shattered the idols of popular religion, was returning to the past rather than anticipating the future; feeling his way back to the deeper, more primordial faith of the old Aryan race, or even of that still older stock whence Aryan and Turanian alike diverged. He turns from the brilliant, passionate, fickle Dyaus, to Zên, or Ten, the ever-present, all-seeing, all-embracing, immovable vault of heaven. Aristotle, with a sympathetic insight unfortunately too rare in his criticisms on earlier systems, observes that Xenophanes did not make it clear whether the absolute unity he taught was material or ideal, but simply looked up at the whole heaven and declared that the One was God.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle was himself the real creator of philosophic monotheism, just because the idea of living, self-conscious personality had a greater value, a profounder meaning for him than for any other thinker of antiquity, one may almost say than for any other thinker whatever. It is, therefore, a noteworthy circumstance that, while warmly acknowledging the anticipations of Anaxagoras, he nowhere speaks of Xenophanes as a predecessor in the same line of enquiry. The latter might be called a pantheist were it not that pantheism belongs to a much later stage of speculation, one, in fact, not reached by the Greek mind at any period of its development. His leading conception was obscured by a confusion of mythological with purely physical ideas, and could only bear full fruit when the religious element had been entirely eliminated from its composition. This elimination was accomplished by a far greater thinker, one who combined poetic inspiration with philosophic depth; who was penetrating enough to discern the logical consequences involved in a fundamental principle of thought, and bold enough to push them to their legitimate conclusions without caring for the shock to sense and common opinion that his merciless dialectic might inflict.

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.* I. v.

Parmenides, of Elea, flourished towards the beginning of the fifth century B.C. We know very little about his personal history. According to Plato, he visited Athens late in life, and there made the acquaintance of Socrates, at that time a very young man. But an unsupported statement of Plato's must always be received with extreme caution; and this particular story is probably not less fictitious than the dialogue which it serves to introduce. Parmenides embodied his theory of the world in a poem, the most important passages of which have been preserved. They show that, while continuing the physical studies of his predecessors, he proceeded on an entirely different method. Their object was to deduce every variety of natural phenomena from a fundamental unity of substance. He declared that all variety and change were a delusion, and that nothing existed but one indivisible, unalterable, absolute reality; just as Descartes' antithesis of thought and extension disappeared in the infinite substance of Spinoza, or as the Kantian dualism of object and subject was eliminated in Hegel's absolute idealism. Again, Parmenides does not dogmatise to the same extent as his predecessors; he attempts to demonstrate his theory by the inevitable necessities of being and thought. Existence, he tells us over and over again, *is*, and non-existence is not, cannot even be imagined or thought of as existing, for thought is the same as being. This is not an anticipation of Hegel's identification of being with thought; it only amounts to the very innocent proposition that a thought is something and about something—enters, therefore, into the general undiscriminated mass of being. He next proceeds to prove that what is can neither come into being nor pass out of it again. It cannot come out of the non-existent, for that is inconceivable; nor out of the existent, for nothing exists but being itself; and the same argument proves that it cannot cease to exist. Here we find the indestructibility of matter, a truth which Anaximander,

had not yet grasped, virtually affirmed for the first time in history. We find also that our philosopher is carried away by the enthusiasm of a new discovery, and covers more ground than he can defend in maintaining the permanence of all existence whatever. The reason is that to him, as to every other thinker of the pre-Socratic period, all existence was material, or, rather, all reality was confounded under one vague conception, of which visible resisting extension supplied the most familiar type. To proceed: Being cannot be divided from being, nor is it capable of condensation or expansion (as the Ionians had taught); there is nothing by which it can be separated or held apart; nor is it ever more or less existent, but all is full of being. Parmenides goes on in his grand style:—

‘ Therefore the whole extends continuously,  
 Being by Being set; immovable,  
 Subject to the constraint of mighty laws;  
 Both increate and indestructible,  
 Since birth and death have wandered far away  
 By true conviction into exile driven;  
 The same, in self-same place, and by itself  
 Abiding, doth abide most firmly fixed,  
 And bounded round by strong Necessity.  
 Wherefore a holy law forbids that Being  
 Should be without an end, else want were there,  
 And want of that would be a want of all.’<sup>1</sup>

Thus does the everlasting Greek love of order, definition, limitation, reassert its supremacy over the intelligence of this noble thinker, just as his almost mystical enthusiasm has reached its highest pitch of exaltation, giving him back a world which thought can measure, circumscribe, and control.

Being, then, is finite in extent, and, as a consequence of its absolute homogeneity, spherical in form. There is good reason for believing that the earth’s true figure was first discovered in the fifth century B.C., but whether it was suggested by the *à priori* theories of Parmenides, or was

<sup>1</sup> Ritter and Preller, p. 63.

generalised by him into a law of the whole universe, or whether there was more than an accidental connexion between the two hypotheses, we cannot tell. Aristotle, at any rate, was probably as much indebted to the Eleatic system as to contemporary astronomy for his theory of a finite spherical universe. It will easily be observed that the distinction between space and matter, so obvious to us, and even to Greek thinkers of a later date, had not yet dawned upon Parmenides. As applied to the former conception, most of his affirmations are perfectly correct, but his belief in the finiteness of Being can only be justified on the supposition that Being is identified with matter. For it must be clearly understood (and Zeller has the great merit of having proved this fact by incontrovertible arguments)<sup>1</sup> that the Eleatic Being was not a transcendental conception, nor an abstract unity, as Aristotle erroneously supposed, nor a Kantian noumenon, nor a spiritual essence of any kind, but a phenomenal reality of the most concrete description. We can only not call Parmenides a materialist, because materialism implies a negation of spiritualism, which in his time had not yet come into existence. He tells us plainly that a man's thoughts result from the conformation of his body, and are determined by the preponderating element in its composition. Not much, however, can be made of this rudimentary essay in psychology, connected as it seems to be with an appendix to the teaching of our philosopher, in which he accepts the popular dualism, although still convinced of its falsity, and uses it, under protest, as an explanation of that very genesis which he had rejected as impossible.

As might be expected, the Parmenidean paradoxes provoked a considerable amount of contradiction and ridicule. The Reids and Beatties of that time drew sundry absurd consequences from the new doctrine, and offered them as a sufficient refutation of its truth. Zeno, a young friend and

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 475.

favourite of Parmenides, took up arms in his master's defence, and sought to prove with brilliant dialectical ability that consequences still more absurd might be deduced from the opposite belief. He originated a series of famous puzzles respecting the infinite divisibility of matter and the possibility of motion, subsequently employed as a disproof of all certainty by the Sophists and Sceptics, and occasionally made to serve as arguments on behalf of agnosticism by writers of our own time. Stated generally, they may be reduced to two. A whole composed of parts and divisible *ad infinitum* must be either infinitely great or infinitely little; infinitely great if its parts have magnitude, infinitely little if they have not. A moving body can never come to the end of a given line, for it must first traverse half the line, then half the remainder, and so on for ever. Aristotle thought that the difficulty about motion could be solved by taking the infinite divisibility of time into account; and Coleridge, according to his custom, repeated the explanation without acknowledgment. But Zeno would have refused to admit that any infinite series could come to an end, whether it was composed of successive or of co-existent parts. So long as the abstractions of our understanding are treated as separate entities, these and similar puzzles will continue to exercise the ingenuity of metaphysicians. Our present business, however, is not to solve Zeno's difficulties, but to show how they illustrate a leading characteristic of Greek thought, its tendency to perpetual analysis, a tendency not limited to the philosophy of the Greeks, but pervading the whole of their literature and even of their art. Homer carefully distinguishes the successive steps of every action, and leads up to every catastrophe by a series of finely graduated transitions. Like Zeno, again, he pursues a system of dichotomy, passing rapidly over the first half of his subject, and relaxes the speed of his narrative by going into ever-closer detail until the consummation is reached. Such a poem as the 'Achilleis' of modern critics

would have been perfectly intolerable to a Greek, from the too rapid and uniform march of its action. Herodotus proceeds after a precisely similar fashion, advancing from a broad and free treatment of history to elaborate minuteness of detail. So, too, a Greek temple divides itself into parts so distinct, yet so closely connected, that the eye, after separating, as easily recombines them into a whole. The evolution of Greek music tells the same tale of progressive subdivision, which is also illustrated by the passage from long speeches to single lines, and from these again to half lines in the dialogue of a Greek drama. No other people could have created mathematical demonstration, for no other would have had skill and patience enough to discover the successive identities interposed between and connecting the sides of an equation. The dialectic of Socrates and Plato, the somewhat wearisome distinctions of Aristotle, and, last of all, the fine-spun series of triads inserted by Proclus between the superessential One and the fleeting world of sense,—were all products of the same fundamental tendency, alternately most fruitful and most barren in its results. It may be objected that Zeno, so far from obeying this tendency, followed a diametrically opposite principle, that of absolutely unbroken continuity. True; but the 'Eleatic Palamedes' fought his adversaries with a weapon wrested out of their own hands; rejecting analysis as a law of real existence, he continued to employ it as a logical artifice with greater subtlety than had ever yet been displayed in pure speculation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The tendency which it has been attempted to characterise as a fundamental moment of Greek thought can only be called analytical in default of a better word. It is a process by which two related terms are at once parted and joined together by the insertion of one or more intermediary links; as, for instance, when a capital is inserted between column and architrave, or when a proposition is demonstrated by the interposition of a middle term between its subject and predicate. The German words *Vermitteln* and *Vermittelung* express what is meant with sufficient exactitude. They play a great part in Hegel's philosophy, and it will be remembered that Hegel was the most Hellenic of modern thinkers. So understood, there will cease to be any contradiction between the Eleates and

Besides Zeno, Parmenides seems to have had only one disciple of note, Melissus, the Samian statesman and general ; but under various modifications and combined with other elements, the Eleatic absolute entered as a permanent factor into Greek speculation. From it were lineally descended the Sphairos of Empedocles, the eternal atoms of Leucippus, the Nous of Anaxagoras, the Megaric Good, the supreme solar idea of Plato, the self-thinking thought of Aristotle, the imperturbable tranquillity attributed to their model sage by Stoics and Epicureans alike, the sovereign indifference of the Sceptics, and finally, the Neo-platonic One. Modern philosophers have sought for their supreme ideal in power, movement, activity, life, rather than in any stationary substance ; yet even among them we find Herbart partially reviving the Eleatic theory, and confronting Hegel's fluent categories with his own inflexible monads.

We have now to study an analogous, though far less complicated, antagonism in ancient Greece, and to show how her most brilliant period of physical philosophy arose from the combination of two seemingly irreconcilable systems. Parmenides, in an address supposed to be delivered by Wisdom to her disciple, warns us against the method pursued by 'ignorant mortals, the blind, deaf, stupid, confused tribes, who hold that to be and not to be are the same, and that all things move round by an inverted path.'<sup>1</sup> What Parmenides denounced as arrant nonsense was deliberately proclaimed to be the highest truth by his illustrious contemporary, Heraclitus, of Ephesus. This wonderful thinker is popularly known as the weeping philosopher, because, according to a very silly tradition, he never went abroad without shedding tears over the follies of mankind. No such mawkish sentimentality, but bitter scorn and indignation, marked the attitude of

Greek thought generally, at least from one point of view, as their object was to fill up the vacant spaces supposed to separate one mode of existence from another.

<sup>1</sup> Ritter and Preller, p. 62.



Heracleitus towards his fellows. A self-taught sage, he had no respect for the accredited instructors of Hellas. 'Much learning,' he says, 'does not teach reason, else it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus.'<sup>1</sup> Homer, he declares, ought to be flogged out of the public assemblages, and Archilochus likewise. When the highest reputations met with so little mercy, it will readily be imagined what contempt he poured on the vulgar herd. The feelings of a high-born aristocrat combine with those of a lofty genius to point and wing his words. 'The many are bad and few are the good. The best choose one thing instead of all, a perpetual well-spring of fame, while the many glut their appetites like beasts. One man is equal to ten thousand if he is the best.' This contempt was still further intensified by the very excusable incapacity of the public to understand profound thought conveyed in a style proverbial for its obscurity. 'Men cannot comprehend the eternal law; when I have explained the order of Nature they are no wiser than before.' What, then, was this eternal law, a knowledge of which Heracleitus found so difficult to popularise? Let us look back for a moment at the earlier Ionian systems. They had taught that the universe arose either by differentiation or by condensation and expansion from a single primordial substance, into which, as Anaximander, at least, held, everything at last returned. Now, Heracleitus taught that this transformation is a universal, never-ending, never-resting process; that all things are moving; that Nature is like a stream in which no man can bathe twice; that rest and stability are the law, not of life, but of death. Again, the Pythagorean school, as we have seen, divided all things into a series of sharply distinguished antithetical pairs. Heracleitus either directly identified the terms of every opposition, or regarded them as necessarily combined, or as continually

<sup>1</sup> For the originals of this and the succeeding quotations from Heracleitus, see Ritter and Preller, pp. 14-23.

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passing into one another. Perhaps we shall express his meaning most thoroughly by saying that he would have looked on all three propositions as equivalent statements of a single fact. In accordance with this principle he calls war the father and king and lord of all, and denounces Homer's prayer for the abolition of strife as an unconscious blasphemy against the universe itself. Yet, even his powerful intellect could not grasp the conception of a shifting relativity as the law and life of things without embodying it in a particular material substratum. Following the Ionian tradition, he sought for a world-element, and found it in that cosmic fire which enveloped the terrestrial atmosphere, and of which the heavenly luminaries were supposed to be formed. 'Fire,' says the Ephesian philosopher, no doubt adapting his language to the comprehension of a great commercial community, 'is the general medium of exchange, as gold is given for everything, and everything for gold.' 'The world was not created by any god or any man, but always was, and is, and shall be, an ever-living fire, periodically kindled and quenched.' By cooling and condensation, water is formed from fire, and earth from water; then, by a converse process called the way up as the other was the way down, earth again passes into water and water into fire. At the end of certain stated periods the whole world is to be reconverted into fire, but only to enter on a new cycle in the series of its endless revolutions—a conception, so far, remarkably confirmed by modern science. The whole theory, including a future world-conflagration, was afterwards adopted by the Stoics, and probably exercised a considerable influence on the eschatology of the early Christian Church. Imagination is obliged to work under forms which thought has already superseded; and Heracleitus as a philosopher had forestalled the dazzling consummation to which as a prophet he might look forward in wonder and hope. For, his elemental fire was only a picturesque presentation indispensable to him, but not to us, of the

sovereign law wherein all things live and move and have their being. To have introduced such an idea into speculation was his distinctive and inestimable achievement, although it may have been suggested by the *εἰμαρμένη* or destiny of the theological poets, a term occasionally employed in his writings. It had a moral as well as a physical meaning, or rather it hovers ambiguously between the two. 'The sun shall not transgress his bounds, or the Erinyes who help justice will find him out.' It is the source of human laws, the common reason which binds men together, therefore they should hold by it even more firmly than by the laws of the State. It is not only all-wise but all-good, even where it seems to be the reverse ; for our distinctions between good and evil, just and unjust, vanish in the divine harmony of Nature, the concurrent energies and identifying transformations of her universal life.

According to Aristotle, the Heracleitean flux was inconsistent with the highest law of thought, and made all predication impossible. It has been shown that the master himself recognised a fixed recurring order of change which could be affirmed if nothing else could. But the principle of change, once admitted, seemed to act like a corrosive solvent, too powerful for any vessel to contain. Disciples were soon found who pushed it to extreme consequences with the effect of abolishing all certainty whatever. In Plato's time it was impossible to argue with a Heracleitean ; he could never be tied down to a definite statement. Every proposition became false as soon as it was uttered, or rather before it was out of the speaker's mouth. At last, a distinguished teacher of the school declined to commit himself by using words, and disputed exclusively in dumb show. A dangerous speculative crisis had set in. At either extremity of the Hellenic world the path of scientific inquiry was barred ; on the one hand by a theory eliminating non-existence from thought, and on the other hand by a theory identifying it with existence. The

luminous beam of reflection had been polarised into two divergent rays, each light where the other was dark and dark where the other was light, each denying what the other asserted and asserting what the other denied. For a century physical speculation had taught that the universe was formed by the modification of a single eternal substance, whatever that substance might be. By the end of that period, all becoming was absorbed into being at Elea, and all being into becoming at Ephesus. Each view contained a portion of the truth, and one which perhaps would never have been clearly perceived if it had not been brought into exclusive prominence. But further progress was impossible until the two half-truths had been recombined. We may compare Parmenides and Heracleitus to two lofty and precipitous peaks on either side of an Alpine pass. Each commands a wide prospect, interrupted only on the side of its opposite neighbour. And the fertilising stream of European thought originates with neither of them singly, but has its source midway between.

#### IV.

We now enter on the last period of purely objective philosophy, an age of mediating and reconciling, but still profoundly original speculation. Its principal representatives, with whom alone we have to deal, are Empedocles, the Atomists, Leucippus and Democritus, and Anaxagoras. There is considerable doubt and difficulty respecting the order in which they should be placed. Anaxagoras was unquestionably the oldest and Democritus the youngest of the four, the difference between their ages being forty years. It is also nearly certain that the Atomists came after Empedocles. But if we take a celebrated expression of Aristotle's<sup>1</sup> literally (as there is no reason why it should not be taken),

<sup>1</sup> Τῆ μὲν ἡλικίᾳ πρότερος ὦν, τοῖς δ' ἔργοις ὕστερος. *Metaph.* I. iii.

Anaxagoras, although born before Empedocles, published his views at a later period. Was he also anticipated by Leucippus? We cannot tell with certainty, but it seems likely from a comparison of their doctrines that he was; and in all cases the man who naturalised philosophy in Athens, and who by his theory of a creative reason furnishes a transition to the age of subjective speculation, will be most conveniently placed at the close of the pre-Socratic period.

A splendid tribute has been paid to the fame of Empedocles by Lucretius, the greatest didactic poet of all time, and by a great didactic poet of our own time, Mr. Matthew Arnold. But the still more rapturous panegyric pronounced by the Roman enthusiast on Epicurus makes his testimony a little suspicious, and the lofty chant of our own contemporary must be taken rather as an expression of his own youthful opinions respecting man's place in Nature, than as a faithful exposition of the Sicilian thinker's creed. Many another name from the history of philosophy might with better reason have been prefixed to that confession of resigned and scornful scepticism entitled *Empedocles on Etna*. The real doctrines of an essentially religious teacher would hardly have been so cordially endorsed by Mr. Swinburne. But perhaps no other character could have excited the deep sympathy felt by one poetic genius for another, when with both of them thought is habitually steeped in emotion. Empedocles was the last Greek of any note who threw his philosophy into a metrical form. Neither Xenophanes nor Parmenides had done this with so much success. No less a critic than Aristotle extols the Homeric splendour of his verses, and Lucretius, in this respect an authority, speaks of them as almost divine. But, judging from the fragments still extant, their speculative content exhibits a distinct decline from the height reached by his immediate predecessors. Empedocles betrays a distrust in man's power of discovering truth, almost, although not quite, unknown to them. Too much certainty would be

impious. He calls on the 'much-wooded white-armed virgin muse' to—

' Guide from the seat of Reverence thy bright car,  
And bring to us the creatures of a day,  
What without sin we may aspire to know.'<sup>1</sup>

We also miss in him their single-minded devotion to philosophy and their rigorous unity of doctrine. The Acragantine sage was a party leader (in which capacity, to his great credit, he victoriously upheld the popular cause), a rhetorician, an engineer, a physician, and a thaumaturgist. The well-known legend relating to his death may be taken as a not undeserved satire on the colossal self-conceit of the man who claimed divine honours during his lifetime. Half-mystic and half-rationalist, he made no attempt to reconcile the two inconsistent sides of his intellectual character. It may be compared to one of those grotesque combinations in which, according to his morphology, the heads and bodies of widely different animals were united during the beginnings of life before they had learned to fall into their proper places. He believed in metempsychosis, and professed to remember the somewhat miscellaneous series of forms through which his own personality had already run. He had been a boy, a girl, a bush, a bird, and a fish. Nevertheless, as we shall presently see, his theory of Nature altogether excluded such a notion as the soul's separate existence. We have now to consider what that theory actually was. It will be remembered that Parmenides had affirmed the perpetuity and eternal self-identity of being, but that he had deprived this profound divination of all practical value by interpreting it in a sense which excluded diversity and change. Empedocles also declares creation and destruction to be impossible, but explains that the appearances so denominated arise from the union and separation of four everlasting substances—earth, air, fire, and water. This is the famous doctrine of the four

<sup>1</sup> Ritter and Preller, p. 90.

elements, which, adopted by Plato and Aristotle, was long regarded as the last word of chemistry, and still survives in popular phraseology. Its author may have been guided by an unconscious reflection on the character of his own philosophical method, for was not he, too, constructing a new system out of the elements supplied by his predecessors? They had successively fixed on water, air, and fire as the primordial form of existence ; he added a fourth, earth, and effected a sort of reconciliation by placing them all on an equal footing. Curiously enough, the earlier monistic systems had a relative justification which his crude eclecticism lacked. All matter may exist either in a solid, a liquid, or a gaseous form ; and all solid matter has reached its present condition after passing through the two other degrees of consistency. That the three modifications should be found co-existing in our own experience is a mere accident of the present régime, and to enumerate them is to substitute a description for an explanation, the usual fault of eclectic systems. Empedocles, however, besides his happy improvement on Parmenides, made a real contribution to thought when, as Aristotle puts it, he sought for a moving as well as for a material cause ; in other words, when he asked not only of what elements the world is composed, but also by what forces were they brought together. He tells us of two such causes, Love and Strife, the one a combining, the other a dissociating power. If for these half-mythological names we read attractive and repulsive forces, the result will not be very different from our own current cosmologies. Such terms, when so used as to assume the existence of occult qualities in matter, driving its parts asunder or drawing them close together, are, in truth, as completely mythological as any figments of Hellenic fancy. Unlike their modern antitypes, the Empedoclean goddesses did not reign together, but succeeded one another in alternate dominion during protracted periods of time. The victory of Love was complete when all things had been drawn into a

perfect sphere, evidently the absolute Eleatic Being subjected to a Heracleitean law of vicissitude and contradiction. For Strife lays hold on the consolidated orb, and by her disintegrating action gradually reduces it to a formless chaos, till, at the close of another world-period, the work of creation begins again. Yet growth and decay are so inextricably intertwined that Empedocles failed to keep up this ideal separation, and was compelled to admit the simultaneous activity of both powers in our everyday experience, so that Nature turns out to be composed of six elements instead of four, the mind which perceives it being constituted in a precisely similar manner. But Love, although on the whole victorious, can only gradually get the better of her retreating enemy, and Nature, as we know it, is the result of their continued conflict. Empedocles described the process of evolution, as he conceived it, in somewhat minute detail. Two points only are of much interest to us, his alleged anticipation of the Darwinian theory and his psychology. The former, such as it was, has occasionally been attributed to Lucretius, but the Roman poet most probably copied Epicurus, although the very brief summary of that philosopher's physical system preserved by Diogenes Laertius contains no allusion to such a topic. We know, however, that in Aristotle's time a theory identical with that of Lucretius was held by those who rejected teleological explanations of the world in general and of living organisms in particular. All sorts of animals were produced by spontaneous generation; only those survived which were accidentally furnished with appliances for procuring nourishment and for propagating their kind. The notion itself originated with Empedocles, whose fanciful suppositions have already been mentioned in a different connexion. Most assuredly he did not offer it as a solution of problems which in his time had not yet been mooted, but as an illustration of the confusion which prevailed when Love had only advanced a little way in her ordering, harmonising,



unifying task. Prantl, writing a few years before the appearance of Mr. Darwin's book on the Origin of Species, and therefore without any prejudice on the subject, observes with truth that this theory of Empedocles was deeply rooted in the mythological conceptions of the time.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps he was seeking for a rationalistic explanation of the centaurs, minotaurs, hundred-handed giants, and so forth, in whose existence he had not, like Lucretius, learned completely to disbelieve. His strange supposition was afterwards freed from its worst extravagances ; but even as stated in the *De Rerum Naturâ*, it has no claim whatever to rank as a serious hypothesis. Anything more unlike the Darwinian doctrine, according to which all existing species have been evolved from less highly-organised ancestors by the gradual accumulation of minute differences, it would be difficult to conceive. Every thinker of antiquity, with one exception, believed in the immutability of natural species. They had existed unchanged from all eternity, or had sprung up by spontaneous generation from the earth's bosom in their present form. The solitary dissentient was Anaximander, who conjectured that man was descended from an aquatic animal.<sup>2</sup> Strange to say, this lucky guess has not yet been quoted as an argument against the Ascidian pedigree. It is chiefly the enemies of Darwinism who are eager to find it anticipated in Empedocles or Lucretius. By a curious inversion of traditionalism, it is fancied that a modern discovery can be upset by showing that somebody said something of the kind more than two thousand years ago. Unfortunately authority has not the negative value of disproving the principles which it supports. We must be content to accept the truths brought to light by observation and reasoning, even at the risk of finding ourselves in humiliating agreement with a philosopher of antiquity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prantl, *Aristoteles' Physik*, p. 484.

<sup>2</sup> Ritter and Preller, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Since the above remarks were first published, Mr. Wallace, in his work on

Passing from life to mind, we find Empedocles teaching an even more pronounced materialism than Parmenides, inasmuch as it is stated in language of superior precision. Our souls are, according to him, made up of elements like those which constitute the external world, each of these being perceived by a corresponding portion of the same substances within ourselves—fire by fire, water by water, and so on with the rest. It is a mistake to suppose that speculation begins from a subjective stand-point, that men start with a clear consciousness of their own personality, and proceed to construct an objective universe after the same pattern. Doubtless they are too prone to personify the blind forces of Nature, and Empedocles himself has just supplied us with an example of this tendency, but they err still more by reading outward experience into their own souls, by materialising the processes of consciousness, and resolving human personality into a loose confederacy of inorganic units. Even Plato, who did more than anyone else towards distinguishing between mind and body, ended by laying down his psychology on the lines of an astronomical system. Meanwhile, to have separated the perception of an object from the object itself, in ever so slight a degree, was an important gain to thought.

Epicureanism, has stated that, according to Epicurus, 'the very animals which are found upon the earth have been made what they are by slow processes of selection and adaptation through the experience of life;' and he proceeds to call the theory in question, 'ultra-Darwinian' (*Epicureanism*, p. 114). Lucretius—the authority quoted—says nothing about 'slow processes of adaptation,' nor yet does he say that the animals were 'made what they are' by 'selection,' but by the procreative power of the earth herself. Picking out a ready-made pair of boots from among a number which do not fit is a very different process from manufacturing the same pair by measure, or wearing it into shape. To call the Empedoclean theory ultra-Darwinian, is like calling the Democritean or Epicurean theory of gravitation ultra-Newtonian. And Mr. Wallace seems to admit as much, when he proceeds to say on the very same page, 'Of course in this there is no implication of the peculiarly Darwinian doctrine of descent or development of kind from kind with structure modified and complicated to meet changing circumstances.' (By the way, this is *not* a peculiarly Darwinian doctrine, for it originated with Lamarck, spontaneous variation and selection being the additions made by the English naturalists). But what becomes then of the 'slow processes of adaptation' and the 'ultra-Darwinian theory' spoken of just before?

We must not omit to notice a hypothesis by which Empedocles sought to elucidate the mechanism of sensation, and which was subsequently adopted by the atomic school; indeed, as will presently be shown, we have reason to believe that the whole atomic theory was developed out of it. He held that emanations were being continually thrown off from the surfaces of bodies, and that they penetrated into the organs of sense through fine passages or pores. This may seem a crude guess, but it is at any rate much more scientific than Aristotle's explanation. According to the latter, possibilities of feeling are converted into actualities by the presence of an object. In other words, we feel when and because we do; a safe assertion, but hardly an addition to our positive knowledge of the subject.

We have seen how Greek thought had arrived at a perfectly just conception of the process by which all physical transformations are effected. The whole extended universe is an aggregate of bodies, while each single body is formed by a combination of everlasting elements, and is destroyed by their separation. But if Empedocles was right, if these primary substances were no other than the fire, air, water, and earth of everyday experience, what became of the Heracleitean law, confirmed by common observation, that, so far from remaining unaltered, they were continually passing into one another? To this question the atomic theory gave an answer so conclusive, that, although ignored or contemned by later schools, it was revived with the great revival of science in the sixteenth century, was successfully employed in the explanation of every order of phenomena, and still remains the basis of all physical enquiry. The undulatory theory of light, the law of universal gravitation, and the laws of chemical combination can only be expressed in terms implying the existence of atoms; the laws of gaseous diffusion, and of thermodynamics generally, can only be understood with their help; and the latest develop-

ments of chemistry have tended still further to establish their reality, as well as to elucidate their remarkable properties. In the absence of sufficient information, it is difficult to determine by what steps this admirable hypothesis was evolved. Yet, even without external evidence, we may fairly conjecture that, sooner or later, some philosopher, possessed of a high generalising faculty, would infer that if bodies are continually throwing off a flux of infinitesimal particles from their surfaces, they must be similarly subdivided all through ; and that if the organs of sense are honeycombed with imperceptible pores, such may also be the universal constitution of matter.<sup>1</sup> Now, according to Aristotle, Leucippus, the founder of atomism, did actually use the second of these arguments, and employed it in particular to prove the existence of indivisible solids.<sup>2</sup> Other considerations equally obvious suggested themselves from another quarter. If all change was expressible in terms of matter and motion, then gradual change implied interstitial motion, which again involved the necessity of fine pores to serve as channels for the incoming and outgoing molecular streams. Nor, as was supposed, could motion of any kind be conceived without a vacuum, the second great postulate of the atomic theory. Here its advocates directly joined issue with Parmenides. The chief of the Eleatic school had, as we have seen, presented being under the form of a homogeneous sphere, absolutely continuous but limited in extent. Space dissociated from matter was to him, as afterwards to Aristotle, non-existent and impossible. It was, he exclaimed, inconceivable, nonsensical. Unhappily inconceivability is about the worst negative criterion of truth ever yet invented. His challenge was now

<sup>1</sup> By a curious coincidence, the atomic constitution of matter still finds its strongest proof in optical phenomena. Light is propagated by transverse waves, and such waves are only possible in a discontinuous medium. But if the luminiferous ether is composed of discrete particles, so also must be the matter which it penetrates in all directions.

<sup>2</sup> Ar. *De Gen. et Corr.*, I., viii., 325, b, 5.

taken up by the Atomists, who boldly affirmed that if non-being meant empty space, it was just as conceivable and just as necessary as being. A further stimulus may have been received from the Pythagorean school, whose doctrines had, just at this time, been systematised and committed to writing by Philolaus, its most eminent disciple. The hard saying that all things were made out of number might be explained and confirmed if the integers were interpreted as material atoms.

It will have been observed that, so far, the merit of originating atomism has been attributed to Leucippus, instead of to the more celebrated Democritus, with whose name it is usually associated. The two were fast friends, and seem always to have worked together in perfect harmony. But Leucippus, although next to nothing is known of his life, was apparently the older man, and from him, so far as we can make out, emanated the great idea, which his brilliant coadjutor carried into every department of enquiry, and set forth in works which are a loss to literature as well as to science, for the poetic splendour of their style was not less remarkable than the encyclopaedic range of their contents. Democritus was born at Abdêra, a Thracian city, 470 B.C., a year before Socrates, and lived to a very advanced age—more than a hundred, according to some accounts. However this may be, he was probably, like most of his great countrymen, possessed of immense vitality. His early manhood was spent in Eastern travel, and he was not a little proud of the numerous countries which he had visited, and the learned men with whom he had conversed. His time was mostly occupied in observing Nature, and in studying mathematics; the sages of Asia and Egypt may have acquainted him with many useful scientific facts, but we have seen that his philosophy was derived from purely Hellenic sources. A few fragments of his numerous writings still survive—the relics of an intellectual Ozymandias. In them are briefly shadowed forth the conceptions which Lucretius, or at least his modern

English interpreters, have made familiar to all educated men and women. Everything is the result of mechanical causation. Infinite worlds are formed by the collision of infinite atoms falling for ever downward through infinite space. No place is left for supernatural agency; nor are the unaided operations of Nature disguised under Olympian appellations. Democritus goes even further than Epicurus in his rejection of the popular mythology. His system provides no interstellar refuge for abdicated gods. He attributed a kind of objective existence to the apparitions seen in sleep, and even a considerable influence for good or for evil, but denied that they were immortal. The old belief in a Divine Power had arisen from their activity and from meteorological phenomena of an alarming kind, but was destitute of any stronger foundation. For his own part, he looked on the fiery spherical atoms as a universal reason or soul of the world, without, however, assigning to them the distinct and commanding position occupied by a somewhat analogous principle in the system which we now proceed to examine, and with which our survey of early Greek thought will most fitly terminate.

## V.

Reasons have already been suggested for placing Anaxagoras last in order among the physical philosophers, notwithstanding his priority in point of age to more than one of them. He was born, according to the most credible accounts, 500 B.C., at Clazomenae, an Ionian city, and settled in Athens when twenty years of age. There he spent much the greater part of a long life, illustrating the type of character which Euripides—expressly referring, as is supposed, to the Ionian sage—has described in the following choric lines :

‘ Happy is he who has learned  
To search out the secret of things,  
Not to the townsmen’s bane,

Neither for aught that brings  
 An unrighteous gain.  
 But the ageless order he sees  
 Of nature that cannot die,  
 And the causes whence it springs,  
 And the how and the why.  
 Never have thoughts like these  
 To a deed of dishonour been turned.<sup>1</sup>

The dishonour was for the townsmen who, in an outbreak of insane fanaticism, drove the blameless truthseeker from his adopted home. Anaxagoras was the intimate companion of Pericles, and Pericles had made many enemies by his domestic as well as by his foreign policy. A coalition of harassed interests and offended prejudices was formed against him. A cry arose that religion and the constitution were in danger. The Athenians had too much good sense to dismiss their great democratic Minister, but they permitted the illustrious statesman's political opponents to strike at him through his friends.<sup>2</sup> Aspasia was saved only by the tears of her lover. Pheidias, the grandest, most spiritual-minded artist of all time, was arrested on a charge of impiety, and died in a prison of the city whose temples were adorned with the imperishable monuments of his religious inspiration. A decree against 'astronomers and atheists' was so evidently aimed at Anaxagoras that the philosopher retired to Lampsacus, where he died at the age of seventy-two, universally admired and revered. Altars dedicated to Reason and Truth were erected in his honour, and for centuries his memory continued to be celebrated by an annual feast.<sup>3</sup> His whole existence had been devoted to science. When asked what made life worth living, he answered, 'The contemplation of the heavens and of the universal cosmic order.' The reply was like a title-page to his works. We can see that specialisation was

<sup>1</sup> Eurip. *Frag. Incent. Fab.*, CXXXVI. Didot, p. 850. [I am indebted for this version to Miss A. M. F. Robinson, the translator of the *Crowned Hippolytus*.]

<sup>2</sup> Curtius, *Griechische Geschichte*, 342-5 (3rd ed.).

<sup>3</sup> Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 791.

beginning, that the positive sciences were separating themselves from general theories about Nature, and could be cultivated independently of them. A single individual might, indeed, combine philosophy of the most comprehensive kind with a detailed enquiry into some particular order of phenomena, but he could do this without bringing the two studies into any immediate connexion with each other. Such seems to have been the case with Anaxagoras. He was a professional astronomer and also the author of a modified atomic hypothesis. This, from its greater complexity, seems more likely to have been suggested by the purely quantitative conception of Leucippus than to have preceded it in the order of evolution. Democritus, and probably his teacher also, drew a very sharp distinction between what were afterwards called the primary and secondary qualities of matter. Extension and resistance alone had a real existence in Nature, while the attributes corresponding to our special sensations, such as temperature, taste, and colour, were only subjectively, or, as he expressed it, conventionally true. Anaxagoras affirmed no less strongly than his younger contemporaries that the sum of being can neither be increased nor diminished, that all things arise and perish by combination and division, and that bodies are formed out of indestructible elements; like the Atomists, again, he regarded these elementary substances as infinite in number and inconceivably minute; only he considered them as qualitatively distinct, and as resembling on an infinitesimal scale the highest compounds that they build up. Not only were gold, iron, and the other metals formed of homogeneous particles, but such substances as flesh, bone, and blood were, according to him, equally simple, equally decomposable, into molecules of like nature with themselves. Thus, as Aristotle well observes, he reversed the method of Empedocles, and taught that earth, air, fire, and water were really the most complex of all bodies, since they supplied



nourishment to the living tissues, and therefore must contain within themselves the multitudinous variety of units by whose aggregation individualised organic substance is made up.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, our philosopher held that originally this intermixture had been still more thoroughgoing, all possible qualities being simultaneously present in the smallest particles of matter. The resulting state of chaotic confusion lasted until Nous, or Reason, came and segregated the heterogeneous elements by a process of continuous differentiation leading up to the present arrangement of things. Both Plato and Aristotle have commended Anaxagoras for introducing into speculation the conception of Reason as a cosmic world-ordering power; both have censured him for making so little use of his own great thought, for attributing almost everything to secondary, material, mechanical causes; for not everywhere applying the teleological method; in fact, for not anticipating the Bridgewater Treatises and proving that the world is constructed on a plan of perfect wisdom and goodness. Less fortunate than the Athenians, we cannot purchase the work of Anaxagoras on Nature at an orchestral book-stall for the moderate price of a drachma; but we know enough about its contents to correct the somewhat petulant and superficial criticism of a school perhaps less in sympathy than we are with its author's method of research. Evidently the Clazomenian philosopher did not mean by Reason an ethical force, a power which makes for human happiness or virtue, nor yet a reflecting intelligence, a designer adapting means to ends. To all appearances the Nous was not a spirit in the sense which we attach, or which Aristotle attached to the term. It was, according to Anaxagoras, the subtlest and purest of all things, totally unmixed with other substances, and therefore able to control and bring them into order. This is not how men speak of an immaterial inextended consciousness. The truth is that no

<sup>1</sup> Ar. *De Coelo*, III., iii., 302, a, 28.

amount of physical science could create, although it might lead towards a spiritualistic philosophy. Spiritualism first arose from the sophistic negation of an external world, from the exclusive study of man, from the Socratic search after general definitions. Yet, if *Nous* originally meant intelligence, how could it lose this primary signification and become identified with a mere mode of matter? The answer is, that Anaxagoras, whose whole life was spent in tracing out the order of Nature, would instinctively think of his own intelligence as a discriminating, identifying faculty; would, consequently, conceive its objective counterpart under the form of a differentiating and integrating power. All preceding thinkers had represented their supreme being under material conditions, either as one element singly or as a sum total where elemental differences were merged. Anaxagoras differed from them chiefly by the very sharp distinction drawn between his informing principle and the rest of Nature. The absolute intermixture of qualities which he presupposes bears a very strong resemblance both to the *Sphairos* of Empedocles and to the fiery consummation of Heracleitus, it may even have been suggested by them. Only, what with them was the highest form of existence becomes with him the lowest; thought is asserting itself more and more, and interpreting the law of evolution in accordance with its own imperious demands.

A world where ordering reason was not only raised to supreme power, but also jealously secluded from all communion with lower forms of existence, meant to popular imagination a world from which divinity had been withdrawn. The astronomical teaching of Anaxagoras was well calculated to increase a not unfounded alarm. Underlying the local tribal mythology of Athens and of Greece generally, was an older, deeper Nature-worship, chiefly directed towards those heavenly luminaries which shone so graciously on all men, and to which all men yielded, or were supposed to yield,

grateful homage in return. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*. Every Athenian citizen from Nicias to Strepsiades would feel his own belief strengthened by such a universal concurrence of authority. Two generations later, Plato held fast to the same conviction, severely denouncing its impugners, whom he would, if possible, have silenced with the heaviest penalties. To Aristotle, also, the heavenly bodies were something far more precious and perfect than anything in our sublunary sphere, something to be spoken of only in language of enthusiastic and passionate love. At a far later period Marcus Aurelius could refer to them as visible gods;<sup>1</sup> and just before the final extinction of Paganism highly-educated men still offered up their orisons in silence and secrecy to the moon.<sup>2</sup> Judge, then, with what horror an orthodox public received Anaxagoras's announcement that the moon shone only by reflected light, that she was an earthy body, and that her surface was intersected with mountains and ravines, besides being partially built over. The bright Selênê, the Queen of Heaven, the most interesting and sympathetic of goddesses, whose phases so vividly recalled the course of human life, who was firmly believed to bring fine weather at her return and to take it away at her departure, was degraded into a cold, dark, senseless clod.<sup>3</sup> Democritus observed that all this had been known a long time in the Eastern countries where he had travelled. Possibly; but fathers of families could not have been more disturbed if it had been a brand-new discovery. The sun, too, they were told, was a red-hot stone larger than Peloponnesus—a somewhat unwieldy size even for a Homeric god. Socrates, little as he cared about physical investigations generally, took this theory very seriously to heart, and

<sup>1</sup> M. Antoninus, XII., 28.

<sup>2</sup> Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, III., b, p. 669.

<sup>3</sup> Even regulating the calendar by the sun instead of by the moon seems to have been regarded as a dangerous and impious innovation by the more conservative Athenians—at least judging from the half-serious pleasantry of Aristophanes, *Nub.*, 608-26. (Dindorf.)

attempted to show by a series of distinctions that sun-heat and fire-heat were essentially different from each other. A duller people than the Athenians would probably have shown far less suspicion of scientific innovations. Men who were accustomed to anticipate the arguments of an orator before they were half out of his month, with whom the extraction of reluctant admissions by cross-examination was habitually used as a weapon of attack and defence in the public law courts and practised as a game in private circles—who were perpetually on their guard against insidious attacks from foreign and domestic foes—had minds ready trained to the work of an inquisitorial priesthood. An Athenian, moreover, had mythology at his fingers' ends; he was accustomed to see its leading incidents placed before him on the stage not only with intense realism, but with a systematic adaptation to the demands of common experience and a careful concatenation of cause and effect, which gave his belief in them all the force of a rational conviction while retaining all the charm of a supernatural creed. Then, again, the constitution of Athens, less than that of any other Greek State, could be worked without the devoted, self-denying co-operation of her citizens, and in their minds sense of duty was inseparably associated with religious belief, based in its turn on mythological traditions. A great poet has said, and said truly, that Athens was 'on the will of man as on a mount of diamond set,' but the crystallising force which gave that collective human will such clearness and keenness and tenacity was faith in the protecting presence of a diviner Will at whose withdrawal it would have crumbled into dust. Lastly, the Athenians had no genius for natural science; none of them were ever distinguished as savans. They looked on the new knowledge much as Swift looked on it two thousand years afterwards. It was, they thought, a miserable trifling waste of time, not productive of any practical good, breeding conceit in young men, and quite unworthy of receiving any attention from orators, soldiers, and

statesmen. Pericles, indeed, thought differently, but Pericles was as much beyond his age when he talked about Nature with Anaxagoras as when he charged Aspasia with the government of his household and the entertainment of his guests.

These reflections are offered, not in excuse but in explanation of Athenian intolerance, a phenomenon for the rest unparalleled in ancient Greece. We cannot say that men were then, or ever have been, logically obliged to choose between atheism and superstition. If instead of using *Nous* as a half-contemptuous nickname for the Clazomenian stranger, his contemporaries had taken the trouble to understand what *Nous* really meant, they might have found in it the possibility of a deep religious significance; they might have identified it with all that was best and purest in their own guardian goddess *Athênê*; have recognised it as the very foundation of their own most characteristic excellences. But vast spiritual revolutions are not so easily accomplished; and when, before the lapse of many years, *Nous* was again presented to the Athenian people, this time actually personified as an Athenian citizen, it was again misunderstood, again rejected, and became the occasion for a display of the same persecuting spirit, unhappily pushed to a more fatal extreme.

Under such unfavourable auspices did philosophy find a home in Athens. The great maritime capital had drawn to itself every other species of intellectual eminence, and this could not fail to follow with the rest. But philosophy, although hitherto identified with mathematical and physical science, held unexhausted possibilities of development in reserve. According to a well-known legend, Thales once fell into a tank while absorbed in gazing at the stars. An old woman advised him to look at the tank in future, for there he would see the water and the stars as well. Others after him had got into similar difficulties, and might seek to evade them by a similar artifice. While busied with the study of

cosmic evolution, they had stumbled unawares on some perplexing mental problems. Why do the senses suggest beliefs so much at variance with those arrived at by abstract reasoning? Why should reason be more trustworthy than sense? Why are the foremost Hellenic thinkers so hopelessly disagreed? What is the criterion of truth? Of what use are conclusions which cannot command universal assent? Or, granting that truth is discoverable, how can it be communicated to others? Such were some of the questions now beginning urgently to press for a solution. 'I sought for myself,' said Heracleitus in his oracular style. His successors had to do even more—to seek not only for themselves but for others; to study the beliefs, habits, and aptitudes of their hearers with profound sagacity, in order to win admission for the lessons they were striving to impart. And when a systematic investigation of human nature had once begun, it could not stop short with a mere analysis of the intellectual faculties; what a man did was after all so very much more important than what he knew, was, in truth, that which alone gave his knowledge any practical value whatever. Moral distinctions, too, were beginning to grow uncertain. When every other traditional belief had been shaken to its foundations, when men were taught to doubt the evidence of their own senses, it was not to be expected that the conventional laws of conduct, at no time very exact or consistent, would continue to be accepted on the authority of ancient usage. Thus, every kind of determining influences, internal and external, conspired to divert philosophy from the path which it had hitherto pursued, and to change it from an objective, theoretical study into an introspective, dialectic, practical discipline.

## VI.

And now, looking back at the whole course of early Greek thought, presenting as it does a gradual development and an

organic unity which prove it to be truly a native growth, a spontaneous product of the Greek mind, let us take one step further and enquire whether before the birth of pure speculation, or parallel with but apart from its rudimentary efforts, there were not certain tendencies displayed in the other great departments of intellectual activity, fixed forms as it were in which the Hellenic genius was compelled to work, which reproduce themselves in philosophy and determine its distinguishing characteristics. Although the materials for a complete Greek ethnology are no longer extant, it can be shown that such tendencies did actually exist.

It is a familiar fact, first brought to light by Lessing, and generalised by him into a law of all good literary composition, that Homer always throws his descriptions into a narrative form. We are not told what a hero wore, but how he put on his armour; when attention is drawn to a particular object we are made acquainted with its origin and past history; even the reliefs on a shield are invested with life and movement. Homer was not impelled to adopt this method either by conscious reflection or by a profound poetic instinct. At a certain stage of intellectual development, every Greek would find it far easier to arrange the data of experience in successive than in contemporaneous order; the one is fixed, the other admits of indefinite variation. Pictorial and plastic art also begin with serial presentations, and only arrive at the construction of large centralised groups much later on. We have next to observe that, while Greek reflection at first followed the order of time, it turned by preference not to present or future, but to past time. Nothing in Hellenic literature reminds us of Hebrew prophecy. To a Greek all distinct prevision was merged in the gloom of coming death or the glory of anticipated fame. Of course, at every great crisis of the national fortunes much curiosity prevailed among the vulgar as to what course events would take; but it was sedulously discouraged by the noblest minds. Herodotus and

Sophocles look on even divine predictions as purposely ambiguous and misleading. Pindar often dwells on the hopeless uncertainty of life.<sup>1</sup> Thucydides treats all vaticination as utterly delusive. So, when a belief in the soul's separate existence first obtained acceptance among the Greeks, it interested them far less as a pledge of never-ending life and progress hereafter, than as involving a possible revelation of past history, of the wondrous adventures which each individual had passed through before assuming his present form. Hence the peculiar force of Pindar's congratulation to the partaker in the Eleusinian mysteries; after death he knows not only 'the end of life,' but also 'its god-given beginning.'<sup>2</sup> Even the present was not intelligible until it had been projected back into the past, or interpreted by the light of some ancient tale. Sappho, in her famous ode to Aphroditê, recalls the incidents of a former passion precisely similar to the unrequited love which now agitates her heart, and describes at length how the goddess then came to her relief as she is now implored to come again. Modern critics have spoken of this curious literary artifice as a sign of delicacy and reserve. We may be sure that Sappho was an utter stranger to such feelings; she ran her thoughts into a predetermined mould just as a bee builds its wax into hexagonal cells. Curtius, the German historian, has surmised with much plausibility that the entire legend of Troy owes its origin to this habit of throwing back contemporary events into a distant past. According to his view, the characters and scenes recorded by Homer, although unhistorical as they now stand, had really a place in the Achaean colonisation of Asia Minor.<sup>3</sup> But, apart from any disguised allusions, old stories had an inexhaustible charm for the Greek imagination. Even during the stirring events of the Peloponnesian war, elderly Athenian

<sup>1</sup> σύμβολον δ' οὐ πῶ τις ἐπιχθονίων  
πιστὸν ἀμφὶ πράξις ἐσσομένης εὐδρην θεόθεν.—*Ol.*, XII., 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Frag.*, 102.

<sup>3</sup> *Griechische Geschichte*, ii., 112-3 (3rd ed.).



citizens in their hours of relaxation talked of nothing but mythology.<sup>1</sup> When a knowledge of reading became universally diffused, and books could be had at a moderate price, ancient legends seem to have been the favourite literature of the lower classes, just as among ourselves in Caxton's time. Still more must the same taste have prevailed a century earlier. A student who opens Pindar's epinician odes for the first time is surprised to find so little about the victorious combatants and the struggles in which they took part, so much about mythical adventures seemingly unconnected with the ostensible subject of the poem. Furthermore, we find that genealogies were the framework by which these distant recollections were held together. Most noble families traced their descent back to a god or to a god-like hero. The entire interval separating the historical period from the heroic age was filled up with more or less fictitious pedigrees. A man's ancestry was much the most important part of his biography. It is likely that Herodotus had just as enthusiastic an admiration as we can have for Leonidas. Yet one fancies that a historian of later date would have shown his appreciation of the Spartan king in a rather different fashion. We should have been told something about the hero's personal appearance, and perhaps some characteristic incidents from his earlier career would have been related. Not so with Herodotus. He pauses in the story of Thermopylae to give us the genealogy of Leonidas up to Heraclês; no more and no less. That was the highest compliment he could pay, and it is repeated for Pausanias, the victor of Plataea.<sup>2</sup> The genealogical method was capable of wide extension, and could be applied to other than human or animal relationships. Hesiod's Theogony is a genealogy of heaven and earth, and all that in them is. According to Aeschylus, gain is bred from gain, slaughter from slaughter, woe from woe. Insolence bears a child like unto herself, and this in turn gives birth to

<sup>1</sup> Aristophanes, *Vesp.*, 1176.

<sup>2</sup> Herod., VII., 204; IX., 64.

a still more fatal progeny.<sup>1</sup> The same poet terminates his enumeration of the flaming signals that sped the message of victory from Troy to Argos, by describing the last beacon as 'not ungrandsired by the Idaean fire.'<sup>2</sup> Now, when the Greek genius had begun to move in any direction, it rushed forward without pausing until arrested by an impassable limit, and then turned back to retrace at leisure the whole interval separating that limit from its point of departure. Thus, the ascending lines of ancestry were followed up until they led to a common father of all; every series of outrages was traced through successive reprisals back to an initial crime; and more generally every event was affiliated to a preceding event, until the whole chain had been attached to an ultimate self-existing cause. Hence the records of origination, invention, spontaneity were long sought after with an eagerness which threw almost every other interest into the shade. 'Glory be to the inventor,' sings Pindar, in his address to victorious Corinth; 'whence came the graces of the dithyrambic hymn, who first set the double eagle on the temples of the gods?'<sup>3</sup> The *Prometheus* of Aeschylus tells how civilisation began, and the trilogy to which it belongs was probably intended to show how the supremacy of Zeus was first established and secured. A great part of the *Agamemnon* deals with events long anterior to the opening of the drama, but connected as ultimate causes with the terrible catastrophe which it represents. In the *Eumenides* we see how the family, as it now exists, was first constituted by the substitution of paternal for maternal headship, and also how the worship of the Avenging Goddesses was first introduced into Athens, as well as how the Areopagite tribunal was founded. It is very probable that Sophocles's earliest work, the *Triptolemus*, represented the origin of agriculture under a dramatic form; and if the same poet's later pieces, as well as all those of Euripides,

<sup>1</sup> *Agam.*, 750-71.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*, 311.

<sup>3</sup> *Ol.*, XIII, 17 (Donaldson).

stand on quite different ground, occupied as they are with subjects of contemporaneous, or rather of eternal interest, we must regard this as a proof that the whole current of Greek thought had taken a new direction, corresponding to that simultaneously impressed on philosophy by Socrates and the Sophists. We may note further that the Aeginetan sculptures, executed soon after Salamis, though evidently intended to commemorate that victory, represent a conflict waged long before by the tutelary heroes of Aegina against an Asiatic foe. We may also see in our own British Museum how the birth of Athênê was recorded in a marble group on one pediment of the Parthenon, and the foundation of her chosen city on the other. The very temple which these majestic sculptures once adorned was a petrified memorial of antiquity, and, by the mere form of its architecture, must have carried back men's thoughts to the earliest Hellenic habitation, the simple structure in which a gabled roof was supported by cross-beams on a row of upright wooden posts.

Turning back once more from art and literature to philosophy, is it not abundantly clear that if the Greeks speculated at all, they must at first have speculated according to some such method as that which history proves them to have actually followed? They must have begun by fixing their thoughts, as Thales and his successors did, on the world's remotest past; they must have sought for a first cause of things, and conceived it, not as any spiritual power, but as a kind of natural ancestor homogeneous with the forms which issued from it, although greater and more comprehensive than they were; in short, as an elemental body—water, air, fire, or, more vaguely, as an infinite substance. Did not the steady concatenation of cause and effect resemble the unrolling of a heroic genealogy? And did not the reabsorption of every individual existence in a larger whole translate into more general terms that subordination of personal to family and civic glory which is the diapason of Pindar's music?

Nor was this all. Before philosophising, the Greeks did not think only in the order of time ; they learned at a very early period to think also in the order of space, their favourite idea of a limit being made especially prominent here. Homer's geographical notions, however erroneous, are, for his age, singularly well defined. Aeschylus has a wide knowledge of the earth's surface, and exhibits it with perhaps unnecessary readiness. Pindar delights to follow his mythological heroes about on their travels. The same tendency found still freer scope when prose literature began. Hecataeus, one of the earliest prose-writers, was great both as a genealogist and as a geographer ; and in this respect also Herodotus carried out on a great scale the enquiries most habitually pursued by his countrymen. Now, it will be remembered that we have had occasion to characterise early Ionian speculation as being, to a great extent, cosmography. The element from which it deduced all things was, in fact, that which was supposed to lie outside and embrace the rest. The geographical limit was conceived as a genealogical ancestor. Thus, the studies which men like Hecataeus carried on separately, were combined, or rather confused, in a single bold generalisation by Anaximenes and Heraclitus.

Yet, however much may be accounted for by these considerations, they still leave something unexplained. Why should one thinker after another so unhesitatingly assume that the order of Nature as we know it has issued not merely from a different but from an exactly opposite condition, from universal confusion and chaos? Their experience was far too limited to tell them anything about those vast cosmic changes which we know by incontrovertible evidence to have already occurred, and to be again in course of preparation. We can only answer this question by bringing into view what may be called the negative moment of Greek thought. The science of contraries is one, says Aristotle, and it certainly was so to his countrymen. Not only did they delight

to bring together the extremes of weal and woe, of pride and abasement, of security and disaster, but whatever they most loved and clung to in reality seemed to interest their imagination most powerfully by its removal, its reversal, or its overthrow. The Athenians were peculiarly intolerant of regal government and of feminine interference in politics. In Athenian tragedy the principal actors are kings and royal ladies. The Athenian matrons occupied a position of exceptional dignity and seclusion. They are brought upon the comic stage to be covered with the coarsest ridicule, and also to interfere decisively in the conduct of public affairs. Aristophanes was profoundly religious himself, and wrote for a people whose religion, as we have seen, was pushed to the extreme of bigotry. Yet he shows as little respect for the gods as for the wives and sisters of his audience. To take a more general example still, the whole Greek tragic drama is based on the idea of family kinship, and that institution was made most interesting to Greek spectators by the violation of its eternal sanctities, by unnatural hatred, and still more unnatural love; or by a fatal misconception which causes the hands of innocent persons, more especially of tender women, to be armed against their nearest and dearest relatives in utter unconsciousness of the awful guilt about to be incurred. By an extension of the same psychological law to abstract speculation we are enabled to understand how an early Greek philosopher who had come to look on Nature as a cosmos, an orderly whole, consisting of diverse but connected and interdependent parts, could not properly grasp such a conception until he had substituted for it one of a precisely opposite character, out of which he reconstructed it by a process of gradual evolution. And if it is asked how in the first place did he come by the idea of a cosmos, our answer must be that he found it in Greek life, in societies distinguished by a many-sided but harmonious development of concurrent functions, and by

voluntary obedience to an impersonal law. Thus, then, the circle is complete ; we have returned to our point of departure, and again recognise in Greek philosophy a systematised expression of the Greek national genius.

We must now bring this long and complicated, but it is hoped not uninteresting, study to a close. We have accompanied philosophy to a point where it enters on a new field, and embraces themes sufficiently important to form the subject of a separate chapter. The contributions made by its first cultivators to our positive knowledge have already been summarised. It remains to mention that there was nothing of a truly transcendental character about their speculations. Whatever extension we may give to that terrible bugbear, the Unknowable, they did not trespass on its domain. Heracleitus and his compeers, while penetrating far beyond the horizon of their age and country, kept very nearly within the limits of a possible experience. They confused some conceptions which we have learned to distinguish, and separated others which we have learned to combine ; but they were the lineal progenitors of our highest scientific thought ; and they first broke ground on a path where we must continue to advance, if the cosmos which they won for us is not to be let lapse into chaos and darkness again.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE GREEK HUMANISTS: NATURE AND LAW.

## I.

IN the preceding chapter we traced the rise and progress of physical philosophy among the ancient Greeks. We showed how a few great thinkers, borne on by an unparalleled development of intellectual activity, worked out ideas respecting the order of nature and the constitution of matter which, after more than two thousand years, still remain as fresh and fruitful as ever ; and we found that, in achieving these results, Greek thought was itself determined by ascertainable laws. Whether controlling artistic imagination or penetrating to the objective truth of things, it remained always essentially homogeneous, and worked under the same forms of circumscription, analysis, and opposition. It began with external nature, and with a far distant past ; nor could it begin otherwise, for only so could the subjects of its later meditations be reached. Only after less sacred beliefs have been shaken can ethical dogmas be questioned. Only when discrepancies of opinion obtrude themselves on man's notice is the need of an organising logic experienced. And the mind's eye, originally focussed for distant objects alone, has to be gradually restricted in its range by the pressure of accumulated experience before it can turn from past to present, from successive to contemporaneous phenomena. We have now to undertake the not less interesting task of showing how the new culture, the new conceptions, the new power to think obtained through those earliest

speculations, reacted on the life from which they sprang, transforming the moral, religious, and political creeds of Hellas, and preparing, as nothing else could prepare, the vaster revolution which has given a new dignity to existence, and substituted, in however imperfect a form, for the adoration of animalisms which lie below man, the adoration of an ideal which rises above him, but only personifies the best elements of his own nature, and therefore is possible for a perfected humanity to realise.

While most educated persons will admit that the Greeks are our masters in science and literature, in politics and art, some even among those who are free from theological prejudices will not be prepared to grant that the principles which claim to guide our conduct are only a wider extension or a more specific application of Greek ethical teaching. Hebraism has been opposed to Hellenism as the educating power whence our love of righteousness is derived, and which alone prevents the foul orgies of a primitive nature-worship from being still celebrated in the midst of our modern civilisation. And many look on old Roman religion as embodying a sense of duty higher than any bequeathed to us by Greece. The Greeks have, indeed, suffered seriously from their own sincerity. Their literature is a perfect image of their life, reflecting every blot and every flaw, unveiled, uncoloured, undisguised. It was, most fortunately, never subjected to the revision of a jealous priesthood, bent on removing every symptom inconsistent with the hypothesis of a domination exercised by themselves through all the past. Nor yet has their history been systematically falsified to prove that they never wrongfully attacked a neighbour, and were invariably obliged to conquer in self-defence. Still, even taking the records as they stand, it is to Greek rather than to Hebrew or Roman annals that we must look for examples of true virtue; and in Greek literature, earlier than in any other, occur precepts like those which are now held to be most distinctively character-



istic of Christian ethics. Let us never forget that only by Stoical teaching was the narrow and cruel formalism of ancient Roman law elevated into the 'written reason' of the imperial jurists; only after receiving successive infiltrations of Greek thought was the ethnic monotheism of Judaea expanded into a cosmopolitan religion. Our popular theologians are ready enough to admit that Hellenism was providentially the means of giving Christianity a world-wide diffusion; they ignore the fact that it gave the new faith not only wings to fly, but also eyes to see and a soul to love. From very early times there was an intuition of humanity in Hellas which only needed dialectical development to become an all-sufficient law of life. Homer sympathises ardently with his own countrymen, but he never vilifies their enemies. He did not, nor did any Greek, invent impure legends to account for the origin of hostile tribes whose kinship could not be disowned; unlike Samuel, he regards the sacrifice of prisoners with unmixed abhorrence. What would he, whose Odysseus will not allow a shout of triumph to be raised over the fallen, have said to Deborah's exultation at the murder of a suppliant fugitive? Courage was, indeed, with him the highest virtue, and Greek literature abounds in martial spirit-stirring tones, but it is nearly always by the necessities of self-defence that this enthusiasm is invoked; with Pindar and Simonides, with Aeschylus and Sophocles, it is resistance to an invader that we find so proudly commemorated; and the victories which make Greek history so glorious were won in fighting to repel an unjust aggression perpetrated either by the barbarians or by a tyrant state among the Greeks themselves. There was, as will be shown hereafter, an unhappy period when right was either denied, or, what comes to the same thing, identified with might; but this offensive paradox only served to waken true morality into a more vivid self-consciousness, and into the felt need of discovering for itself a stronger foundation than usage and tradition, a loftier

sanction than mere worldly success could afford. The most universal principle of justice, to treat others as we should wish to be treated ourselves, seems before the Rabbi Hillel's time to have become almost a common-place of Greek ethics ;<sup>1</sup> difficulties left unsolved by the Book of Job were raised to a higher level by Greek philosophy ; and long before St. Paul, a Plato reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.

No one will deny that the life of the Greeks was stained with foul vices, and that their theory sometimes fell to the level of their practice. No one who believes that moral truth, like all truth, has been gradually discovered, will wonder at this phenomenon. If moral conduct is a function of social life, then, like other functions, it will be subject, not only to growth, but also to disease and decay. An intense and rapid intellectual development may have for its condition a totally abnormal state of society, where certain vices, unknown to ruder ages, spring up and flourish with rank luxuriance. When men have to take women along with them on every new path of enquiry, progress will be considerably retarded, although its benefits will ultimately be shared among a greater number, and will be better insured against the danger of a violent reaction. But the work that Hellas was commissioned to perform could not wait ; it had to be accomplished in a few generations, or not at all. The barbarians were forcing their way in on every side, not merely with the weight of invading armies, but with the deadlier pressure of a benumbing superstition, with the brute-worship of Egypt and the devil-worship of Phoenicia, with

<sup>1</sup> 'Thou shalt not take that which is mine, and may I do to others as I would that they should do to me' (Plato, *Legg.*, 913, A. Jowett's Transl., vol. V., p. 483). Isocrates makes a king addressing his governors say : 'You should be to others what you think I should be to you' (*Nicoles*, 49). And again : 'Do not to others what it makes you angry to suffer yourselves' (*Ibid.*, 61). A similar observation is attributed to Thales, doubtless by an anachronism (Diogenes Laertius, I., i., 36).

their delirious orgies, their mutilations, their crucifixions, and their gladiatorial contests. Already in the later dramas of Euripides and in the Rhodian school of sculpture, we see the awful shadow coming nearer, and feel the poisonous breath of Asia on our faces. Reason, the reason by which these terrors have been for ever exorcised, could only arrive at maturity under the influence of free and uninterrupted discussion carried on by men among themselves in the gymnasium, the agora, the ecclésia, and the dicastery. The resulting and inevitable separation of the sexes bred frightful disorders, which through all changes of creed have clung like a moral pestilence to the shores of the Aegean, and have helped to complicate political problems by joining to religious hatred the fiercer animosity of physical disgust. But whatever were the corruptions of Greek sentiment, Greek philosophy had the power to purge them away. 'Follow nature' became the watchword of one school after another; and a precept which at first may have meant only that man should not fall below the brutes, was finally so interpreted as to imply an absolute control of sense by reason. No loftier standard of sexual purity has ever been inculcated than that fixed by Plato in his latest work, the *Laws*. Isocrates bids husbands set an example of conjugal fidelity to their wives. Socrates had already declared that virtue was the same for both sexes. Xenophon interests himself in the education of women. Plato would give them the same training, and everywhere associate them in the same functions with men. Equally decisive evidence of a theoretical opposition to slavery is not forthcoming, and we know that it was unfortunately sanctioned by Plato and Aristotle, in this respect no better inspired than the early Christians; nevertheless, the germ of such an opposition existed, and will hereafter be pointed out.

It has been said that the Greeks only worshipped beauty; that they cultivated morality from the aesthetic side; that

virtue was with them a question, not of duty, but of taste. Some very strong texts might be quoted in support of this judgment. For example, we find Isocrates saying, in his encomium on Helen, that 'Beauty is the first of all things in majesty, and honour, and divineness. It is easy to see its power: there are many things which have no share of courage, or wisdom, or justice, which yet will be found honoured above things which have each of these, but nothing which is devoid of beauty is prized; all things are scorned which have not been given their part of that attribute; the admiration for virtue itself comes to this, that of all manifestations of life virtue is the most *beautiful*.'<sup>1</sup> And Aristotle distinguishes the highest courage as willingness to die for the *καλόν*. So also Plato describes philosophy as a love 'that leads one from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is. And this is that life beyond all others which man should live in the contemplation of beauty absolute.'<sup>2</sup> Now, first of all, we must observe that, while loveliness has been worshipped by many others, none have conceived it under a form so worthy of worship as the Greeks. Beauty with them was neither little, nor fragile, nor voluptuous; the soul's energies were not relaxed but exalted by its contemplation; there was in it an element of austere and commanding dignity. The Argive Hêrê, though revealed to us only through a softened Italian copy, has more divinity in her countenance than any Madonna of them all; and the Melian Aphroditê is distinguished by majesty of form not less than by purity and sweetness of expression. This beauty was the unreserved information of matter by mind, the visible rendering of absolute power, wisdom, and goodness. Therefore, what a Greek wor-

<sup>1</sup> We gladly avail ourselves of the masterly translation given by Prof. Jebb. The whole of this splendid passage will be found in his *Attic Orators*, vol. II., pp. 78-79.

<sup>2</sup> *Symposium*, 211, C; Jowett's Transl., vol. II.

shipped was the perpetual and ever-present energising of mind ; but he forgot that beauty can only exist as a combination of spirit with sense ; and, after detaching the higher element, he continued to call it by names and clothe it in attributes proper to its earthly manifestations alone. Yet such an extension of the aesthetic sentiment involved no weakening of the moral fibre. A service comprehending all idealisms in one demanded the self-effacement of a laborious preparation and the self-restraint of a gradual achievement. They who pitched the goal of their aspiration so high, knew that the paths leading up to it were rough, and steep, and long ; they felt that perfect workmanship and perfect taste, being supremely precious, must be supremely difficult as well ; *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά* they said, the beautiful is hard—hard to judge, hard to win, and hard to keep. He who has passed through that stern discipline need tremble at no other task ; nor has duty anything to fear from a companionship whose ultimate requirements are coincident with her own, and the abandonment of which for a joyless asceticism can only lead to the reappearance as an invading army of forces that should have been cherished as indispensable allies.

It may be urged that beauty, however difficult of attainment or severe in form, is, after all, essentially superficial ; and that a morality elaborated on the same principles will be equally superficial—will, in fact, be little more than the art of keeping up appearances, of displaying fine sentiments, of avoiding those actions the consequences of which are immediately felt to be disagreeable, and, above all, of not needlessly wounding anyone's sensibilities. Such an imitation of morality—which it would be a mistake to call hypocrisy—has no doubt been common enough among all civilised nations ; but there is no reason to believe that it was in any way favoured by the circumstances of Greek life. There is even evidence of a contrary tendency, as, indeed, might be expected among a people whose most important states were saved from the corrupt-

ing influences of a court. Where the sympathetic admiration of shallow and excitable spectators is the effect chiefly sought after, the showy virtues will be preferred to the solid, and the appearance to the reality of all virtue; while brilliant and popular qualities will be allowed to atone for the most atrocious crimes. But, among the Greeks of the best period, courage and generosity rank distinctly lower than temperance and justice; their poets and moralists alike inculcate the preference of substance to show; and in no single instance, so far as we can judge, did they, as modern nations often do, for the sake of great achievements condone great wrongs. It was said of a Greek and by a Greek that he did not wish to seem but to be just.<sup>1</sup> We follow the judgment of the Greeks themselves in preferring Leonidas to Pausanias, Aristeides to Themistocles, and Socrates to Alcibiades. And we need only compare Epameinondas with David or Pericles with Solomon as national heroes, to perceive at once how much nearer the two Greeks come to our own standard of perfection, and how futile are the charges sometimes brought against those from whose traditions we have inherited their august and stainless fame.

Moreover, we have not here to consider what was the average level of sentiment and practice among the Greeks; we have to study what alone was of importance for the races which came under their tuition, and that is the highest moral judgment to which they rose. Now, the deliberate verdict of their philosophy on the relation between beauty and virtue is contained in the following passage from Plato's *Laws* :—

‘When anyone prefers beauty to virtue, what is this but the real and utter dishonour of the soul? For such a preference implies that the body is more honourable than the soul; and this is false, for there is nothing of earthly birth which is more honourable than the heavenly, and he who thinks otherwise of the soul has no idea how greatly he undervalues this wonderful possession.’<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aesch., *Sep. con. Theb.*, 592.

<sup>2</sup> *Legg.*, 727, E; Jowett's Transl., V, 299.

## II.

Thus much for the current prejudices which seemed likely to interfere with a favourable consideration of our subject. We have next to study the conditions by which the form of Greek ethical philosophy was originally determined. Foremost among these must be placed the moral conceptions already current long before systematic reflection could begin. What they were may be partly gathered from some wise saws attributed by the Greeks themselves to their Seven Sages, but probably current at a much earlier period. The pith of these maxims, taken collectively, is to recommend the qualities attributed by our own philosophic poet to his perfect woman:—

‘The reason firm, the temperate will,  
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill.’

We may say almost as briefly that they inculcate complete independence both of our own passions and of external circumstances, with a corresponding respect for the independence of others, to be shown by using persuasion instead of force. Their tone will perhaps be best understood by contrast with that collection of Hebrew proverbs which has come down to us under the name of Solomon, but which Biblical critics now attribute to a later period and a divided authorship. While these regularly put forward material prosperity as the chief motive to good conduct, Hellenic wisdom teaches indifference to the variations of fortune. To a Greek, ‘the power that makes for righteousness,’ so far from being ‘not ourselves,’ was our own truest self, the far-seeing reason which should guard us from elation and from depression, from passion and from surprise. Instead of being offered old age as a reward, we are told to be equally prepared for a long and for a short life.

Two precepts stand out before all others, which, trivial as they may seem, are uttered from the very soul of Greek

experience, 'Be moderate,' and, 'Know thyself.' Their joint observance constitutes the characteristic virtue of *Sôphrosynê*, which means all that we understand by temperance, and a great deal more besides; so much, in fact, that very clever Greeks were hard set to define it, and very wise Greeks could pray for it as the fairest gift of the gods.<sup>1</sup> Let us suppose that each individual has a sphere of activity marked out for him by his own nature and his special environment; then to discern clearly the limits of that sphere and to keep within them would be *Sôphrosynê*, while the discernment, taken alone, would be wisdom. The same self-restraint operating as a check on interference with other spheres would be justice; while the expansive force by which a man fills up his entire sphere and guards it against aggressions may be called courage. Thus we are enabled to comprehend the many-sided significance of *Sôphrosynê*, to see how it could stand both for a particular virtue and for all virtuousness whatever. We need only glance at Homer's poems, and in particular at the *Iliad*—a much deeper as well as a more brilliant work than the *Odyssey*—to perceive how very early this demand for moderation combined with self-knowledge had embodied itself in Greek thought. Agamemnon violates the rights of Achilles under the influence of immoderate passion, and through ignorance of how little we can accomplish without the hero's assistance. Achilles, again, carries his vindictiveness too far, and suffers in consequence. But his self-knowledge is absolutely perfect; conscious that he is first in the field while others are better in council, he never undertakes a task to which his powers are not fully adequate; nor does he enter on his final work of vengeance without a clear consciousness of the speedy death which its completion will entail on himself. Hector, too, notwithstanding ominous forebodings, knows his duty and does it, but with much less just an estimate of his own powers, leading him to pursue his success too far, and then, when the

<sup>1</sup> See Plato's *Charmides*; and Euripides' *Medea*, 635 (Dindorf).



tide has turned, not permitting him to make a timely retreat within the walls of Troy. So with the secondary characters. Patroclus also oversteps the limits of moderation, and pays the penalty with his life. Diomed silently bears the unmerited rebuke of Agamemnon, but afterwards recalls it at a most effective moment, when rising to oppose the craven counsels of the great king. This the Greeks called observing opportunity, and opportunism was with them, as with French politicians, a form of moderation.<sup>1</sup> Down at the very bottom of the scale Thersites and Dolon are signal examples of men who do not know their sphere and suffer for their folly. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is a nearly perfect type of wisdom joined with self-control, erring, if we remember rightly, only once, when he insults Polyphemus before the ship is out of danger; while his comrades perish from want of these same gifts.

So far, virtue was with the Greeks what it must inevitably be with all men at first, chiefly self-regarding, a refined form of prudence. Moreover, other-regarding virtues gave less scope for reflection, being originally comprehended under obedience to the law. But there were two circumstances which could not long escape their notice; first, that fraud and violence are often, at least apparently, profitable to those who perpetrate them, a fact bitterly remarked by Hesiod;<sup>2</sup> and secondly, that society cannot hold together without justice. It was long before Governments grew up willing and able to protect their subjects from mutual aggressions, nor does positive law create morality, but implies it, and could not be worked without it. Nor could international obligations be enforced by a superior tribunal; hence they have remained down to the present day a fertile theme for ethical discussion. It is at this point that morality forms a junction with religion, the history of which is highly interesting, but which can here be

<sup>1</sup> Pindar uses *καίρος* and *μέτρον* as synonymous terms.

<sup>2</sup> *Opp. et D.*, 271.

only briefly traced. The Olympian divinities, as placed before us by Homer, are anything but moral. Their conduct towards each other is that of a dissolute nobility; towards men it is that of unscrupulous partisans and patrons. A loyal adherence to friends and gratitude for sacrificial offerings are their most respectable characteristics, raising them already a little above the nature-powers whence they were derived. Now, mark how they first become moralised. It is by being made witnesses to an oath. Any one who is called in to testify to a promise feels aggrieved if it is broken, looking on the breach as an insult to his own dignity. As the Third Commandment well puts it, his name has been taken in vain. Thus it happened that the same gods who left every other crime unpunished, visited perjury with severe and speedy retribution, continued even after the offender's death.<sup>1</sup> Respect for a contract is the primary form of moral obligation, and still seems to possess a peculiar hold over uneducated minds. We see every day how many persons will abstain from actions which they know to be immoral because they have given their word to that effect, not because the actions themselves are wrong. And for that reason law courts would be more willing to enforce contracts than to redress injuries. If, then, one person inflicted damage on another, he might afterwards, in order to escape retaliation from the injured party, or from his family, engage to give satisfaction, and the court would compel him to redeem his promise.<sup>2</sup> Thus contract, by procuring redress for every species of wrong, would gradually extend its own obligatory character to abstinence from injury in general, and the divine sanctions primarily invoked on behalf of oaths would be extended, with them, over the whole domain of moral conduct.

Nor was this all. Laws and justice once established would

<sup>1</sup> Hom. *Il.*, IV., 160, 235; VII., 76, 411; XVI., 386. Hes., *Opp. et D.*, 265. These references are copied from Welcker, *Griechische Götterlehre*, I., p. 178, q. v.

<sup>2</sup> See Maine's *Ancient Law*, chap. X., *The Early History of Delict and Crime*.

require to have their origin accounted for, and, according to the usual genealogical method of the early Greeks, would be described as children of the gods, who would thus be interested in their welfare, and would avenge their violation—a stage of reflection already reached in the *Works and Days* of Hesiod.

Again, when oracles like that at Delphi had obtained wide-spread renown and authority, they would be consulted, not only on ceremonial questions and matters of policy, but also on debateable points of morality. The divine responses, being unbiassed by personal interest, would necessarily be given in accordance with received rules of rectitude, and would be backed by all the terrors of a supernatural sanction. It might even be dangerous to assume that the god could possibly give his support to wrong-doing. A story told by Herodotus proves that such actually was the case. There lived once at Sparta a certain man named Glaucus, who had acquired so great a reputation for probity that, during the troublous times of the Persian conquest, a wealthy Milesian thought it advisable to deposit a large sum of money with him for safe keeping. After a considerable time the money was claimed by his children, but the honesty of Glaucus was not proof against temptation. He pretended to have forgotten the whole affair, and required a delay of three months before making up his mind with regard to the validity of their demand. During that interval he consulted the Delphic oracle to know whether he might possess himself of the money by a false oath. The answer was that it would be for his immediate advantage to do so ; all must die, the faithful and the perjured alike ; but Horcus (oath) had a nameless son swift to pursue without feet, strong to grasp without hands, who would destroy the whole race of the sinner. Glaucus craved forgiveness, but was informed that to tempt the god was equivalent to committing the crime. He went home and restored the deposit, but his whole family perished utterly from the land before three generations had passed by.

Yet another step remained to take. Punishment must be transferred from a man's innocent children to the man himself in a future life. But the Olympian theology was, originally at least, powerless to effect this revolution. Its gods, being personifications of celestial phenomena, had nothing to do with the dark underworld whither men descended after death. There existed, however, side by side with the brilliant religion of courts and camps which Greek poetry has made so familiar to us, another religion more popular with simple country-folk,<sup>1</sup> to whom war meant ruin, courts of justice a means invented by kings for exacting bribes, sea-voyages a senseless imprudence, chariot-racing a sinful waste of money, and beautiful women drones in the human hive, demons of extravagance invented by Zeus for the purpose of venting his spite against mankind. What interest could these poor people take in the resplendent guardians of their hereditary oppressors, in Hêrê and Athênê, Apollo and Poseidôn, Artemis and Aphroditê? But they had other gods peculiar to themselves, whose worship was wrapped in mystery, partly that its objects need not be lured away by the attraction of richer offerings elsewhere, partly because the activity of these Chthonian deities, as they were called, was naturally associated with darkness and secrecy. Presiding over birth and death, over seed-time and harvest and vintage, they personified the frost-bound sleep of vegetation in winter and its return from a dark underworld in spring. Out of their worship grew stories which told how Persephonê, the fair daughter of Démêtêr, or Mother Earth, was carried away by Pluto to reign with him over the shades below, but after long searching was restored to her mother for eight months in every year; and how Dionysus, the wine-god, was twice born, first from

<sup>1</sup> Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, I., p. 523 (3rd ed.), with which cf. Welcker, *op. cit.*, I., 234; and Mr. Walter Pater's *Demeter and Persephone*, and *A Study of Dionysus*, in the *Fortnightly Review* for Jan., Feb., and Dec. 1876. From their popular character, the country gods were favoured by the despots (Curtius, *Gr. Gesch.*, I., p. 338).

the earth burned up and fainting under the intolerable fire of a summer sky, respectively personified as Semelê and her lover Zeus, then from the protecting mist wrapped round him by his divine father, of whom it formed a part. Dionysus, too, was subject to alternations of depression and triumph, from the recital of which Attic drama was developed, and gained a footing in the infernal regions, whither we accompany him in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes. Another country god was Hermês, who seems to have been associated with planting and possession as well as with the demarcation and exchange of property, and who was also a conductor of souls to Hades. Finally, there were the Erinyes, children of night and dwellers in subterranean darkness; they could breed pestilence and discord, but could also avert them; they could blast the produce of the soil or increase its luxuriance and fertility; when blood was spilt on the ground, they made it blossom up again in a harvest of retributive hatred; they pursued the guilty during life, and did not relax their grasp after death; all law, whether physical or moral, was under their protection; the same Erinyes who, in the *Odyssey*, avenge on Oedipus the suicide of his mother, in the *Iliad* will not allow the miraculous speaking of a horse to continue; and we have seen in the last chapter how, according to Heracleitus, it is they who also prevent the sun from transgressing his appointed limits.<sup>1</sup> Dêmêtêr and Persephonê, too, seem to have been law-giving goddesses, as their great festival, celebrated by women alone, was called the Thesmophoria, while eternal happiness was promised to those who had been initiated into their mysteries at Eleusis; and we also find that moral maxims were graven on the marble busts of Hermês placed along every thoroughfare in Athens. We can thus understand why the mutilation of these Hermae caused such

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wordsworth—

‘Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,  
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong.’

*Ode to Duty.*

rage and terror, accompanied, as it was rumoured to be, by a profanation of the Eleusinian mysteries ; for any attack on the deities in question would seem to prefigure an attack on the settled order of things, the popular rights which they both symbolised and protected.

Here, then, we find, chiefly among the rustic population, a religion intimately associated with morality, and including the doctrine of retribution after death. But this simple faith, though well adapted to the few wants of its original votaries, could not be raised to the utmost expansion and purity of which it was susceptible without being brought into vivifying contact with that other Olympian religion which, as we have seen, belonged more peculiarly to the ruling aristocracy. The poor may be more moral than the rich, and the country than the town ; nevertheless it is from dwellers in cities, and from the higher classes, including as they do a large percentage of educated, open-minded individuals, that the impulses to moral progress always proceed. If the narrowness and hardness of primitive social arrangements were overcome ; if justice was disengaged from the ties of blood-relationship, and tempered with consideration for inevitable error ; if deadly feuds were terminated by a habitual appeal to arbitration ; if the worship of one supreme ideal was substituted for a blind sympathy with the ebb and flow of life on earth ; if the numerical strength of states was increased by giving shelter to fugitives ; if a Hellenic nation was created and held together by a common literature and a common civilisation, by oracles accessible to all, and by periodical games in which every free-born Greek could take part ; and, lastly, if a brighter abode than the slumberous garden of Persephoné was assigned after death to the godlike heroes who had come forth from a thrice repeated ordeal with souls unstained by sin ;<sup>1</sup>—all this was due to the military rather than to the industrial classes, to the spirit that breathes through Homer

<sup>1</sup> Pindar, *Olymp.*, II., 57 ff. ; and *Fragm.*, 1-4 (Donaldson).

rather than to the tamer inspiration of Hesiod's muse. But if justice was raised to an Olympian throne ; if righteous providence, no less than creative power, became an inalienable attribute of Zeus ; if lyric poetry, from Archilochus to Simonides and Pindar, is one long hymn of prayer and praise ever turned upward in adoring love to the Divine ; we must remember that Themis was a synonyme for Earth, and that Prometheus, the original friend of humanity, for whose benefit he invented every useful art, augury included, was her son. The seeds of immortal hope were first planted in the fructifying bosom of Dêmêtêr, and life, a forsaken Ariadnê, took refuge in the mystical embraces of Dionysus from the memory of a promise that had allured her to betray. Thus, we may conjecture that between hall and farm-house, between the Olympian and the Chthonian religions, there was a constant reaction going on, during which ethical ideas were continually expanding, and extricating themselves from the superstitious elements associated with their earliest theological expression.

### III.

This process was conceived by Aeschylus as a conflict between two generations of gods, ending with their complete reconciliation. In the *Prometheus Bound* we have the commencement of the conflict, in the *Eumenides* its close. Our sympathies are apparently at first intended to be enlisted on behalf of the older divinities, but at last are claimed exclusively by the younger. As opposed to Prometheus, Zeus is evidently in the wrong, and seeks to make up for his deficiencies by arbitrary violence. In the *Oresteia* he is the champion of justice against iniquity, and through his interpreter, Apollo, he enforces a revised moral code against the antiquated claims of the Erinyes ; these latter, however, ultimately consenting to become guardians of the new social

order. The Aeschylean drama shows us Greek religion at the highest level it could reach, unaided by philosophical reflection. With Sophocles a perceptible decline has already begun. We are loth to say anything that may sound like disparagement of so noble a poet. We yield to none in admiration for one who has combined the two highest qualities of art—sweetness and strength—more completely than any other singer, Homer alone excepted, and who has given the primordial affections their definitive expression for all time. But we cannot help perceiving an element of superstition in his dramas, which, so far, distinguishes them unfavourably from those of his Titanic predecessor. With Sophocles, when the gods interfere, it is to punish disrespect towards themselves, not to enforce justice between man and man. Ajax perishes by his own hand because he has neglected to ask for divine assistance in battle. Laius and Jocastê come to a tragic end through disobedience to a perfectly arbitrary oracle; and as a part of the same divine purpose Oedipus encounters the most frightful calamities by no fault of his own. The gods are, moreover, exclusively objects of fear; their sole business is to enforce the fulfilment of enigmatic prophecies; they give no assistance to the pious and virtuous characters. Antigônê is allowed to perish for having performed the last duties to her brother's corpse. Neoptolemus receives no aid in that struggle between ambition on the one hand with truthfulness and pity on the other which makes his character one of the most interesting in all imaginative literature. When Athênê bids Odysseus exult over the degradation of Ajax, the generous Ithacan refuses to her face, and falls back on the consciousness of a common humanity uniting him in sympathy with his prostrate foe.

The rift within the lute went on widening till all its music was turned to jarring discord. With the third great Attic dramatist we arrive at a period of complete dissolution.



Morality is not only separated from mythological tradition, but is openly at war with it. Religious belief, after becoming almost monotheistic, has relapsed into polytheism. With Euripides the gods do not, as with his predecessors, form a common council. They lead an independent existence, not interfering with each other, and pursuing private ends of their own—often very disreputable ones. Aphrodite inspires Phaedra with an incestuous passion for her stepson. Artemis is propitiated by human sacrifices. Hêrê causes Heraclês to kill his children in a fit of delirium. Zeus and Poseidôn are charged with breaking their own laws, and setting a bad example to mortals. Apollo, once so venerated, fares the worst of any. He outrages a noble maiden, and succeeds in palming off her child on the man whom she subsequently marries. He instigates the murder of a repentant enemy who has come to seek forgiveness at his shrine. He fails to protect Orestes from the consequences of matricide, committed at his own unwise suggestion. Political animosity may have had something to do with these attacks on a god who was believed to side with the Dorian confederacy against Athens. Doubtless, also, Euripides disbelieved many of the scandalous stories which he selected as appropriate materials for dramatic representation. But a satire on immoral beliefs would have been unnecessary had they not been generally accepted. Nor was the poet himself altogether a freethinker. One of his latest and most splendid works, the *Bacchæ*, is a formal submission to the orthodox creed. Under the stimulus of an insane delusion, Pentheus is torn to pieces by his mother Agavê and her attendant Maenads, for having presumed to oppose the introduction of Dionysus-worship into Thebes. The antecedents of the new divinity are questionable, and the nature of his influence on the female population extremely suspicious. Yet much stress is laid on the impiety of Pentheus, and we are clearly intended to consider his fate as well-deserved.

Euripides is not a true thinker, and for that very reason fitly typifies a period when religion had been shaken to its very foundation, but still retained a strong hold on men's minds, and might at any time reassert its ancient authority with unexpected vigour. We gather, also, from his writings, that ethical sentiment had undergone a parallel transformation. He introduces characters and actions which the elder dramatists would have rejected as unworthy of tragedy, and not only introduces them, but composes elaborate speeches in their defence. Side by side with examples of devoted heroism we find such observations as that everyone loves himself best, and that those are most prosperous who attend most exclusively to their own interests. It so happens that in one instance where Euripides has chosen a subject already handled by Aeschylus, the difference of treatment shows how great a moral revolution had occurred in the interim. The conflict waged between Eteoclès and Polyneicès for their father's throne is the theme both of the *Seven against Thebes* and of the *Phoenician Women*. In both, Polyneicès bases his claim on grounds of right. It had been agreed that he and his brother should alternately hold sway over Thebes. His turn has arrived, and Eteoclès refuses to give way. Polyneicès endeavours to enforce his pretensions by bringing a foreign army against Thebes. Aeschylus makes him appear before the walls with an allegorical figure of Justice on his shield, promising to restore him to his father's seat. On hearing this, Eteoclès exclaims:—

‘Aye, if Jove’s virgin daughter Justice shared  
 In deed or thought of his, then it might be.  
 But neither when he left the darkling womb,  
 Nor in his childhood, nor in youth, nor when  
 The clustering hair first gathered round his chin,  
 Hath Justice turned approving eyes on him ;  
 Nor deem I that she comes as his ally,  
 Now that he wastes his native land with war,  
 Or Justice most unjustly were she called  
 If ruthless hearts could claim her fellowship.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Scp. con. Theb.*, 662-71.

Euripides, with greater dramatic skill, brings the two brothers together in presence of their mother, Jocastê. When Polyneicês has spoken, Eteoclês replies :—

‘ Honour and wisdom are but empty names  
That mortals use, each with a different meaning,  
Agreeing in the sound, not in the sense.  
Hear, mother, undisguised my whole resolve !  
Were Sovereignty, chief goddess among gods,  
Far set as is the rising of a star,  
Or buried deep in subterranean gloom,  
There I would seek and win her for mine own.

Come fire, come sword, yoke horses to the car,  
And fill the plain with armed men, for I  
Will not give up my royalty to him !  
Let all my life be guiltless save in this :  
I dare do any wrong for sovereign power—  
The splendid guerdon of a splendid sin.’<sup>1</sup>

The contrast is not only direct, but designed, for Euripides had the work of his predecessor before him, and no doubt imagined that he was improving on it.

We perceive a precisely similar change of tone on comparing the two great historians who have respectively recorded the struggle of Greece against Persia, and the struggle of imperial Athens against Sparta and her allies. Though born within fifteen years of one another, Herodotus and Thucydides are virtually separated by an interval of two generations, for while the latter represents the most advanced thought of his time, the former lived among traditions inherited from the age preceding his own. Now, Herodotus is not more remarkable for the earnest piety than for the clear sense of justice which runs through his entire work. He draws no distinction between public and private morality. Whoever makes war on his neighbours without provocation, or rules without the consent of the governed, is, according to him, in the wrong, although he is well aware that such wrongs are constantly committed. Thucydides knows nothing

<sup>1</sup> *Phoenissae*, 503-23.

of supernatural interference in human affairs. After relating the tragical end of Nicias, he observes, not without a sceptical tendency, that of all the Greeks then living, this unfortunate general least deserved such a fate, so far as piety and respectability of character went. If there are gods they hold their position by superior strength. That the strong should enslave the weak is a universal and necessary law of Nature. The Spartans, who among themselves are most scrupulous in observing traditional obligations, in their dealings with others most openly identify gain with honour, and expediency with right. Even if the historian himself did not share these opinions, it is evident that they were widely entertained by his contemporaries, and he expressly informs us that Greek political morality had deteriorated to a frightful extent in consequence of the civil discords fomented by the conflict between Athens and Sparta ; while, in Athens at least, a similar corruption of private morality had begun with the great plague of 430, its chief symptom being a mad desire to extract the utmost possible enjoyment from life, for which purpose every means was considered legitimate. On this point Thucydides is confirmed and supplemented by the evidence of another contemporary authority. According to Aristophanes, the ancient discipline had in his time become very much relaxed. The rich were idle and extravagant ; the poor mutinous ; young men were growing more and more insolent to their elders ; religion was derided ; all classes were animated by a common desire to make money and to spend it on sensual enjoyment. Only, instead of tracing back this profound demoralisation to a change in the social environment, Aristophanes attributes it to demagogues, harassing informers, and popular poets, but above all to the new culture then coming into vogue. Physical science had brought in atheism ; dialectic training had destroyed the sanctity of ethical restraints. When, however, the religious and virtuous Socrates is put forward as a type of both tend-

encies, our confidence in the comic poet's accuracy, if not in his good faith, becomes seriously shaken; and his whole tone so vividly recalls the analogous invectives now hurled from press and pulpit against every philosophic theory, every scientific discovery, every social reform at variance with traditional beliefs or threatening the sinister interests which have gathered round iniquitous institutions, that at first we feel tempted to follow Grote in rejecting his testimony altogether. So far, however, as the actual phenomena themselves are concerned, and apart from their generating antecedents, Aristophanes does but bring into more picturesque prominence what graver observers are content to indicate, and what Plato, writing a generation later, treats as an unquestionable reality. Nor is the fact of a lowered moral tone going along with accelerated mental activity either incredible or unparalleled. Modern history knows of at least two periods remarkable for such a conjunction, the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, the former stained with every imaginable crime, the latter impure throughout, and lapsing into blood-thirsty violence at its close. Moral progress, like every other mode of motion, has its appropriate rhythm—its epochs of severe restraint followed by epochs of rebellious license. And when, as an aggravation of the reaction from which they periodically suffer, ethical principles have become associated with a mythology whose decay, at first retarded, is finally hastened by their activity, it is still easier to understand how they may share in its discredit, and only regain their ascendancy by allying themselves with a purified form of the old religion, until they can be disentangled from the compromising support of all unverified theories whatever. We have every reason to believe that Greek life and thought did pass through such a crisis during the second half of the fifth century B.C., and we have now to deal with the speculative aspects of that crisis, so far as they are represented by the Sophists.

## IV.

The word Sophist in modern languages means one who purposely uses fallacious arguments. Our definition was probably derived from that given by Aristotle in his *Topics*, but does not entirely reproduce it. What we call sophistry was with him eristic, or the art of unfair disputation ; and by Sophist he means one who practises the eristic art for gain. He also defines sophistry as the appearance without the reality of wisdom. A very similar account of the Sophists and their art is given by Plato in what seems to be one of his later dialogues ; and another dialogue, probably composed some time previously, shows us how eristic was actually practised by two Sophists, Euthydémus and Dionysodôrus, who had learned the art, which is represented as a very easy accomplishment, when already old men. Their performance is not edifying ; and one only wonders how any Greek could have been induced to pay for the privilege of witnessing such an exhibition. But the word Sophist, in its original signification, was an entirely honourable name. It meant a sage, a wise and learned man, like Solon, or, for that matter, like Plato and Aristotle themselves. The interval between these widely-different connotations is filled up and explained by a number of individuals as to whom our information is principally, though by no means entirely, derived from Plato. All of them were professional teachers, receiving payment for their services ; all made a particular study of language, some aiming more particularly at accuracy, others at beauty of expression. While no common doctrine can be attributed to them as a class, as individuals they are connected by a series of graduated transitions, the final outcome of which will enable us to understand how, from a title of respect, their name could be turned into a byword of reproach. The Sophists, concerning whom some details have been trans-

mitted to us, are Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, Pölus, Thrasymachus, and the Eristics already mentioned. We have placed them, so far as their ages can be determined, in chronological order, but their logical order is somewhat different. The first two on the list were born about 480 B.C., and the second pair possibly twenty years later. But neither Protagoras nor Gorgias seems to have published his most characteristic theories until a rather advanced time of life, for they are nowhere alluded to by the Xenophontic Socrates, who, on the other hand, is well acquainted with both Prodicus and Hippias, while, conversely, Plato is most interested in the former pair. We shall also presently see that the scepticism of the elder Sophists can best be explained by reference to the more dogmatic theories of their younger contemporaries, which again easily fit on to the physical speculations of earlier thinkers.

Prodicus was born in Ceos, a little island belonging to the Athenian confederacy, and seems to have habitually resided at Athens. His health was delicate, and he wrapped up a good deal, as we learn from the ridicule of Plato, always pitiless to a valetudinarian. Judging from two allusions in Aristophanes, he taught natural science in such a manner as to conciliate even that unsparing enemy of the new learning.<sup>1</sup> He also gave moral instruction grounded on the traditional ideas of his country, a pleasing specimen of which has been preserved. It is conveyed under the form of an apologue, entitled the Choice of Heraclês, and was taken down in its present form by Xenophon from the lips of Socrates, who quoted it, with full approval, for the benefit of his own disciples. Prodicus also lectured on the use of words, laying especial emphasis on the distinction of synonyms. We hear, not without sympathy, that he tried to check the

<sup>1</sup> Οὐ γὰρ ἄλλω γ' ὑπακούοιμεν τῶν νῦν μετεωροσοφιστῶν  
πλὴν ἢ Προδίκω, τῷ μὲν σοφίας καὶ γνώμης οὕνεκα κ.τ.λ.—

*Luc.*, 361-2. Cf. *Av.*, 692.

indiscriminate employment of 'awful' (*δεινός*), which was even more rife at Athens than among ourselves. Finally, we are told that, like many moderns, he considered the popular divinities to be personifications of natural phenomena. Hippias, who was a native of Elis, seems to have taught on very much the same system. It would appear that he lectured principally on astronomy and physics, but did not neglect language, and is said to have invented an art of memory. His restless inquisitiveness was also exercised on ancient history, and his erudition in that subject was taxed to the utmost during a visit to Sparta, where the unlettered people still delighted in old stories, which among the more enlightened Greeks had been superseded by topics of livelier and fresher interest. At Sparta, too, he recited, with great applause, an ethical discourse under the form of advice given by Nestor to Neoptolemus after the capture of Troy. We know, on good authority, that Hippias habitually distinguished between natural and customary law, the former being, according to him, everywhere the same, while the latter varied from state to state, and in the same state at different times. Natural law he held to be alone binding and alone salutary. On this subject the following expressions, evidently intended to be characteristic, are put into his mouth by Plato:—'All of you who are here present I reckon to be kinsmen and friends and fellow-citizens, by nature and not by law; for by nature like is akin to like, whereas law is the tyrant of mankind, and often compels us to do many things which are against Nature.'<sup>1</sup> Here two distinct ideas are implied, the idea that Nature is a moral guide, and, further, the idea that she is opposed to convention. The habit of looking for examples and lessons to some simpler life than their own prevailed among the Greeks from a very early period, and is, indeed, very common in primitive societies. Homer's similes are a case in point; while all that we are told

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Protagoras*, 337, D; Jowett's Transl., vol. I., p. 152.



about the innocence and felicity of the Aethiopians and Hyperboreans seems to indicate a deep-rooted belief in the moral superiority of savage to civilised nations ; and Hesiod's fiction of the Four Ages, beginning with a golden age, arises from a kindred notion that intellectual progress is accompanied by moral corruption. Simonides of Amorgus illustrates the various types of womankind by examples from the animal world ; and Aesop's fables, dating from the first half of the sixth century, give ethical instruction under the same disguise. We have already pointed out how Greek rural religion established a thorough-going connexion between physical and moral phenomena, and how Heracleitus followed in the same track. Now, one great result of early Greek thought, as described in our first chapter, was to combine all these scattered fugitive incoherent ideas under a single conception, thus enabling them to elucidate and support one another. This was the conception of Nature as a universal all-creative eternal power, first superior to the gods, then altogether superseding them. When Homer called Zeus the father of gods and men ; when Pindar said that both races, the divine and the human, are sprung from one mother (Earth) ;<sup>1</sup> when, again, he spoke of law as an absolute king ; or when Aeschylus set destiny above Zeus himself ;<sup>2</sup> they were but foreshadowing a more despotic authority, whose dominion is even now not extinct, is perhaps being renewed under the title of Evolution. The word Nature was used by most philosophers, and the thing was implied by all. They did not, indeed, commit the mistake of personifying a convenient abstraction ; but a conception which they substituted for the gods would soon inherit every attribute of divine agency. Moreover, the Nature of philosophy had three fundamental attributes admitting of ready application as ethical standards. She was everywhere the same ; fire burned in Greece and Persia alike. She tended towards an

<sup>1</sup> *Nem.*, VI., *sub. in.*

<sup>2</sup> *Prom.*, 518.

orderly system where every agent or element is limited to its appropriate sphere. And she proceeded on a principle of universal compensation, all gains in one direction being paid for by losses in another, and every disturbance being eventually rectified by a restoration of equilibrium. It was, indeed, by no means surprising that truths which were generalised from the experience of Greek social life should now return to confirm the orderliness of that life with the sanction of an all-pervading law.

Euripides gives us an interesting example of the style in which this ethical application of physical science could be practised. We have seen how Eteoclês expresses his determination to do and dare all for the sake of sovereign power. His mother, Jocastê, gently rebukes him as follows :—

‘ Honour Equality who binds together  
 Both friends and cities and confederates,  
 For equity is law, law equity ;  
 The lesser is the greater’s enemy,  
 And disadvantaged aye begins the strife.  
 From her our measures, weights, and numbers come,  
 Defined and ordered by Equality ;  
 So do the night’s blind eye and sun’s bright orb  
 Walk equal courses in their yearly round,  
 And neither is embittered by defeat ;  
 And while both light and darkness serve mankind  
 Wilt thou not bear an equal in thy house ?’<sup>1</sup>

On examining the apologue of Prodicus, we find it characterised by a somewhat similar style of reasoning. There is, it is true, no reference to physical phenomena, but Virtue dwells strongly on the truth that nothing can be had for nothing, and that pleasure must either be purchased by toil or atoned for by languor, satiety, and premature decay.

<sup>1</sup> *Phœnissæ*, 536-47. There is a delicious parody of this method in the *Clouds*. A creditor asks Strepsiades, who has been taking lessons in philosophy, to pay him the interest on a loan. Strepsiades begs to know whether the sea is any fuller now than it used to be. ‘No,’ replies the other, ‘for it would not be just,’ (*οὐ γὰρ δίκαιον πλείον εἶναι*). ‘Then, you wretch,’ rejoins his debtor, ‘do you suppose that the sea is not to get any fuller although all the rivers are flowing into it, and that your money is to go on increasing?’ (1290-95.)

We know also that the Cynical school, as represented by Antisthenês, rejected all pleasure on the ground that it was always paid for by an equal amount of pain ; and Heraclês, the Prodicæan type of a youth who follows virtue in preference to vice disguised as happiness, was also the favourite hero of the Cynics. Again, Plato alludes, in the *Philêbus*, to certain thinkers, reputed to be 'great on the subject of physics,' who deny the very existence of pleasure. Critics have been at a loss to identify these persons, and rather reluctantly put up with the explanation that Antisthenês and his school are referred to. Antisthenês was a friend of Prodicus, and may at one time have shared in his scientific studies, thus giving occasion to the association touched on by Plato. But is it not equally possible that Prodicus left behind disciples who, like him, combined moral with physical teaching ; and, going a little further, may we not conjecture that their opposition to Hedonism was inherited from the master himself, who, like the Stoics afterwards, may have based it on an application of physical reasoning to ethics ?

Still more important was the antithesis between Nature and convention, which, so far as we know, originated exclusively with Hippias. We have already observed that universality and necessity were, with the Greeks, standing marks of naturalness. The customs of different countries were, on the other hand, distinguished by extreme variety, amounting sometimes to diametrical opposition. Herodotus was fond of calling attention to such contrasts ; only, he drew from them the conclusion that law, to be so arbitrary, must needs possess supreme and sacred authority. According to the more plausible interpretation of Hippias, the variety, and at least in Greek democracies, the changeability of law proved that it was neither sacred nor binding. He also looked on artificial social institutions as the sole cause of division and discord among mankind. Here we already see the dawn of a cosmopolitanism afterwards preached by Cynic and

Stoic philosophers. Furthermore, to discover the natural rule of right, he compared the laws of different nations, and selected those which were held by all in common as the basis of an ethical system.<sup>1</sup> Now, this is precisely what was done by the Roman jurists long afterwards under the inspiration of Stoical teaching. We have it on the high authority of Sir Henry Maine that they identified the *Jus Gentium*, that is, the laws supposed to be observed by all nations alike, with the *Jus Naturale*, that is, the code by which men were governed in their primitive condition of innocence. It was by a gradual application of this ideal standard that the numerous inequalities between different classes of persons, enforced by ancient Roman law, were removed, and that contract was substituted for status. Above all, the abolition of slavery was, if not directly caused, at any rate powerfully aided, by the belief that it was against Nature. At the beginning of the fourteenth century we find Louis Hutin, King of France, assigning as a reason for the enfranchisement of his serfs, that, 'according to natural law, everybody ought to be born free,' and although Sir H. Maine holds this to have been a mistaken interpretation of the juridical axiom 'omnes homines naturâ aequales sunt,' which means not an ideal to be attained, but a primitive condition from which we have departed: nevertheless it very faithfully reproduces the theory of those Greek philosophers from whom the idea of a natural law was derived. That, in Aristotle's time at least, a party existed who were opposed to slavery on theoretical grounds of right is perfectly evident from the language of the *Politics*. 'Some persons,' says Aristotle, 'think that slaveholding is against nature, for that one man is a slave and another free by law, while by nature there is no difference between them, for which reason it is unjust as being the result of force.'<sup>2</sup> And he proceeds to prove the contrary at length. The same doctrine of natural equality led to important political consequences, having, again according to Sir

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon. *Memor.*, IV., iv., 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Pol.*, I., ii.

H. Maine, contributed both to the American Declaration of Independence and to the French Revolution.

There is one more aspect deserving our attention, under which the theory of Nature has been presented both in ancient and modern times. A dialogue which, whether rightly or wrongly attributed to Plato, may be taken as good evidence on the subject it relates to,<sup>1</sup> exhibits Hippias in the character of a universal genius, who can not only teach every science and practise every kind of literary composition, but has also manufactured all the clothes and other articles about his person. Here we have precisely the sort of versatility which characterises uncivilised society, and which believers in a state of nature love to encourage at all times. The division of labour, while it carries us ever farther from barbarism, makes us more dependent on each other. An Odysseus is master of many arts, a Themistocles of two, a Demosthenes of only one. A Norwegian peasant can do more for himself than an English countryman, and therefore makes a better colonist. If we must return to Nature, our first step should be to learn a number of trades, and so be better able to shift for ourselves. Such was the ideal of Hippias, and it was also the ideal of the eighteenth century. Its literature begins with *Robinson Crusoe*, the story of a man who is accidentally compelled to provide himself, during many years, with all the necessaries of life. Its educational manuals are, in France, Rousseau's *Émile*; in England, Day's *Sandford and Merton*, both teaching that the young should be thrown as much as possible on their own resources. One of its types is Diderot, who learns handicrafts that he may describe them in the *Encyclopédie*. Its two great spokesmen are Voltaire and Goethe, who, after cultivating every department of literature, take in statesmanship as well. And its last word is Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Culture*, holding up totality of existence as the supreme ideal to be sought after.

<sup>1</sup> The *Hippias Minor*.

There is no reason to believe that Hippias used his distinction between Nature and convention as an argument for despotism. It would rather appear that, if anything, he and his school desired to establish a more complete equality among men. Others, however, both rhetoricians and practical statesmen, were not slow to draw an opposite conclusion. They saw that where no law was recognised, as between different nations, nothing but violence and the right of the stronger prevailed. It was once believed that aggressions which human law could not reach found no favour with the gods, and dread of the divine displeasure may have done something towards restraining them. But religion had partly been destroyed by the new culture, partly perverted into a sanction for wrong-doing. By what right, it was asked, did Zeus himself reign? Had he not unlawfully dethroned his father, Cronos, and did he not now hold power simply by virtue of superior strength? Similar reasonings were soon applied to the internal government of each state. It was alleged that the ablest citizens could lay claim to uncontrolled supremacy by a title older than any social fiction. Rules of right meant nothing but a permanent conspiracy of the weak to withdraw themselves from the legitimate dominion of their born master, and to bamboozle him into a voluntary surrender of his natural privileges. Sentiments bearing a superficial resemblance to these have occasionally found utterance among ourselves. Nevertheless, it would be most unjust to compare Carlyle and Mr. Froude with Critias and Calliclès. We believe that their preference of despotism to representative government is an entire mistake. But we know that with them as with us the good of the governed is the sole end desired. The gentlemen of Athens sought after supreme power only as a means for gratifying their worst passions without let or hindrance; and for that purpose they were ready to ally themselves with every foreign enemy in turn, or to flatter the caprices of the Dêmos, if that policy

promised to answer equally well. The antisocial theories of these 'young lions,' as they were called by their enemies and sometimes by themselves also, do not seem to have been supported by any public teacher. If we are to believe Plato, Pôlus, a Sicilian rhetor, did indeed regard Archelaus, the abler Louis Napoleon of his time, with sympathy and envious admiration, but without attempting to justify the crimes of his hero by an appeal to natural law. The corruption of theoretical morality among the paid teachers took a more subtle form. Instead of opposing one principle to another, they held that all law had the same source, being an emanation from the will of the stronger, and exclusively designed to promote his interest. Justice, according to Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, is another's good, which is true enough, and to practise it except under compulsion is foolish, which, whatever Grote may say, is a grossly immoral doctrine.

## V.

We have seen how the idea of Nature, first evolved by physical philosophy, was taken by some, at least, among the Sophists as a basis for their ethical teaching; then how an interpretation utterly opposed to theirs was put on it by practical men, and how this second interpretation was so generalised by the younger rhetoricians as to involve the denial of all morality whatever. Meanwhile, another equally important conception, destined to come into speedy and prolonged antagonism with the idea of Nature, and like it to exercise a powerful influence on ethical reflection, had almost contemporaneously been elaborated out of the materials which earlier speculation supplied. From Parmenides and Heracleitus down, every philosopher who had propounded a theory of the world, had also more or less peremptorily insisted on the fact that his theory differed widely from common belief. Those who held that change is

impossible, and those who taught that everything is incessantly changing ; those who asserted the indestructibility of matter, and those who denied its continuity ; those who took away objective reality from every quality except extension and resistance, and those who affirmed that the smallest molecules partook more or less of every attribute that is revealed to sense—all these, however much they might disagree among themselves, agreed in declaring that the received opinions of mankind were an utter delusion. Thus, a sharp distinction came to be drawn between the misleading sense-impressions and the objective reality to which thought alone could penetrate. It was by combining these two elements, sensation and thought, that the idea of mind was originally constituted. And mind when so understood could not well be accounted for by any of the materialistic hypotheses at first proposed. The senses must differ profoundly from that of which they give such an unfaithful report ; while reason, which Anaxagoras had so carefully differentiated from every other form of existence, carried back its distinction to the subjective sphere, and became clothed with a new spirituality when reintegrated in the consciousness of man.

The first result of this separation between man and the world was a complete breach with the old physical philosophy, shown, on the one hand, by an abandonment of speculative studies, on the other, by a substitution of convention for Nature as the recognised standard of right. Both consequences were drawn by Protagoras, the most eminent of the Sophists. We have now to consider more particularly what was his part in the great drama of which we are attempting to give an intelligible account.

Protagoras was born about 480 B.C. He was a fellow-townsmen of Democritus, and has been represented, though not on good authority, as a disciple of that illustrious thinker. It was rather by a study of Heracleitus that his



philosophical opinions, so far as they were borrowed from others, seem to have been most decisively determined. In any case, practice, not theory, was the principal occupation of his life. He gave instruction for payment in the higher branches of a liberal education, and adopted the name of Sophist, which before had simply meant a wise man, as an honourable title for his new calling. Protagoras was a very popular teacher. The news of his arrival in a strange city excited immense enthusiasm, and he was followed from place to place by a band of eager disciples. At Athens he was honoured by the friendship of such men as Pericles and Euripides. It was at the house of the great tragic poet that he read out a work beginning with the ominous declaration, 'I cannot tell whether the gods exist or not; life is too short for such difficult investigations.'<sup>1</sup> Athenian bigotry took alarm directly. The book containing this frank confession of agnosticism was publicly burned, all purchasers being compelled to give up the copies in their possession. The author himself was either banished or took flight, and perished by shipwreck on the way to Sicily before completing his seventieth year.

The scepticism of Protagoras went beyond theology and extended to all science whatever. Such, at least, seems to have been the force of his celebrated declaration that 'man is the measure of all things, both as regards their existence and their non-existence.'<sup>2</sup> According to Plato, this doctrine followed from the identification of knowledge with sensible perception, which in its turn was based on a modified form of the Heraclitean theory of a perpetual flux. The series of external changes which constitutes Nature, acting on the series of internal changes which constitutes each man's personality, produces particular sensations, and these alone are the true reality. They vary with every variation in the

<sup>1</sup> Diog. L., IX., viii., 54.

<sup>2</sup> Diog. L., IX., viii., 51.

factors, and therefore are not the same for separate individuals. Each man's perceptions are true for himself, but for himself alone. Plato easily shows that such a theory of truth is at variance with ordinary opinion, and that if all opinions are true, it must necessarily stand self-condemned. We may also observe that if nothing can be known but sensation, nothing can be known of its conditions. It would, however, be unfair to convict Protagoras of talking nonsense on the unsupported authority of the *Theaetétus*. Plato himself suggests that a better case might have been made out for the incriminated doctrine could its author have been heard in self-defence. We may conjecture that Protagoras did not distinguish very accurately between existence, knowledge, and applicability to practice. If we assume, what there seems good reason to believe, that in the great controversy of Nature *versus* Law, Protagoras sided with the latter, his position will at once become clear. When the champions of Nature credited her, with a stability and an authority greater than could be claimed for merely human arrangements, it was a judicious step to carry the war into their territory, and ask, on what foundation then does Nature herself stand? Is not she, too, perpetually changing, and do we not become acquainted with her entirely through our own feelings? Ought not those feelings to be taken as the ultimate standard in all questions of right and wrong? Individual opinion is a fact which must be reckoned with, but which can be changed by persuasion, not by appeals to something that we none of us know anything about. *Man* is the measure of all things, not the will of gods whose very existence is uncertain, nor yet a purely hypothetical state of Nature. Human interests must take precedence of every other consideration. Hector meant nothing else when he preferred the obvious dictates of patriotism to inferences drawn from the flight of birds.

We now understand why Protagoras, in the Platonic dialogue bearing his name, should glance scornfully at the

method of instruction pursued by Hippias, with his lectures on astronomy, and why he prefers to discuss obscure passages in the poets. The quarrel between a classical and a scientific education was just then beginning, and Protagoras, as a Humanist, sided with the classics. Again, he does not think much of the 'great and sane and noble race of brutes.' He would not, like the Cynics, take them as examples of conduct. Man, he says, is naturally worse provided for than any animal; even the divine gift of wisdom would not save him from extinction without the priceless social virtues of justice and reverence, that is, the regard for public opinion which Mr. Darwin, too, has represented as the strongest moralising power in primitive society. And, as the possession of these qualities constituted the fundamental distinction between men and brutes, so also did the advantage of civilisation over barbarism rest on their superior development, a development due to the ethical instruction received by every citizen from his earliest infancy, reinforced through after-life by the sterner correction of legal punishments, and completed by the elimination of all individuals demonstrably unfitted for the social state. Protagoras had no sympathy with those who affect to prefer the simplicity of savages to the fancied corruption of civilisation. Hear how he answers the Rousseaus and Diderots of his time:—

'I would have you consider that he who appears to you to be the worst of those who have been brought up in laws and humanities would appear to be a just man and a master of justice if he were to be compared with men who had no education, or courts of justice, or laws, or any restraints upon them which compelled them to practise virtue—with the savages, for example, whom the poet Pherecrates exhibited on the stage at the last year's Lenaeon festival. If you were living among men such as the man-haters in his chorus, you would be only too glad to meet with Eurybates and Phrynonidas, and you would sorrowfully long to revisit the rascality of this part of the world.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Protagoras*, 327; Jowett's Transl., vol. I., p. 140. On the superior

We find the same theory reproduced and enforced with weighty illustrations by the great historian of that age. It is not known whether Thucydides owed any part of his culture to Protagoras, but the introduction to his history breathes the same spirit as the observations which we have just transcribed. He, too, characterises antiquity as a scene of barbarism, isolation, and lawless violence, particularly remarking that piracy was not then counted a dishonourable profession. He points to the tribes outside Greece, together with the most backward among the Greeks themselves, as representing the low condition from which Athens and her sister states had only emerged within a comparatively recent period. And in the funeral oration which he puts into the mouth of Pericles, the legendary glories of Athens are passed over without the slightest allusion,<sup>1</sup> while exclusive prominence is given to her proud position as the intellectual centre of Greece. Evidently a radical change had taken place in men's conceptions since Herodotus wrote. They were learning to despise the mythical glories of their ancestors, to exalt the present at the expense of the past, to fix their attention exclusively on immediate human interests, and, possibly, to anticipate the coming of a loftier civilisation than had as yet been seen.

The evolution of Greek tragic poetry bears witness to the same transformation of taste. On comparing Sophocles with Aeschylus, we are struck by a change of tone analogous to that which distinguishes Thucydides from Herodotus. It has been shown in our first chapter how the elder dramatist delights in tracing events and institutions back to their first origin, and in following derivations through the steps of a genealogical sequence. Sophocles, on the other hand, limits himself to a close analysis of the action immediately represented, the motives by which his characters are in-

morality which accompanies advancing civilisation, as evinced by the great increase of mutual trust, see Maine's *Ancient Law*, pp. 306-7.

<sup>1</sup> This point is noticed by Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, II., 22.

fluenced, and the arguments by which their conduct is justified or condemned. We have already touched on the very different attitude assumed towards religion by these two great poets. Here we have only to add that while Aeschylus fills his dramas with supernatural beings, and frequently restricts his mortal actors to the interpretation or execution of a divine mandate, Sophocles, representing the spirit of Greek Humanism, only once brings a god on the stage, and dwells exclusively on the emotions of pride, ambition, revenge, terror, pity, and affection, by which men and women of a lofty type are actuated. Again (and this is one of his poetic superiorities), Aeschylus has an open sense for the external world; his imagination ranges far and wide from land to land; his pages are filled with the fire and light, the music and movement of Nature in a Southern country. He leads before us in splendid procession the starry-kirtled night; the bright rulers that bring round winter and summer; the dazzling sunshine; the forked flashes of lightning; the roaring thunder; the white-winged snow-flakes; the rain descending on thirsty flowers; the sea now rippling with infinite laughter, now moaning on the shingle, growing hoary under rough blasts, with its eastern waves dashing against the new-risen sun, or, again, lulled to waveless, windless, noonday sleep; the volcano with its volleys of fire-breathing spray and fierce jaws of devouring lava; the eddying whorls of dust; the resistless mountain-torrent; the meadow-dews; the flowers of spring and fruits of summer; the evergreen olive, and trees that give leafy shelter from dogstar heat. For all this world of wonder and beauty Sophocles offers only a few meagre allusions to the phenomena presented by sunshine and storm. No poet has ever so entirely concentrated his attention on human deeds and human passions. Only the grove of Colônus, interwoven with his own earliest recollections, had power to draw from him, in extreme old age, a song such as the nightingale might have warbled amid those

inviolable recesses where the ivy and laurel, the vine and olive gave a never-failing shelter against sun and wind alike. Yet even this leafy covert is but an image of the poet's own imagination, undisturbed by outward influences, self-involved, self-protected, and self-sustained. Of course, we are only restating in different language what has long been known, that the epic element of poetry, before so prominent, was with Sophocles entirely displaced by the dramatic; but if Sophocles became the greatest dramatist of antiquity, it was precisely because no other writer could, like him, work out a catastrophe solely through the action of mind on mind, without any intervention of physical force; and if he possessed this faculty, it was because Greek thought as a whole had been turned inward; because he shared in the devotion to psychological studies equally exemplified by his younger contemporaries, Protagoras, Thucydides, and Socrates, all of whom might have taken for their motto the noble lines—

‘ On earth there is nothing great but man,  
In man there is nothing great but mind.’

We have said that Protagoras was a partisan of *Nomos*, or convention, against Nature. That was the conservative side of his character. Still, *Nomos* was not with him what it had been with the older Greeks, an immutable tradition indistinguishable from physical law. It was a human creation, and represented the outcome of inherited experience, admitting always of change for the better. Hence the vast importance which he attributed to education. This, no doubt, was magnifying his own office, for the training of youth was his profession. But, unquestionably, the feelings of his more liberal contemporaries went with him. A generation before, Pindar had spoken scornfully of intellectual culture as a vain attempt to make up for the absence of genius which the gods alone could give. Yet Pindar himself was always careful to dwell on the services rendered by professional trainers to the

victorious athletes whose praises he sang, and there was really no reason why genius and culture should be permanently dissociated. A Themistocles might decide offhand on the questions brought before him ; a Pericles, dealing with much more complex interests, already needed a more careful preparation.

On the other hand, conservatives like Aristophanes continued to oppose the spread of education with acrimonious zeal. Some of their arguments have a curiously familiar ring. Intellectual pursuits, they said, were bad for the health, led to irreligion and immorality, made young people quite unlike their grandfathers, and were somehow or other connected with loose company and a fast life. This last insinuation was in one respect the very reverse of true. So far as personal morality went, nothing could be better for it than the change introduced by Protagoras from amateur to paid teaching. Before this time, a Greek youth who wished for something better than the very elementary instruction given at school, could only attach himself to some older and wiser friend, whose conversation might be very improving, but who was pretty sure to introduce a sentimental element into their relationship equally discreditable to both.<sup>1</sup> A similar danger has always existed with regard to highly intelligent women, although it may have threatened a smaller number of individuals ; and the efforts now being made to provide them with a systematic education under official superintendence will incidentally have the effect of saving our future Héloïses and Julies from the tuition of an Abélard or a Saint-Preux.

It was their habit of teaching rhetoric as an art which raised the fiercest storm of indignation against Protagoras and his colleagues. The endeavour to discover rules for addressing a tribunal or a popular assembly in the manner best cal-

<sup>1</sup> This phase of Greek life is well illustrated by the addresses of Theognis to Cyrnus.

culated to win their assent had originated quite independently of any philosophical theory. On the re-establishment of order, that is to say of popular government, in Sicily, many lawsuits arose out of events which had happened years before; and, owing to the lapse of time, demonstrative evidence was not available. Accordingly, recourse was had on both sides to arguments possessing a greater or less degree of probability. The art of putting such probable inferences so as to produce persuasion demanded great technical skill; and two Sicilians, Corax and Tisias by name, composed treatises on the subject. It would appear that the new-born art was taken up by Protagoras and developed in the direction of increased dialectical subtlety. We are informed that he undertook to make the worse appear the better reason; and this very soon came to be popularly considered as an accomplishment taught by all philosophers, Socrates among the rest. But if Protagoras merely meant that he would teach the art of reasoning, one hardly sees how he could have expressed himself otherwise, consistently with the antithetical style of his age. We should say more simply that a case is strengthened by the ability to argue it properly. It has not been shown that the Protagorean dialectic offered exceptional facilities for maintaining unjust pretensions. Taken, however, in connexion with the humanistic teaching, it had an unsettling and sceptical tendency. All belief and all practice rested on law, and law was the result of a convention made among men and ultimately produced by individual conviction. What one man had done another could undo. Religious tradition and natural right, the sole external standards, had already disappeared. There remained the test of self-consistency, and against this all the subtlety of the new dialectic was turned. The triumph of Eristic was to show that a speaker had contradicted himself, no matter how his statements might be worded. Moreover, now that reference to an objective reality was disallowed, words were put in the place



of things and treated like concrete realities. The next step was to tear them out of the grammatical construction, where alone they possessed any truth or meaning, each being simultaneously credited with all the uses which at any time it might be made to fulfil. For example, if a man knew one thing he knew all, for he had knowledge, and knowledge is of everything knowable. Much that seems to us tedious or superfluous in Aristotle's expositions was intended as a safeguard against this endless cavilling. Finally, negation itself was eliminated along with the possibility of falsehood and contradiction. For it was argued that 'nothing' had no existence and could not be an object of thought.<sup>1</sup>

## VI.

From utter confusion to extreme nihilism there was but a single step. This step was taken by Gorgias, the Sicilian rhetorician, who held the same relation towards western Hellas and the Eleatic school as that which Protagoras held towards eastern Hellas and the philosophy of Heraclitus. He, like his eminent contemporary, was opposed to the thinkers whom, borrowing a useful term from the nomenclature of the last century, we may call the Greek physiocrats. To confute them, he wrote a book with the significant title, *On Nature or Nothing*: maintaining, first, that nothing exists; secondly, that if anything exists, we cannot know it; thirdly, that if we know it, there is no possibility of communicating our knowledge to others. The first thesis was established by pushing the Eleatic arguments against movement and change a little further; the second by showing that thought and existence are different, or else everything that is thought of would exist; the third by establishing a similar incommensurability between words and sensations. Grote

<sup>1</sup> Eristicism had also points of contact with the philosophies of Parmenides and Socrates which will be indicated in a future chapter.

has attempted to show that Gorgias was only arguing against the existence of a noumenon underlying phenomena, such as all idealists deny. Zeller has, however, convincingly proved that Gorgias, in common with every other thinker before Plato, was ignorant of this distinction;<sup>1</sup> and we may add that it would leave the second and third theses absolutely unimpaired. We must take the whole together as constituting a declaration of war against science, an assertion, in still stronger language, of the agnosticism taught by Protagoras. The truth is, that a Greek controversialist generally overproved his case, and in order to overwhelm an adversary pulled down the whole house, even at the risk of being buried among the ruins himself. A modern reasoner, taking his cue from Gorgias, without pushing the matter to such an extreme, might carry on his attack on lines running parallel with those laid down by the Sicilian Sophist. He would begin by denying the existence of a 'state of Nature'; for such a state must be either variable or constant. If it is constant, how could civilisation ever have arisen? If it is variable, what becomes of the fixed standard appealed to? Then, again, supposing such a state ever to have existed, how could authentic information about it have come down to us through the ages of corruption which are supposed to have intervened? And, lastly, granting that a state of Nature accessible to enquiry has ever existed, how can we reorganise society on the basis of such discordant data as are presented to us by the physiocrats, no two of whom agree with regard to the first principles of natural order; one saying that it is equality, another aristocracy, and a third despotism? We do not say that these arguments are conclusive, we only mean that in relation to modern thought they very fairly represent the dialectic artillery brought to bear by Greek humanism against its naturalistic opponents.

We have seen how Prodicus and Hippias professed to

<sup>1</sup> *Ph. d. Gr.*, I., 903 (3rd ed.).

teach all science, all literature, and all virtuous accomplishments. We have seen how Protagoras rejected every kind of knowledge unconnected with social culture. We now find Gorgias going a step further. In his later years, at least, he professes to teach nothing but rhetoric or the art of persuasion. We say in his later years, for at one time he seems to have taught ethics and psychology as well.<sup>1</sup> But the Gorgias of Plato's famous dialogue limits himself to the power of producing persuasion by words on all possible subjects, even those of whose details he is ignorant. Wherever the rhetorician comes into competition with the professional he will beat him on his own ground, and will be preferred to him for every public office. The type is by no means extinct, and flourishes like a green bay-tree among ourselves. Like Pendennis, a writer of this kind will review any book from the height of superior knowledge acquired by two hours' reading in the British Museum; or, if he is adroit enough, will dispense with even that slender amount of preparation. He need not even trouble himself to read the book which he criticises. A superficial acquaintance with magazine articles will qualify him to pass judgment on all life, all religion, and all philosophy. But it is in politics that the finest career lies before him. He rises to power by attacking the measures of real statesmen, and remains there by adopting them. He becomes Chancellor of the Exchequer by gross economical blundering, and Prime Minister by a happy mixture of epigram and adulation.

Rhetoric conferred even greater power in old Athens than in modern England. Not only did mastery of expression lead to public employment; but also, as every citizen was permitted by law to address his assembled fellow-countrymen and propose measures for their acceptance, it became a direct passport to supreme political authority. Nor was this all. At Athens the employment of professional advocates was not

<sup>1</sup> See Plato's *Meno*, *sub. in.*

allowed, and it was easy to prosecute an enemy on the most frivolous pretexts. If the defendant happened to be wealthy, and if condemnation involved a loss of property, there was a prejudice against him in the minds of the jury, confiscation being regarded as a convenient resource for replenishing the national exchequer. Thus the possession of rhetorical ability became a formidable weapon in the hands of unscrupulous citizens, who were enabled to extort large sums by the mere threat of putting rich men on their trial for some real or pretended offence. This systematic employment of rhetoric for purposes of self-aggrandisement bore much the same relation to the teaching of Protagoras and Gorgias as the open and violent seizure of supreme power on the plea of natural superiority bore to the theories of their rivals, being the way in which practical men applied the principle that truth is determined by persuasion. It was also attended by considerably less danger than a frank appeal to the right of the stronger, so far at least as the aristocratic party were concerned. For they had been taught a lesson not easily forgotten by the downfall of the oligarchies established in 411 and 404; and the second catastrophe especially proved that nothing but a popular government was possible in Athens. Accordingly, the nobles set themselves to study new methods for obtaining their ultimate end, which was always the possession of uncontrolled power over the lives and fortunes of their fellow-citizens. With wealth to purchase instruction from the Sophists, with leisure to practise oratory, and with the ability often accompanying high birth, there was no reason why the successors of Charmides and Critias should not enjoy all the pleasures of tyranny unaccompanied by any of its drawbacks. Here, again, a parallel suggests itself between ancient Greece and modern Europe. On the Continent, where theories of natural law are far more prevalent than with us, it is by brute force that justice is trampled down: the one great object of every ambitious

intriguer is to possess himself of the military machine, his one great terror, that a stronger man may succeed in wresting it from him; in England the political adventurer looks to rhetoric as his only resource, and at the pinnacle of power has to dread the hailstorm of epigrammatic invective directed against him by abler or younger rivals.<sup>1</sup>

Besides its influence on the formation and direction of political eloquence, the doctrine professed by Protagoras had a far-reaching effect on the subsequent development of thought. Just as Cynicism was evolved from the theory of Hippias, so also did the teaching which denied Nature and concentrated all study on subjective phenomena, with a tendency towards individualistic isolation, lead on to the system of Aristippus. The founder of the Cyrenaic school is called a Sophist by Aristotle, nor can the justice of the appellation be doubted. He was, it is true, a friend and companion of Socrates, but intellectually he is more nearly related to Protagoras. Aristippus rejected physical studies, reduced all knowledge to the consciousness of our own sensations, and made immediate gratification the end of life. Protagoras would have objected to the last principle, but it was only an extension of his own views, for all history proves that Hedonism is constantly associated with sensationalism. The theory that knowledge is built up out of feelings has an elective affinity for the theory that action is, or ought to be, determined in the last resort by the most prominent feelings, which are pleasure and pain. Both theories have since been strengthened by the introduction of a new and more ideal element into each. We have come to see that knowledge is constituted not by sensations alone, but by sensations grouped according to certain laws which seem to be inseparable from the existence of any consciousness whatever. And, similarly,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Beaconsfield recently [written in February 1880] spoke of the Balkans as forming an 'intelligible' frontier for Turkey. Continental telegrams substituted 'natural frontier.' The change was characteristic and significant.

we have learned to take into account, not merely the momentary enjoyments of an individual, but his whole life's happiness as well, and not his happiness only, but also that of the whole community to which he belongs. Nevertheless, in both cases it is rightly held that the element of feeling preponderates, and the doctrines of such thinkers as J. S. Mill are legitimately traceable through Epicurus and Aristippus to Protagoras as their first originator.

Notwithstanding the importance of this impulse, it does not represent the whole effect produced by Protagoras on philosophy. His eristic method was taken up by the Megaric school, and at first combined with other elements borrowed from Parmenides and Socrates, but ultimately extricated from them and used as a critical solvent of all dogmatism by the later Sceptics. From their writings, after a long interval of enforced silence, it passed over to Montaigne, Bayle, Hume, and Kant, with what redoubtable consequences to received opinions need not here be specified. Our object is simply to illustrate the continuity of thought, and the powerful influence exercised by ancient Greece on its subsequent development.

Every variety of opinion current among the Sophists reduces itself, in the last analysis, to their fundamental antithesis between Nature and Law, the latter being somewhat ambiguously conceived by its supporters as either human reason or human will, or more generally as both together, combining to assert their self-dependence and emancipation from external authority. This antithesis was prefigured in the distinction between Chthonian and Olympian divinities. Continuing afterwards to inspire the rivalry of opposing schools, Cynic against Cyrenaic, Stoic against Epicurean, Sceptic against Dogmatist, it was but partially overcome by the mediatorial schemes of Socrates and his successors. Then came Catholicism, equally adverse to the pretensions of either party, and held them down

under its suffocating pressure for more than a thousand years.

‘Natur und Geist, so spricht man nicht zu Christen,  
Darum verbrennt man Atheisten ;  
Natur ist Sünde, Geist ist Teufel.’

Both slowly struggled back into consciousness in the fitful dreams of mediaeval sleep. Nature was represented by astrology with its fatalistic predetermination of events ; idealism by the alchemical lore which was to give its possessor eternal youth and inexhaustible wealth. With the complete revival of classic literature and the temporary neutralisation of theology by internal discord, both sprang up again in glorious life, and produced the great art of the sixteenth century, the great science and philosophy of the seventeenth. Later on, becoming self-conscious, they divide, and their partisans draw off into two opposing armies, Rousseau against Voltaire, Herder against Kant, Goethe against Schiller, Hume against himself. Together they bring about the Revolution ; but after marching hand in hand to the destruction of all existing institutions they again part company, and, putting on the frippery of a dead faith, confront one another, each with its own ritual, its own acolytes, its own intolerance, with feasts of Nature and goddesses of Reason, in mutual and murderous hostility. When the storm subsided, new lines of demarcation were laid down, and the cause of political liberty was dissociated from what seemed to be thoroughly discredited figments. Nevertheless, imaginative literature still preserves traces of the old conflict, and on examining the four greatest English novelists of the last fifty years we shall find that Dickens and Charlotte Brontë, though personally most unlike, agree in representing the arbitrary, subjective, ideal side of life, the subjugation of things to self, not of self to things ; he transfiguring them in the light of humour, fancy, sentiment ; she transforming them by the alchemy of inward passion ; while

Thackeray and George Eliot represent the triumph of natural forces over rebellious individualities ; the one writer depicting an often crude reality at odds with convention and conceit ; while the other, possessing, if not an intrinsically greater genius, at least a higher philosophical culture, discloses to us the primordial necessities of existence, the pitiless conformations of circumstance, before which egoism, ignorance, illusion, and indecision must bow, or be crushed to pieces if they resist.

## VII.

Our readers have now before them everything of importance that is known about the Sophists, and something more that is not known for certain, but may, we think, be reasonably conjectured. Taking the whole class together, they represent a combination of three distinct tendencies, the endeavour to supply an encyclopaedic training for youth, the cultivation of political rhetoric as a special art, and the search after a scientific foundation for ethics derived from the results of previous philosophy. With regard to the last point, they agree in drawing a fundamental distinction between Nature and Law, but some take one and some the other for their guide. The partisans of Nature lean to the side of a more comprehensive education, while their opponents tend more and more to lay an exclusive stress on oratorical proficiency. Both schools are at last infected by the moral corruption of the day, natural right becoming identified with the interest of the stronger, and humanism leading to the denial of objective reality, the substitution of illusion for knowledge, and the confusion of momentary gratification with moral good. The dialectical habit of considering every question under contradictory aspects degenerates into eristic prize-fighting and deliberate disregard of the conditions which alone make argument possible. Finally, the component elements of Sophisti-



cism are dissociated from one another, and are either separately developed or pass over into new combinations. Rhetoric, apart from speculation, absorbs the whole time and talent of an Isocrates ; general culture is imparted by a professorial class without originality, but without reproach ; naturalism and sensuous idealism are worked up into systematic completion for the sake of their philosophical interest alone ; and the name of sophistry is unhappily fastened by Aristotle on paid exhibitions of verbal wrangling which the great Sophists would have regarded with indignation and disgust.

It remains for us to glance at the controversy which has long been carried on respecting the true position of the Sophists in Greek life and thought. We have already alluded to the by no means favourable judgment passed on them by some among their contemporaries. Socrates condemned them severely, but only because they received payment for their lessons ; and the sentiment was probably echoed by many who had neither his disinterestedness nor his frugality. To make profit by intellectual work was not unusual in Greece. Pheidias sold his statues ; Pindar spent his life writing for money ; Simonides and Sophocles were charged with showing too great eagerness in the pursuit of gain.<sup>1</sup> But a man's conversation with his friends had always been gratuitous, and the novel idea of charging a high fee for it excited considerable offence. Socrates called it prostitution—the sale of that which should be the free gift of love—without perhaps sufficiently considering that the same privilege had formerly been purchased with a more dishonourable price. He also considered that a freeman was degraded by placing himself at the beck and call of another, although it would appear that the Sophists chose their own time for lecturing, and were certainly not more slaves than a sculptor or poet who had received an order to execute. It was also argued that any one who really succeeded in improving the

<sup>1</sup> Aristoph., *Pax*, 697.

community benefited so much by the result that it was unfair on his part to demand any additional remuneration. Suppose a popular preacher were to come over from New York to England, star about among the principal cities, charging a high price for admission to his sermons, and finally return home in possession of a handsome fortune, we can well imagine that sarcasms at the expense of such profitable piety would not be wanting. This hypothetical case will help us to understand how many an honest Athenian must have felt towards the showy colonial strangers who were making such a lucrative business of teaching moderation and justice. Plato, speaking for his master but not from his master's standpoint, raised an entirely different objection. He saw no reason why the Sophists should not sell their wisdom if they had any wisdom to sell. But this was precisely what he denied. He submitted their pretensions to a searching cross-examination, and, as he considered, convicted them of being worthless pretenders. There was a certain unfairness about this method, for neither his own positive teaching nor that of Socrates could have stood before a similar test, as Aristotle speedily demonstrated in the next generation. He was, in fact, only doing for Protagoras and Gorgias what they had done for early Greek speculation, and what every school habitually does for its predecessors. It had yet to be learned that this dissolving dialectic constitutes the very law of philosophical progress. The discovery was made by Hegel, and it is to him that the Sophists owe their rehabilitation in modern times. His lectures on the History of Philosophy contain much that was afterwards urged by Grote on the same side. Five years before the appearance of Grote's famous sixty-seventh chapter, Lewes had also published a vindication of the Sophists, possibly suggested by Hegel's work, which he had certainly consulted when preparing his own History. There is, however, this great difference, that while the two English critics endeavour to minimise the

sceptical, innovating tendency of the Sophists, it is, contrariwise, brought into exaggerated prominence by the German philosopher. We have just remarked that the final dissolution of Sophisticism was brought about by the separate development given to each of the various tendencies which it temporarily combined. Now, each of our three apologists has taken up one of these tendencies, and treated it as constituting the whole movement under discussion. To Hegel, the Sophists are chiefly subjective idealists. To Lewes, they are rhetoricians like Isocrates. To Grote, they are, what in truth the Sophists of the Roman empire were, teachers representing the standard opinions of their age. Lewes and Grote are both particularly anxious to prove that the original Sophists did not corrupt Greek morality. Thus much has been conceded by contemporary German criticism, and is no more than was observed by Plato long ago. Grote further asserts that the implied corruption of morality is an illusion, and that at the end of the Peloponnesian war the Athenians were no worse than their forefathers who fought at Marathon. His opinion is shared by so accomplished a scholar as Prof. Jowett;<sup>1</sup> but here he has the combined authority of Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Plato against him. We have, however, examined this question already, and need not return to it. Whether any of the Sophists themselves can be proved to have taught immoral doctrines is another moot point. Grote defends them all, Pölus and Thrasymachus included. Here, also, we have expressed our dissent from the eminent historian, whom we can only suppose to have missed the whole point of Plato's argument. Lewes takes different

<sup>1</sup> 'As Mr. Grote remarks, there is no reason to suspect any greater moral corruption in the age of Demosthenes than in the age of Pericles.' (*The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. IV., p. 380.) We do not remember that Grote commits himself to such a sweeping statement, nor was it necessary for his purpose to do so. No one would have been more surprised than Demosthenes himself to hear that the Athenians of his generation equalled the contemporaries of Pericles in public virtue. (Cf. Grote's *Plato*, II., 148.)

ground when he accuses Plato of misrepresenting his opponents. It is true that the Sophists cannot be heard in self-defence, but there is no internal improbability about the charges brought against them. The Greek rhetoricians are not accused of saying anything that has not been said again and again by their modern representatives. Whether the odium of such sentiments should attach itself to the whole class of Sophists is quite another question. Grote denies that they held any doctrine in common. The German critics, on the other hand, insist on treating them as a school with common principles and tendencies. Brandis calls them 'a number of men, gifted indeed, but not seekers after knowledge for its own sake, who made a trade of giving instruction as a means for the attainment of external and selfish ends, and of substituting mere technical proficiency for real science.'<sup>1</sup> If our account be the true one, this would apply to Gorgias and the younger rhetoricians alone. One does not precisely see what external or selfish ends were subserved by the physical philosophy which Prodicus and Hippias taught, nor why the comprehensive enquiries of Protagoras into the conditions of civilisation and the limits of human knowledge should be contemptuously flung aside because he made them the basis of an honourable profession. Zeller, in much the same strain, defines a Sophist as one who professes to be a teacher of wisdom, while his object is individual culture (*die formelle und praktische Bildung des Subjekts*) and not the scientific investigation of truth.<sup>2</sup> We do not know whether Grote was content with an explanation which would only have required an unimportant modification of his own statements to agree precisely with them. It ought amply to have satisfied Lewes. For ourselves, we must confess to caring very little whether the Sophists investigated truth for its own sake or as a means to self-culture. We believe, and in the next chapter we hope

<sup>1</sup> *Geschichte der Entwicklung der Griechischen Philosophie*, I., p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> *Philosophie d. Gr.*, I., p. 943 (3rd ed.).

to show, that Socrates, at any rate, did not treat knowledge apart from practice as an end in itself. But the history of philosophy is not concerned with such subtleties as these. Our contention is that the Stoic, Epicurean, and Sceptical schools may be traced back through Antisthenes and Aristippus to Hippias and Protagoras much more directly than to Socrates. If Zeller will grant this, then he can no longer treat Sophisticism as a mere solvent of the old physical philosophy. If he denies it, we can only appeal to his own history, which here, as well as in our discussions of early Greek thought, we have found more useful than any other work on the subject. Our obligations to Grote are of a more general character. We have learned from him to look at the Sophists without prejudice. But we think that he, too, underrates their far-reaching intellectual significance, while his defence of their moral orthodoxy seems, so far as certain members of the class are concerned, inconsistent with any belief in Plato's historical fidelity. That the most eminent Sophists did nothing to corrupt Greek morality is now almost universally admitted. If we have succeeded in showing that they did not corrupt but fruitfully develop Greek philosophy, the purpose of this study will have been sufficiently fulfilled.

The title of this chapter may have seemed to promise more than a casual mention of the thinker in whom Greek Humanism attained its loftiest and purest expression. But in history, no less than in life, Socrates must ever stand apart from the Sophists. Beyond and above all specialities of teaching, the transcendent dignity of a character which personified philosophy itself demands a separate treatment. Readers who have followed us thus far may feel interested in an attempt to throw some new light on one who was a riddle to his contemporaries, and has remained a riddle to after-ages.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE PLACE OF SOCRATES IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY.

## I.

APART from legendary reputations, there is no name in the world's history more famous than that of Socrates, and in the history of philosophy there is none so famous. The only thinker that approaches him in celebrity is his own disciple Plato. Every one who has heard of Greece or Athens has heard of him. Every one who has heard of him knows that he was supremely good and great. Each successive generation has confirmed the reputed Delphic oracle that no man was wiser than Socrates. He, with one or two others, alone came near to realising the ideal of a Stoic sage. Christians deem it no irreverence to compare him with the Founder of their religion. If a few dissentient voices have broken the general unanimity, they have, whether consciously or not, been inspired by the Socratic principle that we should let no opinion pass unquestioned and unproved. Furthermore, it so happens that this wonderful figure is known even to the multitude by sight as well as by name. Busts, cameos, and engravings have made all familiar with the Silenus-like physiognomy, the thick lips, upturned nose, and prominent eyes which impressed themselves so strangely on the imagination of a race who are accused of having cared for nothing but physical beauty, because they rightly regarded it as the natural accompaniment of moral loveliness. Those who wish to discover what manner of mind lay hid beneath this uninviting

exterior may easily satisfy their curiosity, for Socrates is personally better known than any other character of antiquity. Dr. Johnson himself is not a more familiar figure to the student of literature. Alone among classical worthies his table-talk has been preserved for us, and the art of memoir-writing seems to have been expressly created for his behoof.<sup>1</sup> We can follow him into all sorts of company and test his behaviour in every variety of circumstances. He conversed with all classes and on all subjects of human interest, with artisans, artists, generals, statesmen, professors, and professional beauties. We meet him in the armourer's workshop, in the sculptor's studio, in the boudoirs of the *demi-monde*, in the banqueting-halls of flower-crowned and wine-flushed Athenian youth, combining the self-mastery of an Antisthenes with the plastic grace of an Aristippus ; or, in graver moments, cheering his comrades during the disastrous retreat from Delium ; upholding the sanctity of law, as President of the Assembly, against a delirious populace ; confronting with invincible irony the oligarchic terrorists who held life and death in their hands ; pleading not for himself, but for reason and justice, before a stupid and bigoted tribunal ; and, in the last sad scene of all, exchanging Attic courtesies with the unwilling instrument of his death.<sup>2</sup>

Such a character would, in any case, be remarkable ; it becomes of extraordinary, or rather of unique, interest when we consider that Socrates could be and do so much, not in spite of being a philosopher, but because he was a philosopher, the chief though not the sole originator of a vast intellectual revolution ; one who, as a teacher, constituted the supremacy

<sup>1</sup> The invention of memoir-writing is claimed by Prof. Mahaffy (*Hist. Gr. Lit.*, II., 42) for Ion of Chios and his contemporary Stesimbrotus. But—apart from their questionable authenticity—the sketches attributed to these two writers do not seem to have aimed at presenting a complete picture of a single individual, which is what was attempted with considerable success in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Havet, *Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, I., 167.

of reason, and as an individual made reason his sole guide in life. He at once discovered new principles, popularised them for the benefit of others, and exemplified them in his own conduct ; but he did not accomplish these results separately ; they were only different aspects of the same systematising process which is identical with philosophy itself. Yet the very success of Socrates in harmonising life and thought makes it the more difficult for us to construct a complete picture of his personality. Different observers have selected from the complex combination that which best suited their own mental predisposition, pushing out of sight the other elements which, with him, served to correct and complete it. The very popularity that has attached itself to his name is a proof of this ; for the multitude can seldom appreciate more than one excellence at a time, nor is that usually of the highest order. Hegel complains that Socrates has been made the patron-saint of moral twaddle.<sup>1</sup> We are fifty years further removed than Hegel from the golden age of platitude ; the twaddle of our own time is half cynical, half aesthetic, and wholly unmoral ; yet there are no signs of diminution in the popular favour with which Socrates has always been regarded. The man of the world, the wit, the *viveur*, the enthusiastic admirer of youthful beauty, the scornful critic of democracy is welcome to many who have no taste for ethical discourses and fine-spun arguments.

Nor is it only the personality of Socrates that has been so variously conceived ; his philosophy, so far as it can be separated from his life, has equally given occasion to conflicting interpretations, and it has even been denied that he had, properly speaking, any philosophy at all. These divergent presentations of his teaching, if teaching it can be called, begin with the two disciples to whom our knowledge of it is almost entirely due. There is, curiously enough, much the same inner discrepancy between Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and those

<sup>1</sup> *Gesch. d. Phil.*, II., 47.



Platonic dialogues where Socrates is the principal spokesman, as that which distinguishes the Synoptic from the Johannine Gospels. The one gives us a report certainly authentic, but probably incomplete; the other account is, beyond all doubt, a highly idealised portraiture, but seems to contain some traits directly copied from the original, which may well have escaped a less philosophical observer than Plato. Aristotle also furnishes us with some scanty notices which are of use in deciding between the two rival versions, although we cannot be sure that he had access to any better sources of information than are open to ourselves. By variously combining and reasoning from these data modern critics have produced a third Socrates, who is often little more than the embodiment of their own favourite opinions.

In England, the most generally accepted method seems to be that followed by Grote. This consists in taking the Platonic *Apologia* as a sufficiently faithful report of the defence actually made by Socrates on his trial, and piecing it on to the details supplied by Xenophon, or at least to as many of them as can be made to fit, without too obvious an accommodation of their meaning. If, however, we ask on what grounds a greater historical credibility is attributed to the *Apologia* than to the *Republic* or the *Phaedo*, none can be offered except the seemingly transparent truthfulness of the narrative itself, an argument which will not weigh much with those who remember how brilliant was Plato's talent for fiction, and how unscrupulously it could be employed for purposes of edification. The *Phaedo* puts an autobiographical statement into the mouth of Socrates which we only know to be imaginary because it involves the acceptance of a theory unknown to the real Socrates. Why, then, may not Plato have thought proper to introduce equally fictitious details into the speech delivered by his master before the dicastery, if, indeed, the speech, as we have it, be not a fancy composition from beginning to end?

Before we can come to a decision on this point it will be necessary briefly to recapitulate the statements in question. Socrates is defending himself against a capital charge. He fears that a prejudice respecting him may exist in the minds of the jury, and tries to explain how it arose without any fault of his, as follows:—A certain friend of his had asked the oracle at Delphi whether there was any man wiser than Socrates? The answer was that no man was wiser. Not being conscious of possessing any wisdom, great or small, he felt considerably surprised on hearing of this declaration, and thought to convince the god of falsehood by finding out some one wiser than himself. He first went to an eminent politician, who, however, proved, on examination, to be utterly ignorant, with the further disadvantage that it was impossible to convince him of his ignorance. On applying the same test to others a precisely similar result was obtained. It was only the handicraftsmen who could give a satisfactory account of themselves, and their knowledge of one trade made them fancy that they understood everything else equally well. Thus the meaning of the oracle was shown to be that God alone is truly wise, and that of all men he is wisest who, like Socrates, perceives that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. Ever since then, Socrates has made it his business to vindicate the divine veracity by seeking out and exposing every pretender to knowledge that he can find, a line of conduct which has made him extremely unpopular in Athens, while it has also won him a great reputation for wisdom, as people supposed that the matters on which he convicted others of ignorance were perfectly clear to himself.

The first difficulty that strikes one in connexion with this extraordinary story arises out of the oracle on which it all hinges. Had such a declaration been really made by the Pythia, would not Xenophon have eagerly quoted it as a proof of the high favour in which his hero stood with the

gods? <sup>1</sup> And how could Socrates have acquired so great a reputation before entering on the cross-examining career which alone made him conscious of any superiority over other men, and had alone won the admiration of his fellow-citizens? Our doubts are still further strengthened when we find that the historical Socrates did not by any means profess the sweeping scepticism attributed to him by Plato. So far from believing that ignorance was the common and necessary lot of all mankind, himself included, he held that action should, so far as possible, be entirely guided by knowledge; <sup>2</sup> that the man who did not always know what he was about resembled a slave; that the various virtues were only different forms of knowledge; that he himself possessed this knowledge, and was perfectly competent to share it with his friends. We do, indeed, find him very ready to convince ignorant and presumptuous persons of their deficiencies, but only that he may lead them, if well disposed, into the path of right understanding. He also thought that there were certain secrets which would remain for ever inaccessible to the human intellect, facts connected with the structure of the universe which the gods had reserved for their own exclusive cognisance. This, however, was, according to him, a kind of knowledge which, even if it could be obtained, would not be particularly worth having, and the search after which would leave us no leisure for more useful acquisitions. Nor does the Platonic Socrates seem to have been at the trouble of arguing against natural science. The subjects of his elenchus are the professors of such arts as politics, rhetoric, and poetry. Further, we have something stronger than a simple inference from the facts recorded by Xenophon; we have his express testimony to the fact that Socrates did not

<sup>1</sup> The oracle quoted in the *Apologia Socratis* attributed to Xenophon praises Socrates not for wisdom but for independence, justice, and temperance. Moreover, the work in question is held to be spurious by nearly every critic.

<sup>2</sup> *Mem.*, IV., vi., 1.

limit himself to confuting people who fancied they knew everything; here we must either have a direct reference to the *Apologia*, or to a theory identical with that which it embodies. Some stress has been laid on a phrase quoted by Xenophon himself as having been used by Hippias, which at first sight seems to support Plato's view. The Elian Sophist charges Socrates with practising a continual irony, refuting others and not submitting to be questioned himself;<sup>1</sup> an accusation which, we may observe in passing, is not borne out by the discussion that subsequently takes place between them. Here, however, we must remember that Socrates used to convey instruction under the form of a series of leading questions, the answers to which showed that his interlocutor understood and assented to the doctrine propounded. Such a method might easily give rise to the misconception that he refused to disclose his own particular opinions, and contented himself with eliciting those held by others. Finally, it is to be noted that the idea of fulfilling a religious mission, or exposing human ignorance *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, on which Grote lays such stress, has no place in Xenophon's conception of his master, although, had such an idea been really present, one can hardly imagine how it could have been passed over by a writer with whom piety amounted to superstition. It is, on the other hand, an idea which would naturally occur to a great religious reformer who proposed to base his reconstruction of society on faith in a supernatural order, and the desire to realise it here below.

So far we have contrasted the *Apologia* with the *Memorabilia*. We have now to consider in what relation it stands to Plato's other writings. The constructive dogmatic Socrates, who is a principal spokesman in some of them, differs widely from the sceptical Socrates of the famous *Defence*, and the difference has been urged as an argument for the historical authenticity of the latter.<sup>2</sup> Plato, it is implied, would not

<sup>1</sup> *Mem.*, IV., iv., 10.

<sup>2</sup> Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, II., 2, 103, note 3 *sub fin.*

have departed so far from his usual conception of the sage, had he not been desirous of reproducing the actual words spoken on so solemn an occasion. There are, however, several dialogues which seem to have been composed for the express purpose of illustrating the negative method supposed to have been described by Socrates to his judges, investigations the sole result of which is to upset the theories of other thinkers, or to show that ordinary men act without being able to assign a reason for their conduct. Even the *Republic* is professedly tentative in its procedure, and only follows out a train of thought which has presented itself almost by accident to the company. Unlike Charles Lamb's Scotchman, the leading spokesman does not bring, but find, and you are invited to cry halves to whatever turns up in his company.

Plato had, in truth, a conception of science which no knowledge then attained—perhaps one may add, no knowledge ever attainable—could completely satisfy. Even the rigour of mathematical demonstration did not content him, for mathematical truth itself rested on unproved assumptions, as we also, by the way, have lately discovered. Perhaps the Hegelian system would have fulfilled his requirements; perhaps not even that. Moreover, that the new order which he contemplated might be established, it was necessary to begin by making a clean sweep of all existing opinions. With the urbanity of an Athenian, the piety of a disciple, and the instinct of a great dramatic artist, he preferred to assume that this indispensable task had already been done by another. And of all preceding thinkers, who was so well qualified for the undertaking as Socrates? Who else had wielded the weapons of negative dialectic with such consummate dexterity? Who had assumed such a critical attitude towards the beliefs of his contemporaries? Who had been so anxious to find a point of attachment for every new truth in the minds of his interlocutors? Who therefore could, with such

plausibility, be put forward in the guise of one who laid claim to no wisdom on his own account? The son of Phaenarcté seemed made to be the Baptist of a Greek Messiah; but Plato, in treating him as such, has drawn a discreet veil over the whole positive side of his predecessor's teaching, and to discover what this was we must place ourselves under the guidance of Xenophon's more faithful report.

Not that Xenophon is to be taken as a perfectly accurate exponent of the Socratic philosophy. His work, it must be remembered, was primarily intended to vindicate Socrates from a charge of impiety and immoral teaching, not to expound a system which he was perhaps incompetent to appreciate or understand. We are bound to accept everything that he relates; we are bound to include nothing that he does not relate; but we may fairly readjust the proportions of his sketch. It is here that a judicious use of Plato will furnish us with the most valuable assistance. He grasped Socratism in all its parts and developed it in all directions, so that by following back the lines of his system to their origin we shall be put on the proper track and shall know where to look for the suggestions which were destined to be so magnificently worked out.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It may possibly be asked, Why, if Plato gave only an ideal picture of Socrates, are we to accept his versions of the Sophistic teaching as literally exact? The answer is that he was compelled, by the nature of the case, to create an imaginary Socrates, while he could have no conceivable object in ascribing views which he did not himself hold to well-known historical personages. Assuming an unlimited right of making fictitious statements for the public good, his principles would surely not have permitted him wantonly to calumniate his innocent contemporaries by foisting on them odious theories for which they were not responsible. Had nobody held such opinions as those attributed to Thrasymachus in the *Republic* there would have been no object in attacking them; and if anybody held them, why not Thrasymachus as well as another? With regard to the veracity of the *Apologia*, Grote, in his work on Plato (I. 291), quotes a passage from Aristeides the rhetor, stating that all the companions of Socrates agreed about the Delphic oracle, and the Socratic disclaimer of knowledge. This, however, proves too much, for it shows that Aristeides quite overlooked the absence of any reference to either point in Xenophon, and therefore cannot be trusted to give an accurate report of the other authorities.

## II.

Before entering on our task of reconstruction, we must turn aside to consider with what success the same enterprise has been attempted by modern German criticism, especially by its chief contemporary representative, the last and most distinguished historian of Greek philosophy. The result at which Zeller, following Schleiermacher, arrives is that the great achievement of Socrates was to put forward an adequate idea of knowledge; in other words, to show what true science ought to be, and what, as yet, it had never been, with the addition of a demand that all action should be based on such a scientific knowledge as its only sure foundation.<sup>1</sup> To know a thing was to know its essence, its concept, the assemblage of qualities which together constitute its definition, and make it to be what it is. Former thinkers had also sought for knowledge, but not *as* knowledge, not with a clear notion of what it was that they really wanted. Socrates, on the other hand, required that men should always be prepared to give a strict account of the end which they had in view, and of the means by which they hoped to gain it. Further, it had been customary to single out for exclusive attention that quality of an object by which the observer happened to be most strongly impressed, passing over all the others; the consequence of which was that the philosophers had taken a one-sided view of facts, with the result of falling into hopeless disagreement among themselves; the Sophists had turned these contradictory points of view against one another, and thus effected their mutual destruction; while the dissolution of objective certainty had led to a corresponding dissolution of moral truth. Socrates accepts the Sophistic scepticism so far as it applies to the existing state of science, but does not push it to the same fatal con-

<sup>1</sup> *Ph. d. Gr.*, II., a, 93 ff

clusion ; he grants that current beliefs should be thoroughly sifted and, if necessary, discarded, but only that more solid convictions may be substituted for them. Here a place is found for his method of self-examination, and for the self-conscious ignorance attributed to him by Plato. Comparing his notions on particular subjects with his idea of what knowledge in general ought to be, he finds that they do not satisfy it ; he knows that he knows nothing. He then has recourse to other men who declare that they possess the knowledge of which he is in search, but their pretended certainty vanishes under the application of his dialectic test. This is the famous Socratic irony. Finally, he attempts to come at real knowledge, that is to say, the construction of definitions, by employing that inductive method with the invention of which he is credited by Aristotle. This method consists in bringing together a number of simple and familiar examples from common experience, generalising from them, and correcting the generalisations by comparison with negative instances. The reasons that led Socrates to restrict his enquiries to human interests are rather lightly passed over by Zeller ; he seems at a loss how to reconcile the alleged reform of scientific method with the complete abandonment of those physical investigations which, we are told, had suffered so severely from being cultivated on a different system.

There seem to be three principal points aimed at in the very ingenious theory which we have endeavoured to summarise as adequately as space would permit. Zeller apparently wishes to bring Socrates into line with the great tradition of early Greek thought, to distinguish him markedly from the Sophists, and to trace back to his initiative the intellectual method of Plato and Aristotle. We cannot admit that the threefold attempt has succeeded. It seems to us that a picture into which so much Platonic colouring has been thrown would for that reason alone, and without any further objection, be open to very grave suspicion. But even accepting the historical accuracy of everything that Plato has



said, or of as much as may be required, our critic's inferences are not justified by his authorities. Neither the Xenophontic nor the Platonic Socrates seeks knowledge for its own sake, nor does either of them offer a satisfactory definition of knowledge, or, indeed, any definition at all. Aristotle was the first to explain what science meant, and he did so, not by developing the Socratic notion, but by incorporating it with the other methods independently struck out by physical philosophy. What would science be without the study of causation? and was not this ostentatiously neglected by the founder of conceptualism? Again, Plato, in the *Theætétus*, makes his Socrates criticise various theories of knowledge, but does not even hint that the critic had himself a better theory than any of them in reserve. The author of the *Phædo* and the *Republic* was less interested in reforming the methods of scientific investigation than in directing research towards that which he believed to be alone worth knowing, the eternal ideas which underlie phenomena. The historical Socrates had no suspicion of transcendental realities; but he thought that a knowledge of physics was unattainable, and would be worthless if attained. By knowledge he meant art rather than science, and his method of defining was intended not for the latter but for the former. Those, he said, who can clearly express what they want to do are best secured against failure, and best able to communicate their skill to others. He made out that the various virtues were different kinds of knowledge, not from any extraordinary opinion of its preciousness, but because he thought that knowledge was the variable element in volition and that everything else was constant. Zeller dwells strongly on the Socratic identification of cognition with conduct; but how could anyone who fell at the first step into such a confusion of ideas be fitted either to explain what science meant or to come forward as the reformer of its methods? Nor is it correct to say that Socrates approached an object from every point of view, and took note of all its characteristic qualities. On the contrary, one would

be inclined to charge him with the opposite tendency, with fixing his gaze too exclusively on some one quality, that to him, as a teacher, was the most interesting. His identification of virtue with knowledge is an excellent instance of this habit. So also is his identification of beauty with serviceableness, and his general disposition to judge of everything by a rather narrow standard of utility. On the other hand, Greek physical speculation would have gained nothing by a minute attention to definitions, and most probably would have been mischievously hampered by it. Aristotle, at any rate, prefers the method of Democritus to the method of Plato; and Aristotle himself is much nearer the truth when he follows on the Ionian or Sicilian track than when he attempts to define what in the then existing state of knowledge could not be satisfactorily defined. To talk about the various elements—earth, air, fire, and water—as things with which everybody was already familiar, may have been a crude unscientific procedure; to analyse them into different combinations of the hot and the cold, the light and the heavy, the dry and the moist, was not only erroneous but fatally misleading; it was arresting enquiry, and doing precisely what the Sophists had been accused of doing, that is, substituting the conceit for the reality of wisdom. It was, no doubt, necessary that mathematical terms should be defined; but where are we told that geometers had to learn this truth from Socrates? The sciences of quantity, which could hardly have advanced a step without the help of exact conceptions, were successfully cultivated before he was born, and his influence was used to discourage rather than to promote their accurate study. With regard to the comprehensive all-sided examination of objects on which Zeller lays so much stress, and which he seems to regard as something peculiar to the conceptual method, it had unquestionably been neglected by Parmenides and Heracleitus; but had not the deficiency been already made good by their immediate successors? What else is the

philosophy of Empedocles, the Atomists, and Anaxagoras, but an attempt—we must add, a by no means unsuccessful attempt—to recombine the opposing aspects of Nature which had been too exclusively insisted on at Ephesus and Elea? Again, to say that the Sophists had destroyed physical speculation by setting these partial aspects of truth against one another is, in our opinion, equally erroneous. First of all, Zeller here falls into the old mistake, long ago corrected by Grote, of treating the class in question as if they all held similar views. We have shown in the preceding chapter, if indeed it required to be shown, that the Sophists were divided into two principal schools, of which one was devoted to the cultivation of physics. Protagoras and Gorgias were the only sceptics; and it was not by setting one theory against another, but by working out a single theory to its last consequences, that their scepticism was reached; with no more effect, be it observed, than was exercised by Pyrrho on the science of his day. For the two great thinkers, with the aid of whose conclusions it was attempted to discredit objective reality, were already left far behind at the close of the fifth century; and neither their reasonings nor reasonings based on theirs, could exercise much influence on a generation which had Anaxagoras on Nature and the encyclopaedia of Democritus in its hands. There was, however, one critic who really did what the Sophists are charged with doing; who derided and denounced physical science on the ground that its professors were hopelessly at issue with one another; and this critic was no other than Socrates himself. He maintained, on purely popular and superficial grounds, the same sceptical attitude to which Protagoras gave at least the semblance of a psychological justification. And he wished that attention should be concentrated on the very subjects which Protagoras undertook to teach—namely, ethics, politics, and dialectics. Once more, to say that Socrates was conscious of not coming up to his own

standard of true knowledge is inconsistent with Xenophon's account, where he is represented as quite ready to answer every question put to him, and to offer a definition of everything that he considered worth defining. His scepticism, if it ever existed, was as artificial and short-lived as the scepticism of Descartes.

The truth is that no man who philosophised at all was ever more free from tormenting doubts and self-questionings ; no man was ever more thoroughly satisfied with himself than Socrates. Let us add that, from a Heilenic point of view, no man had ever more reason for self-satisfaction. None, he observed in his last days, had ever lived a better or a happier life. Naturally possessed of a powerful constitution, he had so strengthened it by habitual moderation and constant training that up to the hour of his death, at the age of seventy, he enjoyed perfect bodily and mental health. Neither hardship nor exposure, neither abstinence nor indulgence in what to other men would have been excess, could make any impression on that adamant frame. We know not how much truth there may be in the story that, at one time, he was remarkable for the violence of his passions ; at any rate, when our principal informants knew him he was conspicuous for the ease with which he resisted temptation, and for the imperturbable sweetness of his temper. His wants, being systematically reduced to a minimum, were easily satisfied, and his cheerfulness never failed. He enjoyed Athenian society so much that nothing but military duty could draw him away from it. For Socrates was a veteran who had served through three arduous campaigns, and could give lectures on the duties of a general, which so high an authority as Xenophon thought worth reporting. He seems to have been on excellent terms with his fellow-citizens, never having been engaged in a lawsuit, either as plaintiff or defendant, until the fatal prosecution which brought his career to a close. He could, on that occasion, refuse to prepare a defence, proudly observing that his whole

life had been a preparation, that no man had ever seen him commit an unjust or impious deed. The anguished cries of doubt uttered by Italian and Sicilian thinkers could have no meaning for one who, on principle, abstained from ontological speculations ; the uncertainty of human destiny which hung like a thunder-cloud over Pindar and the tragic poets had melted away under the sunshine of arguments, demonstrating, to his satisfaction, the reality and beneficence of a supernatural Providence. For he believed that the gods would afford guidance in doubtful conjunctures to all who approached their oracles in a reverent spirit ; while, over and above the Divine counsels accessible to all men, he was personally attended by an oracular voice, a mysterious monitor, which told him what to avoid, though not what to do, a circumstance well worthy of note, for it shows that he did not, like Plato, attribute every kind of right action to divine inspiration.

It may be said that all this only proves Socrates to have been, in his own estimation, a good and happy, but not necessarily a wise man. With him, however, the last of these conditions was inseparable from the other two. He was prepared to demonstrate, step by step, that his conduct was regulated by fixed and ascertainable principles, and was of the kind best adapted to secure happiness both for himself and for others. That there were deficiencies in his ethical theory may readily be admitted. The idea of universal beneficence seems never to have dawned on his horizon ; and chastity was to him what sobriety is to us, mainly a self-regarding virtue. We do not find that he ever recommended conjugal fidelity to husbands ; he regarded prostitution very much as it is still, unhappily, regarded by men of the world among ourselves ; and in opposing the darker vices of his countrymen, it was the excess rather than the perversion of appetite which he condemned. These, however, are points which do not interfere with our general contention that Socrates adopted the ethical standard of his time, that he adopted it on rational

grounds, that having adopted he acted up to it, and that in so reasoning and acting he satisfied his own ideal of absolute wisdom.

Even as regards physical phenomena, Socrates, so far from professing complete ignorance, held a very positive theory which he was quite ready to share with his friends. He taught what is called the doctrine of final causes; and, so far as our knowledge goes, he was either the first to teach it, or, at any rate, the first to prove the existence of divine agencies by its means. The old poets had occasionally attributed the origin of man and other animals to supernatural intelligence, but, apparently, without being led to their conviction by any evidence of design displayed in the structure of organised creatures. Socrates, on the other hand, went through the various external organs of the human body with great minuteness, and showed, to his own satisfaction, that they evinced the workings of a wise and beneficent Artist. We shall have more to say further on about this whole argument; here we only wish to observe that, intrinsically, it does not differ very much from the speculations which its author derided as the fruit of an impertinent curiosity; and that no one who now employed it would, for a single moment, be called an agnostic or a sceptic.

Must we, then, conclude that Socrates was, after all, nothing but a sort of glorified Greek Paley, whose principal achievement was to present the popular ideas of his time on morals and politics under the form of a rather grovelling utilitarianism; and whose 'evidences of natural and revealed religion' bore much the same relation to Greek mythology as the corresponding lucubrations of the worthy archdeacon bore to Christian theology? Even were this the whole truth, it should be remembered that there was an interval of twenty-three centuries between the two teachers, which ought to be taken due account of in estimating their relative importance. Socrates, with his closely-reasoned, vividly-illustrated ethical

expositions, had gained a tactical advantage over the vague declamations of Gnostic poetry and the isolated aphorisms of the Seven Sages, comparable to that possessed by Xenophon and his Ten Thousand in dealing with the unwieldy masses of Persian infantry and the undisciplined mountaineers of Carduchia ; while his idea of a uniformly beneficent Creator marked a still greater advance on the jealous divinities of Herodotus. On the other hand, as against Hume and Bentham, Paley's pseudo-scientific paraphernalia were like the muskets and cannon of an Asiatic army when confronted by the English conquerors of India. Yet had Socrates done no more than contributed to philosophy the idea just alluded to, his place in the evolution of thought, though honourable, would not have been what it is justly held to be—unique.

### III.

So far we have been occupied in disputing the views of others ; it is now time that our own view should be stated. We maintain, then, that Socrates first brought out the idea, not of knowledge, but of mind in its full significance ; that he first studied the whole circle of human interests as affected by mind ; that, in creating dialectics, he gave this study its proper method, and simultaneously gave his method the only subject-matter on which it could be profitably exercised ; finally, that by these immortal achievements philosophy was constituted, and received a threefold verification—first, from the life of its founder ; secondly, from the success with which his spirit was communicated to a band of followers ; thirdly, from the whole subsequent history of thought. Before substantiating these assertions point by point, it will be expedient to glance at the external influences which may be supposed to have moulded the great intellect and the great character now under consideration.

Socrates was, before all things, an Athenian. To under-

stand him we must first understand what the Athenian character was in itself and independently of disturbing circumstances. Our estimate of that character is too apt to be biassed by the totally exceptional position which Athens occupied during the fifth century B.C. The possession of empire developed qualities in her children which they had not exhibited at an earlier period, and which they ceased to exhibit when empire had been lost. Among these must be reckoned military genius, an adventurous and romantic spirit, and a high capacity for poetical and artistic production—qualities displayed, it is true, by every Greek race, but by some for a longer and by others for a shorter period. Now, the tradition of greatness does not seem to have gone very far back with Athens. Her legendary history, what we have of it, is singularly unexciting. The same rather monotonous though edifying story of shelter accorded to persecuted fugitives, of successful resistance to foreign invasions, and of devoted self-sacrifice to the State, meets us again and again. The Attic drama itself shows how much more stirring was the legendary lore of other tribes. One need only look at the few remaining pieces which treat of patriotic subjects to appreciate the difference; and an English reader may easily convince himself of it by comparing Mr. Swinburne's *Erechtheus* with the same author's *Atalanta*. There is a want of vivid individuality perceptible all through. Even Theseus, the great national hero, strikes one as a rather tame sort of personage compared with Perseus, Heraclês, and Jason. No Athenian figures prominently in the *Iliad*; and on the only two occasions when Pindar was employed to commemorate an Athenian victory at the Panhellenic games, he seems unable to associate it with any legendary glories in the past. The circumstances which for a long time made Attic history so barren of incident are the same to which its subsequent importance is due. The relation in which Attica stood to the rest of Greece was somewhat similar to the relation in



which Tuscany, long afterwards, stood to the rest of Italy. It was the region least disturbed by foreign immigration, and therefore became the seat of a slower but steadier mental development. It was among those to whom war, revolution, colonisation, and commerce brought the most many-sided experience that intellectual activity was most speedily ripened. Literature, art, and science were cultivated with extraordinary success by the Greek cities of Asia Minor, and even in some parts of the old country, before Athens had a single man of genius, except Solon, to boast of. But along with the enjoyment of undisturbed tranquillity, habits of self-government, orderliness, and reasonable reflection were establishing themselves, which finally enabled her to inherit all that her predecessors in the race had accomplished, and to add, what alone they still wanted, the crowning consecration of self-conscious mind. There had, simultaneously, been growing up an intensely patriotic sentiment, due, in part, to the long-continued independence of Attica; in part, also, we may suppose, to the union, at a very early period, of her different townships into a single city. The same causes had, however, also favoured a certain love of comfort, a jovial pleasure-seeking disposition often degenerating into coarse sensuality, a thriftiness, and an inclination to grasp at any source of profit, coupled with extreme credulity where hopes of profit were excited, together forming an element of prose-comedy which mingles strangely with the tragic grandeur of Athens in her imperial age, and emerges into greater prominence after her fall, until it becomes the predominant characteristic of her later days. It is, we may observe, the contrast between these two aspects of Athenian life which gives the plays of Aristophanes their unparalleled comic effect, and it is their very awkward conjunction which makes Euripides so unequal and disappointing a poet. We find, then, that the original Athenian character is marked by reasonable reflection, by patriotism, and by a tendency towards self-seeking

materialism. Let us take note of these three qualities, for we shall meet with them again in the philosophy of Socrates.

Empire, when it came to Athens, came almost unsought. The Persian invasions had made her a great naval power ; the free choice of her allies placed her at the head of a great maritime confederacy. The sudden command of vast resources and the tension accumulated during ages of repose, stimulated all her faculties into preternatural activity. Her spirit was steeled almost to the Dorian temper, and entered into victorious rivalry with the Dorian Muse. Not only did her fleet sweep the sea, but her army, for once, defeated Theban hoplites in the field. The grand choral harmonies of Sicilian song, the Sicyonian recitals of epic adventure, were rolled back into a framework for the spectacle of individual souls meeting one another in argument, expostulation, entreaty, and defiance ; a nobler Doric edifice rose to confront the Aeginetan temple of Athênê ; the strained energy of Aeginetan combatants was relaxed into attitudes of reposing power, and the eternal smile on their faces was deepened into the sadness of unfathomable thought. But to the violet-crowned city, Athênê was a giver of wealth and wisdom rather than of prowess ; her empire rested on the contributions of unwilling allies, and on a technical proficiency which others were sure to equal in time ; so that the Corinthian orators could say with justice that Athenian skill was more easily acquired than Dorian valour. At once receptive and communicative, Athens absorbed all that Greece could teach her, and then returned it in a more elaborate form, but without the freshness of its earliest inspiration. Yet there was one field that still afforded scope for creative originality. Habits of analysis, though fatal to spontaneous production, were favourable, or rather were necessary, to the growth of a new philosophy. After the exhaustion of every limited idealism, there remained that highest idealisation which is the reduction of all past experience to a method available for the guidance

of all future action. To accomplish this last enterprise it was necessary that a single individual should gather up in himself the spirit diffused through a whole people, bestowing on it by that very concentration the capability of an infinitely wider extension when its provisional representative should have passed away from the scene.

Socrates represents the popular Athenian character much as Richardson, in a different sphere, represents the English middle-class character—represents it, that is to say, elevated into transcendent genius. Except this elevation, there was nothing anomalous about him. If he was exclusively critical, rationalising, unadventurous, prosaic; in a word, as the German historians say, something of a Philistine; so, we may suspect, were the mass of his countrymen. His illustrations were taken from such plebeian employments as cattle-breeding, cobbling, weaving, and sailing. These were his 'touches of things common' which at last 'rose to touch the spheres.' He both practised and inculcated virtues, the value of which is especially evident in humble life—frugality and endurance. But he also represents the *Dêmos* in its sovereign capacity as legislator and judge. Without aspiring to be an orator or statesman, he reserves the ultimate power of arbitration and election. He submits candidates for office to a severe scrutiny, and demands from all men an even stricter account of their lives than retiring magistrates had to give of their conduct, when in power, to the people. He applies the judicial method of cross-examination to the detection of error, and the parliamentary method of joint deliberation to the discovery of truth. He follows out the democratic principles of free speech and self-government, by submitting every question that arises to public discussion, and insisting on no conclusion that does not command the willing assent of his audience. Finally, his conversation, popular in form, was popular also in this respect, that everybody who chose to listen might have the

benefit of it gratuitously. Here we have a great change from the scornful dogmatism of Heracleitus, and the virtually oligarchic exclusiveness of the teachers who demanded high fees for their instruction.

To be free and to rule over freemen were, with Socrates, as with every Athenian, the goals of ambition, only his freedom meant absolute immunity from the control of passion or habit; government meant superior knowledge, and government of freemen meant the power of producing intellectual conviction. In his eyes, the possessor of any art was, so far, a ruler, and the only true ruler, being obeyed under severe penalties by all who stood in need of his skill. But the royal art which he himself exercised, without expressly laying claim to it, was that which assigns its proper sphere to every other art, and provides each individual with the employment which his peculiar faculties demand. This is Athenian liberty and Athenian imperialism carried into education, but so idealised and purified that they can hardly be recognised at first sight.

The philosophy of Socrates is more obviously related to the practical and religious tendencies of his countrymen. Neither he nor they had any sympathy with the cosmological speculations which seemed to be unconnected with human interests, and to trench on matters beyond the reach of human knowledge. The old Attic sentiment was averse from adventures of any kind, whether political or intellectual. Yet the new spirit of enquiry awakened by Ionian thought could not fail to react powerfully on the most intelligent man among the most intelligent people of Hellas. Above all, one paramount idea which went beyond the confines of the old philosophy had been evolved by the differentiation of knowledge from its object, and had been presented, although under a materialising form, by Anaxagoras to the Athenian public. Socrates took up this idea, which expressed what was highest and most distinctive in the national

character, and applied it to the development of ethical speculation. We have seen, in the last chapter, how an attempt was made to base moral truth on the results of natural philosophy, and how that attempt was combated by the Humanistic school. It could not be doubtful which side Socrates would take in this controversy. That he paid any attention to the teaching of Protagoras and Gorgias is, indeed, highly problematic, for their names are never mentioned by Xenophon, and the Platonic dialogues in which they figure are evidently fictitious. Nevertheless, he had to a certain extent arrived at the same conclusion with them, although by a different path. He was opposed, on religious grounds, to the theories which an acute psychological analysis had led them to reject. Accordingly, the idea of Nature is almost entirely absent from his conversation, and, like Protagoras, he is guided solely by regard for human interests. To the objection that positive laws were always changing, he victoriously replied that it was because they were undergoing an incessant adaptation to varying needs.<sup>1</sup> Like Protagoras, again, he was a habitual student of old Greek literature, and sedulously sought out the practical lessons in which it abounded. To him, as to the early poets and sages, *Sôphrosynê*, or self-knowledge and self-command taken together, was the first and most necessary of all virtues. Unlike them, however, he does not simply accept it from tradition, but gives it a philosophical foundation—the newly-established distinction between mind and body; a distinction not to be confounded with the old Psychism, although Plato, for his reforming purposes, shortly afterwards linked the two together. The disembodied spirit of mythology was a mere shadow or memory, equally destitute of solidity and of understanding; with Socrates, mind meant the personal consciousness which retains its continuous identity through every change, and as against every passing impulse. Like

<sup>1</sup> In the conversation with *Hippias* already referred to.

the Humanists, he made it the seat of knowledge—more than the Humanists, he gave it the control of appetite. In other words, he adds the idea of will to that of intellect; but instead of treating them as distinct faculties or functions, he absolutely identifies them. Mind having come to be first recognised as a knowing power, carried over its association with knowledge into the volitional sphere, and the two were first disentangled by Aristotle, though very imperfectly even by him. Yet no thinker helped so much to make the confusion apparent as the one to whom it was due. Socrates deliberately insisted that those who knew the good must necessarily be good themselves. He taught that every virtue was a science; courage, for example, was a knowledge of the things which should or should not be feared; temperance, a knowledge of what should or should not be desired, and so forth. Such an account of virtue would, perhaps, be sufficient if all men did what, in their opinion, they ought to do; and, however strange it may seem, Socrates assumed that such was actually the case.<sup>1</sup> The paradox, even if accepted at the moment by his youthful friends, was sure to be rejected, on examination, by cooler heads, and its rejection would prove that the whole doctrine was essentially unsound. Various causes prevented Socrates from perceiving what seemed so clear to duller intelligences than his. First of all, he did not separate duty from personal interest. A true Athenian, he recommended temperance and righteousness very largely on account of the material advantages they secured. That the agreeable and the honourable, the expedient and the just, frequently came into collision, was at that time a rhetorical commonplace; and it might be supposed that, if they were shown to coincide, no motive to misconduct but ignorance could exist. Then, again, being accustomed to compare conduct of every kind with the practice of such arts as flute-playing, he had come to take knowledge in a rather extended

<sup>1</sup> *Mem.* III. ix., 4.

sense, just as we do when we say, indifferently, that a man knows geometry and that he knows how to draw. Aristotle himself did not see more clearly than Socrates that moral habits are only to be acquired by incessant practice ; only the earlier thinker would have observed that knowledge of every kind is gained by the same laborious repetition of particular actions. To the obvious objection that, in this case, morality cannot, like theoretical truth, be imparted by the teacher to his pupils, but must be won by the learner for himself, he would probably have replied that all truth is really evolved by the mind from itself, and that he, for that very reason, disclaimed the name of a teacher, and limited himself to the seemingly humbler task of awakening dormant capacities in others.

An additional influence, not the less potent because unacknowledged, was the same craving for a principle of unity that had impelled early Greek thought to seek for the sole substance or cause of physical phenomena in some single material element, whether water, air, or fire ; and just as these various principles were finally decomposed into the multitudinous atoms of Leucippus, so also, but much more speedily, did the general principle of knowledge tend to decompose itself into innumerable cognitions of the partial ends or utilities which action was directed to achieve. The need of a comprehensive generalisation again made itself felt, and all good was summed up under the head of happiness. The same difficulties recurred under another form. To define happiness proved not less difficult than to define use or practical knowledge. Three points of view offered themselves, and all three had been more or less anticipated by Socrates. Happiness might mean unmixed pleasure, or the exclusive cultivation of man's higher nature, or voluntary subordination to a larger whole. The founder of Athenian philosophy used to present each of these, in turn, as an end, without recognising the possibility of a conflict between

them ; and it certainly would be a mistake to represent them as constantly opposed. Yet a truly scientific principle must either prove their identity, or make its choice among them, or discover something better. Plato seems to have taken up the three methods, one after the other, without coming to any very satisfactory conclusion. Aristotle identified the first two, but failed, or rather did not attempt to harmonise them with the third. Succeeding schools tried various combinations, laying more or less stress on different principles at different periods, till the will of an omnipotent Creator was substituted for every human standard. With the decline of dogmatic theology we have seen them all come to life again, and the old battle is still being fought out under our eyes. Speaking broadly, it may be said that the method which we have placed first on the list is more particularly represented in England, the second in France, and the last in Germany. Yet they refuse to be separated by any rigid line of demarcation, and each tends either to combine with or to pass into one or both of the rival theories. Modern utilitarianism, as constituted by John Stuart Mill, although avowedly based on the paramount value of pleasure, in admitting qualitative differences among enjoyments, and in subordinating individual to social good, introduces principles of action which are not, properly speaking, hedonistic. Neither is the idea of the whole by any means free from ambiguity. We have party, church, nation, order, progress, race, humanity, and the sum total of sensitive beings, all putting in their claims to figure as that entity. Where the pursuit of any single end gives rise to conflicting pretensions, a wise man will check them by reference to the other accredited standards, and will cherish a not unreasonable expectation that the evolution of life is tending to bring them all into ultimate agreement.

Returning to Socrates, we must further note that his identification of virtue with science, though it does not ex-



press the whole truth, expresses a considerable part of it, especially as to him conduct was a much more complex problem than it is to some modern teachers. Only those who believe in the existence of intuitive and infallible moral perceptions can consistently maintain that nothing is easier than to know our duty, and nothing harder than to do it. Even then, the intuitions must extend beyond general principles, and also inform us how and where to apply them. That no such inward illumination exists is sufficiently shown by experience; so much so that the mischief done by foolish people with good intentions has become proverbial. Modern casuists have, indeed, drawn a distinction between the intention and the act, making us responsible for the purity of the former, not for the consequences of the latter. Though based on the Socratic division between mind and body, this distinction would not have commended itself to Socrates. His object was not to save souls from sin, but to save individuals, families, and states from the ruin which ignorance of fact entails.

If we enlarge our point of view so as to cover the moral influence of knowledge on society taken collectively, its relative importance will be vastly increased. When Auguste Comte assigns the supreme direction of progress to advancing science, and when Buckle, following Fichte, makes the totality of human action depend on the totality of human knowledge, they are virtually attributing to intellectual education an even more decisive part than it played in the Socratic ethics. Even those who reject the theory, when pushed to such an extreme, will admit that the same quantity of self-devotion must produce a far greater effect when it is guided by deeper insight into the conditions of existence.

The same principle may be extended in a different direction if we substitute for knowledge, in its narrower significance, the more general conception of associated feeling. We shall then see that belief, habit, emotion, and instinct are only

different stages of the same process—the process by which experience is organised and made subservient to vital activity. The simplest reflex and the highest intellectual conviction are alike based on sensori-motor mechanism, and, so far, differ only through the relative complexity and instability of the nervous connexions involved. Knowledge is life in the making, and when it fails to control practice fails only by coming into conflict with passion—that is to say, with the consolidated results of an earlier experience. Physiology offers another analogy to the Socratic method which must not be overlooked. Socrates recommended the formation of definite conceptions because, among other advantages, they facilitated the diffusion of useful knowledge. So, also, the organised associations of feelings are not only serviceable to individuals, but may be transmitted to offspring with a regularity proportioned to their definiteness. How naturally these deductions follow from the doctrine under consideration, is evident from their having been, to a certain extent, already drawn by Plato. His plan for the systematic education of feeling under scientific supervision answers to the first; his plan for breeding an improved race of citizens by placing marriage under State control answers to the second. Yet it is doubtful whether Plato's predecessor would have sanctioned any scheme tending to substitute an external compulsion, whether felt or not, for freedom and individual initiative, and a blind instinct for the self-consciousness which can give an account of its procedure at every step. He would bring us back from social physics and physiology to psychology, and from psychology to dialectic philosophy.

#### IV.

To Socrates himself the strongest reason for believing in the identity of conviction and practice was, perhaps, that he had made it a living reality. With him to know the right

and to do it were the same. In this sense we have already said that his life was the first verification of his philosophy. And just as the results of his ethical teaching can only be ideally separated from their application to his conduct, so also these results themselves cannot be kept apart from the method by which they were reached; nor is the process by which he reached them for himself distinguishable from the process by which he communicated them to his friends. In touching on this point, we touch on that which is greatest and most distinctively original in the Socratic system, or rather in the Socratic impulse to systematisation of every kind. What it was will be made clearer by reverting to the central conception of mind. With Protagoras mind meant an ever-changing stream of feeling; with Gorgias it was a principle of hopeless isolation, the interchange of thoughts between one consciousness and another, by means of signs, being an illusion. Socrates, on the contrary, attributed to it a steadfast control over passion, and a unifying function in society through its essentially synthetic activity, its need of co-operation and responsive assurance. He saw that the reason which overcomes animal desire tends to draw men together just as sensuality tends to drive them into hostile collision. If he recommended temperance on account of the increased egoistic pleasure which it secures, he recommended it also as making the individual a more efficient instrument for serving the community. If he inculcated obedience to the established laws, it was no doubt partly on grounds of enlightened self-interest, but also because union and harmony among citizens were thereby secured. And if he insisted on the necessity of forming definite conceptions, it was with the same twofold reference to personal and public advantage. Along with the diffusive, social character of mind he recognised its essential spontaneity. In a commonwealth where all citizens were free and equal, there must also be freedom and equality of reason. Having worked out a theory of life for himself, he

desired that all other men should, so far as possible, pass through the same bracing discipline. Here we have the secret of his famous erotetic method. He did not, like the Sophists, give continuous lectures, nor profess, like some of them, to answer every question that might be put to him. On the contrary, he put a series of questions to all who came in his way, generally in the form of an alternative, one side of which seemed self-evidently true and the other self-evidently false, arranged so as to lead the respondent, step by step, to the conclusion which it was desired that he should accept. Socrates did not invent this method. It had long been practised in the Athenian law-courts as a means for extracting from the opposite party admissions which could not be otherwise obtained, whence it had passed into the tragic drama, and into the discussion of philosophical problems. Nowhere else was the analytical power of Greek thought so brilliantly displayed; for before a contested proposition could be subjected to this mode of treatment, it had to be carefully discriminated from confusing adjuncts, considered under all the various meanings which it might possibly be made to bear, subdivided, if it was complex, into two or more distinct assertions, and linked by a minute chain of demonstration to the admission by which its validity was established or overthrown.

Socrates, then, did not create the cross-examining elenchus, but he gave it two new and very important applications. So far as we can make out, it had hitherto been only used (again, after the example of the law-courts) for the purpose of detecting error or intentional deceit. He made it an instrument for introducing his own convictions into the minds of others, but so that his interlocutors seemed to be discovering them for themselves, and were certainly learning how, in their turn, to practise the same didactic interrogation on a future occasion. And he also used it for the purpose of logical self-discipline in a manner which will be

presently explained. Of course, Socrates also employed the erotetic method as a means of confutation, and, in his hands, it powerfully illustrated what we have called the negative moment of Greek thought. To prepare the ground for new truth it was necessary to clear away the misconceptions which were likely to interfere with its admission; or, if Socrates himself had nothing to impart, he could at any rate purge away the false conceit of knowledge from unformed minds, and hold them back from attempting difficult tasks until they were properly qualified for the undertaking. For example, a certain Glauco, a brother of Plato, had attempted to address the public assembly, when he was not yet twenty years of age, and was naturally quite unfitted for the task. At Athens, where every citizen had a voice in his country's affairs, obstruction, whether intentional or not, was very summarily dealt with. Speakers who had nothing to say that was worth hearing were forcibly removed from the *bêma* by the police; and this fate had already more than once befallen the youthful orator, much to the annoyance of his friends, who could not prevail on him to refrain from repeating the experiment, when Socrates took the matter in hand. One or two adroit compliments on his ambition drew Glauco into a conversation with the veteran dialectician on the aims and duties of a statesman. It was agreed that his first object should be to benefit the country, and that a good way of achieving this end would be to increase its wealth, which, again, could be done either by augmenting the receipts or by diminishing the expenditure. Could Glauco tell what was the present revenue of Athens, and whence it was derived?—No; he had not studied that question.—Well then, perhaps, he had some useful retrenchments to propose.—No; he had not studied that either. But the State might, he thought, be enriched at the expense of its enemies.—A good idea, if we can be sure of beating them first! Only, to avoid the risk of attacking somebody who is stronger than ourselves, we must

know what are the enemy's military resources as compared with our own. To begin with the latter: Can Glauco tell how many ships and soldiers Athens has at her disposal?—No, he does not at this moment remember.—Then, perhaps, he has it all written down somewhere?—He must confess not. So the conversation goes on until Socrates has convicted his ambitious young friend of possessing no accurate information whatever about political questions.<sup>1</sup>

Xenophon has recorded another dialogue in which a young man named Euthydêmus, who was also in training for a statesman, and who, as he supposed, had learned a great deal more out of books than Socrates could teach him, is brought to see how little he knows about ethical science. He is asked, Can a man be a good citizen without being just? No, he cannot.—Can Euthydêmus tell what acts are just? Yes, certainly, and also what are unjust.—Under which head does he put such actions as lying, deceiving, harming, enslaving?—Under the head of injustice.—But suppose a hostile people are treated in the various manners specified, is that unjust?—No, but it was understood that only one's friends were meant.—Well, if a general encourages his own army by false statements, or a father deceives his child into taking medicine, or your friend seems likely to commit suicide, and you purloin a deadly weapon from him, is that unjust?—No, we must add 'for the purpose of harming' to our definition. Socrates, however, does not stop here, but goes on cross-examining until the unhappy student is reduced to a state of hopeless bewilderment and shame. He is then brought to perceive the necessity of self-knowledge, which is explained to mean knowledge of one's own powers. As a further exercise Euthydêmus is put through his facings on the subject of good and evil. Health, wealth, strength, wisdom and beauty are mentioned as unquestionable goods. Socrates shows, in the style long afterwards imitated by Juvenal, that

<sup>1</sup> *Mem.*, III., vi.

they are only means towards an end, and may be productive of harm no less than good.—Happiness at any rate is an unquestionable good.—Yes, unless we make it consist of questionable goods like those just enumerated.<sup>1</sup>

It is in this last conversation that the historical Socrates most nearly resembles the Socrates of Plato's *Apologia*. Instead, however, of leaving Euthydêmus to the consciousness of his ignorance, as the latter would have done, he proceeds, in Xenophon's account, to direct the young man's studies according to the simplest and clearest principles; and we have another conversation where religious truths are instilled by the same catechetical process.<sup>2</sup> Here the erotetic method is evidently a mere didactic artifice, and Socrates could easily have written out his lesson under the form of a regular demonstration. But there is little doubt that in other cases he used it as a means for giving increased precision to his own ideas, and also for testing their validity, that, in a word, the habit of oral communication gave him a familiarity with logical processes which could not otherwise have been acquired. The same cross-examination that acted as a spur on the mind of the respondent, reacted as a bridle on the mind of the interrogator, obliging him to make sure beforehand of every assertion that he put forward, to study the mutual bearings of his beliefs, to analyse them into their component elements, and to examine the relation in which they collectively stood to the opinions generally accepted. It has already been stated that Socrates gave the erotetic method two new applications; we now see in what direction they tended. He made it a vehicle for positive instruction, and he also made it an instrument for self-discipline, a help to fulfilling the Delphic precept, 'Know thyself.' The second application was even more important than the first. With us literary training—that is, the practice of continuous reading and composition—is so widely diffused, that conversation has become

<sup>1</sup> *Mem.*, IV., ii.

<sup>2</sup> *Mem.*, IV., iii.

rather a hindrance than a help to the cultivation of argumentative ability. The reverse was true when Socrates lived. Long familiarity with debate was unfavourable to the art of writing ; and the speeches in Thucydides show how difficult it was still found to present close reasoning under the form of an uninterrupted exposition. The traditions of conversational thrust and parry survived in rhetorical prose ; and the crossed swords of tongue-fence were represented by the bristling *chevaux de frise* of a laboured antithetical arrangement where every clause received new strength and point from contrast with its opposing neighbour.

By combining the various considerations here suggested we shall arrive at a clearer understanding of the sceptical attitude commonly attributed to Socrates. There is, first of all, the negative and critical function exercised by him in common with many other constructive thinkers, and intimately associated with a fundamental law of Greek thought. Then there is the Attic courtesy and democratic spirit leading him to avoid any assumption of superiority over those whose opinions he is examining. And, lastly, there is the profound feeling that truth is a common possession, which no individual can appropriate as his peculiar privilege, because it can only be discovered, tested, and preserved by the united efforts of all.

## V.

Thus, then, the Socratic dialogue has a double aspect. It is, like all philosophy, a perpetual carrying of life into ideas and of ideas into life. Life is raised to a higher level by thought ; thought, when brought into contact with life, gains movement and growth, assimilative and reproductive power. If action is to be harmonised, we must regulate it by universal principles ; if our principles are to be efficacious, they must be adopted ; if they are to be adopted, we must demonstrate them to the satisfaction of our contemporaries. Language, consisting as



it does almost entirely of abstract terms, furnishes the materials out of which alone such an ideal union can be framed. But men do not always use the same words, least of all if they are abstract words, in the same sense, and therefore a preliminary agreement must be arrived at in this respect ; a fact which Socrates was the first to recognise. Aristotle tells us that he introduced the custom of constructing general definitions into philosophy. The need of accurate verbal explanations is more felt in the discussion of ethical problems than anywhere else, if we take ethics in the only sense that Socrates would have accepted, as covering the whole field of mental activity. It is true that definitions are also employed in the mathematical and physical sciences, but there they are accompanied by illustrations borrowed from sensible experience, and would be unintelligible without them. Hence it has been possible for those branches of knowledge to make enormous progress, while the elementary notions on which they rest have not yet been satisfactorily analysed. The case is entirely altered when mental dispositions have to be taken into account. Here, abstract terms play much the same part as sensible intuitions elsewhere in steadying our conceptions, but without possessing the same invariable value ; the experiences from which those conceptions are derived being exceedingly complex, and, what is more, exceedingly liable to disturbance from unforeseen circumstances. Thus, by neglecting a series of minute changes the same name may come to denote groups of phenomena not agreeing in the qualities which alone it originally connoted. More than one example of such a gradual metamorphosis has already presented itself in the course of our investigation, and others will occur in the sequel. Where distinctions of right and wrong are involved, it is of enormous practical importance that a definite meaning should be attached to words, and that they should not be allowed, at least without express agreement, to depart from the recognised acceptation : for such words, connoting as they do the approval or disap-

proval of mankind, exercise a powerful influence on conduct, so that their misapplication may lead to disastrous consequences. Where government by written law prevails the importance of defining ethical terms immediately becomes obvious, for, otherwise, personal rule would be restored under the disguise of judicial interpretation. Roman jurisprudence was the first attempt on a great scale to introduce a rigorous system of definitions into legislation. We have seen, in the preceding chapter, how it tended to put the conclusions of Greek naturalistic philosophy into practical shape. We now see how, on the formal side, its determinations are connected with the principles of Socrates. And we shall not undervalue this obligation if we bear in mind that the accurate wording of legal enactments is not less important than the essential justice of their contents. Similarly, the development of Catholic theology required that its fundamental conceptions should be progressively defined. This alone preserved the intellectual character of Catholicism in ages of ignorance and superstition, and helped to keep alive the reason by which superstition was eventually overthrown. Mommsen has called theology the bastard child of Religion and Science. It is something that, in the absence of the robust parent, its features should be recalled and its tradition maintained even by an illegitimate offspring.

So far, we have spoken as if the Socratic definitions were merely verbal; they were, however, a great deal more, and their author did not accurately discriminate between what at that stage of thought could not well be kept apart—explanations of words, practical reforms, and scientific generalisations. For example, in defining a ruler to be one who knew more than other men, he was departing from the common usages of language, and showing not what was, but what ought to be true.<sup>1</sup> And in defining virtue as wisdom, he was putting forward a new theory of his own, instead of formulating the

<sup>1</sup> *Mem.*, III., ix., 10.

received connotation of a term. Still, after making every deduction, we cannot fail to perceive what an immense service was rendered to exact thought by introducing definitions of every kind into that department of enquiry where they were chiefly needed. We may observe also that a general law of Greek intelligence was here realising itself in a new direction. The need of accurate determination had always been felt, but hitherto it had worked under the more elementary forms of time, space, and causality, or, to employ the higher generalisation of modern psychology, under the form of contiguous association. The earlier cosmologies were all processes of circumscription; they were attempts to fix the limits of the universe, and, accordingly, that element which was supposed to surround the others was also conceived as their producing cause, or else (in the theory of Heracleitus) as typifying the rationale of their continuous transformation. For this reason Parmenides, when he identified existence with extension, found himself obliged to declare that extension was necessarily limited. Of all the physical thinkers, Anaxagoras, who immediately precedes Socrates, approaches, on the objective side, most nearly to his standpoint. For the governing *Nous* brings order out of chaos by segregating the confused elements, by separating the unlike and drawing the like together, which is precisely what definition does for our conceptions. Meanwhile Greek literature had been performing the same task in a more restricted province, first fixing events according to their geographical and historical positions, then assigning to each its proper cause, then, as Thucydides does, isolating the most important groups of events from their external connexions, and analysing the causes of complex changes into different classes of antecedents. The final revolution effected by Socrates was to substitute arrangement by difference and resemblance for arrangement by contiguity in coexistence and succession. To say that by so doing he created science is inexact, for science requires to consider nature under every

aspect, including those which he systematically neglected ; but we may say that he introduced the method which is most particularly applicable to mental phenomena, the method of ideal analysis, classification, and reasoning. For, be it observed that Socrates did not limit himself to searching for the One in the Many, he also, and perhaps more habitually, sought for the Many in the One. He would take hold of a conception and analyse it into its various notes, laying them, as it were, piecemeal before his interlocutor for separate acceptance or rejection. If, for example, they could not agree about the relative merits of two citizens, Socrates would decompose the character of a good citizen into its component parts and bring the comparison down to them. A good citizen, he would say, increases the national resources by his administration of the finances, defeats the enemy abroad, wins allies by his diplomacy, appeases dissension by his eloquence at home.<sup>1</sup> When the shy and gifted Charmides shrank from addressing a public audience on public questions, Socrates strove to overcome his nervousness by mercilessly subdividing the august Ecclêsia into its constituent classes. 'Is it the fullers that you are afraid of?' he asked, 'or the leather-cutters, or the masons, or the smiths, or the husbandmen, or the traders, or the lowest class of hucksters?'<sup>2</sup> Here the analytical power of Greek thought is manifested with still more searching effect than when it was applied to space and motion by Zeno.

Nor did Socrates only consider the whole conception in relation to its parts, he also grouped conceptions together according to their genera and founded logical classification. To appreciate the bearing of this idea on human interests it will be enough to study the disposition of a code. We shall

<sup>1</sup> *Mem.*, IV., vi., 14.

<sup>2</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, III., vii. We may incidentally notice that this passage is well worth the attention of those who look on the Athenian Dêmos as an idle and aristocratic body, supported by slave labour.

then see how much more easy it becomes to bring individual cases under a general rule, and to retain the whole body of rules in our memory, when we can pass step by step from the most universal to the most particular categories. Now, it was by jurists versed in the Stoic philosophy that Roman law was codified, and it was by Stoicism that the traditions of Socratic philosophy were most faithfully preserved.

Logical division is, however, a process not fully represented by any fixed and formal distribution of topics, nor yet is it equivalent to the arrangement of genera and species according to their natural affinities, as in the admirable systems of Jussieu and Cuvier. It is something much more flexible and subtle, a carrying down into the minutest detail, of that psychological law which requires, as a condition of perfect consciousness, that feelings, conceptions, judgments, and, generally speaking, all mental modes should be apprehended together with their contradictory opposites. Heraclitus had a dim perception of this truth when he taught the identity of antithetical couples, and it is more or less vividly illustrated by all Greek classic literature after him; but Socrates seems to have been the first who transformed it from a law of existence into a law of cognition; with him knowledge and ignorance, reason and passion, freedom and slavery, virtue, and vice, right and wrong (*πολλῶν ὀνομάτων μορφῆ μία*) were apprehended in inseparable connexion, and were employed for mutual elucidation, not only in broad masses, but also through their last subdivisions, like the delicate adjustments of light and shade on a Venetian canvas. This method of classification by graduated descent and symmetrical contrast, like the whole dialectic system of which it forms a branch, is only suited to the mental phenomena for which it was originally devised; and Hegel committed a fatal error when he applied it to explain the order of external coexistence and succession. We have already touched on the essentially subjective character of the Socratic definition, and

we shall presently have to make a similar restriction in dealing with Socratic induction. With regard to the question last considered, our limits will not permit us, nor, indeed, does it fall within the scope of our present study, to pursue a vein of reflection which was never fully worked out either by the Athenian philosophers or by their modern successors, at least not in its only legitimate direction.

After definition and division comes reasoning. We arrange objects in classes, that by knowing one or some we may know all. Aristotle attributes to Socrates the first systematic employment of induction as well as of general definitions.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, his method was not solely inductive, nor did it bear more than a distant resemblance to the induction of modern science. His principles were not gathered from the particular classes of phenomena which they determined, or were intended to determine, but from others of an analogous character which had already been reduced to order. Observing that all handicrafts were practised according to well-defined intelligible rules, leading, so far as they went, to satisfactory results, he required that life in its entirety should be similarly systematised. This was not so much reasoning as a demand for the more extended application of reasoning. It was a truly philosophic postulate, for philosophy is not science, but precedes and underlies it. Belief and action tend to divide themselves into two provinces, of which the one is more or less organised, the other more or less chaotic. We philosophise when we try to bring the one into order, and also when we test the foundations on which the order of the other reposes, fighting both against incoherent mysticism and against traditional routine. Such is the purpose that the most distinguished thinkers of modern times—Francis Bacon, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Auguste Comte, and Herbert Spencer—however widely they may otherwise differ, have, according to their respective lights, all set themselves to achieve. No doubt, there is

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.*, XIII., iv.

this vast difference between Socrates and his most recent successors, that physical science is the great type of certainty to the level of which they would raise all speculation, while with him it was the type of a delusion and an impossibility. The analogy of artistic production when applied to Nature led him off on a completely false track, the ascription to conscious design of that which is, in truth, a result of mechanical causation.<sup>1</sup> But now that the relations between the known and the unknown have been completely transformed, there is no excuse for repeating the fallacies which imposed on his vigorous understanding ; and the genuine spirit of Socrates is best represented by those who, starting like him from the data of experience, are led to adopt a diametrically opposite conclusion. We may add, that the Socratic method of analogical reasoning gave a retrospective justification to early Greek thought, of which Socrates was not himself aware. Its daring generalisations were really an inference from the known to the unknown. To interpret all physical processes in terms of matter and motion, is only assuming that the changes to which our senses cannot penetrate are homogeneous with the changes which we can feel and see. When Socrates argued that, because the human body is animated by a consciousness, the material universe must be similarly animated, Democritus might have answered that the world presents no appearance of being organised like an animal. When he argued that, because statues and pictures are known to be the work of intelligence, the living models from which they are copied must be similarly due to design, Aristodêmus should have answered, that the former are seen to be manufactured, while the others are seen to grow. It might also have been observed, that if our own intelligence requires to be accounted for by a cause like itself, so also does the creative cause, and so on through an infinite regress of antecedents. Teleology has been destroyed by the Darwinian theory ; but before the *Origin of*

<sup>1</sup> *Mem.*, I., iv.

*Species* appeared, the slightest scrutiny might have shown that it was a precarious foundation for religious belief. If many thoughtful men are now turning away from theism, 'natural theology' may be thanked for the desertion. 'I believe in God,' says the German baron in *Thorndale*, 'until your philosophers demonstrate His existence.' 'And then?' asks a friend. 'And then—I do not believe the demonstration.'

Whatever may have been the errors into which Socrates fell, he did not commit the fatal mistake of compromising his ethical doctrine by associating it indissolubly with his metaphysical opinions. Religion, with him, instead of being the source and sanction of all duty, simply brought in an additional duty—that of gratitude to the gods for their goodness. We shall presently see where he sought for the ultimate foundation of morality, after completing our survey of the dialectic method with which it was so closely connected. The induction of Socrates, when it went beyond that kind of analogical reasoning which we have just been considering, was mainly abstraction, the process by which he obtained those general conceptions or definitions which played so great a part in his philosophy. Thus, on comparing the different virtues, as commonly distinguished, he found that they all agreed in requiring knowledge, which he accordingly concluded to be the essence of virtue. So other moralists have been led to conclude that right actions resemble one another in their felicitic quality, and in that alone. Similarly, political economists find, or formerly found (for we do not wish to be positive on the matter), that a common characteristic of all industrial employments is the desire to secure the maximum of profit with the minimum of trouble. Another comparison shows that value depends on the relation between supply and demand. Aesthetic enjoyments of every kind resemble one another by including an element of ideal emotion. It is a common characteristic of all cognitions that they are



constructed by association out of elementary feelings. All societies are marked by a more or less developed division of labour. These are given as typical generalisations which have been reached by the Socratic method. They are all taken from the philosophic sciences—that is, the sciences dealing with phenomena which are partly determined by mind, and the systematic treatment of which is so similar that they are frequently studied in combination by a single thinker, and invariably so by the greatest thinkers of any. But were we to examine the history of the physical sciences, we should find that this method of wide comparison and rapid abstraction cannot, as Francis Bacon imagined, be successfully applied to them. The facts with which they deal are not transparent, not directly penetrable by thought; hence they must be treated deductively. Instead of a front attack, we must, so to speak, take them in the rear. Bacon never made a more unfortunate observation than when he said that the syllogism falls far short of the subtlety of Nature. Nature is even simpler than the syllogism, for she accomplishes her results by advancing from equation to equation. That which really does fall far short of her subtlety is precisely the Baconian induction with its superficial comparison of instances. No amount of observation could detect any resemblance between the bursting of a thunderstorm and the attraction of a loadstone, or between the burning of charcoal and the rusting a nail.

But while philosophers cannot prescribe a method to physical science, they may, to a certain extent, bring it under their cognisance, by disengaging its fundamental conceptions and assumptions, and showing that they are functions of mind; by arranging the special sciences in systematic order for purposes of study; and by investigating the law of their historical evolution. Furthermore, since psychology is the central science of philosophy, and since it is closely connected with physiology, which in turn reposes on the inorganic

sciences, a certain knowledge of the objective world is indispensable to any knowledge of ourselves. Lastly, since the subjective sphere not only rests, once for all, on the objective, but is also in a continual state of action and reaction with it, no philosophy can be complete which does not take into account the constitution of things as they exist independently of ourselves, in order to ascertain how far they are unalterable, and how far they may be modified to our advantage. We see, then, that Socrates, in restricting philosophy to human interests, was guided by a just tact ; that in creating the method of dialectic abstraction, he created an instrument adequate to this investigation, but to this alone ; and, finally, that human interests, understood in the largest sense, embrace a number of subsidiary studies which either did not exist when he taught, or which the inevitable superstitions of his age would not allow him to pursue.

It remains to glance at another aspect of the dialectic method first developed on a great scale by Plato, and first fully defined by Aristotle, but already playing a certain part in the Socratic teaching. This is the testing of common assumptions by pushing them to their logical conclusion, and rejecting those which lead to consequences inconsistent with themselves. So understood, dialectic means the complete elimination of inconsistency, and has ever since remained the most powerful weapon of philosophical criticism. To take an instance near at hand, it is constantly employed by thinkers so radically different as Mr. Herbert Spencer and Professor T. H. Green ; while it has been generalised into an objective law of Nature and history, with dazzling though only momentary success, by Hegel and his school.

## VI.

Consistency is, indeed, the one word which, better than any other, expresses the whole character of Socrates, and the whole of philosophy as well. Here the supreme conception

of mind reappears under its most rigorous, but, at the same time, its most beneficent aspect. It is the temperance which no allurements can surprise; the fortitude which no terror can break through; the justice which eliminates all personal considerations, egoistic and altruistic alike; the truthfulness which, with exactest harmony, fits words to meanings, meanings to thoughts, and thoughts to things; the logic which will tolerate no self-contradiction; the conviction which seeks for no acceptance unwon by reason; the liberalism which works through free agencies for freedom; the love which wills another's good for that other's sake alone.<sup>1</sup> It was the intellectual passion for consistency which made Socrates so great and which fused his life into a flawless whole; but it was an unconscious motive power, and therefore he attributed to mere knowledge what knowledge alone could not supply. A clear perception of right cannot by itself secure the obedience of our will. High principles are not of any value, except to those in whom a discrepancy between practice and profession produces the sharpest anguish of which their nature is capable; a feeling like, though immeasurably stronger than, that which women of exquisite sensibility experience when they see a candle set crooked or a table-cover awry. How moral laws have come to be established, and why they prescribe or prohibit certain classes of actions, are questions which still divide the schools, though with an increasing consensus of authority on the utilitarian side: their ultimate sanction—that which, whatever they are, makes obedience to them truly moral—can hardly be sought elsewhere than in the same consciousness of logical stringency that determines, or should determine, our abstract beliefs.

Be this as it may, we venture to hope that a principle has

<sup>1</sup> 'Il sait que, dans l'intérêt même du bien, il ne faut pas imposer le bien d'une manière trop absolue, le jeu libre de la liberté étant la condition de la vie humaine. . . . poursuite en toutes choses du bien public, non des applaudissements.'—Renan, *Marc-Aurèle*, pp. 18, 19.

been here suggested deep and strong enough to reunite the two halves into which historians have hitherto divided the Socratic system, or, rather, the beginning of that universal systematisation called philosophy, which is not yet, and perhaps never will be, completed ; a principle which is outwardly revealed in the character of the philosopher himself. With such an one, ethics and dialectics become almost indistinguishable through the intermixture of their processes and the parallelism of their aims. Integrity of conviction enters, both as a means and as an element, into perfect integrity of conduct, nor can it be maintained where any other element of rectitude is wanting. Clearness, consecutiveness, and coherence are the morality of belief ; while temperance, justice, and beneficence, taken in their widest sense and taken together, constitute the supreme logic of life.

It has already been observed that the thoughts of Socrates were thrown into shape for and by communication, that they only became definite when brought into vivifying contact with another intelligence. Such was especially the case with his method of ethical dialectic. Instead of tendering his advice in the form of a lecture, as other moralists have at all times been so fond of doing, he sought out some pre-existing sentiment or opinion inconsistent with the conduct of which he disapproved, and then gradually worked round from point to point, until theory and practice were exhibited in immediate contrast. Here, his reasoning, which is sometimes spoken of as exclusively inductive, was strictly syllogistic, being the application of a general law to a particular instance. With the growing emancipation of reason, we may observe a return to the Socratic method of moralisation. Instead of rewards and punishments, which encourage selfish calculation, or examples, which stimulate a mischievous jealousy when they do not create a spirit of servile imitation, the judicious trainer will find his motive power in the pupil's incipient tendency to form moral judgments, which, when reflected on the

individual's own actions, become what we call a conscience. It has been mentioned in the preceding chapter that the celebrated golden rule of justice was already enunciated by Greek moralists in the fourth century B.C. Possibly it may have been first formulated by Socrates. In all cases it occurs in the writings of his disciples, and happily expresses the drift of his entire philosophy. This generalising tendency was, indeed, so natural to a noble Greek, that instances of it occur long before philosophy began. We find it in the famous question of Achilles: 'Did not this whole war begin on account of a woman? Are the Atreidae the only men who love their wives?'<sup>1</sup> and in the now not less famous apostrophe to Lycaon, reminding him that an early death is the lot of far worthier men than he<sup>2</sup>—utterances which come on us with the awful effect of lightning flashes, that illuminate the whole horizon of existence while they paralyse or destroy an individual victim.

The power which Socrates possessed of rousing other minds to independent activity and apostolic transmission of spiritual gifts was, as we have said, the second verification of his doctrine. Even those who, like Antisthenes and Aristippus, derived their positive theories from the Sophists rather than from him, preferred to be regarded as his followers; and Plato, from whom his ideas received their most splendid development, has acknowledged the debt by making that venerated figure the centre of his own immortal Dialogues. A third verification is given by the subjective, practical, dialectic tendency of all subsequent philosophy properly so called. On this point we will content ourselves with mentioning one instance out of many, the recent declaration of Mr. Herbert Spencer that his whole system was constructed for the sake of its ethical conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

Apart, however, from abstract speculation, the ideal

<sup>1</sup> *Il.*, IX., 337.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*, XXI., 106.

<sup>3</sup> In the preface to the *Data of Ethics*,

method seems to have exercised an immediate and powerful influence on Art, an influence which was anticipated by Socrates himself. In two conversations reported by Xenophon,<sup>1</sup> he impresses on Parrhasius, the painter, and Cleito, the sculptor, the importance of so animating the faces and figures which they represented as to make them express human feelings, energies, and dispositions, particularly those of the most interesting and elevated type. And such, in fact, was the direction followed by imitative art after Pheidias, though not without degenerating into a sensationalism which Socrates would have severely condemned. Another and still more remarkable proof of the influence exercised on plastic representation by ideal philosophy was, perhaps, not foreseen by its founder. We allude to the substitution of abstract and generic for historical subjects by Greek sculpture in its later stages, and not by sculpture only, but by dramatic poetry as well. For early art, whether it addressed itself to the eye or to the imagination, and whether its subjects were taken from history or from fiction, had always been historical in this sense, that it exhibited the performance of particular actions by particular persons in a given place and at a given time; the mode of presentment most natural to those whose ideas are mainly determined by contiguous association. The schools which came after Socrates let fall the limitations of concrete reality, and found the unifying principle of their works in association by resemblance, making their figures the personification of a single attribute or group of attributes, and bringing together forms distinguished by the community of their characteristics or the convergence of their functions. Thus Aphrodité no longer figured as the lover of Arês or Anchisês, but as the personification of female beauty; while her statues were grouped together with images of the still more transparent abstractions, Love, Longing, and Desire. Similarly Apollo became a personification of musical enthusiasm, and Dionysus

<sup>1</sup> *Mem.*, III., x.

of Bacchic inspiration. So also dramatic art, once completely historical, even with Aristophanes, now chose for its subjects such constantly-recurring types as the ardent lover, the stern father, the artful slave, the boastful soldier, and the fawning parasite.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was this all. Thought, after having, as it would seem, wandered away from reality in search of empty abstractions, by the help of those very abstractions regained possession of concrete existence, and acquired a far fuller intelligence of its complex manifestations. For, each individual character is an assemblage of qualities, and can only be understood when those qualities, after having been separately studied, are finally recombined. Thus, biography is a very late production of literature, and although biographies are the favourite reading of those who most despise philosophy, they could never have been written without its help. Moreover, before characters can be described they must exist. Now, it is partly philosophy which calls character into existence by sedulous inculcation of self-knowledge and self-culture, by consolidating a man's individuality into something independent of circumstances, so that it comes to form, not a figure in bas-relief, but what sculptors call a figure in the round. Such was Socrates himself, and such were the figures which he taught Xenophon and Plato to recognise and portray. Character-drawing begins with them, and the *Memorabilia* in particular is the earliest attempt at a biographical analysis that we possess. From this to Plutarch's *Lives* there was still a long journey to be accomplished, but the interval between them is less considerable than that which divides Xenophon from his immediate predecessor, Thucydides. And when we remember how intimately the substance of Christian teaching is connected with the literary form of its first record, we shall still better appreciate the all-penetrating influence of Hellenic thought,

<sup>1</sup> Curtius, *Griechische Geschichte*, III., 526-30 (3rd ed.), where, however, the revolution in art is attributed to the influence of the Sophists.

vying, as it does, with the forces of nature in subtlety and universal diffusion.

Besides transforming art and literature, the dialectic method helped to revolutionise social life, and the impulse communicated in this direction is still very far from being exhausted. We allude to its influence on female education. The intellectual blossoming of Athens was aided, in its first development, by a complete separation of the sexes. There were very few of his friends to whom an Athenian gentleman talked so little as to his wife.<sup>1</sup> Colonel Mure aptly compares her position to that of an English housekeeper, with considerably less liberty than is enjoyed by the latter. Yet the union of tender admiration with the need for intelligent sympathy and the desire to awaken interest in noble pursuits existed at Athens in full force, and created a field for its exercise. Wilhelm von Humboldt has observed that at this time chivalrous love was kept alive by customs which, to us, are intensely repellent. That so valuable a sentiment should be preserved and diverted into a more legitimate channel was an object of the highest importance. The naturalistic method of ethics did much, but it could not do all, for more was required than a return to primitive simplicity. Here the method of mind stepped in and supplied the deficiency. Reciprocity was the soul of dialectic as practised by Socrates, and the dialectic of love demands a reciprocity of passion which can only exist between the sexes. But in a society where the free intercourse of modern Europe was not permitted, the modern sentiment could not be reached at a single bound ; and those who sought for the conversation of intelligent women had to seek for it among a class of which Aspasia was the highest representative. Such women played a great part in later Athenian society ; they attended philosophical lectures, furnished heroines to the New Comedy, and on the whole gave a healthier tone to literature. Their successors, the Delias and Cynthias of

<sup>1</sup> Xenoph., *Oeconom.*, iii., 12.



Roman elegiac poetry, called forth strains of exalted affection which need nothing but a worthier object to place them on a level with the noblest expressions of tenderness that have since been heard. Here at least, to understand is to forgive; and we shall be less scandalised than certain critics,<sup>1</sup> we shall even refuse to admit that Socrates fell below the dignity of a moralist, when we hear that he once visited a celebrated beauty of this class, Theodotê by name;<sup>2</sup> that he engaged her in a playful conversation; and that he taught her to put more mind into her profession; to attract by something deeper than personal charms; to show at least an appearance of interest in the welfare of her lovers; and to stimulate their ardour by a studied reserve, granting no favour that had not been repeatedly and passionately sought after.

Xenophon gives the same interest a more edifying direction when he enlivens the dry details of his *Cyropaedia* with touching episodes of conjugal affection, or presents lessons in domestic economy under the form of conversations between a newly-married couple.<sup>3</sup> Plato in some respects transcends, in others falls short of his less gifted contemporary. For his doctrine of love as an educating process—a true doctrine, all sneers and perversions notwithstanding—though readily applicable to the relation of the sexes, is not applied to it by him; and his project of a common training for men and women, though suggestive of a great advance on the existing system if rightly carried out, was, from his point of view, a retrograde step towards savage or even animal life, an attempt to throw half the burdens incident to a military organisation of society on those who had become absolutely incapable of bearing them.

Fortunately, the dialectic method proved stronger than its own creators, and, once set going, introduced feelings and ex-

<sup>1</sup> Mure, *History of Grecian Literature*, IV., 451.

<sup>2</sup> *Mem.*, III., xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Oeconom.*, vii., 4 ff.

periences of which they had never dreamed, within the horizon of philosophic consciousness. It was found that if women had much to learn, much also might be learned from them. Their wishes could not be taken into account without giving a greatly increased prominence in the guidance of conduct to such sentiments as fidelity, purity, and pity; and to that extent the religion which they helped to establish has, at least in principle, left no room for any further progress. On the other hand, it is only by reason that the more exclusively feminine impulses can be freed from their primitive narrowness and elevated into truly human emotions. Love, when left to itself, causes more pain than pleasure, for the words of the old idyl still remain true which associate it with jealousy as cruel as the grave; pity, without prevision, creates more suffering than it relieves; and blind fidelity is instinctively opposed even to the most beneficent changes. We are still suffering from the excessive preponderance which Catholicism gave to the ideas of women; but we need not listen to those who tell us that the varied experiences of humanity cannot be organised into a rational, consistent, self-supporting whole.

A survey of the Socratic philosophy would be incomplete without some comment on an element in the life of Socrates, which at first sight seems to lie altogether outside philosophy. There is no fact in his history more certain than that he believed himself to be constantly accompanied by a *Daemonium*, a divine voice often restraining him, even in trifling matters, but never prompting to positive action. That it was neither conscience in our sense of the word, nor a supposed familiar spirit, is now generally admitted. Even those who believe in the supernatural origin and authority of our moral feelings do not credit them with a power of divining the accidentally good or evil consequences which may attend on our most trivial and indifferent actions; while, on the other hand, those feelings have a positive no less than a negative

function, which is exhibited whenever the performance of good deeds becomes a duty. That the *Daemonium* was not a personal attendant is proved by the invariable use of an indefinite neuter adjective to designate it. How the phenomenon itself should be explained is a question for professional pathologists. We have here to account for the interpretation put upon it by Socrates, and this, in our judgment, follows quite naturally from his characteristic mode of thought. That the gods should signify their pleasure by visible signs and public oracles was an experience familiar to every Greek. Socrates, conceiving God as a mind diffused through the whole universe, would look for traces of the Divine presence in his own mind, and would readily interpret any inward suggestion, not otherwise to be accounted for, as a manifestation of this all-pervading power. Why it should invariably appear under the form of a restraint is less obvious. The only explanation seems to be that, as a matter of fact, such mysterious feelings, whether the product of unconscious experience or not, do habitually operate as deterrents rather than as incentives.

## VII.

This *Daemonium*, whatever it may have been, formed one of the ostensible grounds on which its possessor was prosecuted and condemned to death for impiety. We might have spared ourselves the trouble of going over the circumstances connected with that tragical event, had not various attempts been made in some well-known works to extenuate the significance of a singularly atrocious crime. The case stands thus. In the year 399 B.C. Socrates, who was then over seventy, and had never in his life been brought before a law-court, was indicted on the threefold charge of introducing new divinities, of denying those already recognised by the State, and of corrupting young men. His principal accuser was one Melétus, a poet, supported by Lycon, a rhetorician,

and by a much more powerful backer, Anytus, a leading citizen in the restored democracy. The charge was tried before a large popular tribunal, numbering some five hundred members. Socrates regarded the whole affair with profound indifference. When urged to prepare a defence, he replied, with justice, that he had been preparing it his whole life long. He could not, indeed, have easily foreseen what line the prosecutors would take. Our own information on this point is meagre enough, being principally derived from allusions made by Xenophon, who was not himself present at the trial. There seems, however, no unfairness in concluding that the charge of irreligion neither was nor could be substantiated. The evidence of Xenophon is quite sufficient to establish the unimpeachable orthodoxy of his friend. If it really was an offence at Athens to believe in gods unrecognised by the State, Socrates was not guilty of that offence, for his *Daemonium* was not a new divinity, but a revelation from the established divinities, such as individual believers have at all times been permitted to receive even by the most jealous religious communities. The imputation of infidelity, commonly and indiscriminately brought against all philosophers, was a particularly unhappy one to fling at the great opponent of physical science, who, besides, was noted for the punctual discharge of his religious duties. That the first two counts of the indictment should be so frivolous raises a strong prejudice against the third. The charges of corruption seem to have come under two heads—alleged encouragement of disrespect to parents, and of disaffection towards democratic institutions. In support of the former some innocent expressions let fall by Socrates seem to have been taken up and cruelly perverted. By way of stimulating his young friends to improve their minds, he had observed that relations were only of value when they could help one another, and that to do so they must be properly educated. This was twisted into an assertion that ignorant parents might properly be placed

under restraint by their better-informed children. That such an inference could not have been sanctioned by Socrates himself is obvious from his insisting on the respect due even to so intolerable a mother as Xanthippê.<sup>1</sup> The political opinions of the defendant presented a more vulnerable point for attack. He thought the custom of choosing magistrates by lot absurd, and did not conceal his contempt for it. There is, however, no reason for believing that such purely theoretical criticisms were forbidden by law or usage at Athens. At any rate, much more revolutionary sentiments were tolerated on the stage. That Socrates would be no party to a violent subversion of the Constitution, and would regard it with high disapproval, was abundantly clear both from his life and from the whole tenor of his teaching. In opposition to Hippias, he defined justice as obedience to the law of the land. The chances of the lot had, on one memorable occasion, called him to preside over the deliberations of the Sovereign Assembly. A proposition was made, contrary to law, that the generals who were accused of having abandoned the crews of their sunken ships at Arginusæ should be tried in a single batch. In spite of tremendous popular clamour, Socrates refused to put the question to the vote on the single day for which his office lasted. The just and resolute man, who would not yield to the unrighteous demands of a crowd, had shortly afterwards to face the threats of a frowning tyrant. When the Thirty were installed in power, he publicly, and at the risk of his life, expressed disapproval of their sanguinary proceedings. The oligarchy, wishing to involve as many respectable citizens as possible in complicity with their crimes, sent for five persons, of whom Socrates was one, and ordered them to bring a certain Leo from Salamis, that he might be put to death; the others obeyed, but Socrates refused to accompany them on their disgraceful errand. Nevertheless, it told heavily against the philosopher that

<sup>1</sup> *Mem.*, II., i.

Alcibiades, the most mischievous of demagogues, and Critias, the most savage of aristocrats, passed for having been educated by him. It was remembered, also, that he was in the habit of quoting a passage from Homer, where Odysseus is described as appealing to the reason of the chiefs, while he brings inferior men to their senses with rough words and rougher chastisement. In reality, Socrates did not mean that the poor should be treated with brutality by the rich, for he would have been the first to suffer had such license been permitted, but he meant that where reason failed harsher methods of coercion must be applied. Precisely because expressions of opinion let fall in private conversation are so liable to be misunderstood or purposely perverted, to adduce them in support of a capital charge where no overt act can be alleged, is the most mischievous form of encroachment on individual liberty.

Modern critics, beginning with Hegel,<sup>1</sup> have discovered reasons for considering Socrates a dangerous character, which apparently did not occur to Melétus and his associates. We are told that the whole system of applying dialectics to morality had an unsettling tendency, for if men were once taught that the sacredness of duty rested on their individual conviction they might refuse to be convinced, and act accordingly. And it is further alleged that Socrates first introduced this principle of subjectivity into morals. The persecuting spirit is so insatiable that in default of acts it attacks opinions, and in default of specific opinions it fastens on general tendencies. We know that Joseph de Maistre was suspected by his ignorant neighbours of being a Revolutionist because most of his time was spent in study; and but the other day a French preacher was sent into exile by his ecclesiastical superiors for daring to support Catholic morality on rational grounds.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately Greek society was not

<sup>1</sup> *Gesch. d. Ph.*, II., 100 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Written in the spring of 1880. The allusion is to Father Didon, who was at that time rusticated in Corsica.

subject to the rules of the Dominican Order. Never anywhere in Greece, certainly not at Athens, did there exist that solid, all-comprehensive, unquestionable fabric of traditional obligation assumed by Hegel ; and Zeller is conceding far too much when he defends Socrates, on the sole ground that the recognised standards of right had fallen into universal contempt during the Peloponnesian war, while admitting that he might fairly have been silenced at an earlier period, if indeed his teaching could have been conceived as possible before it actually began.<sup>1</sup> For from the first, both in literature and in life, Greek thought is distinguished by an ardent desire to get to the bottom of every question, and to discover arguments of universal applicability for every decision. Even in the youth of Pericles knotty ethical problems were eagerly discussed without any interference on the part of the public authorities. Experience had to prove how far-reaching was the effect of ideas before a systematic attempt could be made to control them.

In what terms Socrates replied to his accusers cannot be stated with absolute certainty. Reasons have been already given for believing that the speech put into his mouth by Plato is not entirely historical ; and here we may mention as a further reason that the specific charges mentioned by Xenophon are not even alluded to in it. Thus much, however, is clear, that the defence was of a thoroughly dignified character ; and that, while the allegations of the prosecution were successfully rebutted, the defendant stood entirely on his innocence, and refused to make any of the customary but illegal appeals to the compassion of the court. We are assured that he was condemned solely on account of this defiant attitude, and by a very small majority. Melétus had demanded the penalty of death, but by Attic law Socrates had the right of proposing some milder sentence as an alternative. According to Plato, he began by stating that

<sup>1</sup> *Ph. d. Gr.*, II., a, 192.

the justest return for his entire devotion to the public good would be maintenance at the public expense during the remainder of his life, an honour usually granted to victors at the Olympic games. In default of this he proposed a fine of thirty minae, to be raised by contributions among his friends. According to another account,<sup>1</sup> he refused, on the ground of his innocence, to name any alternative penalty. On a second division Socrates was condemned to death by a much larger majority than that which had found him guilty, eighty of those who had voted for his acquittal now voting for his execution.

Such was the transaction which some moderns, Grote among the number, holding Socrates to be one of the best and wisest of men, have endeavoured to excuse. Their argument is that the illustrious victim was jointly responsible for his own fate, and that he was really condemned, not for his teaching, but for contempt of court. To us it seems that this is a distinction without a difference. What has been so finely said of space and time may be said also of the Socratic life and the Socratic doctrine; each was contained entire in every point of the other. Such as he appeared to the Dicastery, such also he appeared everywhere, always, and to all men, offering them the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If conduct like his was not permissible in a court of law, then it was not permissible at all; if justice could not be administered without reticences, evasions, and disguises, where was sincerity ever to be practised? If reason was not to be the paramount arbitress in questions of public interest, what issues could ever be entrusted to her decision? Admit every extenuating circumstance that the utmost ingenuity can devise, and from every point of view one fact will come out clearly, that Socrates was impeached as a philosopher, that he defended himself like a philosopher, and that he was condemned to

<sup>1</sup> In the *Apologia* attributed to Xenophon.



death because he was a philosopher. Those who attempt to remove this stain from the character of the Athenian people will find that, like the blood-stain on Bluebeard's key, when it is rubbed out on one side it reappears on the other. To punish Socrates for his teaching, or for the way in which he defended his teaching, was equally persecution, and persecution of the worst description, that which attacks not the results of free thought but free thought itself. We cannot then agree with Grote when he says that the condemnation of Socrates 'ought to count as one of the least gloomy items in an essentially gloomy catalogue.' On the contrary, it is the gloomiest of any, because it reveals a depth of hatred for pure reason in vulgar minds which might otherwise have remained unsuspected. There is some excuse for other persecutors, for Caiaphas, and St. Dominic, and Calvin: for the Inquisition, and for the authors of the dragonnades; for the judges of Giordano Bruno, and the judges of Vanini: they were striving to exterminate particular opinions, which they believed to be both false and pernicious; there is no such excuse for the Athenian dicasts, least of all for those eighty who, having pronounced Socrates innocent, sentenced him to death because he reasserted his innocence; if, indeed, innocence be not too weak a word to describe his life-long battle against that very irreligion and corruption which were laid to his charge. Here, in this one cause, the great central issue between two abstract principles, the principle of authority and the principle of reason, was cleared from all adventitious circumstances, and disputed on its own intrinsic merits with the usual weapons of argument on the one side and brute force on the other. On that issue Socrates was finally condemned, and on it his judges must be condemned by us.

Neither can we admit Grote's further contention, that in no Greek city but Athens would Socrates have been permitted to carry on his cross-examining activity for so long a

period. On the contrary, we agree with Colonel Mure,<sup>1</sup> that in no other state would he have been molested. Xenophanes and Parmenides, Heracleitus and Democritus, had given utterance to far bolder opinions than his, opinions radically destructive of Greek religion, apparently without running the slightest personal risk; while Athens had more than once before shown the same spirit of fanatical intolerance, though without proceeding to such a fatal extreme, thanks, probably, to the timely escape of her intended victims. M. Ernest Renan has quite recently contrasted the freedom of thought accorded by Roman despotism with the narrowness of old Greek Republicanism, quoting what he calls the Athenian Inquisition as a sample of the latter. The word inquisition is not too strong, only the lecturer should not have led his audience to believe that Greek Republicanism was in this respect fairly represented by its most brilliant type, for had such been the case very little free thought would have been left for Rome to tolerate.

During the month's respite accidentally allowed him, Socrates had one more opportunity of displaying that steadfast obedience to the law which had been one of his great guiding principles through life. The means of escaping from prison were offered to him, but he refused to avail himself of them, according to Plato, that the implicit contract of loyalty to which his citizenship had bound him might be preserved unbroken. Nor was death unwelcome to him although it is not true that he courted it, any desire to figure as a martyr being quite alien from the noble simplicity of his character. But he had reached an age when the daily growth in wisdom which for him alone made life worth living, seemed likely to be exchanged for a gradual and melancholy decline. That this past progress was a good in itself he never doubted, whether it was to be continued in other worlds, or succeeded by the happiness of an eternal sleep. And we may be sure that he

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. of Gr. Lit.*, IV., App. A.

would have held his own highest good to be equally desirable for the whole human race, even with the clear prevision that its collective aspirations and efforts cannot be prolonged for ever.

Two philosophers only can be named who, in modern times, have rivalled or approached the moral dignity of Socrates. Like him, Spinoza realised his own ideal of a good and happy life. Like him, Giordano Bruno, without a hope of future recompense, chose death rather than a life unfaithful to the highest truth, and death, too, under its most terrible form, not the painless extinction by hemlock inflicted in a heathen city, but the agonising dissolution intended by Catholic love to serve as a foretaste of everlasting fire. Yet with neither can the parallel be extended further; for Spinoza, wisely perhaps, refused to face the storms which a public profession and propagation of his doctrine would have raised; and the wayward career of Giordano Bruno was not in keeping with its heroic end. The complex and distracting conditions in which their lot was cast did not permit them to attain that statuesque completeness which marked the classic age of Greek life and thought. Those times developed a wilder energy, a more stubborn endurance, a sweeter purity than any that the ancient world had known. But until the scattered elements are recombined in a still loftier harmony, our sleepless thirst for perfection can be satisfied at one spring alone. Pericles must remain the ideal of statesmanship, Pheidias of artistic production, and Socrates of philosophic power.

Before the ideas which we have passed in review could go forth on their world-conquering mission, it was necessary, not only that Socrates should die, but that his philosophy should die also, by being absorbed into the more splendid generalisations of Plato's system. That system has, for some time past, been made an object of close study in our most famous seats of learning, and a certain acquaintance with it has almost become part of a liberal education in England. No

better source of inspiration, combined with discipline, could be found ; but we shall understand and appreciate Plato still better by first extricating the nucleus round which his speculations have gathered in successive deposits, and this we can only do with the help of Xenophon, whose little work also well deserves attention for the sake of its own chaste and candid beauty. The relation in which it stands to the Platonic writings may be symbolised by an example familiar to the experience of every traveller. As sometimes, in visiting a Gothic cathedral, we are led through the wonders of the more modern edifice—under soaring arches, over tessellated pavements, and between long rows of clustered columns, past frescoed walls, storied windows, carven pulpits, and sepulchral monuments, with their endless wealth of mythologic imagery—down into the oldest portion of any, the bare stern crypt, severe with the simplicity of early art, resting on pillars taken from an ancient temple, and enclosing the tomb of some martyred saint, to whose glorified spirit an office of perpetual intercession before the mercy-seat is assigned, and in whose honour all that external magnificence has been piled up ; so also we pass through the manifold and marvellous constructions of Plato's imagination to that austere memorial where Xenophon has enshrined with pious care, under the great primary divisions of old Hellenic virtue, an authentic reliquary of one standing foremost among those who, having worked out their own deliverance from the powers of error and evil, would not be saved alone, but published the secret of redemption though death were the penalty of its disclosure ; and who, by their transmitted influence, even more than by their eternal example, are still contributing to the progressive development of all that is most rational, most consistent, most social, and therefore most truly human in ourselves.

## CHAPTER IV.

## PLATO: HIS TEACHERS AND HIS TIMES.

## I.

IN studying the growth of philosophy as an historical evolution, repetitions and anticipations must necessarily be of frequent occurrence. Ideas meet us at every step which can only be appreciated when we trace out their later developments, or only understood when we refer them back to earlier and half-forgotten modes of thought. The speculative tissue is woven out of filaments so delicate and so complicated that it is almost impossible to say where one begins and the other ends. Even conceptions which seem to have been transmitted without alteration are constantly acquiring a new value according to the connexions into which they enter or the circumstances to which they are applied. But if the method of evolution, with its two great principles of continuity and relativity, substitutes a maze of intricate lines, often returning on themselves, for the straight path along which progress was once supposed to move, we are more than compensated by the new sense of coherence and rationality where illusion and extravagance once seemed to reign supreme. It teaches us that the dreams of a great intellect may be better worth our attention than the waking perceptions of ordinary men. Combining fragments of the old order with rudimentary outlines of the new, they lay open the secret laboratory of spiritual chemistry, and help to bridge over the interval separating the most widely contrasted phases of life and thought. Moreover, when we have once accustomed ourselves to break up past systems of philosophy

into their component elements, when we see how heterogeneous and ill-cemented were the parts of this and that proud edifice once offered as the only possible shelter against dangers threatening the very existence of civilisation—we shall be prepared for the application of a similar method to contemporary systems of equally ambitious pretensions; distinguishing that which is vital, fruitful, original, and progressive in their ideal synthesis from that which is of merely provisional and temporary value, when it is not the literary resuscitation of a dead past, visionary, retrograde, and mischievously wrong. And we shall also be reminded that the most precious ideas have only been shaped, preserved, and transmitted through association with earthy and perishable ingredients. The function of true criticism is, like Robert Browning's Roman jeweller, to turn on them 'the proper fiery acid' of purifying analysis which dissolves away the inferior metal and leaves behind the gold ring whereby thought and action are inseparably and fruitfully united.

Such, as it seems to us, is the proper spirit in which we should approach the great thinker whose works are to occupy us in this and the succeeding chapter. No philosopher has ever offered so extended and vulnerable a front to hostile criticism. None has so habitually provoked reprisals by his own incessant and searching attacks on all existing professions, customs, and beliefs. It might even be maintained that none has used the weapons of controversy with more unscrupulous zeal. And it might be added that he who dwells so much on the importance of consistency has occasionally denounced and ridiculed the very principles which he elsewhere upholds as demonstrated truths. It was an easy matter for others to complete the work of destruction which he had begun. His system seems at first sight to be made up of assertions, one more outrageous than another. The ascription of an objective concrete separate reality to verbal abstractions is assuredly the most astounding paradox ever

maintained even by a metaphysician. Yet this is the central article of Plato's creed. That body is essentially different from extension might, one would suppose, have been sufficiently clear to a mathematician who had the advantage of coming after Leucippus and Democritus. Their identity is implicitly affirmed in the *Timæus*. That the soul cannot be both created and eternal; that the doctrine of metempsychosis is incompatible with the hereditary transmission of mental qualities; that a future immortality equivalent to, and proved by the same arguments as, our antenatal existence, would be neither a terror to the guilty nor a consolation to the righteous:—are propositions implicitly denied by Plato's psychology. Passing from theoretical to practical philosophy, it might be observed that respect for human life, respect for individual property, respect for marriage, and respect for truthfulness, are generally numbered among the strongest moral obligations, and those the observance of which most completely distinguishes civilised from savage man; while infanticide, communism, promiscuity, and the occasional employment of deliberate deceit, form part of Plato's scheme for the redemption of mankind. We need not do more than allude to those Dialogues where the phases and symptoms of unnameable passion are delineated with matchless eloquence, and apparently with at least as much sympathy as censure. Finally, from the standpoint of modern science, it might be urged that Plato used all his powerful influence to throw back physical speculation into the theological stage; that he deliberately discredited the doctrine of mechanical causation which, for us, is the most important achievement of early Greek thought; that he expatiated on the criminal folly of those who held the heavenly bodies to be, what we now know them to be, masses of dead matter with no special divinity about them; and that he proposed to punish this and other heresies with a severity distinguishable from the fitful fanaticism of his native city only by its more disciplined and rigorous application.

A plain man might find it difficult to understand how such extravagances could be deliberately propounded by the greatest intellect that Athens ever produced, except on the principle, dear to mediocrity, that genius is but little removed from madness, and that philosophical genius resembles it more nearly than any other. And his surprise would become much greater on learning that the best and wisest men of all ages have looked up with reverence to Plato; that thinkers of the most opposite schools have resorted to him for instruction and stimulation; that his writings have never been more attentively studied than in our own age—an age which has witnessed the destruction of so many illusive reputations; and that the foremost of English educators has used all his influence to promote the better understanding and appreciation of Plato as a prime element in academic culture—an influence now extended far beyond the limits of his own university through that translation of the Platonic Dialogues which is too well known to need any commendation on our part, but which we may mention as one of the principal authorities used for the present study, together with the work of a German scholar, his obligations to whom Prof. Jowett has acknowledged with characteristic grace.<sup>1</sup>

As a set-off against the list of paradoxes cited from Plato, it would be easy to quote a still longer list of brilliant contributions to the cause of truth and right, to strike a balance between the two, and to show that there was a preponderance on the positive side sufficiently great to justify the favourable verdict of posterity. We believe, however, that such a method would be as misleading as it is superficial. Neither Plato nor any other thinker of the same calibre—if any other there be—should be estimated by a simple analysis of his opinions. We must go back to the underlying forces of which individual

<sup>1</sup> *The Dialogues of Plato translated into English.* By B. Jowett, M.A. 2nd ed., 1875. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen.* Zweiter Theil, erste Abtheilung. *Plato und die alte Academie,* 3rd ed., 1875.



opinions are the resultant and the revelation. Every systematic synthesis represents certain profound intellectual tendencies, derived partly from previous philosophies, partly from the social environment, partly from the thinker's own genius and character. Each of such tendencies may be salutary and necessary, according to the conditions under which it comes into play, and yet two or more of them may form a highly unstable and explosive compound. Nevertheless, it is in speculative combinations that they are preserved and developed with the greatest distinctness, and it is there that we must seek for them if we would understand the psychological history of our race. And this is why we began by intimating that the lines of our investigation may take us back over ground which has been already traversed, and forward into regions which cannot at present be completely surveyed.

We have this great advantage in dealing with Plato—that his philosophical writings have come down to us entire, while the thinkers who preceded him are known only through fragments and second-hand reports. Nor is the difference merely accidental. Plato was the creator of speculative literature, properly so called: he was the first and also the greatest artist that ever clothed abstract thought in language of appropriate majesty and splendour; and it is probably to their beauty of form that we owe the preservation of his writings. Rather unfortunately, however, along with the genuine works of the master, a certain number of pieces have been handed down to us under his name, of which some are almost universally admitted to be spurious, while the authenticity of others is a question on which the best scholars are still divided. In the absence of any very cogent external evidence, an immense amount of industry and learning has been expended on this subject, and the arguments employed on both sides sometimes make us doubt whether the reasoning powers of philologists are better developed than, according to Plato, were those of mathematicians in his time. The

two extreme positions are occupied by Grote, who accepts the whole Alexandrian canon, and Krohn, who admits nothing but the *Republic*;<sup>1</sup> while much more serious critics, such as Schaarschmidt, reject along with a mass of worthless compositions several Dialogues almost equal in interest and importance to those whose authenticity has never been doubted. The great historian of Greece seems to have been rather indiscriminating both in his scepticism and in his belief; and the exclusive importance which he attributed to contemporary testimony, or to what passed for such with him, may have unduly biassed his judgment in both directions. As it happens, the authority of the canon is much weaker than Grote imagined; but even granting his extreme contention, our view of Plato's philosophy would not be seriously affected by it, for the pieces which are rejected by all other critics have no speculative importance whatever. The case would be far different were we to agree with those who impugn the genuineness of the *Parmenides*, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, the *Philébus*, and the *Laws*; for these compositions mark a new departure in Platonism amounting to a complete transformation of its fundamental principles, which indeed is one of the reasons why their authenticity has been denied. Apart, however, from the numerous evidences of Platonic authorship furnished by the Dialogues themselves, as well as by the indirect references to them in Aristotle's writings, it seems utterly incredible that a thinker scarcely, if at all, inferior to the master himself—as the supposed imitator must assuredly have been—should have consented to let his reasonings pass current under a false name, and that, too, the name of one whose teaching he in some respects controverted; while there is a further difficulty in assuming that his existence could pass unnoticed at a period marked by intense literary and philosophical activity. Readers who

<sup>1</sup> Krohn, *Der Platonische Staat*, Halle 1876. [I know this work only through Chiapelli, *Della Interpretazione panteistica di Platone*, Florence, 1881.]

wish for fuller information on the subject will find in Zeller's pages a careful and lucid digest of the whole controversy leading to a moderately conservative conclusion. Others will doubtless be content to accept Prof. Jowett's verdict, that 'on the whole not a sixteenth part of the writings which pass under the name of Plato, if we exclude the works rejected by the ancients themselves, can be fairly doubted by those who are willing to allow that a considerable change and growth may have taken place in his philosophy.'<sup>1</sup> To which we may add that the Platonic dialogues, whether the work of one or more hands, and however widely differing among themselves, together represent a single phase of thought, and are appropriately studied as a connected series.

We have assumed in our last remark that it is possible to discover some sort of chronological order in the Platonic Dialogues, and to trace a certain progressive modification in the general tenor of their teaching from first to last. But here also the positive evidence is very scanty, and a variety of conflicting theories have been propounded by eminent scholars. Where so much is left to conjecture, the best that can be said for any hypothesis is that it explains the facts according to known laws of thought. It will be for the reader to judge whether our own attempt to trace the gradual evolution of Plato's system satisfies this condition. In making it we shall take as a basis the arrangement adopted by Prof. Jowett, with some reservations hereafter to be specified.

Before entering on our task, one more difficulty remains to be noticed. Plato, although the greatest master of prose composition that ever lived, and for his time a remarkably voluminous author, cherished a strong dislike for books, and even affected to regret that the art of writing had ever been invented. A man, he said, might amuse himself by putting down his ideas on paper, and might even find written

<sup>1</sup> III., 418.

memoranda useful for private reference, but the only instruction worth speaking of was conveyed by oral communication, which made it possible for objections unforeseen by the teacher to be freely urged and answered.<sup>1</sup> Such had been the method of Socrates, and such was doubtless the practice of Plato himself whenever it was possible for him to set forth his philosophy by word of mouth. It has been supposed, for this reason, that the great writer did not take his own books in earnest, and wished them to be regarded as no more than the elegant recreations of a leisure hour, while his deeper and more serious thoughts were reserved for lectures and conversations, of which, beyond a few allusions in Aristotle, every record has perished. That such, however, was not the case, may be easily shown. In the first place it is evident, from the extreme pains taken by Plato to throw his philosophical expositions into conversational form, that he did not despair of providing a literary substitute for spoken dialogue. Secondly, it is a strong confirmation of this theory that Aristotle, a personal friend and pupil of Plato during many years, should so frequently refer to the Dialogues as authoritative evidences of his master's opinions on the most important topics. And, lastly, if it can be shown that the documents in question do actually embody a comprehensive and connected view of life and of the world, we shall feel satisfied that the oral teaching of Plato, had it been preserved, would not modify in any material degree the impression conveyed by his written compositions.

## II.

There is a story that Plato used to thank the gods, in what some might consider a rather Pharisaic spirit, for having made him a human being instead of a brute, a man instead of a woman, and a Greek instead of a barbarian ; but more than

<sup>1</sup> *Phaedr.*, p. 274 B ff.

anything else for having permitted him to be born in the time of Socrates. It will be observed that all these blessings tended in one direction, the complete supremacy in his character of reason over impulse and sense. To assert, extend, and organise that supremacy was the object of his whole life. Such, indeed, had been the object of all his predecessors, and such, stated generally, has been always and everywhere the object of philosophy ; but none had pursued it so consciously before, and none has proclaimed it so enthusiastically since then. Now, although Plato could not have done this without a far wider range of knowledge and experience than Socrates had possessed, it was only by virtue of the Socratic method that his other gifts and acquisitions could be turned to complete account ; while, conversely, it was only when brought to bear upon these new materials that the full power of the method itself could be revealed. To be continually asking and answering questions ; to elicit information from everybody on every subject worth knowing ; and to elaborate the resulting mass of intellectual material into the most convenient form for practical application or for further transmission, was the secret of true wisdom with the sage of the market-place and the workshop. But the process of dialectic investigation as an end in itself, the intense personal interest of conversation with living men and women of all classes, the impatience for immediate and visible results, had gradually induced Socrates to restrict within far too narrow limits the sources whence his ideas were derived and the purposes to which they were applied. And the dialectic method itself could not but be checked in its internal development by this want of breadth and variety in the topics submitted to its grasp. Therefore the death of Socrates, however lamentable in its occasion, was an un-mixed benefit to the cause for which he laboured, by arresting (as we must suppose it to have arrested) the popular and indiscriminate employment of his cross-examining method,

liberating his ablest disciple from the ascendancy of a revered master, and inducing him to reconsider the whole question of human knowledge and action from a remoter point of view. For, be it observed that Plato did not begin where Socrates had left off; he went back to the germinal point of the whole system, and proceeded to reconstruct it on new lines of his own. The loss of those whom we love habitually leads our thoughts back to the time of our first acquaintance with them, or, if these are ascertainable, to the circumstances of their early life. In this manner Plato seems to have been at first occupied exclusively with the starting-point of his friend's philosophy, and we know, from the narrative given in the *Apologia*, under what form he came to conceive it. We have attempted to show that the account alluded to cannot be entirely historical. Nevertheless it seems sufficiently clear that Socrates began with a conviction of his own ignorance, and that his efforts to improve others were prefaced by the extraction of a similar confession of ignorance on their part. It is also certain that through life he regarded the causes of physical phenomena as placed beyond the reach of human reason and reserved by the gods for their own exclusive cognisance, pointing, by way of proof, to the notorious differences of opinion prevalent among those who had meddled with such matters. Thus, his scepticism worked in two directions, but on the one side it was only provisional and on the other it was only partial. Plato began by combining the two. He maintained that human nescience is universal and necessary; that the gods had reserved all knowledge for themselves; and that the only wisdom left for men is a consciousness of their absolute ignorance. The Socratic starting-point gave the centre of his agnostic circle; the Socratic theology gave the distance at which it was described. Here we have to note two things—first, the breadth of generalisation which distinguishes the disciple from the master; and, secondly, the symptoms of a strong

religious reaction against Greek humanism. Even before the end of the Peloponnesian War, evidence of this reaction had appeared, and the *Bacchae* of Euripides bears striking testimony to its gloomy and fanatical character. The last agony of Athens, the collapse of her power, and the subsequent period of oligarchic terrorism, must have given a stimulus to superstition like that which quite recently afflicted France with an epidemic of apparitions and pilgrimages almost too childish for belief. Plato followed the general movement, although on a much higher plane. While looking down with undisguised contempt on the immoral idolatry of his countrymen, he was equally opposed to the irreligion of the New Learning, and, had an opportunity been given him, he would, like the Reformers of the sixteenth century, have put down both with impartial severity. Nor was this the only analogy between his position and that of a Luther or a Calvin. Like them, and indeed like all great religious teachers, he exalted the Creator by enlarging on the nothingness of the creature; just as Christianity exhibits the holiness of God in contrast and correlation with the sinfulness of unregenerate hearts; just as to Pindar man's life seemed but the fleeting shadow in a dream when compared with the beauty and strength and immortality of the Olympian divinities; so also did Plato deepen the gloom of human ignorance that he might bring out in dazzling relief the fulness of that knowledge which he had been taught to prize as a supreme ideal, but which, for that very reason, seemed proper to the highest existences alone. And we shall presently see how Plato also discovered a principle in man by virtue of which he could claim kindred with the supernatural, and elaborated a scheme of intellectual mediation by which the fallen spirit could be regenerated and made a partaker in the kingdom of speculative truth.

Yet if Plato's theology, from its predominantly rational character, seemed to neglect some feelings which were better

satisfied by the earlier or the later faiths of mankind, we cannot say that it really excluded them. The unfading strength of the old gods was comprehended in the self-existence of absolute ideas, and moral goodness was only a particular application of reason to the conduct of life. An emotional or imaginative element was also contributed by the theory that every faculty exercised without a reasoned consciousness of its processes and aims was due to some saving grace and inspiration from a superhuman power. It was thus, according to Plato, that poets and artists were able to produce works of which they were not able to render an intelligent account ; and it was thus that society continued to hold together with such an exceedingly small amount of wisdom and virtue. Here, however, we have to observe a marked difference between the religious teachers pure and simple, and the Greek philosopher who was a dialectician even more than he was a divine. For Plato held that providential government was merely provisional ; that the inspired prophet stood on a distinctly lower level than the critical, self-conscious thinker ; that ratiocination and not poetry was the highest function of mind ; and that action should be reorganised in accordance with demonstrably certain principles.<sup>1</sup>

This search after a scientific basis for conduct was quite in the spirit of Socrates, but Plato seems to have set very little value on his master's positive contributions to the systematisation of life. We have seen that the *Apologia* is purely sceptical in its tendency ; and we find a whole group of Dialogues, probably the earliest of Plato's compositions, marked by the same negative, inconclusive tone. These are commonly spoken of as Socratic, and so no doubt they are in reference to the subjects discussed ; but they would be more accurately described as an attempt to turn the Socratic method against its first originator. We know from another source that tem-

<sup>1</sup> See Zeller's note on the *θεία μῶρα*, *op. cit.* p. 497.



perance, fortitude, and piety were the chief virtues inculcated and practised by Socrates; while friendship, if not strictly speaking a virtue, was equally with them one of his prime interests in life. It is clear that he considered them the most appropriate and remunerative subjects of philosophical discussion; that he could define their nature to his own satisfaction; and that he had, in fact, defined them as so many varieties of wisdom. Now, Plato has devoted a separate Dialogue to each of the conceptions in question,<sup>1</sup> and in each instance he represents Socrates, who is the principal spokesman, as professedly ignorant of the whole subject under discussion, offering no definition of his own (or at least none that he will stand by), but asking his interlocutors for theirs, and pulling it to pieces when it is given. We do, indeed, find a tendency to resolve the virtues into knowledge, and, so far, either to identify them with one another, or to carry them up into the unity of a higher idea. To this extent Plato follows in the footsteps of his master, but a result which had completely satisfied Socrates became the starting-point of a new investigation with his successor. If virtue is knowledge, it must be knowledge of what we most desire—of the good. Thus the original difficulty returns under another form, or rather we have merely restated it in different terms. For, to ask what is temperance or fortitude, is equivalent to asking what is its use. And this was so obvious to Socrates, that, apparently, he never thought of distinguishing between the two questions. But no sooner were they distinguished than his reduction of all morality to a single principle was shown to be illusive. For each specific virtue had been substituted the knowledge of a specific utility, and that was all. Unless the highest good were one, the means by which it was sought could not converge to a single point; nor, according to the new ideas, could their mastery come under the jurisdiction of a single art.

<sup>1</sup> The *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Euthyphro*, and *Iysis*

We may also suspect that Plato was dissatisfied not only with the positive results obtained by Socrates, but also with the Socratic method of constructing general definitions. To rise from the part to the whole, from particular instances to general notions, was a popular rather than a scientific process ; and sometimes it only amounted to taking the current explanations and modifying them to suit the exigencies of ordinary experience. The resulting definitions could never be more than tentative, and a skilful dialectician could always upset them by producing an unlooked-for exception, or by discovering an ambiguity in the terms by which they were conveyed.

Before ascertaining in what direction Plato sought for an outlet from these accumulated difficulties, we have to glance at a Dialogue belonging apparently to his earliest compositions, but in one respect occupying a position apart from the rest. The *Crito* tells us for what reasons Socrates refused to escape from the fate which awaited him in prison, as, with the assistance of generous friends, he might easily have done. The aged philosopher considered that by adopting such a course he would be setting the Athenian laws at defiance, and doing what in him lay to destroy their validity. Now, we know that the historical Socrates held justice to consist in obedience to the law of the land ; and here for once we find Plato agreeing with him on a definite and positive issue. Such a sudden and singular abandonment of the sceptical attitude merits our attention. It might, indeed, be said that Plato's inconsistencies defy all attempts at reconciliation, and that in this instance the desire to set his maligned friend in a favourable light triumphed over the claims of an impracticable logic. We think, however, that a deeper and truer solution can be found. If the *Crito* inculcates obedience to the laws as a binding obligation, it is not for the reasons which, according to Xenophon, were adduced by the real Socrates in his dispute with the Sophist Hippias ; general utility and private interest were the sole grounds appealed to then. Plato, on

the other hand, ignores all such external considerations. True to his usual method, he reduces the legal conscience to a purely dialectical process. Just as in an argument the disputants are, or ought to be, bound by their own admissions, so also the citizen is bound by a tacit compact to fulfil the laws whose protection he has enjoyed and of whose claims his protracted residence is an acknowledgment. Here there is no need of a transcendent foundation for morality, as none but logical considerations come into play. And it also deserves to be noticed that, where this very idea of an obligation based on acceptance of services had been employed by Socrates, it was discarded by Plato. In the *Euthyphro*, a Dialogue devoted to the discussion of piety, the theory that religion rests on an exchange of good offices between gods and men is mentioned only to be scornfully rejected. Equally remarkable, and equally in advance of the Socratic standpoint, is a principle enunciated in the *Crito*, that retaliation is wrong, and that evil should never be returned for evil.<sup>1</sup> And both are distinct anticipations of the earliest Christian teaching, though both are implicitly contradicted by the so-called religious services celebrated in Christian churches, and by the doctrine of a divine retribution which is only not retaliatory because it is infinitely in excess of the provocation received.

If the earliest of Plato's enquiries, while they deal with the same subjects and are conducted on the same method as those cultivated by Socrates, evince a breadth of view surpassing anything recorded of him by Xenophon, they also exhibit traces of an influence disconnected with and inferior in value to his. On more than one occasion<sup>2</sup> Plato reasons, or rather quibbles, in a style which he has elsewhere held up to ridicule as characteristic of the Sophists, with such success that the name of sophistry has clung to it ever since.

<sup>1</sup> P. 49, A ff. Zeller, 142.

<sup>2</sup> *Charmides*, 161 E; *Lysis*, 212 C.

Indeed, some of the verbal fallacies employed are so transparent that we can hardly suppose them to be unintentional, and we are forced to conclude that the young despiser of human wisdom was resolved to maintain his thesis with any weapons, good or bad, which came to hand. And it seems much more likely that he learned the eristic art from Protagoras or from his disciples than from Socrates. Plato spent a large part of his life in opposing the Sophists—that is to say, the paid professors of wisdom and virtue; but in spite of, or rather perhaps because of, this very opposition, he was profoundly affected by their teaching and example. It is quite conceivable, although we do not find it stated as a fact, that he resorted to them for instruction when a young man, and before coming under the influence of Socrates, an event which did not take place until he was twenty years old; or he may have been directed to them by Socrates himself. With all its originality, his style bears traces of a rhetorical training in the more elaborate passages, and the Sophists were the only teachers of rhetoric then to be found. His habit of clothing philosophical lessons in the form of a myth seems also to have been borrowed from them. It would, therefore, not be surprising that he should cultivate their argumentative legerdemain side by side with the more strict and severe discipline of Socratic dialectics.

Plato does, no doubt, make it a charge against the Sophists that their doctrines are not only false and immoral, but that they are put together without any regard for logical coherence. It would seem, however, that this style of attack belongs rather to the later and constructive than to the earlier and receptive period of his intellectual development. The original cause of his antagonism to the professional teachers seems to have been their general pretensions to knowledge, which, from the standpoint of universal scepticism, were, of course, utterly illusive; together with a feeling of aristocratic contempt for a calling in which considerations of

pecuniary interest were involved, heightened in this instance by a conviction that the buyer received nothing better than a sham article in exchange for his money. Here, again, a parallel suggests itself with the first preaching of the Gospel. The attitude of Christ towards the scribes and Pharisees, as also that of St. Paul towards Simon Magus, will help us to understand how Plato, in another order of spiritual teaching, must have regarded the hypocrisy of wisdom, the intrusion of fraudulent traders into the temple of Delphic inspiration, and the sale of a priceless blessing whose unlimited diffusion should have been its own and only reward.

Yet throughout the philosophy of Plato we meet with a tendency to ambiguous shiftings and reversions of which, here also, due account must be taken. That curious blending of love and hate which forms the subject of a mystical lyric in Mr. Browning's *Pippa Passes*, is not without its counterpart in purely rationalistic discussion. If Plato used the Socratic method to dissolve away much that was untrue, because incomplete, in Socratism, he used it also to absorb much that was deserving of development in Sophisticism. If, in one sense, the latter was a direct reversal of his master's teaching, in another it served as a sort of intermediary between that teaching and the unenlightened consciousness of mankind. The shadow should not be confounded with the substance, but it might show by contiguity, by resemblance, and by contrast where the solid reality lay, what were its outlines, and how its characteristic lights might best be viewed.

Such is the mild and conciliatory mode of treatment at first adopted by Plato in dealing with the principal representative of the Sophists—Protagoras. In the Dialogue which bears his name the famous humanist is presented to us as a professor of popular unsystematised morality, proving by a variety of practical arguments and ingenious illustrations that virtue can be taught, and that the preservation of social order depends upon the possibility of teaching it; but unwilling to

go along with the reasonings by which Socrates shows the applicability of rigorously scientific principles to conduct. Plato has here taken up one side of the Socratic ethics, and developed it into a complete and self-consistent theory. The doctrine inculcated is that form of utilitarianism to which Mr. Sidgwick has given the name of egoistic hedonism. We are brought to admit that virtue is one because the various virtues reduce themselves in the last analysis to prudence. It is assumed that happiness, in the sense of pleasure and the absence of pain, is the sole end of life. Duty is identified with interest. Morality is a calculus for computing quantities of pleasure and pain, and all virtuous action is a means for securing a maximum of the one together with a minimum of the other. Ethical science is constituted; it can be taught like mathematics; and so far the Sophists are right, but they have arrived at the truth by a purely empirical process; while Socrates, who professes to know nothing, by simply following the dialectic impulse strikes out a generalisation which at once confirms and explains their position; yet from self-sufficiency or prejudice they refuse to agree with him in taking their stand on its only logical foundation.

That Plato put forward the ethical theory of the Protagoras in perfect good faith cannot, we think, be doubted; although in other writings he has repudiated hedonism with contemptuous aversion; and it seems equally evident that this was his earliest contribution to positive thought. Of all his theories it is the simplest and most Socratic; for Socrates, in endeavouring to reclaim the foolish or vicious, often spoke as if self-interest was the paramount principle of human nature; although, had his assumption been formulated as an abstract proposition, he too might have shrunk from it with something of the uneasiness attributed to Protagoras. And from internal evidence of another description we have reason to think that the Dialogue in question is a comparatively juvenile production, remembering always that the period of youth was much more

protracted among the Greeks than among ourselves. One almost seems to recognise the hand of a boy just out of college, who delights in drawing caricatures of his teachers ; and who, while he looks down on classical scholarship in comparison with more living and practical topics, is not sorry to show that he can discuss a difficult passage from Simonides better than the professors themselves.

### III.

Our survey of Plato's first period is now complete ; and we have to enter on the far more arduous task of tracing out the circumstances, impulses, and ideas by which all the scattered materials of Greek life, Greek art, and Greek thought were shaped into a new system and stamped with the impress of an imperishable genius. At the threshold of this second period the personality of Plato himself emerges into greater distinctness, and we have to consider what part it played in an evolution where universal tendencies and individual leanings were inseparably combined.

Plato was born in the year 429, or according to some accounts 427, and died 347 B.C. Few incidents in his biography can be fixed with any certainty ; but for our purpose the most general facts are also the most interesting, and about these we have tolerably trustworthy information. His family was one of the noblest in Athens, being connected on the father's side with Codrus, and on the mother's with Solon ; while two of his kinsmen, Critias and Charmides, were among the chiefs of the oligarchic party. It is uncertain whether he inherited any considerable property, nor is the question one of much importance. It seems clear that he enjoyed the best education Athens could afford, and that through life he possessed a competence sufficient to relieve him from the cares of material existence. Possibly the preference which he expressed, when far advanced in life, for moderate health and

wealth arose from having experienced those advantages himself. If the busts which bear his name are to be trusted, he was remarkably beautiful, and, like some other philosophers, very careful of his personal appearance. Perhaps some reminiscences of the admiration bestowed on himself may be mingled with those pictures of youthful loveliness and of its exciting effect on the imaginations of older men which give such grace and animation to his earliest dialogues. We know not whether as lover or beloved he passed unscathed through the storms of passion which he has so powerfully described, nor whether his apparently intimate acquaintance with them is due to divination or to regretful experience. We may pass by in silence whatever is related on this subject, with the certainty that, whether true or not, scandalous stories could not fail to be circulated about him.

It was natural that one who united a great intellect to a glowing temperament should turn his thoughts to poetry. Plato wrote a quantity of verses—verse-making had become fashionable just then—but wisely committed them to the flames on making the acquaintance of Socrates. It may well be doubted whether the author of the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* would ever have attained eminence in metrical composition, even had he lived in an age far more favourable to poetic inspiration than that which came after the flowering time of Attic art. It seems as if Plato, with all his fervour, fancy, and dramatic skill, lacked the most essential quality of a singer; his finest passages are on a level with the highest poetry, and yet they are separated from it by a chasm more easily felt than described. Aristotle, whom we think of as hard and dry and cold, sometimes comes much nearer to the true lyric cry. And, as if to mark out Plato's style still more distinctly from every other, it is also deficient in oratorical power. The philosopher evidently thought that he could beat the rhetoricians on their own ground; if the *Menexenus* be genuine, he tried to do so and failed; and even without its



testimony we are entitled to say as much on the strength of shorter attempts. We must even take leave to doubt whether dialogue, properly so called, was Plato's forte. Where one speaker is placed at such a height above the others as Socrates, or the Eleatic Stranger, or the Athenian in the *Laws*, there cannot be any real conversation. The other interlocutors are good listeners, and serve to break the monotony of a continuous exposition by their expressions of assent or even by their occasional inability to follow the argument, but give no real help or stimulus. And when allowed to offer an opinion of their own, they, too, lapse into a monologue, addressed, as our silent trains of thought habitually are, to an imaginary auditor whose sympathy and support are necessary but are also secure. Yet if Plato's style is neither exactly poetical, nor oratorical, nor conversational, it has affinities with each of these three varieties; it represents the common root from which they spring, and brings us, better than any other species of composition, into immediate contact with the mind of the writer. The Platonic Socrates has eyes like those of a portrait which follow us wherever we turn, and through which we can read his inmost soul, which is no other than the universal reason of humanity in the delighted surprise of its first awakening to self-conscious activity. The poet thinks and feels for us; the orator makes our thoughts and feelings his own, and then restores them to us in a concentrated form, 'receiving in vapour what he gives back in a flood.' Plato removes every obstacle to the free development of our faculties; he teaches us by his own example how to think and to feel for ourselves. If Socrates personified philosophy; Plato has reproduced the personification in artistic form with such masterly effect that its influence has been extended through all ages and over the whole civilised world. This portrait stands as an intermediary between its original and the far-reaching effects indirectly due to his dialectic inspiration, like that universal soul which Plato himself has placed between

the supreme artificer and the material world, that it might bring the fleeting contents of space and time into harmony with uncreated and everlasting ideas.

To paint Socrates at his highest and his best, it was necessary to break through the narrow limits of his historic individuality, and to show how, had they been presented to him, he would have dealt with problems outside the experience of a home-staying Athenian citizen. The founder of idealism—that is to say, the realisation of reason, the systematic application of thought to life—had succeeded in his task because he had embodied the noblest elements of the Athenian *Dêmos*, orderliness, patriotism, self-control, and publicity of debate, together with a receptive intelligence for improvements effected in other states. But, just as the impulse which enabled those qualities to tell decisively on Greek history at a moment of inestimable importance came from the Athenian aristocracy, with its Dorian sympathies, its adventurous ambition, and its keen attention to foreign affairs, so also did Plato, carrying the same spirit into philosophy, bring the dialectic method into contact with older and broader currents of speculation, and employ it to recognise the whole spiritual activity of his race.

A strong desire for reform must always be preceded by a deep dissatisfaction with things as they are; and if the reform is to be very sweeping the discontent must be equally comprehensive. Hence the great renovators of human life have been remarkable for the severity with which they have denounced the failings of the world where they were placed, whether as regards persons, habits, institutions, or beliefs. Yet to speak of their attitude as pessimistic would either be unfair, or would betray an unpardonable inability to discriminate between two utterly different theories of existence. Nothing can well be more unlike the systematised pusillanimity of those lost souls, without courage and without hope, who find a consolation for their own failure in the belief that everything

is a failure, than the fiery energy which is drawn into a perpetual tension by the contrast of what is with the vision of what yet may be. But if pessimism paralyses every generous effort and aspiration by teaching that misery is the irremediable lot of animated beings, or even, in the last analysis, of all being, the opposing theory of optimism exercises as deadly an influence when it induces men to believe that their present condition is, on the whole, a satisfactory one, or that at worst wrong will be righted without any criticism or interference on their part. Even those who believe progress to have been, so far, the most certain fact in human history, cannot blind themselves to the existence of enormous forces ever tending to draw society back into the barbarism and brutality of its primitive condition; and they know also, that whatever ground we have won is due to the efforts of a small minority, who were never weary of urging forward their more sluggish companions, without caring what angry susceptibilities they might arouse—risking recrimination, insult, and outrage, so that only, under whatever form, whether of divine mandate or of scientific demonstration, the message of humanity to her children might be delivered in time. Nor is it only with immobility that they have had to contend. Gains in one direction are frequently balanced by losses in another; while at certain periods there is a distinct retrogression along the whole line. And it is well if, amid the general decline to a lower level, sinister voices are not heard proclaiming that the multitude may safely trust to their own promptings, and that self-indulgence or self-will should be the only law of life. It is also on such occasions that the rallying cry is most needed, and that the born leaders of civilisation must put forth their most strenuous efforts to arrest the disheartened fugitives and to denounce the treacherous guides. It was in this aspect that Plato viewed his age; and he set himself to continue the task which Socrates had attempted, but had been trampled down in endeavouring to achieve.

The illustrious Italian poet and essayist, Leopardi, has observed that the idea of the world as a vast confederacy banded together for the repression of everything good and great and true, originated with Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> It is surprising that so accomplished a Hellenist should not have attributed the priority to Plato. It is true that he does not speak of the world itself in Leopardi's sense, because to him it meant something different—a divinely created order which it would have been blasphemy to revile ; but the thing is everywhere present to his thoughts under other names, and he pursues it with relentless hostility. He looks on the great majority of the human race, individually and socially, in their beliefs and in their practices, as utterly corrupt, and blinded to such an extent that they are ready to turn and rend any one who attempts to lead them into a better path. The many 'know not wisdom and virtue, and are always busy with gluttony and sensuality. Like cattle, with their eyes always looking down and their heads stooping, not, indeed, to the earth, but to the dining-table, they fatten and feed and breed, and in their excessive love of these delights they kick and butt at one another with horns and hoofs which are made of iron ; and they kill one another by reason of their insatiable lust.'<sup>2</sup> Their ideal is the man who nurses up his desires to the utmost intensity, and procures the means for gratifying them by fraud or violence. The assembled multitude resembles a strong and fierce brute expressing its wishes by inarticulate grunts, which the popular leaders make it their business to understand and to comply with. A statesman of the nobler kind who should attempt to benefit the people by thwarting their foolish appetites will be denounced as a public enemy by the demagogues, and will stand no more chance of acquittal than a physician if he were brought before a jury of children by the pastry-cook.

<sup>1</sup> *Pensieri*, lxxxiv and lxxxv.

<sup>2</sup> *Repub.*, 586, A. Jowett, III, p. 481.

That an Athenian, or, indeed, any Greek gentleman, should regard the common people with contempt and aversion was nothing strange. A generation earlier such feelings would have led Plato to look on the overthrow of democracy and the establishment of an aristocratic government as the remedy for every evil. The upper classes, accustomed to decorate themselves with complimentary titles, had actually come to believe that all who belonged to them were paragons of wisdom and goodness. With the rule of the Thirty came a terrible awakening. In a few months more atrocities were perpetrated by the oligarchs than the Dêmos had been guilty of in as many generations. It was shown that accomplished gentlemen like Critias were only distinguished from the common herd by their greater impatience of opposition and by the more destructive fury of their appetites. With Plato, at least, all allusions on this head came to an end. He now 'smiled at the claims of long descent,' considering that 'every man has had thousands and thousands of progenitors, and among them have been rich and poor, kings and slaves, Hellenes and barbarians, many times over;' and even the possession of a large landed property ceased to inspire him with any respect when he compared it with the surface of the whole earth.

There still remained one form of government to be tried, the despotic rule of a single individual. In the course of his travels Plato came into contact with an able and powerful specimen of the tyrant class, the elder Dionysius. A number of stories relating to their intercourse have been preserved; but the different versions disagree very widely, and none of them can be entirely trusted. It seems certain, however, that Plato gave great offence to the tyrant by his freedom of speech, that he narrowly escaped death, and that he was sold into slavery, from which condition he was redeemed by the generosity of Anniceris, a Cyrenaean philosopher. It is supposed that the scathing description in which Plato has

held up to everlasting infamy the unworthy possessor of absolute power—a description long afterwards applied by Tacitus to the vilest of the Roman emperors—was suggested by the type which had come under his own observation in Sicily.

Of all existing constitutions that of Sparta approached nearest to the ideal of Plato, or, rather, he regarded it as the least degraded. He liked the conservatism of the Spartans, their rigid discipline, their haughty courage, the participation of their daughters in gymnastic exercises, the austerity of their manners, and their respect for old age; but he found much to censure both in their ancient customs and in the characteristics which the possession of empire had recently developed among them. He speaks with disapproval of their exclusively military organisation, of their contempt for philosophy, and of the open sanction which they gave to practices barely tolerated at Athens. And he also comments on their covetousness, their harshness to inferiors, and their haste to throw off the restraints of the law whenever detection could be evaded.<sup>1</sup>

So far we have spoken as if Plato regarded the various false polities existing around him as so many fixed and disconnected types. This, however, was not the case. The present state of things was bad enough, but it threatened to become worse wherever worse was possible. The constitutions exhibiting a mixture of good and evil contained within themselves the seeds of a further corruption, and tended to pass into the form standing next in order on the downward slope. Spartan timocracy must in time become an oligarchy, to oligarchy would succeed democracy, and this would end in tyranny, beyond which no further fall was possible.<sup>2</sup> The degraded condition of Syracuse seemed likely to be the last outcome of Hellenic civilisation. We know not how far the gloomy forebodings of Plato may have been justified by his

<sup>1</sup> Zeller, *op. cit.*, 777-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Repub.*, VIII. and IX.

own experience, but he sketched with prophetic insight the future fortunes of the Roman Republic. Every phase of the progressive degeneration is exemplified in its later history, and the order of their succession is most faithfully preserved. Even his portraits of individual timocrats, oligarchs, demagogues; and despots are reproduced to the life in the pages of Plutarch, of Cicero, and of Tacitus.

If our critic found so little to admire in Hellas, still less did he seek for the realisation of his dreams in the outlying world. The lessons of Protagoras had not been wasted on him, and, unlike the nature-worshippers of the eighteenth century, he never fell into the delusion that wisdom and virtue had their home in *primaeval* forests or in corrupt Oriental despotisms. For him, Greek civilisation, with all its faults, was the best thing that human nature had produced, the only hearth of intellectual culture, the only soil where new experiments in education and government could be tried. He could go down to the roots of thought, of language, and of society; he could construct a new style, a new system, and a new polity, from the foundation up; he could grasp all the tendencies that came under his immediate observation, and follow them out to their utmost possibilities of expansion; but his vast powers of analysis and generalisation remained subject to this restriction, that a Hellene he was and a Hellene he remained to the end.

A Hellene, and an aristocrat as well. Or, using the word in its most comprehensive sense, we may say that he was an aristocrat all round, a believer in inherent superiorities of race, sex, birth, breeding, and age. Everywhere we find him restlessly searching after the wisest, purest, best, until at last, passing beyond the limits of existence itself, words fail him to describe the absolute ineffable only good, not being and not knowledge, but creating and inspiring both. Thus it came to pass that his hopes of effecting a thorough reform did not lie in an appeal to the masses, but in the selection and

seclusion from evil influences of a few intelligent youths. Here we may detect a remarkable divergence between him and his master. Socrates, himself a man of the people, did not like to hear the Athenians abused. If they went wrong, it was, he said, the fault of their leaders.<sup>1</sup> But according to Plato, it was from the people themselves that corruption originally proceeded, it was they who instilled false lessons into the most intelligent minds, teaching them from their very infancy to prefer show to substance, success to merit, and pleasure to virtue ; making the study of popular caprice the sure road to power, and poisoning the very sources of morality by circulating blasphemous stories about the gods—stories which represented them as weak, sensual, capricious beings, setting an example of iniquity themselves, and quite willing to pardon it in men on condition of going shares in the spoil. The poets had a great deal to do with the manufacture of these discreditable myths ; and towards poets as a class Plato entertained feelings of mingled admiration and contempt. As an artist, he was powerfully attracted by the beauty of their works ; as a theologian, he believed them to be the channels of divine inspiration, and sometimes also the guardians of a sacred tradition ; but as a critic, he was shocked at their incapacity to explain the meaning of their own works, especially when it was coupled with ridiculous pretensions to omniscience ; and he regarded the imitative character of their productions as illustrating, in a particularly flagrant manner, that substitution of appearance for reality which, according to his philosophy, was the deepest source of error and evil.

If private society exercised a demoralising influence on its most gifted members, and in turn suffered a still further debasement by listening to their opinions, the same fatal interchange of corruption went on still more actively in public life, so far, at least, as Athenian democracy was concerned. The people would tolerate no statesman who did not pamper

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, III., v., 18.



their appetites; and the statesmen, for their own ambitious purposes, attended solely to the material wants of the people, entirely neglecting their spiritual interests. In this respect, Pericles, the most admired of all, had been the chief of sinners; for 'he was the first who gave the people pay and made them idle and cowardly, and encouraged them in the love of talk and of money.' Accordingly, a righteous retribution overtook him, for 'at the very end of his life they convicted him of theft, and almost put him to death.' So it had been with the other boasted leaders, Miltiades, Themistocles, and Cimon; all suffered from what is falsely called the ingratitude of the people. Like injudicious keepers, they had made the animal committed to their charge fiercer instead of gentler, until its savage propensities were turned against themselves. Or, changing the comparison, they were like purveyors of luxury, who fed the State on a diet to which its present 'ulcerated and swollen condition' was due. They had 'filled the city full of harbours, and docks, and walls, and revenues and all that, and had left no room for justice and temperance.' One only among the elder statesmen, Aristeides, is excepted from this sweeping condemnation, and, similarly, Socrates is declared to have been the only true statesman of his time.<sup>1</sup>

On turning from the conduct of State affairs to the administration of justice in the popular law courts, we find the same tale of iniquity repeated, but this time with more telling satire, as Plato is speaking from his own immediate experience. He considers that, under the manipulation of dexterous pleaders, judicial decisions had come to be framed with a total disregard of righteousness. That disputed claims should be submitted to a popular tribunal and settled by counting heads was, indeed, according to his view, a virtual admission that no absolute standard of justice existed; that moral truth varied with individual opinion. And this

<sup>1</sup> *Gorgias*, 515, C., ff. Jowett, II., 396-400.

is how the character of the lawyer had been moulded in consequence :—

He has become keen and shrewd ; he has learned how to flatter his master in word and indulge him in deed ; but his soul is small and unrighteous. His slavish condition has deprived him of growth and uprightness and independence ; dangers and fears which were too much for his truth and honesty came upon him in early years, when the tenderness of youth was unequal to them, and he has been driven into crooked ways ; from the first he has practised deception and retaliation, and has become stunted and warped. And so he has passed out of youth into manhood, having no soundness in him, and is now, as he thinks, a master in wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

To make matters worse, the original of this unflattering portrait was rapidly becoming the most powerful man in the State. Increasing specialisation had completely separated the military and political functions which had formerly been discharged by a single eminent individual, and the business of legislation was also becoming a distinct profession. No orator could obtain a hearing in the assembly who had not a technical acquaintance with the subject of deliberation, if it admitted of technical treatment, which was much more frequently the case now than in the preceding generation. As a consequence of this revolution, the ultimate power of supervision and control was passing into the hands of the law courts, where general questions could be discussed in a more popular style, and often from a wider or a more sentimental point of view. They were, in fact, beginning to wield an authority like that exercised until quite lately by the press in modern Europe, only that its action was much more direct and formidable. A vote of the Ecclêsia could only deprive a statesman of office : a vote of the Dicastery might deprive him of civil rights, home, freedom, property, or even life itself. Moreover, with the loss of empire and the decline of public spirit, private interests had come to attract a proportionately larger share of attention ; and unobtrusive citi-

<sup>1</sup> *Theætelus*, 173, A. Jowett, IV., 322.

zens who had formerly escaped from the storms of party passion, now found themselves marked out as a prey by every fluent and dexterous pleader who could find an excuse for dragging them before the courts. Rhetoric was hailed as the supreme art, enabling its possessor to dispense with every other study, and promising young men were encouraged to look on it as the most paying line they could take up. Even those whose civil status or natural timidity precluded them from speaking in public could gain an eminent and envied position by composing speeches for others to deliver. Behind these, again, stood the professed masters of rhetoric, claiming to direct the education and the whole public opinion of the age by their lectures and pamphlets. Philosophy was not excluded from their system of training, but it occupied a strictly subordinate place. Studied in moderation, they looked on it as a bracing mental exercise and a repertory of sounding commonplaces, if not as a solvent for old-fashioned notions of honesty; but a close adherence to the laws of logic or to the principles of morality seemed puerile pedantry to the elegant stylists who made themselves the advocates of every crowned filibuster abroad, while preaching a policy of peace at any price at home.

It is evident that the fate of Socrates was constantly in Plato's thoughts, and greatly embittered his scorn for the multitude as well as for those who made themselves its ministers and minions. It so happened that his friend's three accusers had been respectively a poet, a statesman, and a rhetor; thus aptly typifying to the philosopher's lively imagination the triad of charlatans in whom public opinion found its appropriate representatives and spokesmen. Yet Plato ought consistently to have held that the condemnation of Socrates was, equally with the persecution of Pericles, a satire on the teaching which, after at least thirty years' exercise, had left its auditors more corrupt than it found them. In like manner the ostracism of Aristides might be set against similar

sentences passed on less puritanical statesmen. For the purpose of the argument it would have been sufficient to show that in existing circumstances the office of public adviser was both thankless and dangerous. We must always remember that when Plato is speaking of past times he is profoundly influenced by aristocratic traditions, and also that under a retrospective disguise he is really attacking contemporary abuses. And if, even then, his denunciations seem excessive, their justification may be found in that continued decay of public virtue which, not long afterwards, brought about the final catastrophe of Athenian independence.

#### IV.

To illustrate the relation in which Plato stood towards his own times, we have already had occasion to draw largely on the productions of his maturer manhood. We have now to take up the broken thread of our systematic exposition, and to trace the development of his philosophy through that wonderful series of compositions which entitle him to rank among the greatest writers, the most comprehensive thinkers, and the purest religious teachers of all ages. In the presence of such glory a mere divergence of opinion must not be permitted to influence our judgment. High above all particular truths stands the principle that truth itself exists, and it was for this that Plato fought. If there were others more completely emancipated from superstition, none so persistently appealed to the logic before which superstition must ultimately vanish. If his schemes for the reconstruction of society ignore many obvious facts, they assert with unrivalled force the necessary supremacy of public welfare over private pleasure; and their avowed utilitarianism offers a common ground to the rival reformers who will have nothing to do with the mysticism of their metaphysical foundation. Those, again, who hold, like the youthful Plato himself, that the

ultimate interpretation of existence belongs to a science transcending human reason, will here find the doctrines of their religion anticipated as in a dream. And even those who, standing aloof both from theology and philosophy, live, as they imagine, for beauty alone, will observe with interest how the spirit of Greek art survived in the denunciation of its idolatry, and 'the light that never was on sea or land,' after fading away from the lower levels of Athenian fancy, came once more to suffuse the frozen steeps of dialectic with its latest and divinest rays.

The glowing enthusiasm of Plato is, however, not entirely derived from the poetic traditions of his native city; or perhaps we should rather say that he and the great writers who preceded him drew from a common fount of inspiration. Mr. Emerson, in one of the most penetrating criticisms ever written on our philosopher,<sup>1</sup> has pointed out the existence of two distinct elements in the Platonic Dialogues—one dispersive, practical, prosaic; the other mystical, absorbing, centripetal. The American scholar is, however, as we think, quite mistaken when he attributes the second of these tendencies to Asiatic influence. It is extremely doubtful whether Plato ever travelled farther east than Egypt; it is probable that his stay in that country was not of long duration; and it is certain that he did not acquire a single metaphysical idea from its inhabitants. He liked their rigid conservatism; he liked their institution of a dominant priesthood; he liked their system of popular education, and the place which it gave to mathematics made him look with shame on the 'swinish ignorance' of his own countrymen in that respect;<sup>2</sup> but on the whole he classes them among the races exclusively devoted to money-making, and in aptitude for philosophy he places them far below the Greeks. Very different were the impressions brought home from his visits to Sicily and

<sup>1</sup> The lecture on Plato in *Representative Men*.

<sup>2</sup> *Legg*, 819, D. *Jowett*, V., 390.

Southern Italy. There he became acquainted with modes of thought in which the search after hidden resemblances and analogies was a predominant passion ; there the existence of a central unity underlying all phenomena was maintained, as against sense and common opinion, with the intensity of a religious creed ; there alone speculation was clothed in poetic language ; there first had an attempt been made to carry thought into life by associating it with a reform of manners and beliefs. There, too, the arts of dance and song had assumed a more orderly and solemn aspect ; the chorus received its final constitution from a Sicilian master ; and the loftiest strains of Greek lyric poetry were composed for recitation in the streets of Sicilian cities or at the courts of Sicilian kings. Then, with the rise of rhetoric, Greek prose was elaborated by Sicilian teachers into a sort of rhythmical composition, combining rich imagery with studied harmonies and contrasts of sense and sound. And as the hold of Asiatic civilisation on eastern Hellas grew weaker, the attention of her foremost spirits was more and more attracted to this new region of wonder and romance. The stream of colonisation set thither in a steady flow ; the scenes of mythical adventure were rediscovered in Western waters ; and it was imagined that, by grasping the resources of Sicily, an empire extending over the whole Mediterranean might be won. Perhaps, without being too fanciful, we may trace a likeness between the daring schemes of Alcibiades and the more remote but not more visionary kingdom suggested by an analogous inspiration to the idealising soul of Plato. Each had learned to practise, although for far different purposes, the royal art of Socrates—the mastery over men's minds acquired by a close study of their interests, passions, and beliefs. But the ambition of the one defeated his own aim, to the destruction of his country and of himself ; while the other drew into Athenian thought whatever of Western force and fervour was needed for the accomplishment of its

imperial task. We may say of Plato what he has said of his own Theaetétus, that 'he moves surely and smoothly and successfully in the path of knowledge and inquiry; always making progress like the noiseless flow of a river of oil';<sup>1</sup> but everywhere beside or beneath that placid lubricating flow we may trace the action of another current, where still sparkles, fresh and clear as at first, the fiery Sicilian wine.

It will be remembered that in an earlier section of this chapter we accompanied Plato to a period when he had provisionally adopted a theory in which the Protagorean contention that virtue can be taught was confirmed and explained by the Socratic contention that virtue is knowledge; while this knowledge again was interpreted in the sense of a hedonistic calculus, a prevision and comparison of the pleasures and pains consequent on our actions. We have now to trace the lines of thought by which he was guided to a different conception of ethical science.

After resolving virtue into knowledge of pleasure, the next questions which would present themselves to so keen a thinker were obviously, What is knowledge? and What is pleasure? The *Theaetétus* is chiefly occupied with a discussion of the various answers already given to the first of these enquiries. It seems, therefore, to come naturally next after the *Protagoras*; and our conjecture receives a further confirmation when we find that here also a large place is given to the opinions of the Sophist after whom that dialogue is named; the chief difference being that the points selected for controversy are of a speculative rather than of a practical character. There is, however, a close connexion between the argument by which Protagoras had endeavoured to prove that all mankind are teachers of virtue, and his more general principle that man is the measure of all things. And perhaps it was the more obvious difficulties attending the latter view which led Plato, after some hesitation, to reject the former along

<sup>1</sup> *Theaet.*, 144. Jowett's Transl.

with it. In an earlier chapter we gave some reasons for believing that Protagoras did not erect every individual into an arbiter of truth in the sweeping sense afterwards put upon his words. He was probably opposing a human to a theological or a naturalistic standard. Nevertheless, it does not follow that Plato was fighting with a shadow when he pressed the Protagorean dictum to its most literal interpretation. There are plenty of people still who would maintain it to that extent. Wherever and whenever the authority of ancient traditions is broken down, the doctrine that one man's opinion is as good as another's immediately takes its place; or rather the doctrine in question is a survival of traditionalism in an extremely pulverised form. And when we are told that the majority must be right—which is a very different principle from holding that the majority should be obeyed—we may take it as a sign that the loose particles are beginning to coalesce again. The substitution of an individual for a universal standard of truth is, according to Plato, a direct consequence of the theory which identifies knowledge with sense-perception. It is, at any rate, certain that the most vehement assertors of the former doctrine are also those who are fondest of appealing to what they and their friends have seen, heard, or felt; and the more educated among them place enormous confidence in statistics. They are also fond of repeating the adage that an ounce of fact is worth a ton of theory, without considering that theory alone can furnish the balance in which facts are weighed. Plato does not go very deep into the *rationale* of observation, nor in the infancy of exact science was it to be expected that he should. He fully recognised the presence of two factors, an objective and a subjective, in every sensation, but lost his hold on the true method in attempting to trace a like dualism through the whole of consciousness. Where we should distinguish between the mental energies and the physical processes underlying them, or between the



elements respectively contributed to every cognition by immediate experience and reflection, he conceived the inner and outer worlds as two analogous series related to one another as an image to its original.

At this last point we touch on the final generalisation by which Plato extended the dialectic method to all existence, and readmitted into philosophy the earlier speculations provisionally excluded from it by Socrates. The cross-examining elenchus, at first applied only to individuals, had been turned with destructive effect on every class, every institution, and every polity, until the whole of human life was made to appear one mass of self-contradiction, instability, and illusion. It had been held by some that the order of nature offered a contrast and a correction to this bewildering chaos. Plato, on the other hand, sought to show that the ignorance and evil prevalent among men were only a part of the imperfection necessarily belonging to derivative existence of every kind. For this purpose the philosophy of Heraclitus proved a welcome auxiliary. The pupil of Socrates had been taught in early youth by Cratylus, an adherent of the Ephesian school, that movement, relativity, and the conjunction of opposites are the very conditions under which Nature works. We may conjecture that Plato did not at first detect any resemblance between the Heraclitean flux and the mental bewilderment produced or brought to light by the master of cross-examination. But his visit to Italy would probably enable him to take a new view of the Ionian speculations, by bringing him into contact with schools maintaining a directly opposite doctrine. The Eleatics held that existence remained eternally undivided, unmoved, and unchanged. The Pythagoreans arranged all things according to a strained and rigid antithetical construction. Then came the identifying flash.<sup>1</sup> Unchangeable reality, divine order,

<sup>1</sup> This expression is borrowed from Prof. Bain. See the chapter on Association by Resemblance in *The Senses and the Intellect*.

mathematical truth—these were the objective counterpart of the Socratic definitions, of the consistency which Socrates introduced into conduct. The Heraclitean system applied to phenomena only ; and it faithfully reflected the incoherent beliefs and disorderly actions of uneducated men. We are brought into relation with the fluctuating sea of generated and perishing natures by sense and opinion, and these reproduce, in their irreconcilable diversity, the shifting character of the objects with which they are conversant. Whatever we see and feel is a mixture of being and unreality ; it is, and is not, at the same time. Sensible magnitudes are equal or greater or less according as the standard of comparison is chosen. Yet the very act of comparison shows that there is something in ourselves deeper than mere sense ; something to which all individual sensations are referred as to a common centre, and in which their images are stored up. Knowledge, then, can no longer be identified with sensation, since the mental reproductions of external objects are apprehended in the absence of their originals, and since thought possesses the further faculty of framing abstract notions not representing any sensible objects at all.

We need not follow Plato's investigations into the meaning of knowledge and the causes of illusion any further ; especially as they do not lead, in this instance, to any positive conclusion. The general tendency is to seek for truth within rather than without ; and to connect error partly with the disturbing influence of sense-impressions on the higher mental faculties, partly with the inherent confusion and instability of the phenomena whence those impressions are derived. Our principal concern here is to note the expansive power of generalisation which was carrying philosophy back again from man to Nature—the deep-seated contempt of Plato for public opinion—and the incipient differentiation of demonstrated from empirical truth.

A somewhat similar vein of reflection is worked out in the

*Cratylus*, a Dialogue presenting some important points of contact with the *Theaetétus*, and probably belonging to the same period. There is the same constant reference to Heracleitus, whose philosophy is here also treated as in great measure, but not entirely, true; and the opposing system of Parmenides is again mentioned, though much more briefly, as a valuable set-off against its extravagances. The *Cratylus* deals exclusively with language, just as the *Theaetétus* had dealt with sensation and mental imagery, but in such a playful and ironical tone that its speculative importance is likely to be overlooked. Some of the Greek philosophers seem to have thought that the study of things might advantageously be replaced by the study of words, which were supposed to have a natural and necessary connexion with their accepted meanings. This view was particularly favoured by the Heracleiteans, who found, or fancied that they found, a confirmation of their master's teaching in etymology. Plato professes to adopt the theory in question, and supports it with a number of derivations which to us seem ludicrously absurd, but which may possibly have been transcribed from the pages of contemporary philologists. At last, however, he turns round and shows that other verbal arguments, equally good, might be adduced on behalf of Parmenides. But the most valuable part of the discussion is a protest against the whole theory that things can be studied through their names. Plato justly observes that an image, to be perfect, should not reproduce its original, but only certain aspects of it; that the framers of language were not infallible; and that we are just as competent to discover the nature of things as they could be. One can imagine the delight with which he would have welcomed the modern discovery that sensations, too, are a language; and that the associated groups into which they most readily gather are determined less by the necessary connexions of things in themselves than by the exigencies of self-preservation and reproduction in sentient beings.

Through all his criticisms on the popular sources of information—sense, language and public opinion—Plato refers to an ideal of perfect knowledge which he assumes without being able to define it. It must satisfy the negative condition of being free from self-contradiction, but further than this we cannot go. Yet, in the hands of a metaphysician, no more than this was required to reconstruct the world. The demand for consistency explains the practical philosophy of Socrates. It also explains, under another form, the philosophy, both practical and speculative, of his disciple. Identity and the correlative of identity, difference, gradually came to cover with their manifold combinations all knowledge, all life, and all existence.

It was from mathematical science that the light of certainty first broke. Socrates had not encouraged the study of mathematics, either pure or applied; nor, if we may judge from some disparaging allusions to Hippias and his lectures in the *Protagoras*, did Plato at first regard it with any particular favour. He may have acquired some notions of arithmetic and geometry at school; but the intimate acquaintance with, and deep interest in them, manifested throughout his later works, probably dates from his visits to Italy, Sicily, Cyrênê, and Egypt. In each of these places the exact sciences were cultivated with more assiduity than at Athens; in southern Italy they had been brought into close connexion with philosophy by a system of mystical interpretation. The glory of discovering their true speculative significance was reserved for Plato. Just as he had detected a profound analogy between the Socratic scepticism and the Heracleitean flux, so also, by another vivid intuition, he saw in the definitions and demonstrations of geometry a type of true reasoning, a particular application of the Socratic logic. Thus the two studies were brought into fruitful reaction, the one gaining a wider applicability, and the other an exacter method of proof. The mathematical spirit ultimately proved

too strong for Plato, and petrified his philosophy into a lifeless formalism ; but no extraneous influence helped so much to bring about the complete maturity of his constructive powers, in no direction has he more profoundly influenced the thought of later ages.

Both the *Theaetétus* and the *Cratylus* contain allusions to mathematical reasoning, but its full significance is first exhibited in the *Meno*. Here the old question, whether virtue can be taught, is again raised, to be discussed from an entirely new point of view, and resolved into the more general question, Can anything be taught? The answer is, Yes and No. You may stimulate the native activity of the intellect, but you cannot create it. Take a totally uneducated man, and, under proper guidance, he shall discover the truths of geometry for himself, by virtue of their self-evident clearness. Being independent of any traceable experience, the elementary principles of this science, of all science, must have been acquired in some antenatal period, or rather they were never acquired at all, they belong to the very nature of the soul herself. The doctrine here unfolded had a great future before it ; and it has never, perhaps, been discussed with so much eagerness as during the last half-century among ourselves. The masters of English thought have placed the issue first raised by Plato in the very front of philosophical controversy ; and the general public have been brought to feel that their dearest interests hang on its decision. The subject has, however, lost much of its adventitious interest to those who know that the *a priori* position was turned, a hundred years ago, by Kant. The philosopher of Königsberg showed that, granting knowledge to be composed of two elements, mind adds nothing to outward experience but its own forms, the system of connexions according to which it groups phenomena. Deprive these forms of the content given to them by feeling, and the soul will be left beating her wings in a vacuum. The doctrine that knowledge is not a

dead deposit in consciousness or memory, but a living energy whereby phenomena are, to use Kant's words, gathered up into the synthetic unity of apperception, has since found a physiological basis in the theory of central innervation. And the experiential school of psychology have simultaneously come to recognise the existence of fixed conditions under which consciousness works and grows, and which, in the last analysis, resolve themselves into the apprehension of resemblance, difference, coexistence, and succession. The most complex cognition involves no more than these four categories ; and it is probable that they all co-operate in the most elementary perception.

The truths here touched on seem to have been dimly present to the mind of Plato. He never doubts that all knowledge must, in some way or other, be derived from experience ; and, accordingly, he assumes that what cannot have been learned in this world was learned in another. But he does not (in the *Meno* at least) suppose that the process ever had a beginning. It would seem that he is trying to express in figurative language the distinction, lost almost as soon as found, between intelligence and the facts on which intelligence is exercised. An examination of the steps by which Meno's slave is brought to perceive, without being directly told, the truth of the Pythagorean theorem, will show that his share in the demonstration is limited to the intuition of certain numerical equalities and inequalities. Now, to Plato, the perception of sameness and difference meant everything. He would have denied that the sensible world presented examples of these relations in their ideal absoluteness and purity. In tracing back their apprehension to the self-reflection of the soul, the consciousness of personal identity, he would not have transgressed the limits of a legitimate enquiry. But self-consciousness involved a possible abstraction from disturbing influences, which he interpreted as a real separation between mind and matter ; and, to make it more complete, an inde-

pendent pre-existence of the former. Nor was this all. Since knowledge is of likeness in difference, then the central truth of things, the reality underlying all appearance, must be an abiding identity recognised by the soul through her previous communion with it in a purer world. The inevitable tendency of two identities, one subjective and the other objective, was to coalesce in an absolute unity where all distinctions of time and space would have disappeared, carrying the whole mythical machinery along with them ; and Plato's logic is always hovering on the verge of such a consummation without being able fully to accept it. Still, the mystical tendency, which it was reserved for Plotinus to carry out in its entirety, is always present, though restrained by other motives, working for the ascertainment of uniformity in theory and for the enforcement of uniformity in practice.

We have accompanied Plato to a point where he begins to see his way towards a radical reconstruction of all existing beliefs and institutions. In the next chapter we shall attempt to show how far he succeeded in this great purpose, how much, in his positive contributions to thought is of permanent, and how much of merely biographical or literary value.

## CHAPTER V.

## PLATO AS A REFORMER.

## I.

IN the last chapter we considered the philosophy of Plato chiefly under its critical and negative aspects. We saw how it was exclusively from that side that he at first apprehended and enlarged the dialectic of Socrates, how deeply his scepticism was coloured by the religious reaction of the age, and how he attempted, out of his master's mouth, to overturn the positive teaching of the master himself. We saw how, in the *Protagoras*, he sketched a theory of ethics, which was no sooner completed than it became the starting-point of a still more extended and arduous enquiry. We followed the widening horizon of his speculations until they embraced the whole contemporary life of Hellas, and involved it in a common condemnation as either hopelessly corrupt, or containing within itself the seeds of corruption. We then saw how, by a farther generalisation, he was led to look for the sources of error in the laws of man's sensuous nature and of the phenomenal world with which it holds communion; how, moreover, under the guidance of suggestions coming both from within and from without, he reverted to the earlier schools of Greek thought, and brought their results into parallelism with the main lines of Socratic dialectic. And finally, we watched him planting a firm foothold on the basis of mathematical demonstration; seeking in the very constitution of the soul itself for a derivation of the truths which sensuous experience could not impart, and winning back from



a more profoundly reasoned religion the hope, the self-confidence, the assurance of perfect knowledge, which had been formerly surrendered in deference to the demands of a merely external and traditional faith. That God alone is wise, and by consequence alone good, might still remain a fixed principle with Plato; but it ceased to operate as a restraint on human aspiration when he had come to recognise an essential unity among all forms of conscious life, which, though it might be clouded and forgotten, could never be entirely effaced. And when Plato tells us, at the close of his career, that God, far more than any individual man, is the measure of all things,<sup>1</sup> who can doubt that he had already learned to identify the human and divine essences in the common notion of a universal soul?

The germ of this new dogmatism was present in Plato's mind from the very beginning, and was partly an inheritance from older forms of thought. The *Apologia* had reproduced one important feature in the positive teaching of Socrates—the distinction between soul and body, and the necessity of attending to the former rather than to the latter: and this had now acquired such significance as to leave no standing-room for the agnosticism with which it had been incompatible from the first. The same irresistible force of expansion which had brought the human soul into communion with absolute truth, was to be equally verified in a different direction. Plato was too much interested in practical questions to be diverted from them long by any theoretical philosophy; or, perhaps, we should rather say that this interest had accompanied and inspired him throughout. It is from the essential relativity of mind, the profound craving for intellectual sympathy with other minds, that all mystical imaginations and super-subtle abstractions take rise; so that, when the strain of transcendent absorption and ecstasy is relaxed under the chilling but beneficent contact of earthly experience, they become

<sup>1</sup> *Legg.* 716, C.

condensed into ideas for the reconstitution of life and society on a basis of reciprocity, of self-restraint, and of self-devotion to a commonwealth greater and more enduring than any individual, while, at the same time, presenting to each in objective form the principle by virtue of which only, instead of being divided, he can become reconciled with himself. Here we have the creed of all philosophy, whether theological, metaphysical, or positive, that there is, or that there should be, this threefold unity of feeling, of action, and of thought, of the soul, of society, and of universal existence, to win which is everlasting life, while to be without it is everlasting death. This creed must be re-stated and re-interpreted at every revolution of thought. We have to see how it was, for the first time, stated and interpreted by Plato.

The principal object of Plato's negative criticism had been to emphasise the distinction between reality and appearance in the world without, between sense, or imagination, and reason in the human soul. True to the mediatorial spirit of Greek thought, his object now was to bridge over the seemingly impassable gulf. We must not be understood to say that these two distinct, and to some extent contrasted, tendencies correspond to two definitely divided periods of his life. It is evident that the tasks of dissection and reconstruction were often carried on conjointly, and represented two aspects of an indivisible process. But on the whole there is good reason to believe that Plato, like other men, was more inclined to pull to pieces in his youth and to build up in his later days. We are, therefore, disposed to agree with those critics who assign both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* to a comparatively advanced stage of Platonic speculation. It is less easy to decide which of the two was composed first, for there seems to be a greater maturity of thought in the one and of style in the other. For our purposes it will be most convenient to consider them together.

[ We have seen how Plato came to look on mathematics as

an introduction to absolute knowledge. He now discovered a parallel method of approach towards perfect wisdom in an order of experience which to most persons might seem as far as possible removed from exact science—in those passionate feelings which were excited in the Greek imagination by the spectacle of youthful beauty, without distinction of sex. There was, at least among the Athenians, a strong intellectual element in the attachments arising out of such feelings; and the strange anomaly might often be seen of a man devoting himself to the education of a youth whom he was, in other respects, doing his utmost to corrupt. Again, the beauty by which a Greek felt most fascinated came nearer to a visible embodiment of mind than any that has ever been known, and as such could be associated with the purest philosophical aspirations. And, finally, the passion of love in its normal manifestations is an essentially generic instinct, being that which carries an individual most entirely out of himself, making him instrumental to the preservation of the race in forms of ever-increasing comeliness and vigour; so that, given a wise training and a wide experience, the maintenance of a noble breed may safely be entrusted to its infallible selection.<sup>1</sup> All these points of view have been developed by Plato with such copiousness of illustration and splendour of language that his name is still associated in popular fancy with an ideal of exalted and purified desire.

So far, however, we only stand on the threshold of Platonic love. The earthly passion, being itself a kind of generalisation, is our first step in the ascent to that highest stage of existence where wisdom and virtue and happiness are one—the good to which all other goods are related as means to an end. But love is not only an introduction to philosophy, it is a type of philosophy itself. Both are conditions intermediate between vacuity and fulfilment; desire being by its very nature dis-

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on the Metaphysics of Sexual Love in Schopenhauer's *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.

satisfied, and vanishing at the instant that its object is attained. The philosopher is a lover of wisdom, and therefore not wise; and yet not wholly ignorant, for he knows that he knows nothing. Thus we seem to be thrown back on the standpoint of Plato's earliest agnosticism. Nevertheless, if the *Symposium* agrees nominally with the *Apologia*, in reality it marks a much more advanced point of speculation. The idea of what knowledge is has begun to assume a much clearer expression. We gather from various hints and suggestions that it is the perception of likeness; the very process of ascending generalisation typified by intellectual love.

It is worthy of remark that in the Platonic Erôs we have the germ—or something more than the germ—of Aristotle's whole metaphysical system.<sup>1</sup> According to the usual law of speculative evolution, what was subjective in the one becomes objective in the other. With Plato the passion for knowledge had been merely the guiding principle of a few chosen spirits. With Aristotle it is the living soul of Nature, the secret spring of movement, from the revolution of the outermost starry sphere to the decomposition and recomposition of our mutable terrestrial elements; and from these again through the whole scale of organic life, up to the moral culture of man and the search for an ideally-constituted state. What enables all these myriad movements to continue through eternity, returning ever in an unbroken circle on themselves, is the yearning of unformed matter—that is to say, of unrealised power—towards the absolute unchanging actuality, the self-thinking thought, unmoved, but moving every other form of existence by the desire to participate in its ineffable perfection. Born of the Hellenic enthusiasm for beauty, this wonderful conception subsequently became incorporated with the official teaching of Catholic theology. What had once been a theme

<sup>1</sup> Cf. for the whole following passage Havet, *Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, I., 286-8. It was, however, written before the author had become acquainted with M. Havet's work.

for ribald merriment or for rhetorical ostentation among the golden youth of Athens, furnished the motive for his most transcendent meditations to the Angel of the Schools ; but the fire which lurked under the dusty abstractions of Aquinas needed the touch of a poet and a lover before it could be rekindled into flame. The eyes of Beatrice completed what the dialectic of Plato had begun ; and the hundred cantos of her adorer found their fitting close in the love that moves the sun and the other stars.

We must, however, observe that, underlying all these poetical imaginations, there is a deeper and wider law of human nature to which they unconsciously bear witness—the intimate connexion of religious mysticism with the passion of love. By this we do not mean the constant interference of the one with the other, whether for the purpose of stimulation, as with the naturalistic religions, or for the purpose of restraint, as with the ethical religions ; but we mean that they seem to divide between them a common fund of nervous energy, so that sometimes their manifestations are inextricably confounded, as in certain debased forms of modern Christianity ; sometimes they utterly exclude one another ; and sometimes, which is the most frequent case of any, the one is transformed into the other, their substantial identity and continuity being indicated very frankly by their use of the same language, the same ritual, and the same aesthetic decoration. And this will show how the decay of religious belief may be accompanied by an outbreak of moral licence, without our being obliged to draw the inference that passion can only be held in check by irrational beliefs, or by organisations whose supremacy is fatal to industrial, political, and intellectual progress. For, if our view of the case be correct, the passion was not really restrained, but only turned in a different direction, and frequently nourished into hysterical excess ; so that, with the inevitable decay of theology, it returns to its old haunts, bringing with it seven devils worse than the first. After the

Crusades came the Courts of Love ; after the Dominican and Franciscan movements, the Renaissance ; after Puritanism, the Restoration ; after Jesuitism, the Regency. Nor is this all. The passion of which we are speaking, when abnormally developed and unbalanced by severe intellectual exercise, is habitually accompanied by delirious jealousy, by cruelty, and by deceit. On taking the form of religion, the influence of its evil associates immediately becomes manifest in the suppression of alien creeds, in the tortures inflicted on their adherents, and in the maxim that no faith need be kept with a heretic. Persecution has been excused on the ground that any means were justifiable for the purpose of saving souls from eternal torment. But how came it to be believed that such a consequence was involved in a mere error of judgment ? The faith did not create the intolerance, but the intolerance created the faith, and so gave an idealised expression to the jealous fury accompanying a passion which no spiritual alchemy can purify from its original affinities. It is not by turning this most terrible instinct towards a supernatural object that we should combat it, but by developing the active and masculine in preference to the emotional and feminine side of our nervous organisation.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to its other great lessons, the *Symposium* has afforded Plato an opportunity for contrasting his own method of philosophising with pre-Socratic modes of thought. For it consists of a series of discourses in praise of love, so arranged as to typify the manner in which Greek speculation, after beginning with mythology, subsequently advanced to physical theories of phenomena, then passed from the historical to the contemporary method, asking, not whence did things come, but what are they in themselves ; and finally arrived at the logical standpoint of analysis, classification, and induction.

<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid misconception it may be as well to mention that the above remarks apply only to mystical passion assuming the form of religion ; they have nothing to do with intellectual and moral convictions.

The nature of dialectic is still further elucidated in the *Phaedrus*, where it is also contrasted with the method, or rather the no-method, of popular rhetoric. Here, again, discussions about love are chosen as an illustration. A discourse on the subject by no less a writer than Lysias is quoted and shown to be deficient in the most elementary requisites of logical exposition. The different arguments are strung together without any principle of arrangement, and ambiguous terms are used without being defined. In insisting on the necessity of definition, Plato followed Socrates ; but he defines according to a totally different method. Socrates had arrived at his general notions partly by a comparison of particular instances with a view to eliciting the points where they agreed, partly by amending the conceptions already in circulation. We have seen that the earliest Dialogues attributed to Plato are one long exposure of the difficulties attending such a procedure ; and his subsequent investigations all went to prove that nothing solid could be built on such shifting foundations as sense and opinion. Meanwhile increasing familiarity with the great ontological systems had taught him to begin with the most general notions, and to work down from them to the most particular. The consequence was that dialectic came to mean nothing but classification or logical division. Definition was absorbed into this process, and reasoning by syllogism was not yet differentiated from it. To tell what a thing was, meant to fix its place in the universal order of existence, and its individual existence was sufficiently accounted for by the same determination. If we imagine first a series of concentric circles, then a series of contrasts symmetrically disposed on either side of a central dividing line, and finally a series of transitions descending from the most absolute unity to the most irregular diversity—we shall, by combining the three schemes, arrive at some understanding of the Platonic dialectic. To assign anything its place in these various sequences was at once to define it and to demonstrate the necessity of

its existence. The arrangement is also equivalent to a theory of final causes ; for everything has a function to perform, marked out by its position, and bringing it into relation with the universal order. Such a system would inevitably lead to the denial of evil, were not evil itself interpreted as the necessary correlative of good, or as a necessary link in the descending manifestations of reality. Moreover, by virtue of his identifying principle, Plato saw in the lowest forms a shadow or reflection of the highest. Hence the many surprises, concessions, and returns to abandoned positions which we find in his later writings. The three moments of Greek thought, circumscription, antithesis, and mediation, work in such close union, or with such bewildering rapidity of alternation, through all his dialectic, that we are never sure whither he is leading us, and not always sure that he knows it himself.

In the opening chapter of this work we endeavoured to explain how the Pythagorean philosophy arose out of the intoxicated delight inspired by a first acquaintance with the manifold properties of number and figure. If we would enter into the spirit of Platonism, we must similarly throw ourselves back into the time when the idea of a universal classification first dawned on men's minds. We must remember how it gratified the Greek love of order combined with individuality ; what unbounded opportunities for asking and answering questions it supplied ; and what promises of practical regeneration it held out. Not without a shade of sadness for so many baffled efforts and so many blighted hopes, yet also with a grateful recollection of all that reason has accomplished, and with something of his own high intellectual enthusiasm, shall we listen to Plato's prophetic words—words of deeper import than their own author knew—'If I find any man who is able to see a One and Many in Nature, him I follow and walk in his steps as if he were a god.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Phaedr.*, 266, B. Jowett, II., 144. According to Teichmüller (*Literarische Fehden im vierten Jahrhundert vor Chr.*, p. 135)—the god here spoken of is no



It is interesting to see how the most comprehensive systems of the present century, even when most opposed to the metaphysical spirit, are still constructed on the plan long ago sketched by Plato. Alike in his classification of the sciences, in his historical deductions, and in his plans for the reorganisation of society, Auguste Comte adopts a scheme of ascending or descending generality. The conception of differentiation and integration employed both by Hegel and by Mr. Herbert Spencer is also of Platonic origin ; only, what with the ancient thinker was a statical law of order has become with his modern successors a dynamic law of progress ; while, again, there is this distinction between the German and the English philosopher, that the former construes as successive moments of the Idea what the latter regards as simultaneous and interdependent processes of evolution.

## II.

The study of psychology with Plato stands in a fourfold relation to his general theory of the world. The dialectic method, without which Nature would remain unintelligible, is a function of the soul, and constitutes its most essential activity ; then soul, as distinguished from body, represents the higher, supersensual element of existence ; thirdly, the objective dualism of reality and appearance is reproduced in the subjective dualism of reason and sense ; and lastly, soul, as the original spring of movement, mediates between the eternal entities which are unmoved and the material phenomena which are subject to a continual flux. It is very characteristic of Plato that he first strains an antithesis to the utmost and then endeavours to reconcile its extremes by the interposition of one or more intermediate links. So, while assigning this office to soul as a part of the universe, he

other than Plato himself. Even granting the pantheistic interpretation of Platonism to be true, this seems a somewhat strained application of it.

classifies the psychic functions themselves according to a similar principle. On the intellectual side he places true opinion, or what we should now call empirical knowledge, midway between demonstration and sense-perception. Such at least seems to be the result reached in the *Theaetetus* and the *Meno*. In the *Republic* a further analysis leads to a somewhat different arrangement. Opinion is placed between knowledge and ignorance ; while the possible objects to which it corresponds form a transition from being to not-being. Subsequently mathematical reasoning is distinguished from the higher science which takes cognisance of first principles, and thus serves to connect it with simple opinion ; while this again, dealing as it does with material objects, is related to the knowledge of their shadows as the most perfect science is related to mathematics.<sup>1</sup>

Turning from dialectic to ethics, Plato in like manner feels the need of interposing a mediator between reason and appetite. The quality chosen for this purpose he calls *θυμός*, a term which does not, as has been erroneously supposed, correspond to our word Will, but rather to pride, or the feeling of personal honour. It is both the seat of military courage and the natural auxiliary of reason, with which it co-operates in restraining the animal desires. It is a characteristic difference between Socrates and Plato that the former should have habitually reinforced his arguments for virtue by appeals to self-interest ; while the latter, with his aristocratic way of looking at things, prefers to enlist the aid of a haughtier feeling on their behalf. Aristotle followed in the same track when he taught that to be overcome by anger is less discreditable than to be overcome by desire. In reality none of the instincts tending to self-preservation is more praiseworthy than another, or more amenable to the control of reason. Plato's tripartite division of mind cannot be made

<sup>1</sup> Adapting Plato's formula to modern ideas we might say : A literary education : knowledge of the world : : mathematics : physical science.

to fit into the classifications of modern psychology, which are adapted not only to a more advanced state of knowledge but also to more complex conditions of life. But the characters of women, by their greater simplicity and uniformity, show to some extent what those of men may once have been ; and it will, perhaps, confirm the analysis of the *Phaedrus* to recall the fact that personal pride is still associated with moral principle in the guardianship of female virtue.

If the soul served to connect the eternal realities with the fleeting appearances by which they were at once darkened, relieved, and shadowed forth, it was also a bond of union between the speculative and the practical philosophy of Plato ; and in discussing his psychology we have already passed from the one to the other. The transition will become still easier if we remember that the question, 'What is knowledge?' was, according to our view, originally suggested by a theory reducing ethical science to a hedonistic calculus, and that along with it would arise another question, 'What is pleasure?' This latter enquiry, though incidentally touched on elsewhere, is not fully dealt with in any Dialogue except the *Philébus*, which we agree with Prof. Jowett in referring to a very late period of Platonic authorship. But the line of argument which it pursues had probably been long familiar to our philosopher. At any rate, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, and perhaps the *Gorgias*, assume, as already proved, that pleasure is not the highest good. The question is one on which thinkers are still divided. It seems, indeed, to lie outside the range of reason, and the disputants are accordingly obliged to invoke the authority either of individual consciousness or of common consent on behalf of their respective opinions. We have, however, got so far beyond the ancients that the doctrine of egoistic hedonism has been abandoned by almost everybody. The substitution of another's pleasure for our own as the object of pursuit was not a conception which presented itself to any Greek moralist,

although the principle of self-sacrifice was maintained by some of them, and especially by Plato, to its fullest extent. Pleasure-seeking being inseparably associated with selfishness, the latter was best attacked through the former, and if Plato's logic does not commend itself to our understanding, we must admit that it was employed in defence of a noble cause.

The style of polemics adopted on this occasion, whatever else may be its value, will serve excellently to illustrate the general dialectic method of attack. When Plato particularly disliked a class of persons, or an institution, or an art, or a theory, or a state of consciousness, he tried to prove that it was confused, unstable, and self-contradictory; besides taking full advantage of any discredit popularly attached to it. All these objections are brought to bear with full force against pleasure. Some pleasures are delusive, since the reality of them falls far short of the anticipation; all pleasure is essentially transitory, a perpetual becoming, never a fixed state, and therefore not an end of action; pleasures which ensue on the satisfaction of desires are necessarily accompanied by pains and disappear simultaneously with them; the most intense, and for that reason the most typical, pleasures, are associated with feelings of shame, and their enjoyment is carefully hidden out of sight.

Such arguments have almost the air of an afterthought, and Plato was perhaps more powerfully swayed by other considerations, which we shall now proceed to analyse. When pleasure was assumed to be the highest good, knowledge was agreed to be the indispensable means for its attainment; and, as so often happens, the means gradually substituted itself for the end. Nor was this all; for knowledge (or reason) being not only the means but the supreme arbiter, when called on to adjudicate between conflicting claims, would naturally pronounce in its own favour. Naturally, also, a moralist who made science the chief interest of his own life would come to believe that it was the proper object of all

life, whether attended or not by any pleasurable emotion. And so, in direct opposition to the utilitarian theory, Plato declares at last that to brave a lesser pain in order to escape from a greater, or to renounce a lesser pleasure in order to secure a greater, is cowardice and intemperance in disguise ; and that wisdom, which he had formerly regarded as a means to other ends, is the one end for which everything else should be exchanged.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it may have strengthened him in this attitude to observe that the many, whose opinion he so thoroughly despised, made pleasure their aim in life, while the fastidious few preferred knowledge. Yet, after a time, even the latter alternative failed to satisfy his restless spirit. For the conception of knowledge resolved itself into the deeper conceptions of a knowing subject and a known object, the soul and the universe, each of which became in turn the supreme ideal. What interpretation should be given to virtue depended on the choice between them. According to the one view it was a purification of the higher principle within us from material wants and passions. Sensual gratifications should be avoided, because they tend to degrade and pollute the soul. Death should be fearlessly encountered, because it will release her from the restrictions of bodily existence. But Plato had too strong a grasp on the realities of life to remain satisfied with a purely ascetic morality. Knowledge, on the objective side, brought him into relation with an organised universe where each individual existed, not for his own sake but for the sake of the whole, to fulfil a definite function in the system of which he formed a part. And if from one point of view the soul herself was an absolutely simple indivisible substance, from another point of view she reflected the external order, and only fulfilled the law of her being when each separate faculty was exercised within its appropriate sphere.

There still remained one last problem to solve, one point

<sup>1</sup> *Phaedo*, 69, A. Jowett, I., 412.

where the converging streams of ethical and metaphysical speculation met and mixed. Granted that knowledge is the soul's highest energy, what is the object of this beatific vision? Granted that all particular energies co-operate for a common purpose, what is the end to which they are subordinated? Granted that dialectic leads us up through ascending gradations to one all-comprehensive idea, how is that idea to be defined? Plato only attempts to answer this last question by re-stating it under the form of an illustration. As the sun at once gives life to all Nature, and light to the eye by which Nature is perceived, so also the idea of Good is the cause of existence and of knowledge alike, but transcends them both as an absolute unity, of which we cannot even say that it is, for the distinction of subject and predicate would bring back relativity and plurality again. Here we seem to have the Socratic paradox reversed. Socrates identified virtue with knowledge, but, at the same time, entirely emptied the latter of its speculative content. Plato, inheriting the idea of knowledge in its artificially restricted significance, was irresistibly drawn back to the older philosophy whence it had been originally borrowed; then, just as his master had given an ethical application to science, so did he, travelling over the same ground in an opposite direction, extend the theory of ethics far beyond its legitimate range, until a principle which seemed to have no meaning, except in reference to human conduct, became the abstract bond of union between all reality and all thought.

Whether Plato ever succeeded in making the idea of Good quite clear to others, or even to himself, is more than we can tell. In the *Republic* he declines giving further explanations on the ground that his pupils have not passed through the necessary mathematical initiation. Whether quantitative reasoning was to furnish the form or the matter of transcendent dialectic is left undetermined. We are told that on one occasion a large audience assembled to hear Plato lecture on

the Good, but that, much to their disappointment, the discourse was entirely filled with geometrical and astronomical investigations. Bearing in mind, however, that mathematical science deals chiefly with equations, and that astronomy, according to Plato, had for its object to prove the absolute uniformity of the celestial motions, we may perhaps conclude that the idea of Good meant no more than the abstract notion of identity or indistinguishable likeness. The more complex idea of law as a uniformity of relations, whether co-existent or successive, had not then dawned, but it has since been similarly employed to bring physics into harmony with ethics and logic.

### III.

So far we have followed the evolution of Plato's philosophy as it may have been effected under the impulse of purely theoretical motives. We have now to consider what form was imposed on it by the more imperious exigencies of practical experience. Here, again, we find Plato taking up and continuing the work of Socrates, but on a vastly greater scale. There was, indeed, a kind of pre-established harmony between the expression of thought on the one hand and the increasing need for its application to life on the other. For the spread of public corruption had gone on *pari passu* with the development of philosophy. The teaching of Socrates was addressed to individuals, and dealt chiefly with private morality. On other points he was content to accept the law of the land and the established political constitution as sufficiently safe guides. He was not accustomed to see them defied or perverted into instruments of selfish aggrandisement; nor, apparently, had the possibility of such a contingency occurred to him. Still less did he imagine that all social institutions then existing were radically wrong. Hence the personal virtues held a more important place in his system than the social virtues. His attacks were directed

against slothfulness and self-indulgence, against the ignorant temerity which hurried some young men into politics before their education was finished, and the timidity or fastidiousness which prevented others from discharging the highest duties of citizenship. Nor, in accepting the popular religion of his time, had he any suspicion that its sanctions might be invoked on behalf of successful violence and fraud. We have already shown how differently Plato felt towards his age, and how much deeper as well as more shameless was the demoralisation with which he set himself to contend. It must also be remembered how judicial proceedings had come to overshadow every other public interest; and how the highest culture of the time had, at least in his eyes, become identified with the systematic perversion of truth and right. These considerations will explain why Greek philosophy, while moving on a higher plane, passed through the same orbit which had been previously described by Greek poetry. Precisely as the lessons of moderation in Homer had been followed by the lessons of justice in Aeschylus, precisely as the religion which was a selfish traffic between gods and men, and had little to tell of a life beyond the grave, was replaced by the nobler faith in a divine guardianship of morality and a retributive judgment after death—so also did the Socratic ethics and the Socratic theology lead to a system which made justice the essence of morality and religion its everlasting consecration.

Temperance and justice are very clearly distinguished in our minds. The one is mainly a self-regarding, the other mainly a social virtue. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the distinction was equally clear to Plato. He had learned from Socrates that all virtue is one. He found himself confronted by men who pointedly opposed interest to honour and expediency to fair-dealing, without making any secret of their preference for the former. Here, as elsewhere, he laboured to dissolve away the vulgar antithesis and to



substitute for it a deeper one—the antithesis between real and apparent goods. He was quite ready to imagine the case of a man who might have to incur all sorts of suffering in the practice of justice even to the extent of infamy, torture, and death ; but without denying that these were evils, he held that to practise injustice with the accompaniment of worldly prosperity was a greater evil still. And this conviction is quite unconnected with his belief in a future life. He would not have agreed with St. Paul that virtue is a bad calculation without the hope of a reward for it hereafter. His morality is absolutely independent of any extrinsic considerations. Nevertheless, he holds that in our own interest we should do what is right ; and it never seems to have entered his thoughts that there could be any other motive for doing it. We have to explain how such a paradox was possible.

Plato seems to have felt very strongly that all virtuous action tends towards a good exceeding in value any temporary sacrifice which it may involve ; and the accepted connotation of ethical terms went entirely along with this belief. But he could not see that a particular action might be good for the community at large and bad for the individual who performed it, not in a different sense but in the very same sense, as involving a diminution of his happiness. For from Plato's abstract and generalising point of view all good was homogeneous, and the welfare of the individual was absolutely identified with the welfare of the whole to which he belonged. As against those who made right dependent on might and erected self-indulgence into the law of life Plato occupied an impregnable position. He showed that such principles made society impossible, and that without honour even a gang of thieves cannot hold together.<sup>1</sup> He also saw that it is reason which brings each individual into relation with the whole and enables him to understand his obligations towards it ; but at the same time he gave this

<sup>1</sup> *Repub.*, I., 348, B ff. ; Zeller, *op. cit.*, 507-8.

reason a personal character which does not properly belong to it ; or, what comes to the same thing, he treated human beings as pure *entia rationis*, thus unwittingly removing the necessity for having any morality at all. On his assumption it would be absurd to break the law ; but neither would there be any temptation to break it, nor would any unpleasant consequences follow on its violation. Plato speaks of injustice as an injury to the soul's health, and therefore as the greatest evil that can befall a human being, without observing that the inference involves a confusion of terms. For his argument requires that soul should mean both the whole of conscious life and the system of abstract notions through which we communicate and co-operate with our fellow-creatures. All crime is a serious disturbance to the latter, for it cannot without absurdity be made the foundation of a general rule ; but, apart from penal consequences, it does not impair, and may benefit the former.

While Plato identified the individual with the community by slurring over the possible divergence of their interests, he still further contributed to their logical confusion by resolving the ego into a multitude of conflicting faculties and impulses supposed to represent the different classes of which a State is made up. His opponents held that justice and law emanate from the ruling power in the body politic ; and they were brought to admit that supreme power is properly vested in the wisest and best citizens. Transferring these principles to the inner forum, he maintained that a psychological aristocracy could only be established by giving reason a similar control over the animal passions.<sup>1</sup> At first sight, this seemed to imply no more than a return to the standpoint of Socrates, or of Plato himself in the *Protagoras*. The man who indulges his desires within the limits prescribed by a regard for their safe satisfaction through his whole life, may be called temperate and reasonable, but he is not necessarily just. If, how-

<sup>1</sup> See especially the argument with Callicles in the *Gorgias*.

ever, we identify the paramount authority within with the paramount authority without, we shall have to admit that there is a faculty of justice in the individual soul corresponding to the objective justice of political law ; and since the supreme virtue is agreed on all hands to be reason, we must go a step further and admit that justice is reason, or that it is reasonable to be just ; and that by consequence the height of injustice is the height of folly. Moreover, this fallacious substitution of justice for temperance was facilitated by the circumstance that although the former virtue is not involved in the latter, the latter is to a very great extent involved in the former. Self-control by no means carries with it a respect for the rights of others ; but where such respect exists it necessitates a considerable amount of self-control.

We trust that the steps of a difficult argument have been made clear by the foregoing analysis ; and that the whole process has been shown to hinge on the ambiguous use of such notions as the individual and the community, of which the one is paradoxically construed as a plurality and the other as a unity ; justice, which is alternately taken in the sense of control exercised by the worthiest, control of passion in the general interest, control of our passions in the interest of others, and control of the same passions in our own interest ; and wisdom or reason, which sometimes means any kind of excellence, sometimes the excellence of a harmonious society, and sometimes the excellence of a well-balanced mind. Thus, out of self-regarding virtue social virtue is elicited, the whole process being ultimately conditioned by that identifying power which was at once the strength and the weakness of Plato's genius.

Plato knew perfectly well that although rhetoricians and men of the world might be silenced, they could not be converted nor even convinced by such arguments as these. So far from thinking it possible to reason men into virtue, he has observed of those who are slaves to their senses that you must improve them before you can teach them the truth. And he

felt that if the complete assimilation of the individual and the community was to become more than a mere logical formula, it must be effected by a radical reform in the training of the one and in the institutions of the other. Accordingly, he set himself to elaborate a scheme for the purpose, our knowledge of which is chiefly derived from his greatest work, the *Republic*. We have already made large use of the negative criticism scattered through that Dialogue ; we have now to examine the positive teaching by which it was supplemented.

#### IV.

Plato, like Socrates, makes religious instruction the basis of education. But where the master had been content to set old beliefs on a new basis of demonstration, the disciple aimed at nothing less than their complete purification from irrational and immoral ingredients. He lays down two great principles, that God is good, and that He is true.<sup>1</sup> Every story which is inconsistent with such a character must be rejected ; so also must everything in the poets which redounds to the discredit of the national heroes, together with everything tending in the remotest degree to make vice attractive or virtue repellent. It is evident that Plato, like Xenophanes, repudiated not only the scandalous details of popular mythology, but also the anthropomorphic conceptions which lay at its foundation ; although he did not think it advisable to state his unbelief with equal frankness. His own theology was a sort of star-worship, and he proved the divinity of the heavenly bodies by an appeal to the uniformity of their movements.<sup>2</sup> He further taught that the world was created by an absolutely good Being ; but we cannot be sure that this was more than a popular version of the theory which placed the abstract idea of Good at the summit of the dialectic series. The truth is that there are two distinct types of religion, the one chiefly

<sup>1</sup> *Repub.*, II., 379, A : 380, D.

<sup>2</sup> Zeller, 678-8.

interested in the existence and attributes of God, the other chiefly interested in the destiny of the human soul. The former is best represented by Judaism, the latter by Buddhism. Plato belongs to the psychic rather than to the theistic type. The doctrine of immortality appears again and again in his Dialogues, and one of the most beautiful among them is entirely devoted to proving it. He seems throughout to be conscious that he is arguing in favour of a paradox. Here, at least, there are no appeals to popular prejudice such as figure so largely in similar discussions among ourselves. The belief in immortality had long been stirring ; but it had not taken deep root among the Ionian Greeks. We cannot even be sure that it was embraced as a consoling hope by any but the highest minds anywhere in Hellas, or by them for more than a brief period. It would be easy to maintain that this arose from some natural incongeniality to the Greek imagination in thoughts which drew it away from the world of sense and the delights of earthly life. But the explanation breaks down immediately when we attempt to verify it by a wider experience. No modern nation enjoys life so keenly as the French. Yet, quite apart from traditional dogmas, there is no nation that counts so many earnest supporters of the belief in a spiritual existence beyond the grave. And, to take an individual example, it is just the keen relish which Mr. Browning's Cleon has for every sort of enjoyment which makes him shrink back with horror from the thought of annihilation, and grasp at any promise of a happiness to be prolonged through eternity. A closer examination is needed to show us by what causes the current of Greek thought was swayed.

The great religious movement of the sixth and fifth centuries—chiefly represented for us by the names of Pythagoras, Aeschylus, and Pindar—would in all probability have entirely won over the educated classes, and given definiteness to the half-articulate utterances of popular tradition, had it not been arrested prematurely by the development of physical

speculation. We showed in the first chapter that Greek philosophy in its earliest stages was entirely materialistic. It differed, indeed, from modern materialism in holding that the soul, or seat of conscious life, is an entity distinct from the body; but the distinction was one between a grosser and a finer matter, or else between a simpler and a more complex arrangement of the same matter, not between an extended and an indivisible substance. Whatever theories, then, were entertained with respect to the one would inevitably come to be entertained also with respect to the other. Now, with the exception of the Eleates, who denied the reality of change and separation altogether, every school agreed in teaching that all particular bodies are formed either by differentiation or by decomposition and recomposition out of the same primordial elements. From this it followed, as a natural consequence, that, although the whole mass of matter was eternal, each particular aggregate of matter must perish in order to release the elements required for the formation of new aggregates. It is obvious that, assuming the soul to be material, its immortality was irreconcilable with such a doctrine as this. A combination of four elements and two conflicting forces, such as Empedocles supposed the human mind to be, could not possibly outlast the organism in which it was enclosed; and if Empedocles himself, by an inconsistency not uncommon with men of genius, refused to draw the only legitimate conclusion from his own principles, the discrepancy could not fail to force itself on his successors. Still more fatal to the belief in a continuance of personal identity after death was the theory put forward by Diogenes of Apollonia, that there is really no personal identity even in life—that consciousness is only maintained by a perpetual inhalation of the vital air in which all reason resides. The soul very literally left the body with the last breath, and had a poor chance of holding together afterwards, especially, as the wits observed, if a high wind happened to be blowing at the time.

It would appear that even in the Pythagorean school there had been a reaction against a doctrine which its founder had been the first to popularise in Hellas. The Pythagoreans had always attributed great importance to the conceptions of harmony and numerical proportion ; and they soon came to think of the soul as a ratio which the different elements of the animal body bore to one another ; or as a musical concord resulting from the joint action of its various members, which might be compared to the strings of a lute. But

‘When the lute is broken  
Sweet tones are remembered not.’

And so, with the dissolution of our bodily organism, the music of consciousness would pass away for ever. Perhaps no form of psychology taught in the Greek schools has approached nearer to modern thought than this. It was professed at Thebes by two Pythagoreans, Cebes and Simmias, in the time of Plato. He rightly regarded them as formidable opponents, for they were ready to grant whatever he claimed for the soul in the way of immateriality and superiority to the body, while denying the possibility of its separate existence. We may so far anticipate the course of our exposition as to mention that the direct argument by which he met them was a reference to the moving power of mind, and to the constraint exercised by reason over passionate impulse ; characteristics which the analogy with a musical harmony failed to explain. But his chief reliance was on an order of considerations, the historical genesis of which we shall now proceed to trace.

It was by that somewhat slow and circuitous process, the negation of a negation, that spiritualism was finally established. The shadows of doubt gathered still more thickly around futurity before another attempt could be made to remove them. For the scepticism of the Humanists and the ethical dialectic of Socrates, if they tended to weaken the dogmatic materialism of physical philosophy, were at first

not more favourable to the new faith which that philosophy had suddenly eclipsed. For the one rejected every kind of supernaturalism ; and the other did not attempt to go behind what had been directly revealed by the gods, or was discoverable from an examination of their handiwork. Nevertheless, the new enquiries, with their exclusively subjective direction, paved the way for a return to the religious development previously in progress. By leading men to think of mind as, above all, a principle of knowledge and deliberate action, they altogether freed it from those material associations which brought it under the laws of external Nature, where every finite existence was destined, sooner or later, to be reabsorbed and to disappear. The position was completely reversed when Nature was, as it were, brought up before the bar of Mind to have her constitution determined or her very existence denied by that supreme tribunal. If the subjective idealism of Protagoras and Gorgias made for spiritualism, so also did the teleological religion of Socrates. It was impossible to assert the priority and superiority of mind to matter more strongly than by teaching that a designing intelligence had created the whole visible universe for the exclusive enjoyment of man. The infinite without was in its turn absorbed by the infinite within. Finally, the logical method of Socrates contained in itself the germs of a still subtler spiritualism which Plato now proceeded to work out.

The dialectic theory, considered in its relation to physics, tended to substitute the study of uniformity for the study of mechanical causation. But the general conceptions established by science were a kind of soul in Nature ; they were immaterial, they could not be perceived by sense, and yet, remaining as they did unchanged in a world of change, they were far truer, far more real, than the phenomena to which they gave unity and definition. Now these self-existent ideas, being subjective in their origin, readily reacted on



mind, and communicated to it those attributes of fixedness and eternal duration which had in truth been borrowed by them from Nature, not by Nature from them. Plato argued that the soul was in possession of ideas too pure to have been derived from the suggestions of sense, and therefore traceable to the reminiscences of an ante-natal experience. But we can see that the reminiscence was all on the side of the ideas; it was they that betrayed their human origin by the birthmark of abstraction and finality—betokening the limitation of man's faculties and the interest of his desires—which still clung to them when from a temporary law of thought they were erected into an everlasting law of things. As Comte would say, Plato was taking out of his conceptions what he had first put into them himself. And, if this consideration applies to all his reasonings on the subject of immortality, it applies especially to what he regards as the most convincing demonstration of any. There is one idea, he tells us, with which the soul is inseparably and essentially associated—namely, the idea of life. Without this, soul can no more be conceived than snow without cold or fire without heat; nor can death approach it without involving a logical contradiction. To assume that the soul is separable from the body, and that life is inseparable from the soul, was certainly an expeditious method of proof. To a modern, it would have the further disadvantage of proving too much. For, by parity of reasoning, every living thing must have an immortal soul, and every soul must have existed from all eternity. Plato frankly accepted both conclusions, and even incorporated them with his ethical system. He looked on the lower animals as so many stages in a progressive degradation to which human beings had descended through their own violence or sensuality, but from which it was possible for them to return after a certain period of penitence and probation. At other times he describes a hell, a purgatory, and a heaven, not unlike what we read of in

Dante, without apparently being conscious of any inconsistency between the two representations. It was, indeed, an inconsistency such as we find in the highest order of intellects, the inconsistency of one who mediated between two worlds, between naturalistic metempsychosis on the one side, and ethical individualism on the other.

It was not merely the immortality, it was the eternity of the soul that Plato taught. For him the expectation of a life beyond the grave was identified with the memory of an antenatal existence, and the two must stand or fall together. When Shelley's shipwrecked mother exclaims to her child:—

‘Alas ! what is life, what is death, what are we,  
That when the ship sinks we no longer may be !  
What ! to see thee no more, and to feel thee no more,  
To be after life what we have been before !’

Her despair is but the inverted image of Plato's hope, the return to a purer state of being where knowledge will no longer be obscured by passing through the perturbing medium of sight and touch. Again, modern apologists for the injustice and misery of the present system<sup>1</sup> argue that its inequalities will be redressed in a future state. Plato conversely regarded the sufferings of good men as a retribution for former sin, or as the result of a forgotten choice. The authority of Pindar and of ancient tradition generally may have influenced his belief, but it had a deeper ground in the logic of a spiritualistic philosophy. The dualism of soul and body is only one form of his fundamental antithesis between the changeless essence and the transitory manifestations of existence. A pantheism like Spinoza's was the natural outcome of such a system ; but his practical genius or his ardent imagination kept Plato from carrying it so far. Nor in the interests of progress was the result to be regretted ; for theology had to pass through one more phase before the term of its beneficent activity could be reached. Ethical conceptions gained a new

<sup>1</sup> ‘Un monde qui est l'injustice même.’—Ernest Renan, *L'Église Chrétienne*, p. 139.

significance in the blended light of mythology and metaphysics ; those who made it their trade to pervert justice at its mountain-head might still tremble before the terrors of a supernatural tribunal ; or if Plato could not regenerate the life of his own people he could foretell what was to be the common faith of Europe in another thousand years ; and memory, if not hope, is the richer for those magnificent visions where he has projected the eternal conflict between good and evil into the silence and darkness by which our lives are shut in on every side.

## V.

Plato had begun by condemning poetry only in so far as it was inconsistent with true religion and morality. At last, with his usual propensity to generalise, he condemned it and, by implication, every imitative art *quâ* art, as a delusion and a sham, twice removed from the truth of things, because a copy of the phenomena which are themselves unreal representations of an archetypal idea. His iconoclasm may remind us of other ethical theologians both before and after, whether Hebrew, Moslem, or Puritan. If he does not share their fanatical hatred for plastic and pictorial representations, it is only because works of that class, besides being of a chaster character, exercised far less power over the Greek imagination than epic and dramatic poetry. Moreover, the tales of the poets were, according to Plato, the worst lies of any, since they were believed to be true ; whereas statues and pictures differed too obviously from their originals for any such illusion to be produced in their case. Like the Puritans, again, Plato sanctioned the use of religious hymns, with the accompaniment of music in its simplest and most elevated forms. Like them, also, he would have approved of literary fiction when it was employed for edifying purposes. Works like the *Faery Queen*, *Paradise Lost*, and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, would have been his favourites in English literature ; and he might have

extended the same indulgence to fictions of the Edgeworthian type, where the virtuous characters always come off best in the end.

The reformed system of education was to be not only moral and religious but also severely scientific. The place given to mathematics as the foundation of a right intellectual training is most remarkable, and shows how truly Plato apprehended the conditions under which knowledge is acquired and enlarged. Here, as in other respects, he is, more even than Aristotle, the precursor of Auguste Comte. He arranges the mathematical sciences, so far as they then existed, in their logical order; and his remarks on the most general ideas suggested by astronomy read like a divination of rational mechanics. That a recommendation of such studies should be put into the mouth of Socrates is a striking incongruity. The older Plato grew the farther he seems to have advanced from the humanist to the naturalistic point of view; and, had he been willing to confess it, Hippias and Prodicus were the teachers with whom he finally found himself most in sympathy.

Macaulay has spoken as if the Platonic philosophy was totally unrelated to the material wants of men. This, however, is a mistake. It is true that, in the *Republic*, science is not regarded as an instrument for heaping up fresh luxuries, or for curing the diseases which luxury breeds; but only because its purpose is held to be the discovery of those conditions under which a healthy, happy, and virtuous race can best be reared. The art of the true statesman is to weave the web of life with perfect skill, to bring together those couples from whose union the noblest progeny shall issue; and it is only by mastering the laws of the physical universe that this art can be acquired. Plato knew no natural laws but those of mathematics and astronomy; consequently, he set far too much store on the times and seasons at which bride and bridegroom were to meet, and on the numerical ratios by which they were supposed to be determined. He even tells

us about a mysterious formula for discovering the nuptial number, by which the ingenuity of commentators has been considerably exercised. The true laws by which marriage should be regulated among a civilised people have remained wrapped in still more impenetrable darkness. Whatever may be the best solution, it can hardly fail to differ in many respects from our present customs. It cannot be right that the most important act in the life of a human being should be determined by social ambition, by avarice, by vanity, by pique, or by accident—in a word, by the most contemptible impulses of which human nature is susceptible ; nor is it to be expected that sexual selection will always necessitate the employment of insincerity, adulation, and bribery by one of the parties concerned, while fostering in the other credulity, egoism, jealousy, capriciousness, and petty tyranny—the very qualities which a wise training would have for its object to root out.<sup>1</sup>

It seems difficult to reconcile views about marriage involving a recognition of the fact that mental and moral qualities are hereditarily transmitted, with the belief in metempsychosis elsewhere professed by Plato. But perhaps his adhesion to the latter doctrine is not to be taken very seriously. In imitation of the objective world, whose essential truth is half hidden and half disclosed by its phenomenal manifestations, he loves to present his speculative teaching under a mythical disguise ; and so he may have chosen the old doctrine of transmigration as an apt expression for the unity and continuity of life. And, at worst, he would not be guilty of any greater inconsistency than is chargeable to those modern philosophers who, while they admit that mental qualities are inherited, hold each individual soul to be a separate and independent creation.

The rules for breeding and education set forth in the *Republic* are not intended for the whole community, but only

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Lysis*, 210, E. Jowett, I., 54.

for the ruling minority. It was by the corruption of the higher classes that Plato was most distressed, and the salvation of the State depended, according to him, on their reformation. This leads us on to his scheme for the reconstitution of society. It is intimately connected with his method of logical definition and classification. He shows with great force that the collective action of human beings is conditioned by the division of labour; and argues from this that every individual ought, in the interest of the whole, to be restricted to a single occupation. Therefore, the industrial classes, who form the bulk of the population, are to be excluded both from military service and from political power. The Peloponnesian War had led to a general substitution of professional soldiers for the old levies of untrained citizens in Greek warfare. Plato was deeply impressed by the dangers, as well as by the advantages, of this revolution. That each profession should be exercised only by persons trained for it, suited his notions alike as a logician, a teacher, and a practical reformer. But he saw that mercenary fighters might use their power to oppress and plunder the defenceless citizens, or to establish a military despotism. And, holding that government should, like strategy, be exercised only by functionaries naturally fitted and expressly trained for the work, he saw equally that a privileged class would be tempted to abuse their position in order to fill their pockets and to gratify their passions. He proposed to provide against these dangers, first by the new system of education already described, and secondly by pushing the division of labour to its logical conclusion. That they might the better attend to their specific duties, the defenders and the rulers of the State were not to practise the art of money-making; in other words, they were not to possess any property of their own, but were to be supported by the labour of the industrial classes. Furthermore, that they need not quarrel among themselves, he proposed that every private interest should be eliminated

from their lives, and that they should, as a class, be united by the closest bonds of family affection. This purpose was to be effected by the abolition of marriage and of domesticity. The couples chosen for breeding were to be separated when the object of their union had been attained ; children were to be taken from their mothers immediately after birth and brought up at the expense and under the supervision of the State. Sickly and deformed infants were to be destroyed. Those who fell short of the aristocratic standard were to be degraded, and their places filled up by the exceptionally gifted offspring of low-class parents. Members of the military and governing caste were to address each other according to the kinship which might possibly exist between them. In the absence of home-employments, women were to be, so far as possible, assimilated to men ; to pass through the same bodily and mental training ; to be enrolled in the army ; and, if they showed the necessary capacity, to discharge the highest political functions. In this practical dialectic the identifying no less than the differentiating power of logic is displayed, and displayed also in defiance of common ideas, as in the modern classifications of zoology and botany. Plato introduces distinctions where they did not before exist, and annuls those which were already recognised. The sexes were to be assimilated, political life was to be identified with family life, and the whole community was to present an exact parallel with the individual soul. The ruling committee corresponded to reason, the army to passionate spirit, and the industrial classes to the animal desires ; and each, in its perfect constitution, represented one of the cardinal virtues as reinterpreted by Plato. Wisdom belonged to the ruling part, courage to the intermediate executive power, and temperance or obedience to the organs of material existence ; while justice meant the general harmony resulting from the fulfilment of their appropriate functions by all. We may add that the whole State reproduced the Greek family in a much

deeper sense than Plato himself was aware of. For his aristocracy represents the man, whose virtue, in the words of Gorgias, was to 'administer the State;' and his industrial class takes the place of the woman, whose duty was 'to order her house, and keep what is indoors, and obey her husband.'<sup>1</sup>

Such was the celebrated scheme by which Plato proposed to regenerate mankind. We have already taken occasion to show how it was connected with his ethical and dialectical philosophy. We have now to consider in what relation it stands to the political experience of his own and other times, as well as to the revolutionary proposals of other speculative reformers.

## VI.

According to Hegel,<sup>2</sup> the Platonic polity, so far from being an impracticable dream, had already found its realisation in Greek life, and did but give a purer expression to the constitutive principle of every ancient commonwealth. There are, he tells us, three stages in the moral development of mankind. The first is purely objective. It represents a régime where rules of conduct are entirely imposed from without; they are, as it were, embodied in the framework of society; they rest, not on reason and conscience, but on authority and tradition; they will not suffer themselves to be questioned, for, being unproved, a doubt would be fatal to their very existence. Here the individual is completely sacrificed to the State; but in the second or subjective stage he breaks loose, asserting the right of his private judgment and will as against the established order of things. This revolution was, still according to Hegel, begun by the Sophists and Socrates. It proved altogether incompatible with the spirit of Greek civilisation, which it ended by shattering to pieces. The subjective principle found an

<sup>1</sup> *Meno*, 71, E. Jowett, I., 270.

<sup>2</sup> *Gesch. d. Ph.*, II, 272.



appropriate expression in Christianity, which attributes an infinite importance to the individual soul ; and it appears also in the political philosophy of Rousseau. We may observe that it corresponds very nearly to what Auguste Comte meant by the metaphysical period. The modern State reconciles both principles, allowing the individual his full development, and at the same time incorporating him with a larger whole, where, for the first time, he finds his own reason fully realised. Now, Hegel looks on the Platonic republic as a reaction against the subjective individualism, the right of private judgment, the self-seeking impulse, or whatever else it is to be called, which was fast eating into the heart of Greek civilisation. To counteract this fatal tendency, Plato goes back to the constitutive principle of Greek society—that is to say, the omnipotence, or, in Benthamite parlance, omnicompetence, of the State ; exhibiting it, in ideal perfection, as the suppression of individual liberty under every form, more especially the fundamental forms of property, marriage, and domestic life.

It seems to us that Hegel, in his anxiety to crush every historical process into the narrow symmetry of a favourite metaphysical formula, has confounded several entirely distinct conceptions under the common name of subjectivity. First, there is the right of private judgment, the claim of each individual to have a voice in the affairs of the State, and to have the free management of his own personal concerns. But this, so far from being modern, is one of the oldest customs of the Aryan race ; and perhaps, could we look back to the oldest history of other races now despotically governed, we should find it prevailing among them also. It was no new nor unheard-of privilege that Rousseau vindicated for the peoples of his own time, but their ancient birthright, taken from them by the growth of a centralised military system, just as it had been formerly taken from the city communities of the Graeco-Roman world. In this respect, Plato goes against the whole

spirit of his country, and no period of its development, not even the age of Homer, would have satisfied him.

We have next the disposition of individuals, no longer to interfere in making the law, but to override it, or to bend it into an instrument for their own purposes. Doubtless there existed such a tendency in Plato's time, and his polity was very largely designed to hold it in check. But such unprincipled ambition was nothing new in Greece, however the mode of its manifestations might vary. What had formerly been seized by armed violence was now sought after with the more subtle weapons of rhetorical skill; just as at the present moment, among these same Greeks, it is the prize of parliamentary intrigue. The Cretan and Spartan institutions may very possibly have been designed with a view to checking this spirit of selfish lawlessness, by reducing private interests to a minimum; and Plato most certainly had them in his mind when he pushed the same method still further; but those institutions were not types of Hellenism as a whole, they only represented one, and that a very abnormal, side of it. Plato borrowed some elements from this quarter, but, as we shall presently show, he incorporated them with others of a widely different character. Sparta was, indeed, on any high theory of government, not a State at all, but a robber-clan established among a plundered population whom they never tried or cared to conciliate. How little weight her rulers attributed to the interests of the State as such, was well exhibited during the Peloponnesian War, when political advantages of the utmost importance were surrendered in deference to the noble families whose kinsmen had been captured at Sphactéria, and whose sole object was to rescue them from the fate with which they were threatened by the Athenians as a means of extorting concessions;—conduct with which the refusal of Rome to ransom the soldiers who had surrendered at Cannæ may be instructively contrasted.

We have, thirdly, to consider a form of individualism

directly opposed in character to those already specified. It is the complete withdrawal from public affairs for the sake of attending exclusively to one's private duties or pleasures. Such individualism is the characteristic weakness of conservatives, who are, by their very nature, the party of timidity and quiescence. To them was addressed the exhortation of Cato, *capessenda est respublica*. The two other forms of which we have spoken are, on the contrary, diseases of liberalism. We see them exemplified when the leaders of a party are harassed by the perpetual criticism of their professed supporters; or, again, when an election is lost because the votes of the Liberal electors are divided among several candidates. But when a party—generally the Conservative party—loses an election because its voters will not go to the poll, that is owing to the lazy individualism which shuns political contests altogether. It was of this disease that the public life of Athens really perished; and, so far, Hegel is on the right track; but although its action was more obviously and immediately fatal in antiquity, we are by no means safe from a repetition of the same experience in modern society. Nor can it be said that Plato reacted against an evil which, in his eyes, was an evil only when it deprived a very few properly-qualified persons of political supremacy. With regard to all others he proposed to sanction and systematise what was already becoming a common custom—namely, entire withdrawal from the administration of affairs in peace and war. Hegel seems to forget that it is only a single class, and that the smallest, in Plato's republic which is not allowed to have any private interests; while the industrial classes, necessarily forming a large majority of the whole population, are not only suffered to retain their property and their families, but are altogether thrown back for mental occupation on the interests arising out of these. The resulting state of things would have found its best parallel, not in old Greek city life, but in modern Europe, as it was between the Reformation and the French Revolution.

The three forms of individualism already enumerated do not exhaust the general conception of subjectivity. According to Hegel, if we understand him aright, the most important aspect of the principle in question would be the philosophical side, the return of thought on itself, already latent in physical speculation, proclaimed by the Sophists as an all-dissolving scepticism, and worked up into a theory of life by Socrates. That there was such a movement is, of course, certain ; but that it contributed perceptibly to the decay of old Greek morality, or that it was essentially opposed to the old Greek spirit, cannot, we think, be truly asserted. What has been already observed of political liberty and of political unscrupulousness may be repeated of intellectual inquisitiveness, rationalism, scepticism, or by whatever name the tendency in question is to be called—it always was, and still is, essentially characteristic of the Greek race. It may very possibly have been a source of political disintegration at all times, but that it became so to a greater extent after assuming the form of systematic speculation has never been proved. If the study of science, or the passion for intellectual gymnastics, drew men away from the duties of public life, it was simply as one more private interest among many, just like feasting, or lovmaking, or travelling, or poetry, or any other of the occupations in which a wealthy Greek delighted ; not from any intrinsic incompatibility with the duties of a statesman or a soldier. So far, indeed, was this from being true, that liberal studies, even of the abstrusest order, were pursued with every advantage to their patriotic energy by such citizens as Zeno, Melissus, Empedocles, and, above all, by Pericles and Epameinondas. If Socrates stood aloof from public business it was that he might have more leisure to train others for its proper performance ; and he himself, when called upon to serve the State, proved fully equal to the emergency. As for the Sophists, it is well known that their profession was to give young men the sort of education which would enable

them to fill the highest political offices with honour and advantage. It is true that such a special preparation would end by throwing increased difficulties in the way of a career which it was originally intended to facilitate, by raising the standard of technical proficiency in statesmanship; and that many possible aspirants would, in consequence, be driven back on less arduous pursuits. But Plato was so far from opposing this specialisation that he wished to carry it much farther, and to make government the exclusive business of a small class who were to be physiologically selected and to receive an education far more elaborate than any that the Sophists could give. If, however, we consider Plato not as the constructor of a new constitution but in relation to the politics of his own time, we must admit that his whole influence was used to set public affairs in a hateful and contemptible light. So far, therefore, as philosophy was represented by him, it must count for a disintegrating force. But in just the same degree we are precluded from assimilating his idea of a State to the old Hellenic model. We must rather say, what he himself would have said, that it never was realised anywhere; although, as we shall presently see, a certain approach to it was made in the Middle Ages.

Once more, looking at the whole current of Greek philosophy, and especially the philosophy of mind, are we entitled to say that it encouraged, if it did not create, those other forms of individualism already defined as mutinous criticism on the part of the people, and selfish ambition on the part of its chiefs? Some historians have maintained that there was such a connexion, operating, if not directly, at least through a chain of intermediate causes. Free thought destroyed religion, with religion fell morality, and with morality whatever restraints had hitherto kept anarchic tendencies of every description within bounds. These are interesting reflections; but they do not concern us here, for the issue raised by Hegel is entirely different. It matters nothing to him that Socrates was a staunch

defender of supernaturalism and of the received morality. The essential antithesis is between the Socratic introspection and the Socratic dialectics on the one side, and the unquestioned authority of ancient institutions on the other. If this be what Hegel means, we must once more record our dissent. We cannot admit that the philosophy of subjectivity, so interpreted, was a decomposing ferment; nor that the spirit of Plato's republic was, in any case, a protest against it. The Delphic precept, 'Know thyself,' meant in the mouth of Socrates: Let every man find out what work he is best fitted for, and stick to that, without meddling in matters for which he is not qualified. The Socratic dialectic meant: Let the whole field of knowledge be similarly studied; let our ideas on all subjects be so systematised that we shall be able to discover at a moment's notice the bearing of any one of them on any of the others, or on any new question brought up for decision. Surely nothing could well be less individualistic, in a bad sense, less anti-social, less anarchic than this. Nor does Plato oppose, he generalises his master's principles; he works out the psychology and dialectic of the whole state; and if the members of his governing class are not permitted to have any separate interests in their individual capacity, each individual soul is exalted to the highest dignity by having the community reorganised on the model of its own internal economy. There are no violent peripeteias in this great drama of thought, but everywhere harmony, continuity, and gradual development.

We have entered at some length into Hegel's theory of the *Republic*, because it seems to embody a misleading conception not only of Greek politics but also of the most important attempt at a social reformation ever made by one man in the history of philosophy. Thought would be much less worth studying if it only reproduced the abstract form of a very limited experience, instead of analysing and recombining the elements of which that experience is composed. And our

faith in the power of conscious efforts towards improvement will very much depend on which side of the alternative we accept.

Zeller, while taking a much wider view than Hegel, still assumes that Plato's reforms, so far as they were suggested by experience, were simply an adaptation of Dorian practices.<sup>1</sup> He certainly succeeds in showing that private property, marriage, education, individual liberty, and personal morality were subjected, at least in Sparta, to many restrictions resembling those imposed in the Platonic state. And Plato himself, by treating the Spartan system as the first form of degeneration from his own ideal, seems to indicate that this of all existing polities made the nearest approach to it. The declarations of the *Timaeus*<sup>2</sup> are, however, much more distinct; and according to them it was in the caste-divisions of Egypt that he found the nearest parallel to his own scheme of social reorganisation. There, too, the priests, or wise men came first, and after them the warriors, while the different branches of industry were separated from one another by rigid demarcations. He may also have been struck by that free admission of women to employments elsewhere filled exclusively by men, which so surprised Herodotus, from his inability to discern its real cause—the more advanced differentiation of Egyptian as compared with Greek society.<sup>3</sup>

## VII.

But a profounder analysis of experience is necessary before we can come to the real roots of Plato's scheme. It must be remembered that our philosopher was a revolutionist of the most thorough-going description, that he objected not to this or that constitution of his time, but to all existing consti-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 777.

<sup>2</sup> *Timaeus*, 24, A. Jowett, III., 608.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the excellent remarks of Teichmüller, *Lit. Fehden*, p. 107.

tutions whatever. Now, every great revolutionary movement, if in some respects an advance and an evolution, is in other respects a retrogression and a dissolution. When the most complex forms of political association are broken up, the older or subordinate forms suddenly acquire new life and meaning. What is true of practice is true also of speculation. Having broken away from the most advanced civilisation, Plato was thrown back on the spontaneous organisation of industry, on the army, the school, the family, the savage tribe, and even the herd of cattle, for types of social union. It was by taking some hints from each of these minor aggregates that he succeeded in building up his ideal polity, which, notwithstanding its supposed simplicity and consistency, is one of the most heterogeneous ever framed. The principles on which it rests are not really carried out to their logical consequences; they interfere with and supplement one another. The restriction of political power to a single class is avowedly based on the necessity for a division of labour. One man, we are told, can only do one thing well. But Plato should have seen that the producer is not for that reason to be made a monopolist; and that, to borrow his own favourite example, shoes are properly manufactured because the shoemaker is kept in order by the competition of his rivals and by the freedom of the consumer to purchase wherever he pleases. Athenian democracy, so far from contradicting the lessons of political economy, was, in truth, their logical application to government. The people did not really govern themselves, nor do they in any modern democracy, but they listened to different proposals, just as they might choose among different articles in a shop or different tenders for building a house, accepted the most suitable, and then left it to be carried out by their trusted agents.

Again, Plato is false to his own rule when he selects his philosophic governors out of the military caste. If the same individual can be a warrior in his youth and an administrator



in his riper years, one man can do two things well, though not at the same time. If the same person can be born with the qualifications both of a soldier and of a politician, and can be fitted by education for each calling in succession, surely a much greater number can combine the functions of a manual labourer with those of an elector. What prevented Plato from perceiving this obvious parallel was the tradition of the paterfamilias who had always been a warrior in his youth ; and a commendable anxiety to keep the army closely connected with the civil power. The analogies of domestic life have also a great deal to do with his proposed community of women and children. Instead of undervaluing the family affections, he immensely overvalued them ; as is shown by his supposition that the bonds of consanguinity would prevent dissensions from arising among his warriors. He should have known that many a home is the scene of constant wrangling, and that quarrels between kinsfolk are the bitterest of any. Then, looking on the State as a great school, Plato imagined that the obedience, docility, and credulity of young scholars could be kept up through a lifetime ; that full-grown citizens would swallow the absurdest inventions ; and that middle-aged officers could be sent into retirement for several years to study dialectic. To suppose that statesmen must necessarily be formed by the discipline in question is another scholastic trait. The professional teacher attributes far more practical importance to his abstruser lessons than they really possess. He is not content to wait for the indirect influence which they may exert at some remote period and in combination with forces of perhaps a widely different character. He looks for immediate and telling results. He imagines that the highest truth must have a mysterious power of transforming all things into its own likeness, or at least of making its learners more capable than other men of doing the world's work. Here also Plato, instead of being too logical, was not logical

enough. By following out the laws of economy, as applied to mental labour, he might have arrived at the separation of the spiritual and temporal powers, and thus anticipated the best established social doctrine of our time.

With regard to the propagation of the race, Plato's methods are avowedly borrowed from those practised by bird-fanciers, horse-trainers, and cattle-breeders. It had long been a Greek custom to compare the people to a flock of sheep and their ruler to a shepherd, phrases which still survive in ecclesiastical parlance. Socrates habitually employed the same simile in his political discussions; and the rhetoricians used it as a justification of the governors who enriched themselves at the expense of those committed to their charge. Plato twisted the argument out of their hands and showed that the shepherd, as such, studies nothing but the good of his sheep. He failed to perceive that the parallel could not be carried out in every detail, and that, quite apart from more elevated considerations, the system which secures a healthy progeny in the one case cannot be transferred to creatures possessing a vastly more complex and delicate organisation. The destruction of sickly and deformed children could only be justified on the hypothesis that none but physical qualities were of any value to the community. Our philosopher forgets his own distinction between soul and body just when he most needed to remember it.

The position assigned to women by Plato may perhaps have seemed to his contemporaries the most paradoxical of all his projects, and it has been observed that here he is in advance even of our own age. But a true conclusion may be deduced from false premises; and Plato's conclusion is not even identical with that reached on other grounds by the modern advocates of women's rights, or rather of their equitable claims. The author of the *Republic* detested democracy; and the enfranchisement of women is now demanded as a part of

the general democratic programme. It is an axiom, at least with liberals, that no class will have its interests properly attended to which is left without a voice in the election of parliamentary representatives ; and the interests of the sexes are not more obviously identical than those of producers and consumers, or of capitalists and labourers. Another democratic principle is that individuals are, as a rule, the best judges of what occupation they are fit for ; and as a consequence of this it is further demanded that women should be admitted to every employment on equal terms with men ; leaving competition to decide in each instance whether they are suited for it or not. Their continued exclusion from the military profession would be an exception more apparent than real ; because, like the majority of the male sex, they are physically disqualified for it. Now, the profession of arms is the very one for which Plato proposes to destine the daughters of his aristocratic caste, without the least intention of consulting their wishes on the subject. He is perfectly aware that his own principle of differentiation will be quoted against him, but he turns the difficulty in a very dexterous manner. He contends that the difference of the sexes, so far as strength and intelligence are concerned, is one not of kind but of degree ; for women are not distinguished from men by the possession of any special aptitude, none of them being able to do anything that some men cannot do better. Granting the truth of this rather unflattering assumption, the inference drawn from it will still remain economically unsound. The division of labour requires that each task should be performed, not by those who are absolutely, but by those who are relatively, best fitted for it. In many cases we must be content with work falling short of the highest attainable standard, that the time and abilities of the best workmen may be exclusively devoted to functions for which they alone are competent. Even if women could be trained to fight, it does not follow that their energies might not be more advantageously

expended in another direction. Here, again, Plato improperly reasons from low to high forms of association. He appeals to the doubtful example of nomadic tribes, whose women took part in the defence of the camps, and to the fighting power possessed by the females of predatory animals. In truth, the elimination of home life left his women without any employment peculiar to themselves ; and so, not to leave them completely idle, they were drafted into the army, more with the hope of imposing on the enemy by an increase of its apparent strength than for the sake of any real service which they were expected to perform.<sup>1</sup> When Plato proposes that women of proved ability should be admitted to the highest political offices, he is far more in sympathy with modern reformers ; and his freedom from prejudice is all the more remarkable when we consider that no Greek lady (except, perhaps, Artemisia) is known to have ever displayed a talent for government, although feminine interference in politics was common enough at Sparta ; and that personally his feeling towards women was unsympathetic if not contemptuous.<sup>2</sup> Still we must not exaggerate the importance of his concession. The Platonic polity was, after all, a family rather than a true State ; and that women should be allowed a share in the regulation of marriage and in the nurture of children, was only giving them back with one hand what had been taken away with the other. Already, among ourselves, women have a voice in educational matters ; and were marriage brought under State control, few would doubt the propriety of making them eligible to the new Boards which would be charged with its supervision.

The foregoing analysis will enable us to appreciate the true significance of the resemblance pointed out by Zeller<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Repub.*, V., 471, D.

<sup>2</sup> He mentions as one of the worst effects of a democracy that it made them assume airs of equality with men. *Repub.*, 563. B. ; cf. 569, F. *Timaeus*, 90, E. It is to be feared that Plato regarded woman as the missing link.

<sup>3</sup> In his *Vorträge und Abhandlungen*, first series, p. 68.

between the Platonic republic and the organisation of mediæval society. The importance given to religious and moral training ; the predominance of the priesthood ; the sharp distinction drawn between the military caste and the industrial population ; the exclusion of the latter from political power ; the partial abolition of marriage and property ; and, it might be added, the high position enjoyed by women as regents, *hâtelaines*, abbesses, and sometimes even as warriors or professors,—are all innovations more in the spirit of Plato than in the spirit of Pericles. Three converging influences united to bring about this extraordinary verification of a philosophical ideal. The profound spiritual revolution effected by Greek thought was taken up and continued by Catholicism, and unconsciously guided to the same practical conclusions the teaching which it had in great part originally inspired. Social differentiation went on at the same time, and led to the political consequences logically deduced from it by Plato. And the barbarian conquest of Rome brought in its train some of those more primitive habits on which his breach with civilisation had equally thrown him back. Thus the coincidence between Plato's *Republic* and mediæval polity is due in one direction to causal agency, in another to speculative insight, and in a third to parallelism of effects, independent of each other but arising out of analogous conditions.

If, now, we proceed to compare the *Republic* with more recent schemes having also for their object the identification of public with private interests, nothing, at first sight, seems to resemble it so closely as the theories of modern Communism ; especially those which advocate the abolition not only of private property but also of marriage. The similarity, however, is merely superficial, and covers a radical divergence. For, to begin with, the Platonic polity is not a system of Communism at all, in our sense of the word. It is not that the members of the ruling caste are to throw their property into a common fund ; neither as individuals nor as a class do

they possess any property whatever. Their wants are provided for by the industrial classes, who apparently continue to live under the old system of particularism. What Plato had in view was not to increase the sum of individual enjoyments by enforcing an equal division of their material means, but to eliminate individualism altogether, and thus give human feeling the absolute generality which he so much admired in abstract ideas. On the other hand, unless we are mistaken, modern Communism has no objection to private property as such, could it remain divided either with absolute equality or in strict proportion to the wants of its holders; but only as the inevitable cause of inequalities which advancing civilisation seems to aggravate rather than to redress. So also with marriage; the modern assailants of that institution object to it as a restraint on the freedom of individual passion, which, according to them, would secure the maximum of pleasure by perpetually varying its objects. Plato would have looked on such reasonings as a parody and perversion of his own doctrine; as in very truth, what some of them have professed to be, pleas for the rehabilitation of the flesh in its original supremacy over the spirit, and therefore the direct opposite of a system which sought to spiritualise by generalising the interests of life. And so, when in the *Laws* he gives his Communistic principles their complete logical development by extending them to the whole population, he is careful to preserve their philosophical character as the absorption of individual in social existence.<sup>1</sup>

The parentage of the two ideas will further elucidate their essentially heterogeneous character. For modern Communism is an outgrowth of the democratic tendencies which Plato detested; and as such had its counterpart in ancient Athens, if we may trust the *Ecclêsiazusae* of Aristophanes, where also it is associated with unbridled licentiousness.<sup>2</sup> Plato, on the

<sup>1</sup> *Legg.*, 739, B. *Jowett*, V., 311.

<sup>2</sup> [Since the above was first published, Teichmüller has brought forward new

contrary, seems to have received the first suggestion of his Communism from the Pythagorean and aristocratic confraternities of Southern Italy, where the principle that friends have all things in common was an accepted maxim.

If Plato stands at the very antipodes of Fourier and St. Simon, he is connected by a real relationship with those thinkers who, like Auguste Comte and Mr. Herbert Spencer, have based their social systems on a wide survey of physical science and human history. It is even probable that his ideas have exercised a decided though not a direct influence on the two writers whom we have named. For Comte avowedly took many of his proposed reforms from the organisation of mediæval Catholicism, which was a translation of philosophy into dogma and discipline, just as Positivism is a re-translation of theology into the human thought from which it sprang. And Mr. Spencer's system, while it seems to be the direct antithesis of Plato's, might claim kindred with it through the principle of differentiation and integration, which, after passing from Greek thought into political economy and physiology, has been restored by our illustrious countryman to something more than its original generality. It has also to be observed that the application of very abstract truths to political science needs to be most jealously guarded, since their elasticity increases in direct proportion to their width. When one thinker argues from the law of increasing specialisation to a vast extension of governmental interference with personal liberty, and another thinker to its restriction within the narrowest possible limits, it seems time to consider whether experience and expediency are not, after all, the safest guides to trust.

arguments to prove that it was Plato's scheme of Communism which Aristophanes intended to satirise (*Lit. Fehden*, pp. 14, ff.); but I do not think that even the first half of the *Republic* could possibly have been composed at such an early date as that assigned to it by this learned and ingenious critic.]

## VIII.

The social studies through which we have accompanied Plato seem to have reacted on his more abstract speculations, and to have largely modified the extreme opposition in which these had formerly stood to current notions, whether of a popular or a philosophical character. The change first becomes perceptible in his theory of Ideas. This is a subject on which, for the sake of greater clearness, we have hitherto refrained from entering; and that we should have succeeded in avoiding it so long would seem to prove that the doctrine in question forms a much less important part of his philosophy than is commonly imagined. Perhaps, as some think, it was not an original invention of his own, but was borrowed from the Megarian school; and the mythical connexion in which it frequently figures makes us doubtful how far he ever thoroughly accepted it. The theory is, that to every abstract name or conception of the mind there corresponds an objective entity possessing a separate existence quite distinct from that of the scattered particulars by which it is exemplified to our senses or to our imagination. Just as the Heraclitean flux represented the confusion of which Socrates convicted his interlocutors, so also did these Ideas represent the definitions by which he sought to bring method and certainty into their opinions. It may be that, as Grote suggests, Plato adopted this hypothesis in order to escape from the difficulty of defining common notions in a satisfactory manner. It is certain that his earliest Dialogues seem to place true definitions beyond the reach of human knowledge. And at the beginning of Plato's constructive period we find the recognition of abstract conceptions, whether mathematical or moral, traced to the remembrance of an ante-natal state, where the soul held direct converse with the transcendent realities to which those conceptions correspond. Justice, temperance, beauty, and goodness, are especially mentioned as examples



of Ideas revealed in this manner. Subsequent investigations must, however, have led Plato to believe that the highest truths are to be found by analysing not the loose contents but the fixed forms of consciousness ; and that, if each virtue expressed a particular relation between the various parts of the soul, no external experience was needed to make her acquainted with its meaning ; still less could conceptions arising out of her connexion with the material world be explained by reference to a sphere of purely spiritual existence. At the same time, innate ideas would no longer be required to prove her incorporeality, when the authority of reason over sense furnished so much more satisfactory a ground for believing the two to be of different origin. To all who have studied the evolution of modern thought, the substitution of Kantian forms for Cartesian ideas will at once elucidate and confirm our hypothesis of a similar reformation in Plato's metaphysics.

Again, the new position occupied by Mind as an intermediary between the world of reality and the world of appearance, tended more and more to obliterate or confuse the demarcations by which they had hitherto been separated. The most general headings under which it was usual to contrast them were, the One and the Many, Being and Nothing, the Same and the Different, Rest and Motion. Parmenides employed the one set of terms to describe his Absolute, and the other to describe the objects of vulgar belief. They also served respectively to designate the wise and the ignorant, the dialectician and the sophist, the knowledge of gods and the opinions of men ; besides offering points of contact with the antithetical couples of Pythagoreanism. But Plato gradually found that the nature of Mind could not be understood without taking both points of view into account. Unity and plurality, sameness and difference, equally entered into its composition ; although undoubtedly belonging to the sphere of reality, it was self-

moved and the cause of all motion in other things. The dialectic or classificatory method, with its progressive series of differentiations and assimilations, also involved a continual use of categories which were held to be mutually exclusive. And on proceeding to an examination of the *summa genera*, the highest and most abstract ideas which it had been sought to distinguish by their absolute purity and simplicity from the shifting chaos of sensible phenomena, Plato discovered that even these were reduced to a maze of confusion and contradiction by a sincere application of the cross-examining *clenchus*. For example, to predicate being of the One was to mix it up with a heterogeneous idea and let in the very plurality which it denied. To distinguish them was to predicate difference of both, and thus open the door to fresh embarrassments.

Finally, while the attempt to attain extreme accuracy of definition was leading to the destruction of all thought and all reality within the Socratic school, the dialectic method had been taken up and parodied in a very coarse style by a class of persons called *Eristics*. These men had, to some extent, usurped the place of the elder *Sophists* as paid instructors of youth; but their only accomplishment was to upset every possible assertion by a series of verbal juggles. One of their favourite paradoxes was to deny the reality of falsehood on the *Parmenidean* principle that 'nothing cannot exist.' Plato satirises their method in the *Euthydēmus*, and makes a much more serious attempt to meet it in the *Sophist*; two Dialogues which seem to have been composed not far from one another.<sup>1</sup> The *Sophist* effects a considerable simplification in the ideal theory by resolving negation into difference, and altogether omitting the notions of unity and plurality,—perhaps as a result of the investiga-

<sup>1</sup> [Here, also, the recent arguments of Teichmüller (*Lit. Fehden*, p. 51) deserve attention, but they have failed to convince me that an earlier date should be assigned to the *Euthydēmus*.]

tions contained in the *Parmenides*, another dialogue belonging to the same group, where the couple referred to are analysed with great minuteness, and are shown to be infected with numerous self-contradictions. The remaining five ideas of Existence, Sameness, Difference, Rest, and Motion, are allowed to stand; but the fact of their inseparable connexion is brought out with great force and clearness. The enquiry is one of considerable interest, including, as it does, the earliest known analysis of predication, and forming an indispensable link in the transition from Platonic to Aristotelian logic—that is to say, from the theory of definition and classification to the theory of syllogism.

Once the Ideas had been brought into mutual relation and shown to be compounded with one another, the task of connecting them with the external world became considerably easier; and the same intermediary which before had linked them to it as a participant in the nature of both, was now raised to a higher position and became the efficient cause of their intimate union. Such is the standpoint of the *Philæbus*, where all existence is divided into four classes, the limit, the unlimited, the union of both, and the cause of their union. Mind belongs to the last and matter to the second class. There can hardly be a doubt that the first class is either identical with the Ideas or fills the place once occupied by them. The third class is the world of experience, the Cosmos of early Greek thought, which Plato had now come to look on as a worthy object of study. In the *Timæus*, also a very late Dialogue, he goes further, and gives us a complete cosmogony, the general conception of which is clear enough, although the details are avowedly conjectural and figurative; nor do they seem to have exercised any influence or subsequent speculation until the time of Descartes. We are told that the world was created by God, who is absolutely good, and, being without jealousy, wished that all things should be like himself. He makes it to consist

of a soul and a body, the former constructed in imitation of the eternal archetypal ideas which now seem to be reduced to three—Existence, Sameness, and Difference.<sup>1</sup> The soul of the world is formed by mixing these three elements together, and the body is an image of the soul. Sameness is represented by the starry sphere rotating on its own axis; Difference by the inclination of the ecliptic to the equator; Existence, perhaps, by the everlasting duration of the heavens. The same analogy extends to the human figure, of which the head is the most essential part, all the rest of the body being merely designed for its support. Plato seems to regard the material world as a sort of machinery designed to meet the necessities of sight and touch, by which the human soul arrives at a knowledge of the eternal order without;—a direct reversal of his earlier theories, according to which matter and sense were mere encumbrances impeding the soul in her efforts after truth.

What remains of the visible world after deducting its ideal elements is pure space. This, which to some seems the clearest of all conceptions, was to Plato one of the obscurest. He can only describe it as the formless substance out of which the four elements, fire, air, water, and earth, are differentiated. It closes the scale of existence and even lies half outside it, just as the Idea of Good in the *Republic* transcends the same scale at the other end. We may conjecture that the two principles are opposed as absolute self-identity and absolute self-separation; the whole intermediate series of forms serving to bridge over the interval between them. It will then be easy to understand how, as Aristotle tells us, Plato finally came to adopt the Pythagorean nomenclature and designated his two generating principles as the monad and the indefinite dyad. Number was formed by their combination, and all other things were made out of number. Aristotle

<sup>1</sup> We may even say that they are reduced to two; for Existence is a product of Sameness and Difference.

complains that the Platonists had turned philosophy into mathematics ; and perhaps in the interests of science it was fortunate that the transformation occurred. To suppose that matter could be built up out of geometrical triangles, as Plato teaches in the *Timæus*, was, no doubt, a highly reprehensible confusion ; but that the systematic study of science should be based on mathematics was an equally new and important aperçu. The impulse given to knowledge followed unforeseen directions ; and at a later period Plato's true spirit was better represented by Archimêdes and Hipparchus than by Arcesilaus and Carneades.

It is remarkable that the spontaneous development of Greek thought should have led to a form of Theism not unlike that which some persons still imagine was supernaturally revealed to the Hebrew race ; for the absence of any connexion between the two is now almost universally admitted. Modern science has taken up the attitude of Laplace towards the hypothesis in question ; and those critics who, like Lange, are most imbued with the scientific spirit, feel inclined to regard its adoption by Plato as a retrograde movement. We may to a certain extent agree with them, without admitting that philosophy, as a whole, was injured by departing from the principles of Democritus. An intellectual like an animal organism may sometimes have to choose between retrograde metamorphosis and total extinction. The course of events drove speculation to Athens, where it could only exist on the condition of assuming a theological form. Moreover, action and reaction were equal and contrary. Mythology gained as much as philosophy lost. It was purified from immoral ingredients, and raised to the highest level which supernaturalism is capable of attaining. If the *Republic* was the forerunner of the Catholic Church, the *Timæus* was the forerunner of the Catholic faith.

## IX.

The old age of Plato seems to have been marked by restless activity in more directions than one. He began various works which were never finished, and projected others which were never begun. He became possessed by a devouring zeal for social reform. It seemed to him that nothing was wanting but an enlightened despot to make his ideal State a reality. According to one story, he fancied that such an instrument might be found in the younger Dionysius. If so, his expectations were speedily disappointed. As Hegel acutely observes, only a man of half measures will allow himself to be guided by another ; and such a man would lack the energy needed to carry out Plato's scheme.<sup>1</sup> However this may be, the philosopher does not seem to have given up his idea that absolute monarchy was, after all, the government from which most good might be expected. A process of substitution which runs through his whole intellectual evolution was here exemplified for the last time. Just as in his ethical system knowledge, after having been regarded solely as the means for procuring an ulterior end, pleasure, subsequently became an end in itself ; just as the interest in knowledge was superseded by a more absorbing interest in the dialectical machinery which was to facilitate its acquisition, and this again by the social re-organisation which was to make education a department of the State ; so also the beneficent despotism originally invoked for the purpose of establishing an aristocracy on the new model, came at last to be regarded by Plato as itself the best form of government. Such, at least, seems to be the drift of a remarkable Dialogue called the *Statesman*, which we agree with Prof. Jowett in placing immediatly before the *Laws*. Some have denied its authenticity, and others have placed it very early in the entire series of Platonic compositions. But it contains passages of

<sup>1</sup> *Gesch. d. Ph.*, II., 175.

such blended wit and eloquence that no other man could have written them ; and passages so destitute of life that they could only have been written when his system had stiffened into mathematical pedantry and scholastic routine. Moreover, it seems distinctly to anticipate the scheme of detailed legislation which Plato spent his last years in elaborating. After covering with ridicule the notion that a truly competent ruler should ever be hampered by written enactments, the principal spokesman acknowledges that, in the absence of such a ruler, a definite and unalterable code offers the best guarantees for political stability.

This code Plato set himself to construct in his last and longest work, the *Laws*. Less than half of that Dialogue, however, is occupied with the details of legislation. The remaining portions deal with the familiar topics of morality, religion, science, and education. The first book propounds a very curious theory of asceticism, which has not, we believe, been taken up by any subsequent moralist. On the principle of *in vino veritas* Plato proposes that drunkenness should be systematically employed for the purpose of testing self-control. True temperance is not abstinence, but the power of resisting temptation ; and we can best discover to what extent any man possesses that power by surprising him when off his guard. If he should be proof against seductive influences even when in his cups, we shall be doubly sure of his constancy at other times. Prof. Jowett rather maliciously suggests that a personal proclivity may have suggested this extraordinary apology for hard drinking. Were it so, we should be reminded of the successive revelations by which indulgences of another kind were permitted to Mohammed, and of the one case in which divorce was sanctioned by Auguste Comte. We should also remember that the Christian Puritanism to which Plato approached so near has always been singularly lenient to this disgraceful vice. But perhaps a somewhat higher order of considerations will help us to a better under-

standing of the paradox. Plato was averse from rejecting any tendency of his age that could possibly be turned to account in his philosophy. Hence, as we have seen, the use which he makes of love, even under its most unlawful forms, in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Now, it would appear, from our scanty sources of information, that social festivities, always very popular at Athens, had become the chief interest in life about the time when Plato was composing his *Laws*. According to one graceful legend, the philosopher himself breathed his last at a marriage-feast. It may, therefore, have occurred to him that the prevalent tendency could, like the amorous passions of a former generation, be utilised for moral training and made subservient to the very cause with which, at first sight, it seemed to conflict.

The concessions to common sense and to contemporary schools of thought, already pointed out in those Dialogues which we suppose to have been written after the *Republic*, are still more conspicuous in the *Laws*. We do not mean merely the project of a political constitution avowedly offered as the best possible in existing circumstances, though not the best absolutely; but we mean that there is throughout a desire to present philosophy from its most intelligible, practical, and popular side. The extremely rigorous standard of sexual morality (p. 838) seems, indeed, more akin to modern than to ancient notions, but it was in all probability borrowed from the naturalistic school of ethics, the forerunner of Stoicism; for not only is there a direct appeal to Nature's teaching in that connexion; but throughout the entire work the terms 'nature' and 'naturally' occur with greater frequency, we believe, than in all the rest of Plato's writings put together. When, on the other hand, it is asserted that men can be governed by no other motive than pleasure (p. 663, B), we seem to see in this declaration a concession to the Cyrenaic school, as well as a return to the forsaken standpoint of the *Protogoras*. The increasing influence of Pythagoreanism is shown by



the exaggerated importance attributed to exact numerical determinations. The theory of ideas is, as Prof. Jowett observes, entirely absent, its place being taken by the distinction between mind and matter.<sup>1</sup>

The political constitution and code of laws recommended by Plato to his new city are adapted to a great extent from the older legislation of Athens. As such they have supplied the historians of ancient jurisprudence with some valuable indications. But from a philosophic point of view the general impression produced is wearisome and even offensive. A universal system of espionage is established, and the odious trade of informer receives ample encouragement. Worst of all, it is proposed, in the true spirit of Athenian intolerance, to uphold religious orthodoxy by persecuting laws. Plato had actually come to think that disagreement with the vulgar theology was a folly and a crime. One passage may be quoted as a warning to those who would set early associations to do the work of reason ; and who would overbear new truths by a method which at one time might have been used with fatal effect against their own opinions :—

Who can be calm when he is called upon to prove the existence of the gods? Who can avoid hating and abhorring the men who are and have been the cause of this argument? I speak of those who will not believe the words which they have heard as babes and sucklings from their mothers and nurses, repeated by them both in jest and earnest like charms ; who have also heard and seen their parents offering up sacrifices and prayers—sights and sounds delightful to children—sacrificing, I say, in the most earnest manner on behalf of them and of themselves, and with eager interest talking to the gods and beseeching them as though they were firmly convinced of their existence ; who likewise see and hear the genuflexions and prostrations which are made by Hellenes and barbarians to the rising and setting sun and moon, in all the various turns of good and evil for-

<sup>1</sup> In the work already referred to, Teichmüller advances the startling theory that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was published before the completion of the *Laws*, and that Plato took the opportunity thus offered him for replying to the criticisms of his former pupil. (*Lit. Fehden*, pp. 194-226).

tune, not as if they thought that there were no gods, but as if there could be no doubt of their existence, and no suspicion of their non-existence; when men, knowing all these things, despise them on no real grounds, as would be admitted by all who have any particle of intelligence, and when they force us to say what we are now saying, how can any one in gentle terms remonstrate with the like of them, when he has to begin by proving to them the very existence of the gods? <sup>1</sup>

Let it be remembered that the gods of whom Plato is speaking are the sun, moon, and stars; that the atheists whom he denounces only taught what we have long known to be true, which is that those luminaries are no more divine, no more animated, no more capable of accepting our sacrifices or responding to our cries than is the earth on which we tread; and that he attempts to prove the contrary by arguments which, even if they were not inconsistent with all that we know about mechanics, would still be utterly inadequate to the purpose for which they are employed.

Turning back once more from the melancholy decline of a great genius to the splendour of its meridian prime, we will endeavour briefly to recapitulate the achievements which entitle Plato to rank among the five or six greatest Greeks, and among the four or five greatest thinkers of all time. He extended the philosophy of mind until it embraced not only ethics and dialectics but also the study of politics, of religion, of social science, of fine art, of economy, of language, and of education. In other words, he showed how ideas could be applied to life on the most comprehensive scale. Further, he saw that the study of Mind, to be complete, necessitates a knowledge of physical phenomena and of the realities which underlie them; accordingly, he made a return on the objective speculations which had been temporarily abandoned, thus mediating between Socrates and early Greek thought; while on the other hand by his theory of classification he mediated between Socrates and Aristotle. He based physical science

<sup>1</sup> *Legg.*, 887-S. Jowett, V., 456.

on mathematics, thus establishing a method of research and of education which has continued in operation ever since. He sketched the outlines of a new religion in which morality was to be substituted for ritualism, and intelligent imitation of God for blind obedience to his will ; a religion of monotheism, of humanity, of purity, and of immortal life. And he embodied all these lessons in a series of compositions distinguished by such beauty of form that their literary excellence alone would entitle them to rank among the greatest masterpieces that the world has ever seen. He took the recently-created instrument of prose style and at once raised it to the highest pitch of excellence that it has ever attained. Finding the new art already distorted by false taste and overlaid with meretricious ornament, he cleansed and regenerated it in that primal fount of intellectual life, that richest, deepest, purest source of joy, the conversation of enquiring spirits with one another, when they have awakened to the desire for truth and have not learned to despair of its attainment. Thus it was that the philosopher's mastery of expression gave added emphasis to his protest against those who made style a substitute for knowledge, or, by a worse corruption, perverted it into an instrument of profitable wrong. They moved along the surface in a confused world of words, of sensations, and of animal desires ; he penetrated through all those dumb images and blind instincts, to the central verity and supreme end which alone can inform them with meaning, consistency, permanence, and value. To conclude: Plato belonged to that nobly practical school of idealists who master all the details of reality before attempting its reformation, and accomplish their great designs by enlisting and reorganising whatever spontaneous forces are already working in the same direction ; but the fertility of whose own suggestions it needs more than one millennium to exhaust. There is nothing in heaven or earth that was not dreamt of in his philosophy :

some of his dreams have already come true ; others still await their fulfilment ; and even those which are irreconcilable with the demands of experience will continue to be studied with the interest attaching to every generous and daring adventure, in the spiritual no less than in the secular order of existence.

## CHAPTER VI.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ARISTOTLE.

## I.

WITHIN the last twelve years several books, both large and small, have appeared, dealing either with the philosophy of Aristotle as a whole, or with the general principles on which it is constructed. The Berlin edition of Aristotle's collected works was supplemented in 1870 by the publication of a magnificent index, filling nearly nine hundred quarto pages, for which we have to thank the learning and industry of Bonitz.<sup>1</sup> Then came the unfinished treatise of George Grote, planned on so vast a scale that it would, if completely carried out, have rivalled the author's *History of Greece* in bulk, and perhaps exceeded the authentic remains of the Stagirite himself. As it is, we have a full account, expository and critical, of the *Organon*, a chapter on the *De Animâ*, and some fragments on other Aristotelian writings, all marked by Grote's wonderful sagacity and good sense. In 1879 a new and greatly enlarged edition brought that portion of Zeller's work on Greek Philosophy which deals with Aristotle and the Peripatetics<sup>2</sup> fully up to the level of its companion volumes; and we are glad to see that, like them, it is shortly to appear in an English dress. The older work of Brandis<sup>3</sup> goes over the same ground, and, though much behind the present state of knowledge, may still be consulted with advantage, on account of its copious and clear analyses of the Aristotelian texts.

<sup>1</sup> *Aristotelis Opera*. Edidit Academia Regia Borussica. Berlin. 1831-70.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Philosophie der Griechen*. Zweiter Theil, Zweite Abtheilung: *Aristoteles u. d. alten Peripatetiker*. By Dr. Eduard Zeller. Leipzig. 1879.

<sup>3</sup> *Aristoteles*. By Christian Aug. Brandis. Berlin. 1853-57.

Together with these ponderous tomes, we have to mention the little work of Sir Alexander Grant,<sup>1</sup> which, although intended primarily for the unlearned, is a real contribution to Aristotelian scholarship, and, probably as such, received the honours of a German translation almost immediately after its first publication. Mr. Edwin Wallace's *Outlines of the Philosophy of Aristotle*<sup>2</sup> is of a different and much less popular character. Originally designed for the use of the author's own pupils, it does for Aristotle's entire system what Trendelenburg has done for his logic, and Ritter and Preller for all Greek philosophy—that is to say, it brings together the most important texts, and accompanies them with a remarkably lucid and interesting interpretation. Finally we have M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire's Introduction to his translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, republished in a pocket volume.<sup>3</sup> We can safely recommend it to those who wish to acquire a knowledge of the subject with the least possible expenditure of trouble. The style is delightfully simple, and that the author should write from the standpoint of the French spiritualistic school is not altogether a disadvantage, for that school is partly of Aristotelian origin, and its adherents are, therefore, most likely to reproduce the master's theories with sympathetic appreciation.

In view of such extensive labours, we might almost imagine ourselves transported back to the times when Chaucer could describe a student as being made perfectly happy by having

‘ At his beddes hed  
Twenty bookes clothed in blake or red  
Of Aristotle and his philosophie.’

It seems as if we were witnessing a revival of Mediaevalism

<sup>1</sup> *Aristotle*. By Sir Alexander Grant, Bart., LL.D. Edinburgh and London. 1877.

<sup>2</sup> *Outlines of the Philosophy of Aristotle*. Compiled by Edwin Wallace, M.A. Oxford and London. 1880.

<sup>3</sup> *De la Métaphysique: Introduction à la Métaphysique d'Aristote*. By Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire. Paris. 1879.

under another form ; as if, after neo-Gothic architecture, pre-Raphaelitism, and ritualism, we were threatened with a return to the scholastic philosophy which the great scientific reformers of the seventeenth century were supposed to have irrevocably destroyed. And, however chimerical may seem the hopes of such a restoration, we are bound to admit that they do actually exist. One of the most cultivated champions of Ultramontanism in this country, Prof. St. George Mivart, not long ago informed us, at the close of his work on *Contemporary Evolution*, that, 'if metaphysics are possible, there is not, and never was or will be, more than one philosophy which, properly understood, unites all truths and eliminates all errors—the Philosophy of *the* Philosopher — Aristotle.' It may be mentioned also, as a symptom of the same movement, that Leo XIII. has recently directed the works of St. Thomas Aquinas to be reprinted for use in Catholic colleges ; having, according to the newspapers, laid aside 300,000 *lire* for that purpose—a large sum, considering his present necessities ; but not too much for the republication of eighteen folio volumes. Now, it is well known that the philosophy of Aquinas is simply the philosophy of Aristotle, with such omissions and modifications as were necessary in order to piece it on to Christian theology. Hence, in giving his sanction to the teaching of the Angelic Doctor, Leo XIII. indirectly gives it to the source from which so much of that teaching is derived.

It may, perhaps, be considered natural that obsolete authorities should command the assent of a Church whose boast is to maintain the traditions of eighteen centuries intact. But the Aristotelian reaction extends to some who stand altogether aloof from Catholicism. M. Saint-Hilaire speaks in his preface of theology with dislike and suspicion ; he has recently held office in a bitterly anti-clerical Government ; yet his acceptance of Aristotle's metaphysics is almost unreserved. The same tone is common to all official teaching

in France ; and any departure from the strict Peripatetic standard has to be apologised for as if it were a dangerous heresy. On turning to our own country, we find, indeed, a marked change since the time when, according to Mr. Matthew Arnold, Oxford tutors regarded the *Ethics* as absolutely infallible. The great place given to Plato in public instruction, and the rapidly increasing ascendancy of evolutionary ideas, are at present enough to hold any rival authority in check ; still, not only are the once neglected portions of Aristotle's system beginning to attract fresh attention—which is an altogether commendable movement—but we also find the eminent Oxford teacher, whose work on the subject has been already referred to, expressing himself as follows :—

We are still anxious to know whether our perception of a real world comes to us by an exercise of thought, or by a simple impression of sense—whether it is the universal that gives the individual reality, or the individual that shapes itself, by some process not explained, into a universal—whether bodily movements are the causal antecedents of mental functions, or mind rather the reality which gives truth to body—whether the highest life is a life of thought or a life of action—whether intellectual also involves moral progress—whether the state is a mere combination for the preservation of goods and property, or a moral organism developing the idea of right. And about these and such like questions Aristotle has still much to tell us. . . . His theory of a creative reason, fragmentary as that theory is left, is the answer to all materialistic theories of the universe. To Aristotle, as to a subtle Scottish preacher [Principal Caird] ‘the real pre-supposition of all knowledge, or the thought which is the *præ* of all things, is not the individual's consciousness of himself as individual, but a thought or self-consciousness which is beyond all individual selves, which is the unity of all individual selves and their objects, of all thinkers and all objects of all thought.’<sup>1</sup>

Our critics are not content with bringing up Aristotle as an authority on the metaphysical controversies of the present day, and reading into him theories of which he never dreamed :

<sup>1</sup> Wallace's *Outlines*, preface, pp. vi–viii.



they proceed to credit him with modern opinions which he would have emphatically repudiated, and modern methods which directly reverse his scientific teaching. Thus Sir A. Grant takes advantage of an ambiguity in the word Matter, as used respectively by Aristotle and by contemporary writers, to claim his support for the peculiar theories of Prof. Ferrier; although the Stagirite has recorded his belief in the reality and independence of material objects (if not of what he called matter) with a positiveness which one would have thought left no possibility of misunderstanding him.<sup>1</sup> And Mr. Wallace says that Aristotle 'recognises the genesis of things by evolution and development;' a statement which, standing where it does, and with no more qualifications than are added to it, would make any reader not versed in the subject think of the Stagirite rather as a forerunner of Mr. Darwin and Mr. Herbert Spencer, than as the intellectual ancestor of their opponents; while, on a subsequent occasion, he quotes a passage about the variations of plants under domestication, from a work considered to be un-Aristotelian by the best critics, apparently with no other object than that of finding a piece of Darwinism in his author.<sup>2</sup>

In Germany, Neo-Aristotelianism has already lived out the appointed term of all such movements; having, we believe, been brought into fashion by Trendelenburg about forty years ago. Since then, the Aristotelian system in all its branches has been studied with such profound scholarship that any illusions respecting its value for our present needs must, by this time, have been completely dissipated; while the Hegelian dialectic, which it was originally intended to combat, no longer requires a counterbalance, having been entirely driven from German university teaching. Moreover, Lange's famous *History of Materialism* has dealt a staggering blow to the reputation of Aristotle, not merely in itself, but relatively to the services of early Greek thought; although

<sup>1</sup> As will be shown in the next chapter.

<sup>2</sup> *Outlines*, pp. 29 and 38.

Lange goes too far into the opposite extreme when exalting Democritus at his expense.<sup>1</sup> We have to complain, however, that Zeller and other historians of Greek philosophy start with an invariable prejudice in favour of the later speculators as against the earlier, and especially in favour of Aristotle as against all his predecessors, even Plato included, which leads them to slur over his weak points, and to bring out his excellencies into disproportionate relief.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident, then, that Aristotle cannot be approached with the same perfect dispassionateness as the other great thinkers of antiquity. He is, if not a living force, still a force which must be reckoned with in contemporary controversy. His admirers persist in making an authority of him, or at least of quoting him in behalf of their own favourite convictions. We are, therefore, bound to sift his claims with a severity which would not be altogether gracious in a purely historical review. At the same time it is hoped that historical justice will not lose, but gain, by such a procedure. We shall be the better able to understand what Aristotle was, after first showing what he neither was nor could be. And the utility of our investigations will be still further enhanced if we can show that he represents a fixed type regularly recurring in the revolutions of thought.

## II.

Personally, we know more about Aristotle than about any other Greek philosopher of the classic period; but what we know does not amount to much. It is little more than the skeleton of a life, a bald enumeration of names and dates and places, with a few more or less doubtful anecdotes interspersed. These we shall now relate, together with whatever inferences the facts seem to warrant. Aristotle was born 384 B.C., at Stageira, a Greek colony in Thrace. It is remarkable that every single Greek thinker of note, Socrates and Plato alone

<sup>1</sup> Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.

excepted, came from the confines of Hellenedom and barbarism. It has been conjectured by Auguste Comte, we know not with how much reason, that religious traditions were weaker in the colonies than in the parent states, and thus allowed freer play to independent speculation. Perhaps, also, the accumulation of wealth was more rapid, thus affording greater leisure for thought; while the pettiness of political life liberated a fund of intellectual energy, which in more powerful communities might have been devoted to the service of the State. Left an orphan in early youth, Aristotle was brought up by one Proxenus, to whose son, Nicanor, he afterwards repaid the debt of gratitude. In his eighteenth year he settled at Athens, and attended the school of Plato until the death of that philosopher twenty years afterwards. It is not clear whether the younger thinker was quite conscious of his vast intellectual debt to the elder, and he continually emphasises the points on which they differ; but personally his feeling towards the master was one of deep reverence and affection. In some beautiful lines, still extant, he speaks of 'an altar of solemn friendship dedicated to one of whom the bad should not speak even in praise; who alone, or who first among mortals, proved by his own life and by his system, that goodness and happiness go hand in hand;' and it is generally agreed that the reference can only be to Plato. Again, in his *Ethics*, Aristotle expresses reluctance to criticise the ideal theory, because it was held by dear friends of his own; adding the memorable declaration, that to a philosopher truth should be dearer still. What opinion Plato formed of his most illustrious pupil is less certain. According to one tradition, he surnamed Aristotle the *Nous* of his school. It could, indeed, hardly escape so penetrating an observer that the omnivorous appetite for knowledge, which he regarded as most especially characteristic of the philosophic temperament, possessed this young learner to a degree never before paralleled among the sons of men. He may,

however, have considered that the Stagirite's method of acquiring knowledge was unfavourable to its fresh and vivid apprehension. An expression has been preserved which can hardly be other than genuine, so distinguished is it by that delicate mixture of compliment and satire in which Plato particularly excelled. He is said to have called Aristotle's house the 'house of the reader.' The author of the *Phaedrus*, himself a tolerably voluminous writer, was, like Carlyle, not an admirer of literature. Probably it occurred to him that a philosophical student, who had the privilege of listening to his own lectures, might do better than shut himself up with a heap of manuscripts, away from the human inspiration of social intercourse, and the divine inspiration of solitary thought. We moderns have no reason to regret a habit which has made Aristotle's writings a storehouse of ancient speculations; but from a scientific, no less than from an artistic point of view, those works are overloaded with criticisms of earlier opinions, some of them quite undeserving of serious discussion.

Philosophy was no sooner domiciled at Athens than its professors came in for their full share of the scurrilous personalities which seem to have formed the staple of conversation in that enlightened capital. Aristotle, himself a trenchant and sometimes a bitterly scornful controversialist, did not escape; and some of the censures passed on him were, rightly or wrongly, attributed to Plato. The Stagirite, who had been brought up at or near the Macedonian Court, and had inherited considerable means, was, if report speaks truly, somewhat foppish in his dress, and luxurious, if not dissipated in his habits. It would not be surprising if one who was left his own master at so early an age had at first exceeded the limits of that moderation which he afterwards inculcated as the golden rule of morals; but the charge of extravagance was such a stock accusation at Athens, where the continued influence of country life seems to have bred a prejudice in favour

of parsimony, that it may be taken almost as an exoneration from graver imputations; and, perhaps, an admonition from Plato, if any was needed, sufficed to check his disciple's ambition for figuring as a man of fashion.

We cannot tell to what extent the divergences which afterwards made Plato and Aristotle pass for types of the most extreme intellectual opposition were already manifested during their personal intercourse.<sup>1</sup> The tradition is that the teacher compared his pupil to a foal that kicks his mother after draining her dry. There is a certain rough truth as well as rough wit about the remark; but the author of the *Parmenides* could hardly have been much affected by criticisms on the ideal theory which he had himself reasoned out with equal candour and acuteness; and if, as we sometimes feel tempted to conjecture, those criticisms were first suggested to him by Aristotle in conversation, it will be still more evident that they were received without offence.<sup>2</sup>

In some respects, Aristotle began not only as a disciple but as a champion of Platonism. On the popular side, that doctrine was distinguished by its essentially religious character, and by its opposition to the rhetorical training then in vogue. Now, Aristotle's dialogues, of which only a few fragments have been preserved, contained elegant arguments in favour of a creative First Cause, and of human immortality; although in the writings which embody his maturer views, the first of these theories is considerably modified, and the second is absolutely rejected. Further, we are informed that Aristotle expressed himself in terms of rather violent contempt for Isocrates, the greatest living professor of declamation; and

<sup>1</sup> Written before the appearance of Teichmüller's *Lit. Fehden* (already referred to in the preceding chapter).

<sup>2</sup> Zeller's opinion that all the Platonic Dialogues except the *Laws* were composed before Aristotle's arrival in Athens, does not seem to be supported by any satisfactory evidence. [Since the above was first published I have found that a similar view of the *Farmenides* had already been maintained by Tocco (*Ricerche Platoniche*, p. 105); and afterwards, but independently, by Teichmüller (*Neue Studien*, III. 363). See Chiapelli, *Della Interpretazione panteistica di Platone*, p. 152.]

opened an opposition school of his own. This step has, curiously enough, been adduced as a further proof of disagreement with Plato, who, it is said, objected to all rhetorical teaching whatever. It seems to us that what he condemned was rather the method and aim of the then fashionable rhetoric ; and a considerable portion of his *Phaedrus* is devoted to proving how much more effectually persuasion might be produced by the combined application of dialectics and psychology to oratory. Now, this is precisely what Aristotle afterwards attempted to work out in the treatise on Rhetoric still preserved among his writings ; and we may safely assume that his earlier lectures at Athens were composed on the same principle.

In 347 Plato died, leaving his nephew Speusippus to succeed him in the headship of the Academy. Aristotle then left Athens, accompanied by another Platonist, Xenocrates, a circumstance tending to prove that his relations with the school continued to be of a cordial character. The two settled in Atarneus, at the invitation of its tyrant Hermeias, an old fellow-student from the Academy. Hermeias was a eunuch who had risen from the position of a slave to that of vizier, and then, after his master's death, to the possession of supreme power. Three years subsequently a still more abrupt turn of fortune brought his adventurous career to a close. Like Polycrates, he was treacherously seized and crucified by order of the Persian Government. Aristotle, who had married Pythias, his deceased patron's niece, fled with her to Mitylênê. Always grateful, and singularly enthusiastic in his attachments, he celebrated the memory of Hermeias in a manner which gave great offence to the religious sentiment of Hellas, by dedicating a statue to him at Delphi, and composing an elegy, still extant, in which he compares the eunuch-despot to Heracles, the Dioscuri, Achilles, and Ajax ; and promises him immortality from the Muses in honour of Xenian Zeus.

When we next hear of Aristotle he is at the Macedonian

Court,<sup>1</sup> acting as tutor to Alexander, the future conqueror of Asia, who remained under his charge between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years. The philosopher is more likely to have obtained this appointment by Court interest—his father was Court-physician to Alexander's grandfather, Amyntas—than by his reputation, which could hardly have been made until several years afterwards. Much has been made of a connexion which, although it did not last very long, appeals strongly to the imagination, and opens a large field for surmise. The greatest speculative and the greatest practical genius of that age—some might say of all ages—could not, one would think, come into such close contact without leaving a deep impression on each other. Accordingly, the philosopher is supposed to have prepared the hero for his future destinies. Milton has told us how Aristotle 'bred great Alexander to subdue the world.' Hegel tells us that this was done by giving him the consciousness of himself, the full assurance of his own powers; for which purpose, it seems, the infinite daring of thought was required; and he observes that the result is a refutation of the silly talk about the practical inutility of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> It would be unfortunate if philosophy had no better testimonial to show for herself than the character of Alexander. It is not the least merit of Grote's History to have brought out in full relief the savage traits by which his conduct was marked from first to last. Arrogant, drunken, cruel, vindictive, and grossly superstitious, he united the vices of a Highland chieftain to the frenzy of an Oriental despot. No man ever stood further from the gravity, the gentleness, the moderation—in a word, the Sôphrosynê of a true Hellenic hero. The time came when Aristotle himself would have run the most imminent personal risk had he been within the tyrant's immediate grasp. His

<sup>1</sup> Teichmüller infers, from certain expressions in the *Panathenæicus* of Isocrates, that Aristotle had returned from Mitylênê to Athens and resumed his former position as a teacher of rhetoric when the summons to Pella reached him. (*Lit. Fehden*, 261.)

<sup>2</sup> *Gesch. d. Phil.*, II., 302.

nephew, Callisthenes, had incurred deep displeasure by protesting against the servile adulation, or rather idolatry, which Alexander exacted from his attendants. A charge of conspiracy was trumped up against him, and even the exculpatory evidence, taken under torture, of his alleged accomplices did not save him. 'I will punish the sophist,' wrote Alexander, 'and those who sent him out.' It was understood that his old tutor was included in the threat. Fortunately, as Grote observes, Aristotle was not at Ecbatana but at Athens; he therefore escaped the fate of Callisthenes, who suffered death in circumstances, according to some accounts, of great atrocity.

Zeller finds several good qualities in Alexander—precocious statesmanship, zeal for the extension of Hellenic civilisation, long-continued self-restraint under almost irresistible temptation, and through all his subsequent aberrations a nobility, a moral purity, a humanity, and a culture, which raise him above every other great conqueror; and these he attributes, in no small degree, to the fostering care of Aristotle;<sup>1</sup> yet, with the exception of moral purity, which was probably an affair of temperament, and has been remarked to an equal extent in other men of the same general character, he was surpassed, in all these respects, by Julius Caesar; while the ruthless vindictiveness, which was his worst passion, exhibited itself at the very beginning of his reign by the destruction of Thebes. A varnish of literary culture he undoubtedly had, and for this Aristotle may be thanked; but any ordinary sophist would probably have effected as much. As to the Hellenising of Western Asia, this, according to Grote, was the work, not of Alexander, but of the Diadochi after him.

The profit reaped by Aristotle from the connexion seems equally doubtful. Tradition tells us that enormous sums of money were spent in aid of his scientific researches, and a whole army of crown servants deputed to collect information

<sup>1</sup> Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 25.



bearing on his zoological studies. Modern explorations, however, have proved that the conquests of Alexander, at least, did not, as has been pretended, supply him with any new specimens; nor does the knowledge contained in his extant treatises exceed what could be obtained either by his own observations or by private enquiries. At the same time we may suppose that his services were handsomely rewarded, and that his official position at the Macedonian Court gave him numerous opportunities for conversing with the grooms, huntsmen, shepherds, fishermen, and others, from whom most of what he tells us about the habits of animals was learned. In connexion with the favour enjoyed by Aristotle, it must be mentioned as a fresh proof of his amiable character, that he obtained the restoration of Stageira, which had been ruthlessly destroyed by Philip, together with the other Greek cities of the Chalcidic peninsula.

Two passages in Aristotle's writings have been supposed to give evidence of his admiration for Alexander. One is the description of the magnanimous man in the *Ethics*. The other is a reference in the *Politics* to an ideal hero, whose virtue raises him so high above the common run of mortals that their duty is to obey him as if he were a god. But the magnanimous man embodies a grave and stately type of character quite unlike the chivalrous, impulsive theatrical nature of Alexander,<sup>1</sup> while probably not unfrequent among real Hellenes; and the god-like statesman of the *Politics* is spoken of rather as an unattainable ideal than as a contemporary fact. On the whole, then, we must conclude that the intercourse between these two extraordinary spirits has left no distinct trace on the actions of the one or on the thoughts of the other.

On Alexander's departure for the East, Aristotle returned to Athens, where he now placed himself at the head of a new philosophical school. The ensuing period of thirteen years

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Teichmüller, *Lit. Fehden*, 192.

was fully occupied by the delivery of public lectures, and by the composition of those encyclopaedic writings which will preserve his memory for ever, along, perhaps, with many others which have not survived. Like Anaxagoras, he was not allowed to end his days in the city of his adoption. His youthful attacks on Isocrates had probably made him many enemies among that rhetor's pupils. It is supposed by Grote, but warmly disputed by Zeller, that his trenchant criticisms on Plato had excited a similar animosity among the sectaries of the Academy.<sup>1</sup> Anyhow, circumstances had unavoidably associated him with the detested Macedonian party, although his position, as a metic, or resident alien, debarred him from taking any active part in politics. With Alexander's death the storm broke loose. A charge was trumped up against Aristotle, on the strength of his unlucky poem in honour of Hermeias, which was described as an insult to religion. That such an accusation should be chosen is characteristic of Athenian bigotry, even should there be no truth in the story that certain philosophical opinions of his were likewise singled out for prosecution. Before the case came on for trial, Aristotle availed himself of the usual privilege allowed on such occasions, and withdrew to Chalcis, in order, as he said, that the Athenians need not sin a second time against philosophy. But his constitution, naturally a feeble one, was nearly worn out. A year afterwards he succumbed to a stomach complaint, aggravated, if not produced, by incessant mental application. His contemporary, Demosthenes, perished about the same time, and at the same age, sixty-two. Within little more than a twelvemonth the world had lost its three greatest men; and after three centuries of uninterrupted glory, Hellas was left unrepresented by a single individual of commanding genius.

We are told that when his end began to approach, the dying philosopher was pressed to choose a successor in the headship of the School. The manner in which he did this is

<sup>1</sup> Zeller, p. 38.

characteristic of his singular gentleness and unwillingness to give offence. It was understood that the choice must lie between his two most distinguished pupils, Theophrastus of Lesbos, and Eudêmus of Rhodes. Aristotle asked for specimens of the wine grown in those islands. He first essayed the Rhodian vintage, and praised it highly, but remarked after tasting the other, 'The Lesbian is sweeter,' thus revealing his preference for Theophrastus, who accordingly reigned over the Lyceum in his stead.<sup>1</sup>

A document purporting to be Aristotle's will has been preserved by Diogenes Laertius, and although some objections to its authenticity have been raised by Sir A. Grant, they have, in our opinion, been successfully rebutted by Zeller.<sup>2</sup> The philosopher's testamentary dispositions give one more proof of his thoughtful consideration for the welfare of those about him, and his devotion to the memory of departed friends. Careful provision is made for the guardianship of his youthful children, and for the comfort of his second wife, Herpyllis, who, he says, had 'been good to' him. Certain slaves, specified by name, are to be emancipated, and to receive legacies. None of the young slaves who waited on him are to be sold, and on growing up they are to be set free 'if they deserve it.' The bones of his first wife, Pythias, are, as she herself desired, to be laid by his. Monuments are to be erected in memory of his mother, and of certain friends, particularly Proxenus, who had been Aristotle's guardian, and his family.

In person Aristotle resembled the delicate student of modern times rather than the athletic figures of his predecessors. He was not a soldier like Socrates, nor a gymnast like Plato. To judge from several allusions in his works, he put great faith in walking as a preservative of health—even when lecturing he liked to pace up and down a shady avenue. And, probably, a constitutional was the severest exercise that

<sup>1</sup> Ritter and Preller, *Hist. Ph.*, p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> Zeller, p. 41, note 2.

he ever took. He spoke with a sort of lisp, and the expression of his mouth is said to have been sarcastic ; but the traits preserved to us in marble tell only of meditation, and perhaps of pain. A free-spoken and fearless critic, he was not over-sensitive on his own account. When told that somebody had been abusing him in his absence, the philosopher replied, ' He may beat me, too, if he likes—in my absence.' He might be abused, even in his own presence, without departing from the same attitude of calm disdain, much to the disappointment of his petulant assailants. His equanimity was but slightly disturbed by more public and substantial affronts. When certain honorary distinctions, conferred on him by a popular vote at Delphi, were withdrawn, probably on the occasion of his flight from Athens, he remarked with his usual studied moderation, that, while not entirely indifferent, he did not feel very deeply concerned ; a trait which illustrates the character of the ' magnanimous man ' far better than anything related of Alexander. Two other sayings have an almost Christian tone ; when asked how we should treat our friends, he replied, ' As we should wish them to treat us ; ' and on being reproached with wasting his bounty on an unworthy object, he observed, ' it was not the person, but the human being that I pitied.'<sup>1</sup>

Still, taking it altogether, the life of Aristotle gives one the impression of something rather desultory and dependent, not proudly self-determined, like the lives of the thinkers who went before him. We are reminded of the fresh starts and the appeals to authority so frequent in his writings. He is first detained at Athens twenty years by the attraction of Plato ; and no sooner is Plato gone, than he falls under the influence of an entirely different character—Hermeias. Even when his services are no longer needed he lingers near the Macedonian Court, until Alexander's departure leaves him once more without a patron. The most dignified period of

<sup>1</sup> Diog. L., V., 17-21.

his whole career is that during which he presided over the Peripatetic School ; but he owes this position to foreign influence, and loses it with the temporary revival of Greek liberty. A longer life would probably have seen him return to Athens in the train of his last patron Antipater, whom, as it was, he appointed executor to his will. This was just the sort of character to lay great stress on the evidentiary value of sensation and popular opinion. It was also the character of a conservative who was likely to believe that things had always been very much what they were in his time, and would continue to remain so ever afterwards. Aristotle was not the man to imagine that the present order of nature had sprung out of a widely different order in the remote past, nor to encourage such speculations when they were offered to him by others. He would not readily believe that phenomena, as he knew them, rested on a reality which could neither be seen nor felt. Nor, finally, could he divine the movements which were slowly undermining the society in which he lived, still less construct an ideal polity for its reorganisation on a higher and broader basis. And here we at once become conscious of the chief difference separating him from his master, Plato.

### III.

It is an often-quoted observation of Friedrich Schlegel's that every man is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. If we narrow the remark to the only class which, perhaps, its author recognised as human beings, namely, all thinking men, it will be found to contain a certain amount of truth, though probably not what Schlegel intended ; at any rate something requiring to be supplemented by other truths before its full meaning can be understood. The common opinion seems to be that Plato was a transcendentalist, while Aristotle was an experientialist ; and that this constitutes the most typical distinction between them. It would, however, be a mistake to

suppose that the *à priori* and *à posteriori* methods were marked off with such definiteness in Plato's time as to render possible a choice between them. The opposition was not between general propositions and particular facts, but between the most comprehensive and the most limited notions. It was as if the question were now to be raised whether we should begin to teach physiology by at once dividing the organic from the inorganic world, or by directing the learner's attention to some one vital act. Now, we are expressly told that Plato hesitated between these two methods; and in his Dialogues, at least, we find the easier and more popular one employed by preference. It is true that he often appeals to wide principles which do not rest on an adequate basis of experimental evidence; but Aristotle does so also, more frequently even, and, as the event proved, with more fatal injury to the advance of knowledge. In his *Rhetoric* he even goes beyond Plato, constructing the entire art from the general principles of dialectics, psychology, and ethics, without any reference, except for the sake of illustration, to existing models of eloquence.

According to Sir A. Grant, it is by the mystical and poetical side of his nature that Plato differs from Aristotle. The one 'aspired to a truth above the truth of scientific knowledge'; the other to 'methodised experience and the definite.'<sup>1</sup> Now, setting aside the question whether there is any truth above the truth of scientific knowledge, we doubt very much whether Plato believed in its existence. He held that the most valuable truth was that which could be imparted to others by a process even more rigorous than mathematical reasoning; and there was no reality, however transcendent, that he did not hope to bring within the grasp of a dialectic without which even the meanest could not be understood. He did, indeed, believe that, so far, the best and wisest of mankind had owed much more to a divinely implanted instinct than to any conscious chain of reflection; but he distinctly

<sup>1</sup> Grant's *Aristotle*, p. 7.

asserted the inferiority of such guidance to the light of scientific knowledge, if this could be obtained, as he hoped that it could. On the other hand, Aristotle was probably superior to Plato as a poet ; and in speaking about the highest realities he uses language which, though less rich and ornate than his master's, is not inferior to it in force and fervour ; while his metaphysical theories contain a large element of what would now be considered mysticism, that is, he often sees evidence of purpose and animation where they do not really exist. His advantage in definiteness is, of course, indisputable, but this was, perhaps, because he came after Plato and profited by his lessons.

Yet there *was* a difference between them, marking off each as the head of a whole School much wider than the Academy or the Lyceum ; a difference which we can best express by saying that Plato was pre-eminently a practical, Aristotle pre-eminently a speculative genius. The object of the one was to reorganise all human life, that of the other to reorganise all human knowledge. Had the one lived earlier, he would more probably have been a great statesman or a great general than a great writer ; the other would at no time have been anything but a philosopher, a mathematician, or a historian. Even from birth they seemed to be respectively marked out for an active and for a contemplative life : the one, a citizen of the foremost State in Hellas, sprung from a family in which political ambition was hereditary, himself strong, beautiful, fascinating, eloquent, and gifted with the keenest insight into men's capacities and motives ; the other a Stagirite and an Asclepiad, that is to say, without opportunities for a public career, and possessing a hereditary aptitude for anatomy and natural history, fitted by his insignificant person and delicate constitution for sedentary pursuits, and better able to acquire a knowledge even of human nature from books than from a living converse with men and affairs. Of course, we are not for a moment denying to Plato a fore-

most place among the masters of those who know ; he embraced all the science of his age, and to a great extent marked out the course which the science of future ages was to pursue ; nevertheless, for him, knowledge was not so much an end in itself as a means for the attainment of other ends, among which the preservation of the State seems to have been, in his eyes, the most important. (Aristotle, on the other hand, after declaring happiness to be the supreme end, defines it as an energising of man's highest nature, which again he identifies with the reasoning process or cognition in its purest form.)

The same fundamental difference comes out strongly in their respective theologies. Plato starts with the conception that God is good, and being good wishes everything to resemble himself ; an assumption from which the divine origin and providential government of the world are deduced. Aristotle thinks of God as exclusively occupied in self-contemplation, and only acting on Nature through the love which his perfection inspires. If, further, we consider in what relation the two philosophies stand to ethics, we shall find that, to Plato, its problems were the most pressing of any, that they haunted him through his whole life, and that he made contributions of extraordinary value towards their solution ; while to Aristotle, it was merely a branch of natural history, a study of the different types of character to be met with in Greek society, without the faintest perception that conduct required to be set on a wider and firmer basis than the conventional standards of his age. Hence it is that, in reading Plato, we are perpetually reminded of the controversies still raging among ourselves. He gives us an exposition, to which nothing has ever been added, of the theory now known as Egoistic Hedonism ; he afterwards abandons that theory, and passes on to the social side of conduct, the necessity of justice, the relation of private to public interest, the bearing of religion, education, and social institutions on morality, along with other kindred topics, which need not be further specified, as



they have been discussed with sufficient fulness in the preceding chapter. Aristotle, on the contrary, takes us back into old Greek life as it was before the days of Socrates, noticing the theories of that great reformer only that he may reject them in favour of a narrow, common-sense standard. Virtuous conduct, he tells us, consists in choosing a mean between two extremes. If we ask how the proper mean is to be discovered, he refers us to a faculty called *φρόνησις*, or practical reason; but on further enquiry it turns out that this faculty is possessed by none who are not already virtuous. To the question, How are men made moral? he answers, By acquiring moral habits; which amounts to little more than a restatement of the problem, or, at any rate, suggests another more difficult question—How are good habits acquired?

An answer might conceivably have been supplied, had Aristotle been able to complete that sketch of an ideal State which was originally intended to form part of his *Politics*. But the philosopher evidently found that to do so was beyond his powers. If the seventh and eighth books of that treatise, which contain the fragmentary attempt in question, had originally occupied the place where they now stand in our manuscripts, it might have been supposed that Aristotle's labours were interrupted by death. Modern criticism has shown, however, that they should follow immediately after the first three books, and that the author broke off, almost at the beginning of his ideal polity, to take up the much more congenial task of analysing and criticising the actually existing Hellenic constitutions: But the little that he has done proves him to have been profoundly unfitted for the task of a practical reformer. What few actual recommendations it contains are a compromise—somewhat in the spirit of Plato's *Laws*—between the *Republic* and real life. The rest is what he never fails to give us—a mass of details about matters of fact, and a summary of his speculative ethics, along with counsels of moderation in the spirit of his practical ethics; but not one

practical principle of any value, not one remark to show that he understood what direction history was taking, or that he had mastered the elements of social reform as set forth in Plato's works. The progressive specialisation of political functions ; the necessity of a spiritual power ; the formation of a trained standing army ; the admission of women to public employments ; the elevation of the whole race by artificial selection ; the radical reform of religion ; the reconstitution of education, both literary and scientific, the redistribution of property ; the enactment of a new code ; the use of public opinion as an instrument of moralisation ;—these are the ideas which still agitate the minds of men, and they are also the ideas of the *Republic*, the *Statesman*, and the *Laws*. Aristotle, on the other hand, occupies himself chiefly with discussing how far a city should be built from the sea, whether it should be fortified ; how its citizens should *not* be employed ; when people should *not* marry ; what children should *not* be permitted to see ; and what music they should *not* be taught. Apart from his enthusiasm for philosophy, there is nothing generous, nothing large-minded, nothing inspiring. The territory of the city is to be self-sufficing, that it may be isolated from other States ; the citizens are to keep aloof from all industrial occupations ; science is put out of relation to the material well-being of mankind. It was, in short, to be a city where every gentleman should hold an idle fellowship ; a city where Aristotle could live without molestation, and in the enjoyment of congenial friendships ; just as the God of his system was a still higher Aristotle, perpetually engaged in the study of formal logic.

Even in his much-admired criticisms on the actually existing types of government our philosopher shows practical weakness and vacillation of character. There is a good word for them all—for monarchy, for aristocracy, for middle-class rule, and even for pure democracy.<sup>1</sup> The fifth book, treating of

<sup>1</sup> We think, however, that Mr. Edwin Wallace has overstated the case, when

political revolutions, is unquestionably the ablest and most interesting in the whole work ; but when Aristotle quits the domain of natural history for that of practical suggestions, with a view to obviate the dangers pointed out, he can think of nothing better than the old advice—to be moderate, even where the constitutions which moderation is to preserve are by their very nature so excessive that their readjustment and equilibration would be equivalent to their destruction. And in fact, Aristotle's proposals amount to this—that government by the middle class should be established wherever the ideal aristocracy of education is impracticable ; or else a government in which the class interests of rich and poor should be so nicely balanced as to obviate the danger of oligarchic or democratic injustice. His error lay in not perceiving that the only possible means of securing such a happy mean was to break through the narrow circle of Greek city life ; to continue the process which had united families into villages, and villages into towns ; to confederate groups of cities into larger

he makes Aristotle say that ' democracy is not unlikely with the spread of population to become the ultimate form of government ; and may be anticipated without dread by considering that the *collective* voice of a people is as likely to be sound in state administration as in criticisms on art,' pp. 57-8. In the first place, the expressions of opinion which are brought together in Mr. Wallace's summary are separated in the original text by a considerable interval—an important circumstance when we are dealing with so inconsistent a writer ; then what Aristotle says about the collective wisdom of the people, besides being advanced with extreme hesitation, is not a reassurance against any danger to be dreaded from their supremacy, but an answer to the argument that the few had a natural right to political power from their greater wealth and better education ; the whole question being, in this connexion, one of political justice, not of political expediency ; finally, not only is ' ultimate form of government ' a very strong rendering of the Greek words, but what Aristotle says on the subject in his third book is virtually retracted in the fifth, where oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny are regarded as succeeding each other in any order indifferently, and Plato (or the Platonic Socrates) is censured for assuming a constant sequence of revolutions. The explanation of this change seems to be that when Aristotle wrote his third book he was only acquainted with the history of Athens and a few other of the greater states, but that subsequently a vast collection of facts bearing on the subject came to his knowledge, showing that each form of government embraced more varieties and admitted of more mutations than he had been originally aware of ; and this led to a complete recast of his opinions.

states ; and so, by striking an average of different inequalities, to minimise the risk of those incessant revolutions which had hitherto secured the temporary triumph of alternate factions at the expense of their common interest. And, in fact, the spontaneous process of aggregation, which Aristotle did not foresee, has alone sufficed to remedy the evils which he saw, but could not devise any effectual means of curing, and at the same time has bred new evils of which his diagnosis naturally took no account.

But, if this be so, it follows that Mr. Edwin Wallace's appeal to Aristotle as an authority worth consulting on our present social difficulties cannot be upheld. Take the question quoted by Mr. Wallace himself : ' Whether the State is a mere combination for the preservation of goods and property, or a moral organism developing the idea of right ? ' Aristotle certainly held very strong opinions in favour of State interference with education and private morality, if that is what the second alternative implies ; but does it follow that he would agree with those who advocate a similar supervision at the present day ? By no means ; because experience has shown that in enormous industrial societies like ours, protection is attended with difficulties and dangers which he could no more foresee than he could foresee the discoveries on which our physical science is based. Or, returning for a moment to ethics, let us take another of Mr. Wallace's problems : ' Whether intellectual also involves moral progress ? ' What possible light can be thrown on it by Aristotle's exposure of the powerlessness of right knowledge to make an individual virtuous, when writers like Buckle have transferred the whole question from a particular to a general ground ; from the conduct of individuals to the conduct of men acting in large masses, and over vast periods of time ? Or, finally, take the question which forms a point of junction between Aristotle's ethics and his politics : ' Whether the highest life is a life of thought or a life of action ? ' Of what importance is his

decision to us, who attend far more to the social than to the individual consequences of actions ; who have learned to take into account the emotional element of happiness, which Aristotle neglected ; who are uninfluenced by his appeal to the blissful theorising of gods in whom we do not believe ; for whom, finally, experience has altogether broken down the antithesis between knowledge and practice, by showing that speculative ideas may revolutionise the whole of life ? Aristotle is an interesting historical study ; but we are as far beyond him in social as in physical science.

## IV.

On turning to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* we find that, from a practical point of view, his failure here is, if possible, still more complete. This treatise contains, as we have already observed, an immense mass of more or less valuable information on the subject of psychology, ethics, and dialectic, but gives exceedingly little advice about the very essence of rhetoric as an art, which is to say whatever you have to say in the most telling manner, by the arrangement of topics and arguments, by the use of illustrations, and by the choice of language ; and that little is to be found in the third book, the genuineness of which is open to very grave suspicion. It may be doubted whether any orator or critic of oratory was ever benefited in the slightest degree by the study of Aristotle's rules. His collections of scientific data add nothing to our knowledge, but only throw common experience into abstract formulas ; and even as a body of memoranda they would be useless, for no memory could contain them, or if any man could remember them he would have intellect enough not to require them.<sup>1</sup> The professional teachers whom

<sup>1</sup> Many of the topics noted are not only trite enough, but have no possible bearing on the subject under which they stand. For instance, in discussing judicial eloquence Aristotle goes into the motives for committing crime ; among

Aristotle so heartily despised seem to have followed a much more effectual method than his ; they gave their pupils ready-made speeches to analyse and learn by heart, rightly trusting to the imitative instinct to do the rest. He compares them to a master who should teach his apprentices how to make shoes by supplying them with a great variety of ready-made pairs. But this would be a much better plan than to give them an elaborate lecture on the anatomy of the foot, with a full enumeration of its bones, muscles, tendons, nerves, and blood-vessels, which is the most appropriate parallel to *his* system of instruction.

The *Poetics* of Aristotle contains some hints on the subject of composition which entitle it to be mentioned in the present connexion. The deficiencies, even from a purely theoretical point of view, of this work, once pronounced infallible, have at last become so obvious that elaborate hypotheses have been constructed, according to which the recension handed down to us is a mere mutilated extract from the original treatise. Enough, however, remains to convince us that poetry was not, any more than eloquence, a subject with which Aristotle was fitted to cope. He begins by defining it, in common with all other art, as an imitation. Here, we at once recognise the spirit of a philosophy, the whole power and interest of which lay in knowledge ; and, in fact, he tells us that the love of art is derived from the love of knowledge. But the truth seems to be that aesthetic enjoyment is due to an ideal exercise of our faculties, among which the power of perceiving identities is sometimes, though not always, included. That the materials of which every artistic creation is composed are taken from the world of our experience makes no difference ; for it is by the new forms in which they are arranged that we are interested, not because we remember having met them in

these are pleasurable feelings of every kind, including the remembrance of past trouble. Even the hero of a spasmodic tragedy would hardly have committed an offence for the purpose of procuring himself this form of experience.

some natural combination already. Aristotle could not help seeing that this was true in the case of music at least ; and he can only save his principle by treating musical effects as representations of passions in the soul. To say, however, that musical pleasure arises from a perception of resemblance between certain sounds and the emotions with which they are associated, would be an extremely forced interpretation ; the pleasure is due rather to a sympathetic participation in the emotion itself. And when Aristotle goes on to tell us that the characters imitated in epic and dramatic poetry may be either better or worse than in ordinary life, he is obviously admitting other aesthetic motives not accounted for by his general theory. If, on the other hand, we start with ideal energising as the secret of aesthetic emotion, we can easily understand how an imaginary exaltation of our faculties is yielded by the spectacle of something either rising above, or falling below, the level on which we stand. In the one case we become momentarily invested with the strength put into action before our eyes ; in the other, the consciousness of our own superiority amounts to a fund of reserve power, which *not* being put into action, is entirely available for ideal enjoyment. And, if this be the correct view, it will follow that Aristotle was quite wrong when he declared the plot to be more important than the characters of a drama. The reason given for his preference is, even on the principles of his own philosophy, a bad one. He says that there can be plot without character-drawing, but never character-drawing without plot. Yet he has taught us elsewhere that the human soul is of more value than the physical organism on which its existence depends. This very parallel suggests itself to him in his *Poetics* ; but, by an almost inconceivable misjudgment, it is the plot which he likens to the soul of the piece, whereas in truth it should be compared to the body. The practice and preference of his own time may have helped to mislead him, for he argues (rather inconsistently, by the way) that plot

must be more indispensable, as young writers are able to construct good stories before they are able to portray character; and more artistic, as it was developed much later in the historical evolution of tragedy. Fortunately for us, the Alexandrian critics were guided by other canons of taste, or the structurally faulty pieces of Aeschylus might have been neglected, and the ingeniously constructed pieces of Agathon preserved in their place.

It is probable, however, that Aristotle's partiality was determined more by the systematising and analytical character of his own genius than by the public opinion of his age; or rather, the same tendency was at work in philosophy and in art at the same time, and the theories of the one were unconsciously pre-adapted to the productions of the other. In both there was a decay of penetration and of originality, of life and of inspiration; in both a great development of whatever could be obtained by technical proficiency; in both an extension of surface at the expense of depth, a gain of fluency, and a loss of force. But poetry lost far more than philosophy by the change; and so the works of the one have perished while the works of the other have survived.

Modern literature offers abundant materials for testing Aristotle's theory, and the immense majority of critics have decided against it. Even among fairly educated readers few would prefer Molière's *L'Étourdi* to his *Misanthrope*, or Schiller's *Maria Stuart* to Goethe's *Faust*, or Lord Lytton's *Lucretia* to George Eliot's *Romola*, or Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities* to the same writer's *Nicholas Nickleby*, or his *Great Expectations* to his *David Copperfield*, although in each instance the work named first has the better plot of the two.

Characters, then, are not introduced that they may perform actions; but actions are represented for the sake of the characters who do them, or who suffer by them. It is not so much a ghostly apparition or a murder which interests us as the fact that the ghost appears to Hamlet, and that the murder



is committed by Macbeth. And the same is true of the Greek drama, though not perhaps to the same extent. We may care for Oedipus chiefly on account of his adventures ; but we care far more for what Prometheus or Clytemnestra, Antigone or Ajax, say about themselves than for what they suffer or what they do. Thus, and thus only, are we enabled to understand the tragic element in poetry, the production of pleasure by the spectacle of pain. It is not the satisfaction caused by seeing a skilful imitation of reality, for few have witnessed such awful events in real life as on the stage ; nor is it pain, as such, which interests us, for the scenes of torture exhibited in some Spanish and Bolognese paintings do not gratify, they revolt and disgust an educated taste. The true tragic emotion is produced, not by the suffering itself, but by the reaction of the characters against it ; for this gives, more than anything else, the idea of a force with which we can synergise, because it is purely mental ; or by the helpless submission of the victims whom we wish to assist because they are lovable, and whom we love still more from our inability to assist them, through the transformation of arrested action into feeling, accompanied by the enjoyment proper to tender emotion. Hence the peculiar importance of the female parts in dramatic poetry. Aristotle tells us that it is bad art to represent women as nobler and braver than men, because they are not so in reality.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he should have noticed that on the tragic stage of Athens women first competed with men, then equalled, and finally far surpassed them in loftiness of character.<sup>2</sup> But with his philosophy he could not see that, if heroines did not exist, it would be necessary to create them. For, if women are conceived as reacting against outward circumstances at all, their very helplessness will lead to the

<sup>1</sup> *Poet.*, xv., p. 1454, a, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Μάτην ἄρ' εἰς γυναῖκας ἐξ ἀνδρῶν ψόγος  
Ψάλλει κενὸν τόξευμα καὶ κακῶς λέγει.  
αἱ δ' εἶσ' ἀμείνους ἀρσένων, ἐγὼ λέγω.

Euripides, *Frag.* 512. (Didot.)

storing of a greater mental tension in the shape of excited thought and feeling debarred from any manifestation except in words; and it is exactly with this mental tension that the spectator can most easily synergise. The wrath of Orestes is not interesting, because it is entirely absorbed into the pre-meditation and execution of his vengeance. The passion of Electra is profoundly interesting, because it has no outlet but impotent denunciations of her oppressors, and abortive schemes for her deliverance from their yoke. Hence, also, Shakspeare produces some of his greatest effects by placing his male characters, to some extent, in the position of women, either through their natural weakness and indecision, as with Hamlet, and Brutus, and Macbeth, or through the paralysis of unproved suspicion, as with Othello; while the greatest of all his heroines, Lady Macbeth, is so because she has the intellect and will to frame resolutions of dauntless ambition, and eloquence to force them on her husband, without either the physical or the moral force to execute them herself. In all these cases it is the arrest of an electric current which produces the most intense heat, or the most brilliant illumination. Again, by their extreme sensitiveness, and by the natural desire felt to help them, women excite more pity, which, as we have said, means more love, than men; and this in the highest degree when their sufferings are undeserved. We see, then, how wide Aristotle went of the mark when he made it a rule that the sufferings of tragic characters should be partly brought on by their own fault, and that, speaking generally, they should not be distinguished for justice or virtue, nor yet for extreme wickedness.<sup>1</sup> The 'immoderate moderation' of the Stagirite was never more infelicitously exhibited. For, in order to produce truly tragic effects, excess of every kind not only may, but must, be employed. It is by the reaction of heroic fortitude, either against unmerited outrage, or against the whole pressure of social law, that our synergetic interest is wound up

<sup>1</sup> *Poet.*, xiii., p. 1453, a, 8.

to the intensest pitch. It is when we see a beautiful soul requited with evil for good that our eyes are filled with the noblest tears. Yet so absolutely perverted have men's minds been by the Aristotelian dictum that Gervinus, the great Shakspearian critic, actually tries to prove that Duncan, to some extent, deserved his fate by imprudently trusting himself to the hospitality of Macbeth ; that Desdemona was very imprudent in interceding for Cassio ; and that it was treasonable for Cordelia to bring a French army into England ! The Greek drama might have supplied Aristotle with several decisive contradictions of his canons. He should have seen that the *Prometheus*, the *Antigone*, and the *Hippolytus* are affecting in proportion to the pre-eminent virtue of their protagonists. The further fallacy of excluding very guilty characters is, of course, most decisively refuted by Shakspeare, whose Richard III., whose Iago, and whose Macbeth excite keen interest by their association of extraordinary villainy with extraordinary intellectual gifts.

So far Aristotle gives us a purely superficial and sensational view of the drama. Yet he could not help seeing that there was a moral element in tragedy, and he was anxious to show, as against Plato, that it exercised an improving effect on the audience. The result is his famous theory of the Catharsis, so long misunderstood, and not certainly understood even now. The object of Tragedy, he tells us, is to purify (or purge away) pity and terror by means of those emotions themselves. The *Poetics* seems originally to have contained an explanation of this mysterious utterance, now lost, and critics have endeavoured to supply the gap by writing eighty treatises on the subject. The result has been at least to show what Aristotle did *not* mean. The popular version of his dictum, which is that tragedy purges the passions by pity and terror, is clearly inconsistent with the wording of the original text. Pity and terror are both the object and the instrument of purification. Nor yet does he mean, as was once supposed,

that each of these emotions is to counterbalance and moderate the other; for this would imply that they are opposed to one another, whereas in the *Rhetoric* he speaks of them as being akin; while a parallel passage in the *Politics*<sup>1</sup> shows him to have believed that the passions are susceptible of homoeopathic treatment. Violent enthusiasm, he tells us, is to be soothed and carried off by a strain of exciting, impassioned music. But whence come the pity and terror which are to be dealt with by tragic poetry? Not, apparently, from the piece itself, for to inoculate the patient with a new disease, merely for the sake of curing it, could do him no imaginable good. To judge from the passage in the *Politics* already referred to, he believes that pity and terror are always present in the minds of all, to a certain extent; and the theory apparently is, that tragedy brings them to the surface, and enables them to be thrown off with an accompaniment of pleasurable feeling. Now, of course, we have a constant capacity for experiencing every passion to which human nature is liable; but to say that in the absence of its appropriate external stimulus we are ever perceptibly and painfully affected by any passion, is to assert what is not true of any sane mind. And, even were it so, were we constantly haunted by vague presentiments of evil to ourselves or others, it is anything but clear that fictitious representations of calamity would be the appropriate means for enabling us to get rid of them. Zeller explains that it is the insight into universal laws controlling our destiny, the association of misfortune with a divine justice, which, according to Aristotle, produces the purifying effect;<sup>2</sup> but this would be the purgation of pity and terror, not by themselves, but by the intellectual framework in which they are set, the concatenation of events, the workings of character, or the reference of everything to an eternal cause. The truth is that Aristotle's explanation of the moral effect produced by tragedy is

<sup>1</sup> *Pol.*, VIII., vii., p. 1342, a, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Zeller, p. 780.

irrational, because his whole conception of tragedy is mistaken. The emotions excited by its highest forms are not terror and pity, but admiration and love, which, in their ideal exercise, are too holy for purification, too high for restriction, and too delightful for relief.

Before parting with the *Poetics* we must add that it contains one excellent piece of advice to dramatists, which is, to imagine themselves present at the scenes which they are supposing to happen, and also at the representation of their own play. This, however, is an exception which proves the rule, for Aristotle's exclusively theoretic standpoint here, as will sometimes happen, coincides with the truly practical standpoint.

A somewhat similar observation applies to the art of reasoning, which it would be possible to compile by bringing together all the rules on the subject, scattered through the *Organon*. Aristotle has discovered and formulated every canon of theoretical consistency, and every artifice of dialectical debate, with an industry and acuteness which cannot be too highly extolled ; and his labours in this direction have perhaps contributed more than those of any other single writer to the intellectual stimulation of after ages ; but the kind of genius requisite for such a task was speculative rather than practical ; there was no experience of human nature in its concrete manifestations, no prevision of real consequences involved. Such a code might be, and probably was to a great extent, abstracted from the Platonic dialogues ; but to work up the processes of thought into a series of dramatic contests, carried on between living individuals, as Plato has done, required a vivid perception and grasp of realities which, and not any poetical mysticism, is what positively distinguishes a Platonist from an Aristotelian.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As an illustration of the stimulating effect produced by the study of Aristotle's logic, we quote the following anecdote from the notes to Whately's edition of Bacon's *Essays* :—'The late Sir Alexander Johnstone, when acting as temporary Governor of Ceylon (soon after its cession), sat once as judge in a trial of a prisoner

## V.

But if Aristotle had not his master's enthusiasm for practical reforms, nor his master's command of all the forces by which humanity is raised to a higher life, he had, more even than his master, the Greek passion for knowledge as such, apart from its utilitarian applications, and embracing in its vast orb the lowliest things with the loftiest, the most fragmentary glimpses and the largest revelations of truth. He demanded nothing but the materials for generalisation, and there was nothing from which he could not generalise. There was a place for everything within the limits of his world-wide system. Never in any human soul did the

for a robbery and murder ; and the evidence seemed to him so conclusive, that he was about to charge the jury (who were native Cingalese) to find a verdict of guilty. But one of the jurors asked and obtained permission to examine the witnesses himself. He had them brought in one by one, and cross-examined them so ably as to elicit the fact that they were *themselves* the perpetrators of the crime, which they afterwards had conspired to impute to the prisoner. And they were accordingly put on their trial and convicted. Sir Alexander Johnstone was greatly struck by the intelligence displayed by this juror, the more so as he was only a small farmer, who was not known to have had any remarkable advantages of education. He sent for him, and after commending the wonderful sagacity he had shown, inquired eagerly what his studies had been. The man replied that he had never read but one book, the only one he possessed, which had long been in his family, and which he delighted to study in his leisure hours. This book he was prevailed on to show to Sir Alexander Johnstone, who put it into the hands of one who knew the Cingalese language. It turned out to be a translation into that language of a large portion of Aristotle's *Organon*. It appears that the Portuguese, when they first settled in Ceylon and other parts of the East, translated into the native languages several of the works then studied in the European Universities, among which were the Latin versions of Aristotle. The Cingalese in question said that if his understanding had been in any degree cultivated and improved, it was to that book that he owed it. It is likely, however (as was observed to me [Whately] by the late Bishop Copleston), that any other book, containing an equal amount of close reasoning and accurate definition, might have answered the same purpose in sharpening the intellect of the Cingalese.' Possibly, but not to the same effect. What the Cingalese got into his hands was a triple-distilled essence of Athenian legal procedure. The cross-examining elenchus was first borrowed by Socrates from the Athenian courts and applied to philosophical purposes ; it was still further elaborated by Plato, and finally reduced to abstract rules by Aristotle ; so that in using it as he did the juror was only restoring it to its original purposes.

theorising passion burn with so clear and bright and pure a flame. Under its inspiration his style more than once breaks into a strain of sublime, though simple and rugged eloquence. Speaking of that eternal thought which, according to him, constitutes the divine essence, he exclaims :

On this principle the heavens and Nature hang. This is that best life which we possess during a brief period only, for there it is so always, which with us is impossible. And its activity is pure pleasure ; wherefore waking, feeling, and thinking, are the most pleasurable states, on account of which hope and memory exist. . . . And of all activities theorising is the most delightful and the best, so that if God always has such happiness as we have in our highest moments, it is wonderful, and still more wonderful if he has more.<sup>1</sup>

Again, he tells us that—

If happiness consists in the appropriate exercise of our vital functions, then the highest happiness must result from the highest activity, whether we choose to call that reason or anything else which is the ruling and guiding principle within us, and through which we form our conceptions of what is noble and divine ; and whether this be intrinsically divine, or only the divinest thing in us, its appropriate activity must be perfect happiness. Now this, which we call the theoretic activity, must be the mightiest ; for reason is supreme in our souls and supreme over the objects which it cognises ; and it is also the most continuous, for of all activities theorising is that which can be most uninterruptedly carried on. Again, we think that some pleasure ought to be mingled with happiness ; if so, of all our proper activities philosophy is confessedly the most pleasurable, the enjoyments afforded by it being wonderfully pure and steady ; for the existence of those who are in possession of knowledge is naturally more delightful than the existence of those who merely seek it. Of all virtues this is the most self-sufficing ; for while in common with every other virtue it presupposes the indispensable conditions of life, wisdom does not, like justice and temperance and courage, need human objects for its exercise ; theorising may go on in perfect solitude ; for the co-operation of other men, though helpful, is not absolutely necessary to its activity. All other pursuits are exercised for some end lying outside themselves ; war entirely for the sake of

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.*, XII., vii., p. 1072, b, 13.

peace, and statesmanship in great part for the sake of honour and power ; but theorising yields no extraneous profit great or small, and is loved for itself alone. If, then, the energising of pure reason rises above such noble careers as war and statesmanship by its independence, by its inherent delightfulness, and, so far as human frailty will permit, by its untiring vigour, this must constitute perfect human happiness ; or rather such a life is more than human, and man can only partake of it through the divine principle within him ; wherefore let us not listen to those who tell us that we should have no interests except what are human and mortal like ourselves ; but so far as may be put on immortality, and bend all our efforts towards living up to that element of our nature which, though small in compass, is in power and preciousness supreme.<sup>1</sup>

Let us now see how he carries this passionate enthusiasm for knowledge into the humblest researches of zoology :—

Among natural objects, some exist unchanged through all eternity, while others are generated and decay. The former are divinely glorious, but being comparatively inaccessible to our means of observation, far less is known of them than we could wish ; while perishable plants and animals offer abundant opportunities of study to us who live under the same conditions with them. Each science has a charm of its own. For knowledge of the heavenly bodies is so sublime a thing that even a little of it is more delightful than all earthly science put together ; just as the smallest glimpse of a beloved beauty is more delightful than the fullest and nearest revelation of ordinary objects ; while, on the other hand, where there are greater facilities for observation, science can be carried much further ; and our closer kinship with the creatures of earth is some compensation for the interest felt in that philosophy which deals with the divine. Wherefore, in our discussions on living beings we shall, so far as possible, pass over nothing, whether it rank high or low in the scale of estimation. For even such of them as displease the senses, when viewed with the eye of reason as wonderful works of Nature afford an inexpressible pleasure to those who can enter philosophically into the causes of things. For, surely, it would be absurd and irrational to look with delight at the images of such objects on account of our interest in the pictorial or plastic skill which they exhibit, and not to take still greater pleasure in a scien-

<sup>1</sup> *Eth. Nic.*, X., vii. (somewhat condensed).



tific explanation of the realities themselves. We ought not then to shrink with childish disgust from an examination of the lower animals, for there is something wonderful in all the works of Nature ; and we may repeat what Heracleitus is reported to have said to certain strangers who had come to visit him, but hung back at the door when they saw him warming himself before a fire, bidding them come in boldly, for that there also there were gods ; not allowing ourselves to call any creature common or unclean, because there is a kind of natural beauty about them all. For, if anywhere, there is a pervading purpose in the works of Nature, and the realisation of this purpose is the beauty of the thing. But if anyone should look with contempt on the scientific examination of the lower animals, he must have the same opinion about himself ; for the greatest repugnance is felt in looking at the parts of which the human body is composed, such as blood, muscles, bones, veins, and the like.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in discussing any part or organ we should consider that it is not for the matter of which it consists that we care, but for the whole form ; just as in talking about a house it is not bricks and mortar and wood that we mean ; and so the theory of Nature deals with the essential structure of objects, not with the elements which, apart from that structure, would have no existence at all.<sup>2</sup>

It is well for the reputation of Aristotle that he could apply himself with such devotion to the arduous and, in his time, inglorious researches of natural history and comparative anatomy, since it was only in those departments that he made any real contributions to physical science. In the studies which were to him the noblest and most entrancing of any, his speculations are one long record of wearisome, hopeless, unqualified delusion. If, in the philosophy of practice and the philosophy of art, he afforded no real guidance at all, in the philosophy of Nature his guidance has

<sup>1</sup> It is perfectly possible that Aristotle was not acquainted at first hand with human anatomy. But Sir A. Grant is hardly justified in observing that the words quoted above 'do not show the hardihood of the practised dissector' (*Aristotle*, p. 3). Aristotle simply takes the popular point of view in order to prove that the internal structure of the lower animals is no more offensive to the eye than that of man. And, as he took so much delight in the former, nothing but want of opportunity is likely to have prevented him from extending his researches to the latter.

<sup>2</sup> *De Part. An.*, I. v.

always led men fatally astray. So far as his means of observation extended, there was nothing that he did not attempt to explain, and in every single instance he was wrong. He has written about the general laws of matter and motion, astronomy, chemistry, meteorology, and physiology, with the result that he has probably made more blunders on those subjects than any human being ever made before or after him. And, if there is one thing more astounding than his unbroken infelicity of speculation, it is the imperturbable self-confidence with which he puts forward his fallacies as demonstrated scientific certainties. Had he been right, it was no 'slight or partial glimpses of the beloved' that would have been vouchsafed him, but the 'fullest and nearest revelation' of her beauties. But the more he looked the less he saw. Instead of drawing aside he only thickened and darkened the veils of sense which obscured her, by mistaking them for the glorious forms that lay concealed beneath.

Modern admirers of Aristotle labour to prove that his errors were inevitable, and belonged more to his age than to himself; that without the mechanical appliances of modern times science could not be cultivated with any hope of success. But what are we to say when we find that on one point after another the true explanation had already been surmised by Aristotle's predecessors or contemporaries, only to be scornfully rejected by Aristotle himself? Their hypotheses may often have been very imperfect, and supported by insufficient evidence; but it must have been something more than chance which always led him wrong when they were so often right. To begin with, the infinity of space is not even now, nor will it ever be, established by improved instruments of observation and measurement; it is deduced by a very simple process of reasoning, of which Democritus and others were capable, while Aristotle apparently was not. He rejects the idea because it is inconsistent with certain very arbitrary assumptions and definitions of his own, whereas he should have

rejected them because they were inconsistent with it. He further rejects the idea of a vacuum, and with it the atomic theory, entirely on *à priori* grounds, although, even in the then existing state of knowledge, atomism explained various phenomena in a perfectly rational manner which he could only explain by unmeaning or nonsensical phrases.<sup>1</sup> It had been already maintained, in his time, that the apparent movements of the heavenly bodies were due to the rotation of the earth on its own axis.<sup>2</sup> Had Aristotle accepted this theory one can imagine how highly his sagacity would have been extolled. We may, therefore, fairly take his rejection of it as a proof of blind adherence to old-fashioned opinions. When he argues that none of the heavenly bodies rotate, because we can see that the moon does not, as is evident from her always turning the same side to us,<sup>3</sup> nothing is needed but the simplest mathematics to demonstrate the fallacy of his reasoning. Others had surmised that the Milky Way was a collection of stars, and that comets were bodies of the same nature as planets. Aristotle is satisfied that both are appearances like meteors, and the aurora borealis—caused by the friction of our atmosphere against the solid aether above it. A similar origin is ascribed to the heat and light derived from the sun and stars; for it would be derogatory to the dignity of those luminaries to suppose, with Anaxagoras, that they are formed of anything so familiar and perishable as fire. On the contrary, they consist of pure aether like the spheres on which they are fixed as protuberances; though

<sup>1</sup> Compare the arguments in *Phys.*, IV., ix.

<sup>2</sup> The hypothesis of the earth's diurnal rotation had clearly been suggested by a celebrated passage in Plato's *Timæus*, though whether Plato himself held it is still doubtful. That he accepted the revolution of the celestial spheres is absolutely certain; but while to our minds the two beliefs are mutually exclusive, Grote thinks that Plato overlooked the inconsistency. It seems probable that the one was at first actually a generalisation from the other; it was thought that the earth must revolve *because* the crystal spheres revolved; then the new doctrine, thus accidentally struck out, was used to destroy the old one.

<sup>3</sup> *De Coel.*, II., viii., 290, a, 26.

how such an arrangement can co-exist with absolute contact between each sphere and that next below it, or how the effects of friction could be transmitted through such enormous thicknesses of solid crystal, is left unexplained.<sup>1</sup> By a happy anticipation of Roemer, Empedocles conjectured that the transmission of light occupied a certain time: Aristotle declares it to be instantaneous.<sup>2</sup>

On passing to terrestrial physics, we find that Aristotle is, as usual, the dupe of superficial appearances, against which other thinkers were on their guard. Seeing that fire always moved up, he assumed that it did so by virtue of a natural tendency towards the circumference of the universe, as opposed to earth, which always moved towards the centre. The atomists erroneously held that all matter gravitated downwards through infinite space, but correctly explained the ascent of heated particles by the pressure of surrounding matter, in accordance, most probably, with the analogy of floating bodies.<sup>3</sup> Chemistry as a science is, of course, an entirely modern creation, but the first approach to it was made by Democritus, while no ancient philosopher stood farther from its essential principles than Aristotle. He analyses bodies, not into their material elements, but into the sensuous qualities, hot and cold, wet and dry, between which he supposes the underlying substance to be perpetually oscillating; a theory which, if it were true, would make any fixed laws of nature impossible.

It might have been expected that, on reaching physiology, the Stagirite would stand on firmer ground than any of his contemporaries. Such, however, is not the case. As already observed, his achievements belong entirely to the dominion of anatomy and descriptive zoology. The whole internal economy of the animal body is, according to him, designed for the purpose of creating and moderating the vital heat;

<sup>1</sup> Zeller, p. 469.

<sup>2</sup> *De Sens.*, vi., 446, a, 26.

<sup>3</sup> *De Cael.*, I., viii., 277, b, 2.

and in apportioning their functions to the different organs he is entirely dominated by this fundamental error. It was a common notion among the Greeks, suggested by sufficiently obvious considerations, that the brain is the seat of the psychic activities. These, however, Aristotle transports to the heart, which, in his system, not only propels the blood through the body, but is also the source of heat, the common centre where the different special sensations meet to be compared, and the organ of imagination and of passion. The sole function of the brain is to cool down the blood—a purpose which the lungs also subserve. Some persons believe that air is a kind of food, and is inhaled in order to feed the internal fire; but their theory would involve the absurd consequence that all animals breathe, for all have some heat. Anaxagoras and Diogenes did, indeed, make that assertion, and the latter even went so far as to say that fish breathe with their gills, absorbing the air held in solution by the water passed through them—a misapprehension, says Aristotle, which arose from not having studied the final cause of respiration.<sup>1</sup> His physiological theory of generation is equally unfortunate. In accordance with his metaphysical system, hereafter to be explained, he distinguishes two elements in the reproductive process, of which one, that contributed by the male, is exclusively formative; and the other, that contributed by the female, exclusively material. The prevalent opinion was evidently, what we know now to be true, that each parent has both a formative and a material share in the composition of the embryo. Again, Aristotle, strangely enough, regards the generative element in both sexes as an unappropriated portion of the animal's nutriment, the last and most refined product of digestion, and therefore not a portion of the parental system at all; while other biologists, anticipating Mr. Darwin's theory of pangenesis in a very wonderful manner, taught that the semen is a con-

<sup>1</sup> *De Respir.*, i. and ii.

flux of molecules derived from every part of the body, and thus strove to account for the hereditary transmission of individual peculiarities to offspring.<sup>1</sup>

All these, however, are mere questions of detail. It is on a subject of the profoundest philosophical importance that Aristotle differs most consciously, most radically, and most fatally from his predecessors. They were evolutionists, and he was a stationarist. They were mechanicians, and he was a teleologist. They were uniformitarians, and he was a dualist. It is true that, as we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Mr. Edwin Wallace makes him 'recognise the genesis of things by evolution and development,' but the meaning of this phrase requires to be cleared up. In one sense it is, of course, almost an identical proposition. The genesis of things must be by genesis of some kind or other. The great question is, what things have been evolved, and how have they been evolved? Modern science tells us, that not only have all particular aggregates of matter and motion now existing come into being within a finite period of time, but also that the specific types under which we arrange those aggregates have equally been generated; and that their characteristics, whether structural or functional, can only be understood by tracing out their origin and history. And it further teaches us that the properties of every aggregate result from the properties of its ultimate elements, which, within the limits of our experience, remain absolutely unchanged. Now, Aristotle taught very nearly the contrary of all this. He believed that the cosmos, as we now know it, had existed, and would continue to exist, unchanged through all eternity. The sun, moon, planets, and stars, together with the orbs containing them, are composed of an absolutely ungenerable, incorruptible substance. The earth, a cold, heavy, solid sphere, though liable to superficial changes, has always occupied its present position in the centre of the universe.

<sup>1</sup> *De Gen. An.*, I., xvii.

The specific forms of animal life—except a few which are produced spontaneously—have, in like manner, been preserved unaltered through an infinite series of generations. Man shares the common lot. There is no continuous progress of civilisation. Every invention and discovery has been made and lost an infinite number of times. Our philosopher could not, of course, deny that individual living things come into existence and gradually grow to maturity; but he insists that their formation is teleologically determined by the parental type which they are striving to realise. He asks whether we should study a thing by examining how it grows, or by examining its completed form: and Mr. Wallace quotes the question without quoting the answer.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle tells us that the genetic method was followed by his predecessors, but that the other method is his. And he goes on to censure Empedocles for saying that many things in the animal body are due simply to mechanical causation; for example, the segmented structure of the backbone, which that philosopher attributes to continued doubling and twisting—the very same explanation, we believe, that would be given of it by a modern evolutionist.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Aristotle assumes the only sort of transformation which we deny, and which Democritus equally denied—that is to say, the transformation of the ultimate elements into one another by the oscillation of an indeterminate matter between opposite qualities.

<sup>1</sup> *Outlines*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> There is a passage in the *Politics* (I., ii., *sub. in.*) in which Aristotle distinctly inculcates the method of studying things by observing how they are first produced, and how they grow; but this is quite inconsistent with the more deliberate opinion referred to in the text (*De Part. An.*, I., i., p. 640, a, 10). Perhaps, in writing the first book of the *Politics* he was more immediately under the influence of Plato, who preferred the old genetic method in practice, though not in theory.

## VI.

The truth is that while our philosopher had one of the most powerful intellects ever possessed by any man, it was an intellect strictly limited to the surface of things. He was utterly incapable of divining the hidden forces by which inorganic nature and life and human society are moved. He had neither the genius which can reconstruct the past, nor the genius which partly moulds, partly foretells the future. But wherever he has to observe or to report, to enumerate or to analyse, to describe or to define, to classify or to compare ; and whatever be the subject, a mollusc or a mammal, a mouse or an elephant ; the structure and habits of wild animals ; the different stages in the development of an embryo bird ; the variations of a single organ or function through the entire zoological series ; the hierarchy of intellectual faculties ; the laws of mental association ; the specific types of virtuous character ; the relation of equity to law ; the relation of reason to impulse ; the ideals of friendship ; the different members of a household ; the different orders in a State ; the possible variations of political constitutions, or within the same constitution ; the elements of dramatic or epic poetry ; the modes of predication ; the principles of definition, classification, judgment, and reasoning ; the different systems of philosophy ; all varieties of passion, all motives to action, all sources of conviction ;—there we find an enormous accumulation of knowledge, an unwearied patience of research, a sweep of comprehension, a subtlety of discrimination, an accuracy of statement, an impartiality of decision, and an all-absorbing enthusiasm for science, which, if they do not raise him to the supreme level of creative genius, entitle him to rank a very little way below it.

It was natural that one who ranged with such consummate mastery over the whole world of apparent reality, should believe in no other reality ; that for him truth should only



mean the systematisation of sense and language, of opinion, and of thought. The visible order of nature was present to his imagination in such precise determination and fulness of detail that it resisted any attempt he might have made to conceive it under a different form. Each of his conclusions was supported by analogies from every other department of enquiry, because he carried the peculiar limitations of his thinking faculty with him wherever he turned, and unconsciously accommodated every subject to the framework which they imposed. The clearness of his ideas necessitated the use of sharply-drawn distinctions, which prevented the free play of generalisation and fruitful interchange of principles between the different sciences. And we shall have occasion to show hereafter, that, when he attempted to combine rival theories, it was done by placing them in juxtaposition rather than by mutual interpenetration. Again, with his vivid perceptions, it was impossible for him to believe in the justification of any method claiming to supersede, or even to supplement, their authority. Hence he was hardly less opposed to the atomism of Democritus than to the scepticism of Protagoras or the idealism of Plato. Hence, also, his dislike for all explanations which assumed that there were hidden processes at work below the surface of things, even taking surface in its most literal sense. Thus, in discussing the question why the sea is salt, he will not accept the theory that rivers dissolve out the salt from the strata through which they pass, and carry it down to the sea, because river-water tastes fresh; and propounds in its stead the utterly false hypothesis of a dry saline evaporation from the earth's surface, which he supposes to be swept seawards by the wind.<sup>1</sup> Even in his own especial province of natural history the same tendency leads him astray. He asserts that the spider throws off its web from the surface of its body like a skin, instead of evolving it from within, as Democritus had taught.<sup>2</sup> The same thinker had

<sup>1</sup> *Meteor.*, II., iii., 357, a, 15 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. An.*, IX., xxxix., *sub fn.*

endeavoured to prove by analogical reasoning that the invertebrate animals must have viscera, and that only their extreme minuteness prevents us from perceiving them ; a view which his successor will not admit.<sup>1</sup> In fact, wherever the line between the visible and the invisible is crossed, Aristotle's powers are suddenly paralysed, as if by enchantment.

Another circumstance which led Aristotle to disregard the happy aperçus of earlier philosophers was his vast superiority to them in positive knowledge. It never occurred to him that their sagacity might be greater than his, precisely because its exercise was less impeded by the labour of acquiring and retaining such immense masses of irrelevant facts. And his confidence was still further enhanced by the conviction that all previous systems were absorbed into his own, their scattered truths co-ordinated, their aberrations corrected, and their discords reconciled. But in striking a general average of existing philosophies, he was in reality bringing them back to that anonymous philosophy which is embodied in common language and common opinion. And if he afterwards ruled the minds of men with a more despotic sway than any other intellectual master, it was because he gave an organised expression to the principle of authority, which, if it could, would stereotype and perpetuate the existing type of civilisation for all time.

Here, then, are three main points of distinction between our philosopher and his precursors, the advantage being, so far, entirely on their side. He did not, like the Ionian physiologists, anticipate in outline our theories of evolution. He held that the cosmos had always been, by the strictest necessity, arranged in the same manner ; the starry revolutions never changing ; the four elements preserving a constant balance ; the earth always solid ; land and water always distributed according to their present proportions ; living

<sup>1</sup> *De Part. An.*, III., iv., *sub in.*

species transmitting the same unalterable type through an infinite series of generations ; the human race enjoying an eternal duration, but from time to time losing all its conquests in some great physical catastrophe, and obliged to begin over again with the depressing consciousness that nothing could be devised which had not been thought of an infinite number of times already ; the existing distinctions between Hellenes and barbarians, masters and slaves, men and women, grounded on everlasting necessities of nature. He did not, like Democritus, distinguish between objective and subjective properties of matter ; nor admit that void space extends to infinity round the starry sphere, and honeycombs the objects which seem most incompressible and continuous to our senses. He did not hope, like Socrates, for the regeneration of the individual, nor, like Plato, for the regeneration of the race, by enlightened thought. It seemed as if Philosophy, abdicating her high function, and obstructing the paths which she had first opened, were now content to systematise the forces of prejudice, blindness, immobility, and despair.

For the restrictions under which Aristotle thought were not determined by his personality alone ; they followed on the logical development of speculation, and would have imposed themselves on any other thinker equally capable of carrying that development to its predetermined goal. The Ionian search for a primary cause and substance of nature led to the distinction, made almost simultaneously, although from opposite points of view, by Parmenides and Heracleitus, between appearance and reality. From that distinction sprang the idea of mind, organised by Socrates into a systematic study of ethics and dialectics. Time and space, the necessary conditions of physical causality, were eliminated from a method having for its form the eternal relations of difference and resemblance, for its matter the present interests of humanity. Socrates taught that before enquiring whence things come we must first determine what it is they are.

Hence he reduced science to the framing of exact definitions. Plato followed on the same track, and refused to answer a single question about anything until the subject of investigation had been clearly determined. But the form of causation had taken such a powerful hold on Greek thought, that it could not be immediately shaken off; and Plato, as he devoted more and more attention to the material universe, saw himself compelled, like the older philosophers, to explain its construction by tracing out the history of its growth. What is even more significant, he applied the same method to ethics and politics, finding it easier to describe how the various virtues and types of social union came into existence, than to analyse and classify them as fixed ideas without reference to time. Again, while taking up the Eleatic antithesis of reality and appearance, and re-interpreting it as a distinction between noumena and phenomena, ideas and sensations, spirit and matter, he was impelled by the necessity of explaining himself, and by the actual limitations of experience to assimilate the two opposing series, or, at least, to view the fleeting, superficial images as a reflection and adumbration of the being which they concealed. And of all material objects, it seemed as if the heavenly bodies, with their orderly, unchanging movements, their clear brilliant light, and their remoteness from earthly impurities, best represented the philosopher's ideal. Thus, Plato, while on the one side he reaches back to the pre-Socratic age, on the other reaches forward to the Aristotelian system.

Nor was this all. As the world of sense was coming back into favour, the world of reason was falling into disrepute. Just as the old physical philosophy had been decomposed by the Sophisticism of Protagoras and Gorgias, so also the dialectic of Socrates was corrupted into the sophistry of Eubulides and Euthydemus. Plato himself discovered that by reasoning deductively from purely abstract premises, contradictory conclusions could be established with apparently

equal force. It was difficult to see how a decision could be arrived at except by appealing to the testimony of sense. And a moral reform could hardly be effected except by similarly taking into account the existing beliefs and customs of mankind.

It is possible, we think, to trace a similar evolution in the history of the Attic drama. The tragedies of Aeschylus resemble the old Ionian philosophy in this, that they are filled with material imagery, and that they deal with remote interests, remote times, and remote places. Sophocles withdraws his action into the subjective sphere, and simultaneously works out a pervading contrast between the illusions by which men are either lulled to false security or racked with needless anguish, and the terrible or consolatory reality to which they finally awaken. We have also, in his well-known irony, in the unconscious self-betrayal of his characters, that subtle evanescent allusiveness to a hidden truth, that gleaming of reality through appearance which constitutes, first the dialectic, then the mythical illustration, and finally the physics of Plato. In Aeschylus also we have the spectacle of sudden and violent vicissitudes, the abasement of insolent prosperity, and the punishment of long successful crime; only with him the characters which attract most interest are not the blind victims, but the accomplices or the confidants of destiny—the great figures of a Prometheus, a Darius, an Eteocles, a Clytemnestra, and a Cassandra, who are raised above the common level to an eminence where the secrets of past and future are unfolded to their gaze. Far otherwise with Sophocles. The leading actors in his most characteristic works, Oedipus, Electra, Dejanira, Ajax, and Philoctetes, are surrounded by forces which they can neither control nor understand; moving in a world of illusion, if they help to work out their own destinies it is unconsciously, or even in direct opposition to their own designs.<sup>1</sup> Hence in Aeschylus we have something

<sup>1</sup> This characterisation applies neither to the *Antigone* nor to the *Oedipus in Colonus*, the first and the last extant dramas of Sophocles. The reason is

like that superb self-confidence which distinguishes a Parmenides and a Heracleitus ; in Sophocles that confession of human ignorance which the Athenian philosophers made on their own behalf, or strove to extract from others. Euripides introduces us to another mode of thought, more akin to that which characterises Aristotle. For, although there is abundance of mystery in his tragedies, it has not the profound religious significance of the Sophoclean irony ; he uses it rather for romantic and sentimental purposes, for the construction of an intricate plot, or for the creation of pathetic situations. His whole power is thrown into the immediate and detailed representation of living passion, and of the surroundings in which it is displayed, without going far back into its historical antecedents like Aeschylus, or, like Sophocles, into the divine purposes which underlie it. On the other hand, as a Greek writer could not be other than philosophical, he uses particular incidents as an occasion for wide generalisations and dialectical discussions ; these, and not the idea of justice or of destiny, being the pedestal on which his figures are set. And it may be noticed as another curious coincidence that, like Aristotle again, he is disposed to criticise his predecessors, or at least one of them, Aeschylus, with some degree of asperity.

The critical tendency just alluded to suggests one more reason why philosophy, from having been a method of discovery, should at last become a mere method of description and arrangement. The materials accumulated by nearly three centuries of observation and reasoning were so enormous that they began to stifle the imaginative faculty. If there was any opening for originality it lay in the task of carrying order into this chaos by reducing it to a few general heads, by mapping out the whole field of knowledge, and subjecting each particular branch to the new-found processes of definition

that the one is still half Aeschylean, and the other distinctly an imitation of Euripides.

and classification. And along with the incapacity for framing new theories there arose a desire to diminish the number of those already existing, to frame, if possible, a system which should select and combine whatever was good in any or all of them.

## VII.

This, then, was the revolution effected by Aristotle, that he found Greek thought in the form of a solid, and unrolled into a surface of the utmost possible tenuity, transparency, and extension. In so doing, he completed what Socrates and Plato had begun, he paralleled the course already described by Greek poetry, and he offered the first example of what since then has more than once recurred in the history of philosophy. It was thus that the residual substance of Locke and Berkeley was resolved into phenomenal succession by Hume. It was thus that the unexplained reality of Kant and Fichte was drawn out into a play of logical relations by Hegel. And, if we may venture on a forecast of the future towards which speculation is now advancing, it is thus that the limits imposed on human knowledge by positivists and agnostics in our own day, are yielding to the criticism of those who wish to establish either a perfect identity or a perfect equation between consciousness and being. This is the position represented in France by M. Taine, a thinker offering many points of resemblance to Aristotle, which it would be interesting to work out had we space at our command for the purpose. The forces which are now guiding English philosophy in an analogous direction have hitherto escaped observation on account of their disunion among themselves, and their intermixture with others of a different character. But on the whole we may say that the philosophy of Mill and his school corresponds very nearly in its practical idealism to Plato's teaching; that Mr. Herbert Spencer approaches

Aristotle on the side of theorising systematisation, while sharing to a more limited extent the metaphysical and political realism which accompanied it; that Lewes was carrying the same transformation a step further in his unfinished *Problems of Life and Mind*; that the philosophy of Mr. Shadworth Hodgson is marked by the same spirit of actuality, though not without a vista of multitudinous possibilities in the background; that the Neo-Hegelian school are trying to do over again for us what their master did in Germany; and that the lamented Professor Clifford had already given promise of one more great attempt to widen the area of our possible experience into co-extension with the whole domain of Nature.<sup>1</sup>

The systematising power of Aristotle, his faculty for bringing the isolated parts of a surface into co-ordination and continuity, is apparent even in those sciences with whose material truths he was utterly unacquainted. Apart from the falseness of their fundamental assumptions, his scientific treatises are, for their time, masterpieces of method. In this respect they far surpass his moral and metaphysical works, and they are also written in a much more vigorous style, occasionally even rising into eloquence. He evidently moves with much more assurance on the solid ground of external nature than in the cloudland of Platonic dialectics, or among the possibilities of an ideal morality. If, for example, we open his *Physics*, we shall find such notions as Causation, Infinity, Matter, Space, Time, Motion, and Force, for the first time in history separately discussed, defined, and made the foundation of natural philosophy. The treatise *On the Heavens* very properly regards the celestial movements as a purely mechanical problem, and strives throughout to bring theory and practice

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the memorable declaration of Mr. F. Pollock: 'To me it amounts to a contradiction in terms to speak of unknowable existence or unknowable reality in an absolute sense. I cannot tell what existence means if not the possibility of being known or perceived.'—*Spinoza*, p. 163.



into complete agreement. While directly contradicting the truths of modern astronomy, it stands on the same ground with them ; and anyone who had mastered it would be far better prepared to receive those truths than if he were only acquainted with such a work as Plato's *Timaeus*. The remaining portions of Aristotle's scientific encyclopaedia follow in perfect logical order, and correspond very nearly to Auguste Comte's classification, if, indeed, they did not directly or indirectly suggest it. We cannot, however, view the labours of Aristotle with unmixed satisfaction until he comes on to deal with the provinces of natural history, comparative anatomy, and comparative psychology. Here, as we have shown, the subject exactly suited the comprehensive observation and systematising formalism in which he excelled. Here, accordingly, not only the method but the matter of his teaching is good. In theorising about the causes of phenomena he was behind the best science of his age ; in dissecting the phenomena themselves he was far before it. Of course very much of what he tells was learned at second-hand, and some of it is not authentic. But to collect such masses of information from the reports of uneducated hunters, fishermen, grooms, shepherds, beemasters, and the like, required an extraordinary power of putting pertinent questions, such as could only be acquired in the school of Socratic dialectic. Nor should we omit to notice the vivid intelligence which enabled even ordinary Greeks to supply him with the facts required for his generalisations. But some of his most important researches must be entirely original. For instance, he must have traced the development of the embryo chicken with his own eyes ; and, here, we have it on good authority that his observations are remarkable for their accuracy, in a field where accuracy, according to Caspar Friedrich Wolff, is almost impossible.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Aristoteles von d. Zeugung u. Entwicklung d. Thiere.* Aubert u. Wimmer, Einleitung, p. 15.

Still more important than these observations themselves is the great truth he derives from them—since rediscovered and worked out in detail by Von Baer—that in the development of each individual the generic characters make their appearance before the specific characters.<sup>1</sup> Nor is this a mere accidental or isolated remark, but, as we shall show in the next chapter, intimately connected with one of the philosopher's metaphysical theories. Although not an evolutionist, he has made other contributions to biology, the importance of which has been first realised in the light of the evolution theory. Thus he notices the antagonism between individuation and reproduction ;<sup>2</sup> the connexion of increased size with increased vitality ;<sup>3</sup> the connexion of greater mobility,<sup>4</sup> and of greater intelligence,<sup>5</sup> with increased complexity of structure ; the physiological division of labour in the higher animals ;<sup>6</sup> the formation of heterogeneous organs out of homogeneous tissues ;<sup>7</sup> the tendency towards greater centralisation in the higher organisms<sup>8</sup>—a remark connected with his two great anatomical discoveries, the central position of the heart in the vascular system, and the possession of a backbone by all red-blooded animals ;<sup>9</sup> the resemblance of animal intelligence to a rudimentary human intelligence, especially as manifested in children ;<sup>10</sup> and, finally, he attempts to trace a continuous series of gradations connecting the inorganic with the organic world, plants with animals, and the lower animals with man.<sup>11</sup>

The last mentioned principle gives one more illustration of the distinction between Aristotle's system and that of the evolutionist, properly so called. The continuity recognised

<sup>1</sup> *De Gen. An.*, II., iii., 736, b, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I., xviii., 725, b, 25.

<sup>3</sup> *De Respir.*, 477, a, 18.

<sup>4</sup> *De Part. An.*, I., vii., *sub. in.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, II., x., 656, a, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, IV., vi., 683, a, 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, II., i.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, IV., v., 682, a, 8 ; *De Long.*, vi., 467, a, 18 ; *De Ingr. An.*, vii., 707, a, 24.

<sup>9</sup> *De Part. An.*, II., ix., 664, b, 11 ; Zeller, p. 522.

<sup>10</sup> *Hist. An.*, VIII., i, *sub in.*

<sup>11</sup> Zeller, p. 553.

by the former only obtains among a number of coexisting types ; it is a purely logical or ideal arrangement, facilitating the acquisition and retention of knowledge, but adding nothing to its real content. The continuity of the latter implies a causal connexion between successive types evolved from each other by the action of mechanical forces. Moreover, our modern theory, while accounting for whatever is true in Aristotle's conception, serves, at the same time, to correct its exaggeration. The totality of existing species only imperfectly fill up the interval between the highest human life and the inorganic matter from which we assume it to be derived, because they are collaterally, and not lineally, related. Probably no one of them corresponds to any less developed stage of another, although some have preserved, with more constancy than others, the features of a common parent. In diverging from a single stock (if we accept the monogenetic hypothesis,) they have become separated by considerable spaces, which the innumerable multitude of extinct species alone could fill up.

Our preliminary survey of the subject is now completed. So far, we have been engaged in studying the mind of Aristotle rather than his system of philosophy. In the next chapter we shall attempt to give a more complete account of that system in its internal organisation not less than in its relations to modern science and modern thought.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHY OF ARISTOTLE.

## I.

WE have considered the Aristotelian philosophy in relation to the great concrete interests of life, morals, politics, literature, and science. We have now to ask what it has to tell us about the deepest and gravest problems of any, the first principles of Being and Knowing, God and the soul, spirit and matter, metaphysics, psychology, and logic. We saw that very high claims were advanced on behalf of Aristotle in respect to his treatment of these topics ; and had we begun with them, we should only have been following the usual example of his expositors. We have, however, preferred keeping them to the last, that our readers might acquire some familiarity with the Aristotelian method, by seeing it applied to subjects where the results were immediately intelligible, and could be tested by an appeal to the experience of twenty-two centuries. We know that there are some who will demur to this proceeding, who will say that Aristotle the metaphysician stands on quite different ground from Aristotle the man of science, because in the one capacity he had, and in the other capacity he had not, sufficient facts to warrant an authoritative conclusion. They will say, with Prof. St. George Mivart, that in accumulating natural knowledge men's minds have become deadened to spiritual truth ; or with Mr. Edwin Wallace, that the questions opened by Aristotle have not yet been closed, and that we may with advantage begin

our study of them under his guidance. We, on the other hand, will endeavour to show that there is a unity of composition running through the Stagirite's entire labours, that they everywhere manifest the same excellences and defects, which are those of an anatomising, critical, descriptive, classificatory genius; that his most important conclusions, however great their historical interest, are without any positive or even educational value for us, being almost entirely based on false physical assumptions; that his ontology and psychology are not what his admirers suppose them to be; and that his logic, though meriting our gratitude, is far too confused and incomplete to throw any light on the questions raised by modern thinkers.

Here, as elsewhere, we shall employ the genetic method of investigation. Aristotle's writings do not, indeed, present that gradual development of ideas which makes the Platonic Dialogues so interesting. Still they exhibit traces of such a development, and the most important among them seems to have been compiled from notes taken by the philosopher before his conclusions were definitely reasoned out, or worked up into a consistent whole. It is this fragmentary collection which, from having been placed by some unknown editor after the *Physics*, has received a name still associated with every kind of speculation that cannot be tested by a direct or indirect appeal to the evidence of external sense.

Whether there exist any realities beyond what are revealed to us by this evidence, and what sensible evidence itself may be worth, were problems already actively canvassed in Aristotle's time. His *Metaphysics* at once takes us into the thick of the debate. The first question of that age was, What are the causes and principles of things? On one side stood the materialists—the old Ionian physicists and their living representatives. They said that all things came from water or air or fire, or from a mixture of the four elements, or from the interaction of opposites, such as wet and dry, hot and cold.

Aristotle, following in the track of his master, Plato, blames them for ignoring the incorporeal substances, by which he does not mean what would now be understood—feelings or states of consciousness, or even the spiritual substratum of consciousness—but rather the general qualities or assemblages of qualities which remain constant amid the fluctuations of sensible phenomena ; considered, let us observe, not as subjective thoughts, but as objective realities. Another deficiency in the older physical theories is that they either ignore the efficient cause of motion altogether (like Thales), or assign causes not adequate to the purpose (like Empedocles) ; or when they hit on the true cause do not make the right use of it (like Anaxagoras). Lastly, they have omitted to study the final cause of a thing—the good for which it exists.

The teleology of Aristotle requires a word of explanation, which may appropriately find its place in the present connexion. In speaking of a purpose in Nature, he does not mean that natural productions subserve an end lying outside themselves ; as if, to use Goethe's illustration, the bark of cork-trees was intended to be made into stoppers for ginger-beer bottles ; but that in every perfect thing the parts are interdependent, and exist for the sake of the whole to which they belong. Nor does he, like so many theologians, both ancient and modern, argue from the evidence of design in Nature to the operation of a designing intelligence outside her. Not believing in any creation at all apart from works of art, he could not believe in a creative intelligence other than that of man. He does, indeed, constantly speak of Nature as if she were a personal providence, continually exerting herself for the good of her creatures. But, on looking a little closer, we find that the agency in question is completely unconscious, and may be identified with the constitution of each particular thing, or rather of the type to which it belongs. We have said that Aristotle's intellect was essentially descriptive, and we have here another illustration of its characteristic quality.

The teleology which he parades with so much pomp adds nothing to our knowledge of causes, implies nothing that a positivist need not readily accept. It is a mere study of functions, an analysis of statical relations. Of course, if there were really any philosophers who said that the connexion between teeth and mastication was entirely accidental, the Aristotelian doctrine was a useful protest against such an absurdity; but when we have established a fixed connexion between organ and function, we are bound to explain the association in some more satisfactory manner than by re-affirming it in general terms, which is all that Aristotle ever does. Again, whatever may be the relative justification of teleology as a study of functions in the living body, we have no grounds for interpreting the phenomena of inorganic nature on an analogous principle. Some Greek philosophers were acute enough to perceive the distinction. While admitting that plants and animals showed traces of design, they held that the heavenly bodies arose spontaneously from the movements of a vortex or some such cause;<sup>1</sup> just as certain religious savants of our own day reject the Darwinian theory while accepting the nebular hypothesis.<sup>2</sup> But to Aristotle the unbroken regularity of the celestial movements, which to us is the best proof of their purely mechanical nature, was, on the contrary, a proof that they were produced and directed by an absolutely reasonable purpose; much more so indeed than terrestrial organisms, marked as these are by occasional deviations and imperfections; and he concludes that each of those movements must be directed towards the attainment of some correspondingly consummate end;<sup>3</sup> while, again, in dealing with those precursors of Mr. Darwin, if such they can be called, who argued that the utility of an organ does not disprove its spontaneous origin, since only the creatures which, by a happy accident, came to possess it would survive—he

<sup>1</sup> *Phys.*, II., viii., p. 198, b, 24.

<sup>2</sup> The late Father Secchi, for example.

<sup>3</sup> *Phys.*, II., iv., p. 196, a, 28; *De Coel.*, II., xii.

answers that the constant reproduction of such organs is enough to vindicate them from being the work of chance ;<sup>1</sup> thus displaying his inability to distinguish between the two ideas of uniform causation and design.

As a result of the foregoing criticism, Aristotle distinguishes four different causes or principles by which all things are determined to be what they are—Matter, Form, Agent, and Purpose.<sup>2</sup> If, for example, we take a saw, the matter is steel ; the form, a toothed blade ; the agent or cause of its assuming that shape, a smith ; the purpose, to divide wood or stone. When we have enumerated these four principles, we have told everything that can be known about a saw. But Aristotle could not keep the last three separate ; he gradually extended the definition of form until it absorbed, or became identified with, agent and purpose.<sup>3</sup> It was what we should call the idea of function that facilitated the transition. If the very essence or nature of a saw implies use, activity, movement, how can we define it without telling its purpose ? The toothed blade is only intelligible as a cutting, dividing instrument. Again, how came the saw into being ? What shaped the steel into that particular form ? We have said that it was the smith. But surely that is too vague. The smith is a man, and may be able to exercise other trades as well. Suppose him to be a musician, did he make the saw in that capacity ? No ; and here comes in a distinction which plays an immense part in Aristotle's metaphysics, whence it has passed into our every-day speech. He does not make the saw *quâ* musician but *quâ* smith. He can, however, in the exercise of his trade as smith make many other tools—knives, axes, and so forth. Nevertheless, had he only learned to make saws it would be enough. Therefore, he does not make

<sup>1</sup> *Phys.*, II., viii., p. 199, b, 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Metaph.*, I., iii., *sub in.* ; *Anal. Post.*, II., xi., *sub in.* Bekker. (cap. x., in the Tauchnitz ed.) ; *Phys.* II., iii. ; *De Gen. An.*, I., i. *sub in.*

<sup>3</sup> *Metaph.*, VIII., iv., p. 1044, b, 1 ; *De Gen. An.*, I., i., p. 715, a, 6 ; *ib.* II., i., 732, a, 4 ; *Phys.*, II., vii., p. 198, a, 24 ff.



the saw *quâ* axe-maker, he makes it *quâ* saw-maker. Nor, again, does he make it with his whole mind and body, but only with just those thoughts and movements required to give the steel that particular shape. Now, what are these thoughts but the idea of a saw present in his mind and passing through his eyes and hands, till it fixes itself on the steel? The immaterial form of a saw creates the real saw which we use. Let us apply the preceding analogies to a natural object; for example, a man. What is the Form, the definition of a man? Not a being possessing a certain outward shape, for then a marble statue would be a man, which it is not; nor yet a certain assemblage of organs, for then a corpse would be a man, which, according to Aristotle, criticising Democritus, it is not; but a living, feeling, and reasoning being, the end of whose existence is to fulfil all the functions involved in this definition. So, also, the creative cause of a man is another man, who directly impresses the human form on the material supplied by the female organism. In the same way, every definite individual aggregate becomes what it is through the agency of another individual representing the same type in its perfect manifestation.<sup>1</sup>

The substantial forms of Aristotle, combining as they do the notion of a definition with that of a moving cause and a fulfilled purpose, are evidently derived from the Platonic Ideas; a reflection which at once leads us to consider the relation in which he stands to the spiritualism of Plato and to the mathematical idealism of the Neo-Pythagoreans. He agrees with them in thinking that general conceptions are the sole object of knowledge—the sole enduring reality in a world of change. He differs from them in maintaining that such conceptions have no existence apart from the particulars in which they reside. It has been questioned whether Aristotle ever really understood his master's teaching on the subject. Among recent critics, M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire asserts,

with considerable vehemence, that he did not. It is certain that in some respects Aristotle is not just to the Platonic theory, that he exaggerates its absurdities, ignores its developments, and occasionally brings charges against it which might be retorted with at least equal effect against his own philosophy. But on the most important point of all, whether Plato did or did not ascribe a separate existence to his Ideas, we could hardly believe a disciple of twenty years' standing<sup>1</sup> to be mistaken, even if the master had not left on record a decisive testimony to the affirmative side in his *Parmenides*, and one scarcely less decisive in his *Timaeus*.<sup>2</sup> And so far as the controversy reduces itself to this particular issue, Aristotle is entirely right. His most powerful arguments are not, indeed, original, having been anticipated by Plato himself; but as they were left unanswered he had a perfect right to repeat them, and his dialectical skill was great enough to make him independent of their support. The extreme minuteness of his criticism is wearisome to us, who can hardly conceive how another opinion could ever have been held. Yet such was the fascination exercised by Plato's idealism, that not only was it upheld with considerable acrimony by his immediate followers,<sup>3</sup> but under one form or another it has been revived over and over again, in the long period which has elapsed since its first promulgation, and on every one of these occasions the arguments of Aristotle have been raised up again to meet it, each time with triumphant success. Ockham's razor, *Entia non sunt sine necessitate multiplicanda*, is borrowed from the *Metaphysics*; Locke's principal objection to innate ideas closely resembles the sarcastic observation in

<sup>1</sup> That is, according to the traditional view, which, however, will have to be considerably modified if we accept the conclusions embodied in Teichmüller's *Literarische Fehden*.

<sup>2</sup> *Parmen.*, 130, A ff.; *Tim.*, 28, A.

<sup>3</sup> As we may infer from a passage in the *Rhetoric* (II., ii., p. 1379, a, 35), where partisans of the Idea are said to be exasperated by any slight thrown on their favourite doctrine.

the last chapter of the *Posterior Analytics*, that, according to Plato's theory, we must have some very wonderful knowledge of which we are not conscious.<sup>1</sup> And the weapons with which Trendelenburg and others have waged war on Hegel are avowedly drawn from the Aristotelian arsenal.<sup>2</sup>

In his criticism on the ideal theory, Aristotle argues that it is unproved; that the consequences to which it leads would be rejected by the idealists themselves; that it involves a needless addition to the sum of existence; that it neither explains the origin of things nor helps us to understand them, while taking away from them their substantial reality; that the Ideas are merely sensible objects hypostasised, like the anthropomorphic divinities of primitive men; that, to speak of them as patterns, in whose likeness the world was created, is a mere idle metaphor; that, even assuming the existence of such patterns, each individual must be made in the likeness, not of one, but of many ideas—a human being, for instance, must be modelled after the ideal biped and the ideal animal, as well as after the ideal man; while many of the ideas themselves, although all are supposed to exist absolutely, must be dependent on other and simpler types; finally, that, assuming an idea for every abstract relation, there must be ideas to represent the relation between every sensible object and its prototype, others for the new relations thus introduced, and so on to infinity.

Aristotle's objections to the Neo-Pythagorean theory of ideal numbers need not delay us here. They are partly a repetition of those brought against the Platonic doctrine in its

<sup>1</sup> Repeated in the *Metaphysics*, I., ix., p. 993, a, 1.

<sup>2</sup> This may seem inconsistent with our former assertion, that Hegel holds in German philosophy a place analogous to that held by Aristotle in Greek philosophy. Such analogies, however, are always more or less incomplete; and, so far as he attributes a self-moving power to ideas, Hegel is a Platonist rather than an Aristotelian. Similarly, as an evolutionist, Mr. Herbert Spencer stands much nearer to early Greek thought than to Aristotle, whom, in other respects, he so much resembles.

original form, partly derived from the impossibility of identifying qualitative with quantitative differences.<sup>1</sup>

Such arguments manifestly tell not only against Platonism, but against every kind of transcendental realism, from the natural theology of Paley to the dogmatic agnosticism of Mr. Herbert Spencer. A modern Aristotle might say that the hypothesis of a creative first cause, personal or otherwise, logically involves the assumption of as many original specific energies as there are qualities to be accounted for, and thus gives us the unnecessary trouble of counting everything twice over ; that every difficulty and contradiction from which the transcendental assumption is intended to free us, must, on analysis, reappear in the assumption itself—for example, the God who is to deliver us from evil must be himself conceived as the creator of evil ; that the infinite and absolute can neither cause, nor be apprehended by, the finite and relative ; that to separate from Nature all the forces required for its perpetuation, and relegate them to a sphere apart, is a false antithesis and a sterile abstraction ; lastly, that causation, whether efficient or final, once begun, cannot stop ; that if this world is not self-existing, nothing is ; that the mutual adaptation of thoughts in a designing intelligence requires to be accounted for just like any other adaptation ; that if the relative involves the absolute, so also does the relation between the two involve another absolute, and so on to infinity.

These are difficulties which will continue to perplex us until every shred of the old metaphysics has been thrown off. To that task Aristotle was not equal. He was profoundly influenced by the very theory against which he contended ; and, at the risk of being paradoxical, we may even say that it assumed a greater importance in his system than had ever been attributed to it by Plato himself. To prove this, we must resume the thread of our exposition, and follow the

<sup>1</sup> Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, II., b, 297 f.

Stagirite still further in his analysis of the fundamental reality with which the highest philosophy is concerned.

## II.

Ever since the age of Parmenides and Heracleitus, Greek thought had been haunted by a pervading dualism which each system had in turn attempted to reconcile, with no better result than its reproduction under altered names. And speculation had latterly become still further perplexed by the question whether the antithetical couples supposed to divide all Nature between them could or could not be reduced to so many aspects of a single opposition. In the last chapter but one we showed that there were four such competing pairs—Being and Not-Being, the One and the Many, the Same and the Other, Rest and Motion. Plato employed his very subtlest dialectic in tracing out their connexions, readjusting their relationships, and diminishing the total number of terms which they involved. In what was probably his last great speculative effort, the *Timæus*, he seems to have selected Sameness and Difference as the couple best adapted to bear the heaviest strain of thought. There is some reason for believing that in his spoken lectures he followed the Pythagorean system more closely, giving the preference to the One and the Many; or he may have employed the two expressions indifferently. The former would sooner commend itself to a dialectician, the latter to a mathematician. Aristotle was both, but he was before all things a naturalist. As such, the antithesis of Being and Not-Being, to which Plato attached little or no value, suited him best. Accordingly, he proceeds to work it out with a clearness before unknown in Greek philosophy. The first and surest of all principles, he declares, is, that a thing cannot both be and not be, in the same sense of the words, and furthermore that it must either be or not be. Subsequent

logicians prefixed to these axioms another, declaring that whatever is is. The three together are known as the laws of Identity, Contradiction, and Excluded Middle. By all, except Hegelians, they are recognised as the highest laws of thought ; and even Hegel was indebted to them, through Fichte, for the ground-plan of his entire system.<sup>1</sup>

The whole meaning and value of such excessively abstract propositions must lie in their application to the problems which they are employed to solve. Aristotle made at once too much and too little of his. Too much—for he employed them to refute doctrines not really involving any logical inconsistency—the theory of Heracleitus, that everything is in motion ; the theory of Anaxagoras, that everything was originally confused together ; the theory of Protagoras, that man is the measure of all things. Too little—for he admitted a sphere of possibilities where logical definition did not apply, and where subjects simultaneously possessed the capacity of taking on one or other of two contradictory attributes.

Nor is this all. After sharply distinguishing what is from what is not, and refusing to admit any intermediary between them, Aristotle proceeds to discover such an intermediary in the shape of what he calls Accidental Predication.<sup>2</sup> An accident is an attribute not necessarily or usually inhering in its subject—in other words, a co-existence not dependent on causation. Aristotle could never distinguish between the two notions of cause and kind, nor yet between interferences with the action of some particular cause and exceptions to the law of causation in general ; and so he could not frame an intelligible theory of chance. Some propositions, he tells us, are necessarily true, others are only generally true ; and it is the exceptions to the latter which constitute accident ; as, for instance, when a cold day happens to come in the middle

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.* IV., iii. and viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* VI., ii., p. 1026, b, 21.

of summer. So also a man is necessarily an animal, but only exceptionally white. Such distinctions are not uninteresting, for they prove with what difficulties the idea of invariable sequence had to contend before even the highest intellects could grasp it. There was a constant liability to confound the order of succession with the order of co-existence, the order of our sensations with the order of objective existence, and the subjection of human actions to any fixed order, with the impossibility of deliberation and choice. The earlier Greek thinkers had proclaimed that all things existed by necessity; but with their purely geometrical or historical point of view, they entirely ignored the more complex questions raised by theories about classification, logical attribution, and moral responsibility. And the modifications introduced by Epicurus, into the old physics, show us how unanswerable Aristotle's reasonings seemed to some of his ablest successors.

Absolute being is next distinguished from truth, which, we are told, has no objective existence<sup>1</sup>—a remarkable declaration, which throws much light on other parts of the Aristotelian system, and to which we shall subsequently return.<sup>2</sup>

After explaining at considerable length what Being is not, Aristotle now proceeds to ascertain what it is. He tells us that just as all number *quâ* number must be either odd or even, so all Being *quâ* Being must have certain universal attributes. These he sets himself to discover. When Descartes long afterwards entered on a somewhat similar inquiry, he fell back on the facts of his own individual consciousness. Aristotle, on the contrary, appeals to the common consciousness of mankind as embodied in ordinary language. In how many senses do we say that a thing is? The first answer is contained in his famous Ten Categories.<sup>3</sup> These

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.*, VI., iv., p. 1027, b, 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, VI., iv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, VI., ii., *sub in.*; VII., i., *sub in.*; *Topic.*, I., ix.

are not what some have supposed them to be, *summa genera* of existence, but *summia genera* of predication. In other words, they are not a classification of things, but of the information which it is possible to receive about a single thing, more especially about the richest and most concrete thing known to us—a human being. If we want to find out all about a thing we ask, What is it? Of what sort? How large? To what does it belong? Where and when can we find it? What does it do? What happens to it? And if the object of our investigations be a living thing, we may add, What are its habits and dispositions? The question has been raised, how Aristotle came to think of these ten particular categories, and a wonderful amount of rubbish has been written on the subject, while apparently no scholar could see what was staring him in the face all the time, that Aristotle got them by collecting all the simple forms of interrogation supplied by the Greek language,<sup>1</sup> and writing out their most general expressions.

Having obtained his categories, Aristotle proceeds to mark off the first from the other nine. The subject or substance named in answer to the question, What is it? can exist without having any quality, size, and so forth predicated of it; but they cannot exist without it. Logically, they cannot be defined without telling *what* they are; really they cannot be conceived without something not themselves in

<sup>1</sup> These are τί, ποῖόν, ποσόν, πού, ποτέ, and πῶς. Τί is associated with πρὸς in the question πρὸς τί, which has no simple English equivalent. Apparently it was suggested to Aristotle by ποσόν, how much? in connexion with which it means, in relation to what standard? If we were told that a thing was double, we should ask, double what? Again, the Greeks had a simply compound question, τί παθόν, meaning, what was the matter with him? or, what made him do it? From this Aristotle extracted πάσχειν, a wider notion than our passion, meaning whatever is done or happens to anything; which again would suggest ποιῆν, what it does. Finally, πῶς, taken alone, is too vague a question for any answer, but must be taken in its simplest compounds πῶς διακείμενον and πῶς ἔχον, which give the two rarely-occurring categories ἔχειν and κείσθαι, for which it is on one occasion substituted (*Soph. El.*, xxii., p. 178, b, 39). Διὰ τί does not figure among the categories, because it is reserved for the special analysis of οὐσία.



which they inhere. They are like the tail of a kite, giving greater conspicuousness and buoyancy to the body, but entirely dependent on it for support. What our philosopher fails to perceive is, that the dependence is reciprocal, that substance can no more be conceived without attributes than attributes without substance; or rather that substance, like all other categories, can be resolved into Relation.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, he had a logical machine ready to hand, which could be used with terrible effect against the Platonic Ideas. Any of these—and there were a great number—that could be brought under one of the last nine categories were at once deprived of all claim to independent existence. Take Equality, for instance. It cannot be discovered outside quantity, and quantity is always predicated of a substance. And the same is true of number, to the utter destruction of the Neo-Pythagorean theory which gave it a separate existence. Moreover, the categories served not only to generalise and combine, but also to specificate and divide. The idea of motion occurs in three of them; in quantity, where it means increase or diminution; in quality, where it means alteration, as from hot to cold, or *vice versâ*; and in place, implying transport from one point to another. The Idea of Good, which stands at the very summit of Plato's system, may be traced through all ten categories.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the supposed unity and simplicity of such conceptions was shown to be an illusion. Platonism was, in truth, so inconsistent with the notions embodied in common language, that it could not but be condemned by a logic based on those notions.

Aristotle next takes the Idea of Substance and subjects it to a fresh analysis.<sup>3</sup> Of all things none seem to possess so evident an existence as the bodies about us—plants and animals, the four elements, and the stars. But each of these

<sup>1</sup> As Grote has shown in his chapter on the Categories.

<sup>2</sup> *Eth. Nic.*, I., iv., p. 1096, a, 24, where six are enumerated.

<sup>3</sup> *Metaph.*, VII. *passim*.

has already been shown to consist of Form and Matter. A statue, for instance, is a lump of bronze shaped into the figure of a man. Of these two constituents, Matter seems at first sight to possess the greater reality. The same line of thought which led Aristotle to place substance before the other categories now threatens to drive him back into materialism. This he dreaded, not on sentimental or religious grounds, but because he conceived it to be the negation of knowledge. He first shows that Matter cannot be the real substance to which individuals owe their determinate existence, since it is merely the unknown residuum left behind when every predicate, common to them with others, has been stripped off. Substance, then, must be either Form alone or Form combined with Matter.—Form, in its completest sense, is equivalent to the essential definition of a thing—the collection of attributes together constituting its essence or conception. To know the definition is to know the thing defined. The way to define is to begin with the most general notion, and proceed by adding one specific difference after another, until we reach the most particular and concrete expression. The union of this last with a certain portion of Matter gives us the individual Socrates or Callias. There are no real entities (as the Platonists pretend) corresponding to the successive stages of generalisation, biped, animal, and so forth, any more than there are self-existing quantities, qualities, and relations. Thus the problem has been driven into narrower and narrower limits, until at last we are left with the *infimæ species* and the individuals contained under them. It remains to discover in what relation these stand to one another. The answer is unsatisfactory. We are told that there is no definition of individuals, and also that the definition is identical with the individual.<sup>1</sup> Such, indeed, is the conclusion necessarily resulting from Aristotle's repeated declarations that all knowledge is of

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.*, VII., vi., p. 1031, b, 18 ff.

definitions, that all knowledge is of something really existing, and that nothing really exists but individual things. Nevertheless, against these we have to set equally strong declarations to the effect that knowledge is of something general, not of the perishing individuals which may pass out of existence at any moment. The truth is, that we are here, as Zeller has shown,<sup>1</sup> in presence of an insoluble contradiction, and we must try to explain, not how Aristotle reconciled it with itself, for that was impossible, but how he reconciled himself to it.

His analysis of individuality was the first step in this direction. We have seen that he treats definition as a process of gradual specification, beginning with the most general notions, and working down by successive differentiations to the most particular. Now, the completed conception is itself the integration of all these differences, the bond of union holding them together. Turning to an antithetical order of ideas, to the material substance of which bodies are composed, and its various transformations, we find him working out the same vein of thought. According to the Aristotelian chemistry, an ultimate indeterminate unknowable something clothes itself with one or other of the opposing attributes, dry and moist, hot and cold; and when two of these are combined, manifests itself to our senses as one of the four elements. The elements combine in a particular manner to form homogeneous animal tissues, and these again are united into heterogeneous organs, which together constitute the living body. Here, then, we have two analogous series of specifications—one conceptual and leading down from the abstract to the concrete, the other physical, and leading up from the vague, the simple, and the homogeneous, to the definite, the complex, and the heterogeneous. Aristotle embraces both processes under a single comprehensive generalisation. He describes each of them as the continuous conversion of a

<sup>1</sup> Zeller, *Phil. d. Gr.*, II., b, 309.

possibility into an actuality. For the sake of greater clearness, let us take the liberty of substituting modern scientific terms for his cumbrous and obsolete classifications. We shall then say that the general notion, living thing, contains under it the two less general notions—plant and animal. If we only know of any given object that it has life, there is implied the possibility of its being either the one or the other, but not both together. On determining it to be (say) an animal, we actualise one of the possibilities. But the actualisation is only relative, and immediately becomes the possibility of being either a vertebrate or an invertebrate animal. The actuality vertebrate becomes the possibility of viviparous or oviparous, and so on through successive differentiations until we come (say) to a man. Now let us begin at the material end. Here are a mass of molecules, which, in their actual state are only carbon, nitrogen, and so forth. But they are potential starch, gluten, water, or any other article of food that might be named ; for under favourable conditions they will combine to form it. Once actualised as such, they are possible blood-cells ; these are possible tissues ; these, again, possible organs, and lastly we come to the consensus of vital functions, which is a man. What the raw material is to the finished product, that are the parts to the entire organism, the elements to the compound, the genus to the species, and such in its very widest sense is potency to realisation, *δύναμις* to *ἐντελέχεια*, throughout the universe of growth and decay.<sup>1</sup>

It will be observed that, so far, this famous theory does not add one single jot to our knowledge. Under the guise of an explanation, it is a description of the very facts needing to be explained. We did not want an Aristotle to tell us that before a thing exists it must be possible. We want to know how it is possible, what are the real conditions of its existence, and why they combine at a particular moment to

<sup>1</sup> For the general theory of Actuality and Possibility, see *Metaph.*, VIII.

produce it. The Atomists showed in what direction the solution should be sought, and all subsequent progress has been due to a development of their method. Future ages will perhaps consider our own continued distinction between force and motion as a survival of the Peripatetic philosophy. Just as sensible aggregates of matter arise not out of potential matter, but out of matter in an extremely fine state of diffusion, so also sensible motion will be universally traced back, not to potential motion, which is all that force means, but to molecular or ethereal vibrations, like those known to constitute heat and light.

We have said, in comparing him with his predecessors, that the Stagirite unrolled Greek thought from a solid into a continuous surface. We have now to add that he gave his surface the false appearance of a solid by the use of shadows, and of aërial perspective. In other words, he made the indication of his own ignorance and confusion do duty for depth and distance. For to say that a thing is developed out of its possibility, merely means that it is developed out of something, the nature of which we do not know. And to speak about such possibilities as imperfect existences, or matter, or whatever else Aristotle may be pleased to call them, is simply constructing the universe, not out of our ideas, but out of our absolute want of ideas.

We have seen how, for the antithesis between Form and Matter, was substituted the wider antithesis between Actuality and Possibility. Even in this latter the opposition is more apparent than real. A permanent possibility is only intelligible through the idea of its realisation, and sooner or later is certain to be realised. Aristotle still further bridges over the interval between them by a new conception—that of motion. Motion, he tells us, is the process of realisation, the transformation of power into act. Nearly the whole of his *Physics* is occupied with an enquiry into its nature and origin. As first conceived, it is equivalent to what we call change rather than

to mechanical movement. The table of categories supplies an exhaustive enumeration of its varieties. These are, as we have already mentioned, alteration of quality or transformation, increase or decrease of quantity, equivalent to growth and decay, and transport from place to place. Sometimes a fourth variety is added, derived from the first category, substance. He calls it generation and destruction, the coming into existence or passing out of it again. A careful analysis shows that motion in space is the primordial change on which all others depend for their accomplishment. To account for it is the most vitally important problem in philosophy.

### III.

Before entering on the chain of reasoning which led Aristotle to postulate the existence of a personal First Cause, we must explain the difference between his scientific standpoint, and that which is now accepted by all educated minds. To him the eternity not only of Matter, but also of what he called Form,—that is to say, the collection of attributes giving definiteness to natural aggregates, more especially those known as organic species—was an axiomatic certainty. Every type, capable of self-propagation, that could exist at all, had existed, and would continue to exist for ever. For this, no explanation beyond the generative power of Nature was required. But when he had to account for the machinery by which the perpetual alternation of birth and death below, and the changeless revolutions of the celestial spheres above the moon were preserved, difficulties arose. He had reduced every other change to transport through space; and with regard to this his conceptions were entirely mistaken. He believed that moving matter tended to stop unless it was sustained by some external force; and whatever their advantages over him in other respects, we cannot say that the Atomists were in a position to correct him here: for their

theory, that every particle of matter gravitated downward through infinite space, was quite incompatible with the latest astronomical discoveries. Aristotle triumphantly showed that the tendency of heavy bodies was not to move indefinitely downwards in parallel lines, but to move in converging lines to the centre of the earth, which he, in common with most Greek astronomers, supposed to be also the centre of the universe; and seeing light bodies move up, he credited them with an equal and opposite tendency to the circumference of the universe, which, like Parmenides and Plato, he believed to be of finite extent. Thus each kind of matter has its appropriate place, motion to which ends in rest, while motion away from it, being constrained, cannot last. Accordingly, the constant periodicity of terrestrial phenomena necessitates as constant a transformation of dry and wet, and of hot and cold bodies into one another. This is explained with perfect accuracy by the diurnal and annual revolutions of the sun. Here, however, we are introduced to a new kind of motion, which, instead of being rectilinear and finite, is circular and eternal. To account for it, Aristotle assumes a fifth element entirely different in character from the four terrestrial elements. Unlike them, it is absolutely simple, and has a correspondingly simple mode of motion, which, as our philosopher erroneously supposes, can be no other than circular rotation.

Out of this eternal unchanging divine substance, which he calls aether, are formed the heavenly bodies and the transparent spheres containing them. But there is something beyond it of an even higher and purer nature. Aristotle proves, with great subtlety, from his fundamental assumptions, that the movement of an extended substance cannot be self-caused. He also proves that motion must be absolutely continuous and without a beginning. We have, therefore, no choice but to accept the existence of an unextended, immaterial, eternal, and infinite Power on which the whole cosmos depends.

So much only is established in the *Physics*. Further particulars are given in the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics*. There we learn that, all movement being from possibility to actuality, the source of movement must be a completely realised actuality—pure form without any admixture of matter. But the highest form known to us in the ascending scale of organic life is the human soul, and the highest function of soul is reason. Reason then must be that which moves without being moved itself, drawing all things upwards and onwards by the love which its perfection inspires. The eternal, infinite, absolute actuality existing beyond the outermost starry sphere is God. Aristotle describes God as the thought which thinks itself and finds in the simple act of self-consciousness an everlasting happiness, wonderful if it always equals the best moments of our mortal life, more wonderful still if it surpasses them. There is only one supreme God, for plurality is due to an admixture of matter, and He is pure form. The rule of many is not good, as Homer says. Let there be one Lord.

Such are the closing words of what was possibly Aristotle's last work, the clear confession of his monotheistic creed. A monotheistic creed, we have said, but one so unlike all other religions, that its nature has been continually misunderstood. While some have found in it a theology like that of the Jews or of Plato or of modern Europe, others have resolved it into a vague pantheism. Among the latter we are surprised to find Sir A. Grant, a writer to whom the Aristotelian texts must be perfectly familiar both in spirit and in letter. Yet nothing can possibly be more clear and emphatic than the declarations they contain. Pantheism identifies God with the world; Aristotle separates them as pure form from form more or less alloyed with matter. Pantheism denies personality to God; Aristotle gives him unity, spirituality, self-consciousness, and happiness. If these qualities do not collectively involve personality, we should like to know what does. Need we



remind the accomplished editor of the *Nicomachean Ethics* how great a place is given in that work to human self-consciousness, to waking active thought as distinguished from mere slumbering faculties or unrealised possibilities of action? And what Aristotle regarded as essential to human perfection, he would regard as still more essential to divine perfection. Finally, the God of pantheism is a general idea; the God of Aristotle is an individual. Sir A. Grant says that he (or it) is the idea of Good.<sup>1</sup> We doubt very much whether there is a single passage in the *Metaphysics* to sanction such an expression. Did it occur, however, that would be no warrant for approximating the Aristotelian to the Platonic theology, in presence of such a distinct declaration as that the First Mover is both conceptually and numerically one,<sup>2</sup> coming after repeated repudiations of the Platonic attempt to isolate ideas from the particulars in which they are immersed. Then Sir A. Grant goes on to speak of the desire felt by Nature for God as being itself God,<sup>3</sup> and therefore involving a belief in pantheism. Such a notion is not generally called pantheism, but hylozoism, the attribution of life to matter. We have no desire, however, to quarrel about words. The philosopher who believes in the existence of a vague consciousness, a spiritual effort towards something higher diffused through nature, may, if you will, be called a pantheist, but not unless this be the only divinity he recognises. The term is altogether misleading when applied to one who also proclaims the existence of something in his opinion far higher, better and more real—a living God, who transcends Nature, and is independent of her, although she is not independent of him.

We must also observe that the parallel drawn by Sir A. Grant between the theology of Aristotle and that of John Stuart Mill is singularly unfortunate. It is in the first place incorrect to say that Mill represented God as benevolent but

<sup>1</sup> Grant's *Aristotle*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> *Metaph.*, XII., viii., p. 1074, a, 36.

<sup>3</sup> Grant's *Aristotle*, p. 176.

not omnipotent. He only suggested the idea as less inconsistent with facts than other forms of theism.<sup>1</sup> In the next place, Aristotle's God was almost exactly the reverse of this. He possesses infinite power, but no benevolence at all. He has nothing to do with the internal arrangements of the world, either as creator or as providence. He is, in fact, an egoist of the most transcendent kind, who does nothing but think about himself and his own perfections. Nothing could be more characteristic of the unpractical Aristotelian philosophy; nothing more repugnant to the eager English reformer, the pupil of Bentham and of Plato. And, thirdly, Sir A. Grant takes what is not the God of Aristotle's system at all, but a mere abstraction, the immanent reason of Nature, the Form which can never quite conquer Matter, and places it on the same line with a God who, however hypothetical, is nothing if not a person distinct from the world; while, as if to bewilder the unfortunate 'English reader' still further, he adds, in the very next sentence, that 'the great defect in Aristotle's conception of God is' the denial 'that God can be a moral Being.'<sup>2</sup>

The words last quoted, which in a Christian sense are true enough, lead us over to the contrasting view of Aristotle's theology, to the false theory of it held by critics like Prof. St. George Mivart. The Stagirite agrees with Catholic theism in accepting a personal God, and he agrees with the First Article of the English Church, though not with the Pentateuch, in saying that God is without parts or passions; but there his agreement ceases. Excluding such a thing as divine interference with nature, his theology of course excludes the possibility of revelation, inspiration, miracles, and grace. Nor is this a mere omission; it is a necessity of the system. If there can

<sup>1</sup> 'The rational attitude of a thinking mind towards the supernatural, whether in natural or revealed religion, is that of scepticism, as distinguished from belief on the one hand and atheism on the other.'—Mill's *Essays on Religion*, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> Grant's *Aristotle*, p. 177.

be no existence without time, no time without motion, no motion without unrealised desire, no desire without an ideal, no ideal but eternally self-thinking thought—then it logically follows that God, in the sense of such a thought, must not interest himself in the affairs of men. Again, Aristotelianism equally excludes the arguments by which modern theologians have sought to prove the existence of God. Here also the system is true to its contemporaneous, stational, superficial character. The First Mover is not separated from us by a chain of causes extending through past ages, but by an intervening breadth of space and the wheels within wheels of a cosmic machine. Aristotle had no difficulty in conceiving what some have since declared to be inconceivable, a series of antecedents without any beginning in time ; it was rather the beginning of such a series that he could not make intelligible to himself. Nor, as we have seen, did he think that the adaptation in living organisms of each part to every other required an external explanation. Far less did it occur to him that the production of impressions on our senses was due to the agency of a supernatural power. It is absolutely certain that he would have rejected the Cartesian argument, according to which a perfect being must exist if it be only conceivable—existence being necessarily involved in the idea of perfection.<sup>1</sup> Finally, not recognising such a faculty as conscience, he would not have admitted it to be the voice of God speaking in the soul.

On the other hand, Aristotle's own theistic arguments cannot stand for a moment in the face of modern science. We know by the law of inertia that it is not the continuance, but the arrest or the beginning of motion which requires to be accounted for. We know by the Copernican system that there is no solid sidereal sphere governing the revolutions of all Nature. And we know by the Newtonian physics that

<sup>1</sup> ὁ δ' εἶναι οὐκ οὐσία οὐδενί· οὐ γὰρ γένος τὸ ὄν.—*An. Post.*, II., vii., p. 92, b, 13.

gravitation is not dependent on fixed points in space for its operation. *The Philosophy of the Philosopher* Aristotle is as inconsistent with the demonstrations of modern astronomy as it is with the faith of mediæval Catholicism.

It remains to be seen whether the system which we are examining is consistent with itself. It is not. The Prime Mover, being unextended, cannot be located outside the sidereal sphere; nor can he be brought into immediate contact with it more than with any other part of the cosmos. If the æther has a motion proper to itself, then no spiritual agency is required to keep it in perpetual rotation. If the crystalline spheres fit accurately together, as they must, to avoid leaving a vacuum anywhere, there can be no friction, no production of heat, and consequently no effect produced on the sublunary sphere. Finally, no rotatory or other movement can, taken alone, have any conceivable connexion with the realisation of a possibility, in the sense of progress from a lower to a higher state of being. It is merely the perpetual exchange of one indifferent position for another.

We have now to consider what were the speculative motives that led Aristotle to overlook these contradictions, and to find rest in a theory even less satisfactory than the earlier systems which he is always attacking with relentless animosity. The first motive, we believe, was the train of reasoning, already laid before the reader, by which universal essences, the objects of knowledge, gradually came to be identified with particular objects, the sole existing realities. For the arguments against such an identification, as put forward by our philosopher himself, still remained unanswered. The individuals comprising a species were still too transient for certainty and too numerous for comprehension. But when for the antithesis between Form and Matter was substituted the antithesis between Actuality and Possibility, two modes of evasion presented themselves. The first was to distinguish between actual knowledge and potential knowledge.

The former corresponded to existing particulars, the latter to general ideas.<sup>1</sup> This, however, besides breaking up the unity of knowledge, was inconsistent with the whole tenor of Aristotle's previous teaching. What can be more actual than demonstration, and how can there be any demonstration of transient particulars? The other mode of reconciliation was perhaps suggested by the need of an external cause to raise Possibility into Actuality. Such a cause might be conceived with all the advantages and without the drawbacks of a Platonic Idea. It would be at once the moving agent and the model of perfection; it could reconcile the general and the particular by the simple fact of being eternal in time, comprehensive in space, and unique in kind. Aristotle found such a cause, or rather a whole series of such causes, in the celestial spheres. In his system, these bear just the same relation to terrestrial phenomena that Plato's Ideas bear to the world of sense. They are, in fact, the Ideas made sensible and superficial, placed alongside of, instead of beneath or behind, the transient particulars which they irradiate and sustain.

The analogy may be carried even farther. If Plato regarded the things of sense as not merely a veil, but an imperfect imitation of the only true realities; so also did Aristotle represent the sublunary elements as copying the disposition and activities of the ethereal spheres. They too have their concentric arrangements—first fire, then air, then water, and lastly earth in the centre; while their perpetual transformation into one another presents an image in time of the spatial rotation which those sublime beings perform. And although we think that Sir A. Grant is quite mistaken in identifying Aristotle's Supreme Mind with the Idea of Good, there can be no doubt of its having been suggested by that Idea. It is, in fact, the translation of Plato's abstraction into concrete reality, and the completion of a process which Plato

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.*, -XIII., x.

had himself begun. From another point of view we may say that both master and disciple were working, each in his own way, at the solution of a problem which entirely dominates Greek philosophy from Empedocles on—the reconciliation of Parmenides and Heracleitus, Being and Becoming, the eternal and the changeful, the one and the many. Aristotle adopts the superficial, external method of placing the two principles side by side in space; and for a long time the world accepted his solution for the same reason that had commended it to his own acceptance, its apparent agreement with popular tradition and with the facts of experience. It must be confessed, however, that here also he was following the lines laid down by Plato. The *Timæus* and the *Laws* are marked by a similar tendency to substitute astronomy for dialectics, to study the celestial movements with religious veneration, to rebuild on a scientific basis that ancient star-worship which, even among the Greeks, enjoyed a much higher authority and prestige than the humanised mythology of the poets. But for Christianity this star-worship would probably have become the official faith of the Roman world. As it is, Dante's great poem presents us with a singular compromise between the two creeds. The crystalline spheres are retained, only they have become the abode of glorified spirits instead of being the embodiment of eternal gods. We often hear it said that the Copernican system was rejected as offensive to human pride, because it removed the earth from the centre of the universe. This is a profound mistake. Its offence was to degrade the heavenly bodies by assimilating them to the earth.<sup>1</sup> Among several planets, all revolving round the sun, there could not be any marked qualitative difference. In the theological sense there was no longer any heaven; and with the disappearance of the solid

<sup>1</sup> Non pensar oltre lei [la terra] essere uu corpo senza alma e vita et anche feccia tra le sustanze corporali.' Giordano Bruno, *Cena de le Ceneri*, p. 130 (*Opere*, ed. Wagner). 'Non dovete stimar. . . che il corpo terreno sia vile e più degli altri ignobile.'—*De l' Infinito Univerſo e Mondi*, p. 54 (*ib.*).

sidereal sphere there was no longer any necessity for a Prime Mover.

There is, perhaps, no passage in Aristotle's writings—there is certainly none in his scientific writings—more eloquent than that which describes the glory of his imaginary heavens. The following translation may give some faint idea of its solemnity and splendour :—

We believe, then, that the whole heaven is one and everlasting, without beginning or end through all eternity, but holding infinite time within its orb ; not, as some say, created or capable of being destroyed. We believe it on account of the grounds already stated, and also on account of the consequences resulting from a different hypothesis. For, it must add great weight to our assurance of its immortality and everlasting duration that this opinion may, while the contrary opinion cannot possibly, be true. Wherefore, we may trust the traditions of old time, and especially of our own race, when they tell us that there is something deathless and divine about the things which, although moving, have a movement that is not bounded, but is itself the universal bound, a perfect circle enclosing in its revolutions the imperfect motions that are subject to restraint and arrest ; while this, being without beginning or end or rest through infinite time, is the one from which all others originate, and into which they disappear. That heaven which antiquity assigned to the gods as an immortal abode, is shown by the present argument to be uncreated and indestructible, exempt alike from mortal weakness and from the weariness of subjection to a force acting in opposition to its natural inclination ; for in proportion to its everlasting continuance such a compulsion would be laborious, and unparticipant in the highest perfection of design. We must not, then, believe with the old mythologists that an Atlas is needed to uphold it ; for they, like some in more recent times, fancied that the heavens were made of heavy earthy matter, and so fabled an animated necessity for their support ; nor yet that, as Empedocles says, they will last only so long as their own proper momentum is exceeded by the whirling motion of which they partake.<sup>1</sup> Nor, again, is it likely that their everlasting revolution can be kept up by the exercise of a conscious will ;

<sup>1</sup> This conjecture of Empedocles deserves more attention than it has as yet received. It illustrates once more the superior insight of the early thinkers as compared with Aristotle.

for no soul could lead a happy and blessed existence that was engaged in such a task, necessitating, as it would, an unceasing struggle with their native tendency to move in a different direction, without even the mental relaxation and bodily rest which mortals gain by sleep, but doomed to the eternal torment of an Ixion's wheel. Our explanation, on the other hand, is, as we say, not only more consistent with the eternity of the heavens, but also can alone be reconciled with the acknowledged vaticinations of religious faith.<sup>1</sup>

It will be seen from the foregoing passage how strong a hold the old Greek notion of an encircling limit had on the mind of Aristotle, and how he transformed it back from the high intellectual significance given to it by Plato into its original sense of a mere space-enclosing figure. And it will also be seen how he credits his spheres with a full measure of that moving power which, according to his rather unfair criticism, the Platonic Ideas did not possess. His astronomy also supplied him with that series of graduated transitions between two extremes in which Greek thought so much delighted. The heavenly bodies mediate between God and the earth; partly active and partly passive, they both receive and communicate the moving creative impulse. The four terrestrial elements are moved in the various categories of substance, quantity, quality, and place; the aether moves in place only. God remains 'without variableness or shadow of a change.' Finally, by its absolute simplicity and purity, the aether mediates between the coarse matter perceived by our senses and the absolutely immaterial *Nous*, and is itself supposed to be pervaded by a similar gradation of fineness from top to bottom. Furthermore, the upper fire, which must not be confounded with flame, furnishes a connecting link between the aether and the other elements, being related to them as Form to Matter, or as agent to patient; and, when the elements are decomposed into their constituent qualities, hot and cold occupy a similar position with regard to wet and dry.

<sup>1</sup> *De Caelo*, II., 1.



## IV.

In mastering Aristotle's cosmology, we have gained the key to his entire method of systematisation. Henceforth, the Stagirite has no secrets from us. Where we were formerly content to show that he erred, we can now show why he erred; by generalising his principles of arrangement, we can exhibit them still more clearly in their conflict with modern thought. The method, then, pursued by Aristotle is to divide his subject into two more or less unequal masses, one of which is supposed to be governed by necessary principles, admitting of certain demonstration; while the other is irregular, and can only be studied according to the rules of probable evidence. The parts of the one are homogeneous and concentrically disposed, the movements of each being controlled by that immediately outside and above it. The parts of the other are heterogeneous and distributed among a number of antithetical pairs, between whose members there is, or ought to be, a general equilibrium preserved, the whole system having a common centre which either oscillates from one extreme to another, or holds the balance between them. The second system is enclosed within the first, and is altogether dependent on it for the impulses determining its processes of metamorphosis and equilibration. Where the internal adjustments of a system to itself or of one system to the other are not consciously made, Aristotle calls them Nature. They are always adapted to secure its everlasting continuance either in an individual or a specific form. Actuality belongs more particularly to the first sphere, and possibility to the second, but both are, to a certain extent, represented in each.

We have already seen how this fundamental division is applied to the universe as a whole. But our philosopher is not content with classifying the phenomena as he finds

them ; he attempts to demonstrate the necessity of their dual existence ; and in so doing is guilty of something very like a vicious circle. For, after proving from the terrestrial movements that there must be an eternal movement to keep them going, he now assumes the revolving aether, and argues that there must be a motionless solid centre for it to revolve round, although a geometrical axis would have served the purpose equally well. By a still more palpable fallacy, he proceeds to show that a body whose tendency is towards the centre, must, in the nature of things, be opposed by another body whose tendency is towards the circumference. In order to fill up the interval created by this opposition, two intermediate bodies are required, and thus we get the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire. These, again, are resolved into the antithetical couples, dry and wet, hot and cold, the possible combinations of which, by twos, give us the four elements once more. Earth is dry and cold, water cold and wet, air wet and hot, fire hot and dry ; each adjacent pair having a quality in common, and each element being characterised by the excess of a particular quality ; earth is especially dry, water cold, air wet, and fire hot. The common centre of each antithesis is what Aristotle calls the First Matter, the mere abstract unformed possibility of existence. This matter always combines two qualities, and has the power of oscillating from one quality to another, but it cannot, as a rule, simultaneously exchange both for their opposites. Earth may pass into water, exchanging dry for wet, but not so readily into air, which would necessitate a double exchange at the same moment.

Those who will may see in all this an anticipation of chemical substitution and double decomposition. We can assure them that it will be by no means the most absurd parallel discovered between ancient and modern ideas. It is possible, however, to trace a more real connexion between the Aristotelian physics and mediaeval thought. We do not of

course mean the scholastic philosophy, for there never was the slightest doubt as to its derivation ; we allude to the alchemy and astrology which did duty for positive science during so many centuries, and even overlapped it down to the time of Newton, himself an ardent alchemist. The superstitions of astrology originated independently of the peripatetic system, and probably long before it, but they were likely to be encouraged by it instead of being repressed, as they would have been by a less anthropomorphic philosophy. Aristotle himself, as we have seen, limited the action of the heavens on the sublunary sphere to their heating power ; but, by crediting them with an immortal reason and the pursuit of ends unknown to us, he opened a wide field for conjecture as to what those ends were, and how they could be ascertained. That the stars and planets were always thinking and acting, but never about our affairs, was not a notion likely to be permanently accepted. Neither was it easy to believe that their various configurations, movements, and names (the last probably revealed by themselves) were entirely without significance. From such considerations to the casting of horoscopes is not a far remove. The Aristotelian chemistry would still more readily lend itself to the purposes of alchemy. If Nature is one vast process of transmutation, then particular bodies, such as the metals, not only may, but must be convertible into one another. And even those who rejected Aristotle's logic with scorn still clung to his natural philosophy when it flattered their hopes of gain. Bacon kept the theory of substantial forms. His originality consisted in looking for a method by which any form, or assemblage of forms might be superinduced at pleasure on the underlying matter. The real development of knowledge pursued a far different course. The great discoverers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries achieved their success by absolutely reversing the method of Aristotle, by bringing into fruitful contact principles which he had condemned to barren isolation.

They carried terrestrial physics into the heavens ; they brought down the absoluteness and eternity of celestial law to earth ; they showed that Aristotle's antithetical qualities were merely quantitative distinctions. These they resolved into modes of motion ; and they also resolved all motions into one, which was both rectilinear and perpetual. But they and their successors put an end to all dreams of transmutation, when they showed by another synthesis that all matter, at least within the limits of our experience, has the changeless consistency once attributed exclusively to the stellar spheres.

When Aristotle passes from the whole cosmos to the philosophy of life, his method of systematic division is less distinctly illustrated, but still it may be traced. The fundamental separation is between body and soul. The latter has a wider meaning than what we associate with it at present. It covers the psychic functions and the whole life of the organism, which, again, is not what we mean by life. For life with us is both individual and collective ; it resides in each speck of protoplasm, and also in the consensus of the whole organism. With Aristotle it is more exclusively a central principle, the final cause of the organism, the power which holds it together, and by which it was originally shaped. Biology begins by determining the idea of the whole, and then considers the means by which it is realised. The psychic functions are arranged according to a system of teleological subordination. The lower precedes the higher in time, but is logically necessitated by it. Thus nutrition, or the vegetative life in general, must be studied in close connexion with sensation and impulse, or animal life ; and this, again, with thought or pure reasoning. On the other hand, anatomy and physiology are considered from a purely chemical and mechanical point of view. A vital purpose is, indeed, assigned to every organ, but with no more reference to its specifically vital properties than if it formed part of a steam engine. Here, as always with Aristotle, the idea of moderation determines the point of view

whence the inferior or material system is to be studied. Organic tissue is made up of the four elemental principles—hot, cold, wet, and dry—mixed together in proper proportions ; and the object of organic function is to maintain them in due equilibrium, an end effected by the regulating power of the soul, which, accordingly, has its seat in the heart or centre of the body. It has been already shown how, in endeavouring to work out this chimerical theory, Aristotle went much further astray from the truth than sundry other Greek physiologists less biassed by the requirements of a symmetrical method.

After the formal and material elements of life have been separately discussed, there comes an account of the process by which they are first brought into connexion, for this is how Aristotle views generation. With him it is the information of matter by psychic force ; and his notions about the part which each parent plays in the production of a new being are vitiated throughout by this mistaken assumption. Nevertheless his treatise on the subject is, for its time, one of the most wonderful works ever written, and, as we are told on good authority,<sup>1</sup> is now less antiquated than the corresponding researches of Harvey. The philosopher's peculiar genius for observation, analysis, and comparison will partly account for his success ; but, if we mistake not, there is another and less obvious reason. Here the fatal separation of form and matter was, except at first starting, precluded by the very idea of generation ; and the teleological principle of spontaneous efforts to realise a predetermined end was, as it happened, perfectly in accordance with the facts themselves.

And now, looking back on his cosmology, we can see that Aristotle was never so near the truth as when he tried to bridge over the gulf between his two spheres, the one corruptible and the other eternal, by the idea of motion considered as a specific property of all matter, and persisting through all

<sup>1</sup> Lewes, quoted by Zeller, p. 524.

time ; as a link between the celestial revolutions and the changes occurring on or near the earth's surface ; and, finally, as the direct cause of heat, the great agent acting in opposition to gravity—which last view may have suggested Bacon's capital discovery, that heat is itself a mode of motion.

Another method by which Aristotle strove to overcome the antithesis between life as a mechanical arrangement and life as a metaphysical conception, was the newly created study of comparative anatomy. The variations in structure and function which accompany variations in the environment, though statically and not dynamically conceived, bring us very near to the truth that biological phenomena are subject to the same general laws of causation as all other phenomena ; and it is this truth which, in the science of life, corresponds to the identification of terrestrial with celestial physics in the science of general mechanics. Vitality is not an individualised principle stationed in the heart and serving only to balance opposite forces against one another ; but it is diffused through all the tissues, and bestows on them that extraordinary plasticity which responds to the actions of the environment by spontaneous variations capable of being summed up in any direction, and so creating entirely new organic forms without the intervention of any supernatural agency.

## V.

We have now to consider how Aristotle treats psychology, not in connexion with biology, but as a distinct science—a separation not quite consistent with his own definition of soul, but forced on him by the traditions of Greek philosophy and by the nature of things. Here the fundamental antithesis assumes a three-fold form. First the theoretical activity of mind is distinguished from its practical activity ; the one being exercised on things which cannot, the other on things which

can, be changed. Again, a similar distinction prevails within the special province of each. Where truth is the object, knowledge stands opposed to sense ; where good is sought, reason rises superior to passion. The one antithesis had been introduced into philosophy by the early physicists, the other by Socrates. They were confounded in the psychology of Plato, and Aristotle had the merit of separating them once more. Yet even he preserves a certain artificial parallelism between them by using the common name *Nous*, or reason, to denote the controlling member in each. To make his anthropology still more complex, there is a third antithesis to be taken into account, that between the individual and the community, which also sometimes slides into a partial coincidence with the other two.

Aristotle's treatise on the soul is mainly devoted to a description of the theoretical faculties—sense, and thought or reason. By sense we become acquainted with the material qualities of things ; by thought with their forms or ideas. It has been already mentioned that, according to our philosopher, the organism is a system of contrary forces held in equilibrium by the soul, whose seat he supposes to be in the heart. We now learn that every sensation is a disturbance of this equilibrium. In other words, the sensorium being virtually any and every mode of matter, is raised from possibility to actuality by the presence of some one force, such as heat or cold, in sufficient strength to incline the balance that way. Here we have, quite in Aristotle's usual style, a description instead of an explanation. The atomic notion of thin films thrown off from the object of sense, and falling on the organs of sight or touch, was but a crude guess ; still it has more affinity with the discoveries of a Young or a Helmholtz than scholastic phrases about potentiality and actuality. That sensation implies a disturbance of equilibrium is, indeed, an important truth ; only, the equilibrium must be conceived as a balance, not of possible sensations, but of molecular states ; that is to say, it must be interpreted according to the atomic theory.

Aristotle is more successful when he proceeds to discuss the imagination. He explains it to be a continuance of the movement originally communicated by the felt object to the organ of sense, kept up in the absence of the object itself;—as near an approach to the truth as could be made in his time. And he is also right in saying that the operations of reason are only made possible by the help of what he calls phantasms—that is, faint reproductions of sensations. In addition to this, he points out the connexion between memory and imagination, and enumerates the laws of association briefly, but with great accuracy. He is, however, altogether unaware of their scope. So far from using them to explain all the mental processes, he does not even see that they account for involuntary reminiscence, and limits them to the voluntary operation by which we recall a missing name or other image to consciousness.

So far, Aristotle regards the soul as a function, or energy, or perfection of the body, from which it can no more be separated than vision from the eye. It is otherwise with the part of mind which he calls *Nous*, or Reason—the faculty which takes cognisance of abstract ideas or the pure forms of things. This corresponds, in the microcosm, to the eternal *Nous* of the macrocosm, and, like it, is absolutely immaterial, not depending for its activity on the exercise of any bodily organ. There is, however, a general analogy between sensation and thought considered as processes of cognition. Previous to experience, the *Nous* is no thought in particular, but merely a possibility of thinking, like a smooth wax tablet waiting to be written on. It is determined to some particular idea by contact with the objective forms of things, and in this determination is raised from power to actuality. The law of moderation, however, does not apply to thought. Excessive stimulation is first injurious and then destructive to the organs of sense, but we cannot have too much of an idea; the more intense it is the better are we able to conceive all the



ideas that come under it, just because ideation is an incorporeal process. And there seems to be this further distinction between sensation and thought, that the latter is much more completely identified with its object than the former; it is in the very act of imprinting themselves on the Nous that the forms of things become perfectly detached from matter, and so attain their final realisation. It is only in our consciousness that the eternal ideas of transient phenomena become conscious of themselves. Such, we take it, is the true interpretation of Aristotle's famous distinction between an active and a passive Nous. The one, he tells us, *makes* whatever the other is *made*. The active Nous is like light raising colours from possibility to actuality. It is eternal, but we have no remembrance of its past existence, because the passive Nous, without which it can think nothing, is perishable.

It will be seen that we do not consider the two kinds of Nous to differ from each other as a higher and a lower faculty. This, in our opinion, has been the great mistake of the commentators, of those, at least, who do not identify the active Nous with God, or with some agency emanating from God—a hypothesis utterly inconsistent with Aristotle's theology. They describe it as a faculty, and as concerned with some higher kind of knowledge than what lies within the reach of the passive Nous.<sup>1</sup> But with Aristotle faculty is always a potentiality and a passive recipient, whereas the creative reason is expressly declared to be an actuality, which, in this connexion, can mean nothing but an individual idea. The difficulty is to understand why the objective forms of things should suddenly be spoken of as existing within the mind, and denominated by a term carrying with it such subjective associations as Nous; a difficulty not diminished by the mysterious comparison with light in its relation to colour, an illus-

<sup>1</sup> So Trendelenburg, Brandis, Kampe, and apparently also Zeller. Grote speaks of it rather vaguely as an intelligence pervading the celestial sphere. Schwegler vacillates between the theological and the psychological explanation.

tration which, in this instance, has only made the darkness visible. We believe that Aristotle was led to express himself as he did by the following considerations. He began by simply conceiving that, just as the senses were raised from potency to actuality through contact with the corresponding qualities in external objects, so also was the reasoning faculty moulded into particular thoughts through contact with the particular things embodying them; thus, for instance, it was led to conceive the general idea of straightness by actual experience of straight lines. It then, perhaps, occurred to him that one and the same object could not produce two such profoundly different impressions as a sensation and a thought; that mind was opposed to external realities by the attribute of self-consciousness; and that a form inherent in matter could not directly impress itself on an immaterial substance. The idea of a creative *Nous* was, we think, devised in order to escape from these perplexities. The ideal forms of things are carried into the mind, together with the sensations, and in passing through the imagination, become purified from the matter previously associated with them. Thus they may be conceived as part of the mind—in, though not yet of it—and as acting on its highest faculty, the passive *Nous*. And, by a kind of anticipation, they are called by the name of what they become completely identified with in cognition. As forms of things they are eternal; as thoughts they are self-conscious; while, in both capacities, they are creative, and their creative activity is an essentially immaterial process. Here we have the old confusion between form and function; the old inability to reconcile the claims of the universal and the particular in knowledge and existence. After all, Aristotle is obliged to extract an actuality from the meeting of two possibilities, instead of from the meeting of an actuality and a possibility. Probably the weakness of his own theory did not escape him, for he never subsequently recurs to it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The last chapter of the *Posterior Analytics* sets forth a much more developed

Aristotle's work on reproduction is supposed by many to contain a reference to his distinction between the two Reasons, but we are convinced that this is a mistake. What we are told is that at the very first formation of a new being, the vegetative soul, being an exclusively corporeal function, is precontained in the elements furnished by the female; that the sensitive soul is contributed by the male (being, apparently, engendered in the semen by the vital heat of the parent organism); and, finally, that the rational soul, although entirely immaterial, is also carried in with the semen, into which it has first been introduced from without, but where, or when, or how is not more particularly specified.<sup>1</sup> But even were the genetic theory in question perfectly cleared up, it would still throw no light on the distinction between active and passive reason, as the latter alone can be understood by the rational soul to which it refers. For we are expressly informed — what indeed hardly required to be stated — that the embryonic souls exist not in act but in potency.<sup>2</sup> It seems, therefore, that Mr. Edwin Wallace is doubly mistaken when he quotes a sentence from this passage in justification of his statement, that 'Aristotle would seem almost to identify' the creative reason 'with God as the eternal and omnipresent thinker;'<sup>3</sup> first, because it does not refer to the creative *Nous* at all; and, secondly, because, if it did, the words would not stand the meaning which he puts upon them.<sup>4</sup>

and definite theory of the process by which general ideas are formed. We think that it was composed at a considerably later date than the rest of the work, and probably after the treatise on the Soul, to which we should almost suspect an allusion in the word *πάλα* (p. 100, a, 14), did philology permit. The reference can hardly be to the first part of the chapter (as is generally supposed); nor has the subject under discussion been touched on in any other part of the *Analytics*.

<sup>1</sup> Grote and Kampe think that Aristotle assigns a portion of aether as an extended, if not precisely a material, substratum to the rational soul; but the arguments of Zeller (p. 569) seem decisive against this view.

<sup>2</sup> *De Gen. An.*, II., iii., p. 736, b, 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Outlines of the Philosophy of Aristotle*, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> The word *θεῖον*, at any rate, does not mean 'almost God,' for Aristotle applies it to the intelligence of bees, and also to the heavenly bodies (*De Gen. An.*, III., x., p. 761, a, 5; *De Coel.*, II., xii., p. 292, b, 32).

But if even so little as this remains unproved, what are we to think of the astounding assertion, that 'Aristotle's theory of a creative reason, fragmentary as that theory is left, is the answer to all materialistic theories of the universe. To Aristotle, as to a subtle Scottish preacher,<sup>1</sup> "the real presupposition of all knowledge, or the thought which is the *prius* of all things, is not the individual's consciousness of himself as individual, but a thought or self-consciousness which is beyond all individual selves, which is the unity of all individual selves, and their objects, of all thinkers and all objects of thought.'" <sup>2</sup> How can materialism or anything else be possibly refuted by a theory which is so obscurely set forth that no two interpreters are able to agree in their explanation of it? And even were it stated with perfect clearness and fulness, how can any hypothesis be refuted by a mere dogmatic declaration of Aristotle? Are we back in the Middle Ages that his *ipse dixit* is to decide questions now raised with far ampler means of discussion than he could possess? As to Principal Caird's metaphysics, we have no wish to dispute their theoretic accuracy, and can only admire the liberality of a Church in which propositions so utterly destructive of traditional orthodoxy are allowed to be preached. But one thing we are certain of, and that is, that whether or not they are consistent with Christian theism, they are utterly inconsistent with Aristotelian principles. Which is the 'thought or self-consciousness' referred to, a possibility or an actuality? If the former, it is not a *prius*, nor is it the creative reason. If the latter, it cannot transcend all or any individual selves, for, with Aristotle, individuals are the sole reality, and the supreme being of his system is pre-eminently individual; neither can it unify them, for, according to Aristotle, two things which are two in actuality cannot be one in actuality.<sup>3</sup>

We now turn to Sir A. Grant, who, as was mentioned at

<sup>1</sup> Principal Caird.

<sup>2</sup> *Outlines*, Preface, p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> *Metaph.*, VII., xiii., p. 1039, a, 4.

the beginning of the last chapter, makes Aristotle a supporter of the late Prof. Ferrier. We will state the learned Principal's view in his own words :—

‘ His utterances on this subject [the existence of an external world] are perhaps chiefly to be found in the third book of his treatise “ On the Soul,” beginning with the fourth chapter. On turning to them we see that he never separates existence from knowledge. “ A thing in actual existence,” he says, “ is identical with the knowledge of that thing.” Again, “ The possible existence of a thing is identical with the possibility in us of perceiving or knowing it.” Thus, until a thing is perceived or known, it can only be said to have a potential or possible existence. And from this a doctrine very similar to that of Ferrier might be deduced, that “ nothing exists except *plus me*,”—that is to say, in relation to some mind perceiving it.’ (*Aristotle*, p. 165.)

After much searching, we have not been able to find the originals of the two passages quoted by Sir A. Grant. We have, however, found others setting forth the doctrine of Natural Realism with a clearness which leaves nothing to be desired. Aristotle tells us that former naturalists were wrong when they said that there could be no black or white without vision, and no taste without tasting ; that is, they were right about the actuality, and wrong about the possibility ; for, as he explains, our sensations are produced by the action of external bodies on the appropriate organs, the activity being the same while the existence is different. A sonorous body produces a sound in our hearing ; the sound perceived and the action of the body are identical, but not their existence ; for, he adds, the hearer need not be always listening, nor the sonorous body sounding ; and so with all the other senses.<sup>1</sup>

This is not making the *percipi* of objects their *esse*. Again, in the eighth chapter he tells us that the soul is ‘ in a certain way ’ (*πῶς*) all things, since all things are either sensible or cogitable ; and then he proceeds to explain what is meant by

<sup>1</sup> *De An.*, III., ii., p. 426, a, 20 ; 425, b, 25 ff. What Aristotle means by saying that the *εἶναι* of object and sensation is not the same, appears from a passage in his tract on Memory (p. 450, b, 20), where he employs the illustration of a portrait and its original, which are the same, although their *εἶναι* is different.

'in a certain way.' Sense and knowledge are distributed over things in such wise that their possibility is the possibility, and their actuality the actuality, of the things. They must, then, be either the things themselves or their forms. '*But the things themselves they are surely not*, for the stone is not in the soul, but its form.' In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle expresses himself to the same effect, but even more explicitly. Criticising the Protagorean doctrine, he reduces it to an absurdity by urging that if there were nothing but sensibles, then nothing at all could exist in the absence of animated beings, for without them there would be no sensation. He admits that in the case supposed there would be neither feelings nor felt objects, since these presuppose a sentient subject; but adds, that for the substances (*τὰ ὑποκείμενα*) which produce the feeling not to exist is impossible; 'for there is something else besides the feeling which must necessarily exist before it.'<sup>1</sup> And immediately afterwards he clinches the argument by observing that if appearances were the only truth, there would be no independent existences, and everything would be relative, since appearances exist only in relation to some one to whom they appear. Now we need hardly say that this universal relativity was precisely what Ferrier contended for.

Sir A. Grant is on stronger, or rather on more inaccessible ground, when he uses the distinction between the two reasons as involving a sort of idealistic theory, because here Aristotle's meaning is much less clearly expressed. Yet, if our interpretation be the correct one, if the creative *Nous* simply means the forms of things acting through the imagination on the possibilities of subjective conception, Aristotle's view will be exactly the reverse of that contended for by Sir Alexander; thought, instead of moulding, will itself be moulded by external reality. In no case have we a right to set an obscure and disputed passage against Aristotle's distinct, emphatic, and reiterated declarations, that sensation and ideation are

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.*, IV., v., *sub fin.*

substantially analogous processes, taken together with his equally distinct declaration, that the objects of sensation are independent of our feelings. We think, indeed, that Sir A. Grant will find, on reconsideration, that he is proving too much. For, if the things which reason creates were external to the mind, then Aristotle would go at least as far as those 'extreme German idealists' from whom his expositor is anxious to separate him. Finally, we would observe that to set up Aristotle's distinction between form and matter in opposition to the materialistic theories of the present day, shows a profound misconception of its meaning. Form and matter are nowhere distinguished from one another as subject and object. Form simply means the attributes of a thing, the entire aggregate of its differential characteristics. But that this does not of itself amount to conscious reason we are told by Aristotle himself.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the 'matter' to which 'some philosophers' attribute 'an independent existence,' is not his 'matter' at all, but just the sum of things *minus* consciousness. The Stagirite did not, it is true, believe in the possibility of such a universe, but only (as we have shown) because he was not acquainted with the highest laws of motion. Yet, even taking 'matter' in his own technical sense, Aristotle would have agreed with Prof. Tyndall, that it contained the promise and the potency of all future life, reason alone excepted. He tells us very clearly that the sensitive soul is a somatic function, something which, although not body, belongs to body; and this we conceive is all that any materialist would now contend for.<sup>2</sup> And having gone so far, there really was nothing to prevent him from going a step farther, had he only been acquainted with the dependence of all intelligence on nervous action. At any rate, the tendency is now to obliterate the distinction where he drew it, and to substitute for it another distinction which he neglected. While all functions of consciousness, from the most elementary

<sup>1</sup> *De An.*, III., iv., *sub fin.*

<sup>2</sup> *De An.*, II., ii., p. 414, a, 20.

sensation to the most complex reasoning, seem to pass into one another by imperceptible gradations, consciousness in general is still separated from objective existence by an impassable chasm ; and if there is any hope of reconciling them it lies in the absolute idealism which he so summarily rejected. What we have had occasion repeatedly to point out in other departments of his system, is verified once more in his psychology. The progress of thought has resulted from a reunion of the principles between which he drew a rigid demarcation. We have found that perception can only be understood as a process essentially homogeneous with the highest thought, and neither more nor less immaterial than it is. On the objective side, both may be resolved into sensori-motor actions ; on the subjective side, into groups of related feelings. And here, also, we have to note that when Aristotle anticipates modern thought, it is through his one great mediating, synthetic conception. He observes incidentally that our knowledge of size and shape is acquired, not through the special senses, but by motion—an aperçu much in advance of Locke.<sup>1</sup>

If there are any who value Aristotle as a champion of spiritualism, they must take him with his encumbrances. If his philosophy proves that one part of the soul is immaterial, it proves equally that the soul, taking it altogether, is perishable. Not only does he reject Plato's metempsychosis as inconsistent with physiology, but he declares that affection, memory, and reasoning are functions not of the eternal *Nous*, but of the whole man, and come to an end with his dissolution. As to the active *Nous*, he tells us that it cannot think without the assistance of the passive *Nous*, which is mortal. And there are various passages in the 'Nicomachean Ethics' showing that he had faced this negation of a future life, and was perfectly resigned to its consequences.<sup>2</sup> At one period of his life, probably when under the immediate influence of Plato, he had indulged

<sup>1</sup> *De An.*, III., i., p. 425. a, 13.

<sup>2</sup> See Zeller pp. 602-606, where the whole subject is thoroughly discussed.



in dreams of immortality ; but a profounder acquaintance with natural science sufficed to dissipate them. Perhaps a lingering veneration for his teacher made him purposely use ambiguous language in reference to the eternity of that creative reason which he had so closely associated with self-consciousness. It may remind us of Spinoza's celebrated proposition, *Sentimus experimurque nos aeternos esse*, words absolutely disconnected with the hope of a continued existence of the individual after death, but apparently intended to enlist some of the sentiment associated with that belief on the side of the writer's own philosophy.

On the other hand, the spirit of Plato's religion survived in the teaching of his disciple under a new form. The idea of an eternal personality was, as it were, unified and made objective by being transferred from the human to the divine ; and so each philosopher develops an aspect of religious faith which is wanting in the other, thereby illustrating the tendencies, to some extent mutually exclusive, which divide all theology between them. It remains to observe that if even Aristotle's theism is inconsistent with the Catholic faith, much more must his psychology be its direct negation. *The Philosophy of the Philosopher* is as fatal to the Church's doctrine of future rewards and punishments as it is to her doctrine of divine interference with the usual order of nature.

## VI.

We now pass to the consideration of Aristotle's most important achievement—his system of logic. And as, here also, we shall find much to criticise, it is as well to begin by saying that, in our opinion, his contributions to the science are the most valuable ever made, and perhaps have done more to advance it than all other writings on the same subject put together.

The principal business of reason is, as we have seen, to

form abstract ideas or concepts of things. But before the time of Aristotle it had already been discovered that concepts, or rather the terms expressing them, were capable of being united in propositions which might be either true or false, and whose truth might be a matter either of certainty or of simple opinion. Now, in modern psychology, down to the most recent times, it has always been assumed that, just as there is an intellectual faculty or operation called abstraction corresponding to the terms of which a proposition is composed, so also there is a faculty or operation called judgment corresponding to the entire proposition. Sometimes, again, the third operation, which consists in linking propositions together to form syllogisms, is assigned to a distinct faculty called reason; sometimes all three are regarded as ascending steps in a single fundamental process. Neither Plato nor Aristotle, however, had thought out the subject so scientifically. To both the framing, or rather the discovery, of concepts was by far the most important business of a philosopher, judgment and reasoning being merely subsidiary to it. Hence, while in one part of their logic they were realists and conceptualists, in other parts they were nominalists. Abstract names and the definitions unfolding their connotation corresponded to actual entities in Nature—the eternal Ideas of the one and the substantial forms of the other—as well as to mental representations about whose existence they were agreed, while ascribing to them a different origin. But they did not in like manner treat propositions as the expression of natural laws without, or of judgments within, the mind; while reasoning they regarded much more as an art of thinking, a method for the discovery of ideas, than as the systematisation of a process spontaneously performed by every human being without knowing it; and, even as such, their tendency is to connect it with the theory of definition rather than with the theory of synthetic propositions. Some approach to a realistic view is, indeed, made by both. The

restless and penetrating thought of Plato had, probably towards the close of his career, led him to enquire into the mutual relations of those Ideas which he had at first been inclined to regard as absolutely distinct. He shows us in the *Sophist* how the most abstract notions, such as Being, Identity, and so forth, must, to a certain extent, partake of each other's nature; and when their relationship does not lie on the surface, he seeks to establish it by the interposition of a third idea obviously connected with both. In the later books of the *Republic* he also points to a scheme for arranging his Ideas according to a fixed hierarchy resembling the concatenation of mathematical proofs, by ascending and descending whose successive gradations the mind is to become familiarised with absolute truth; and we shall presently see how Aristotle, following in the same track, sought for a counterpart to his syllogistic method in the objective order of things. Nevertheless, with him, as well as with his master, science was not what it is with us, a study of laws, a perpetually growing body of truth, but a process of definition and classification, a systematisation of what had already been perceived and thought.

It was from the initiative of Socrates that logic received this direction. By insisting on the supreme importance of definition, he drew away attention from the propositions which add to our knowledge, and concentrated it on those which only fix with precision the meaning of words. Yet, in so doing he was influenced quite as much by the spirit of the older physical philosophy, which he denounced, as by the necessities of the new humanistic culture, which he helped to introduce. His definitions were, in truth, the reproduction, on a very minute scale, of those attempts to formulate the whole universe which busied the earliest Ionian speculation. Following the natural tendency of Greek thought, and the powerful attraction of cosmic philosophy, an effort was speedily made to generalise and connect these partial defini-

tions until they grew into a system of universal classification. It was when, under the influence of a new analysis, this system threatened to fall to pieces, that a rudimentary doctrine of judgment first made its appearance. The structure of a grammatical sentence was used to explain how objective ideas could, in a manner, overlap and adhere to one another. Hence propositions, which, as the expression of general truths, were destined to become the beginning and end of thought, remained at first strictly subordinated to the individual concepts that they linked and reconciled.

With Aristotle propositions assumed a new importance. He looked on them as mediating, not only between concepts, but also between conception and reasoning. Still, neither as a psychologist nor as a logician did he appreciate them at their real value. A very brief consideration is given to judgment in his work on the soul, and we are left in doubt whether it is a function of *Nous* alone or of *Nous* combined with some other faculty. Setting aside the treatise on Interpretation, which is probably spurious, and, at any rate, throws no new light on the subject, we may gather from his logical writings half a dozen different suggestions towards a classification of propositions, based partly on their form and partly on their import. In all we find an evident tendency to apply, here also, his grand fundamental distinction between the sphere of uniformity and the sphere of change and opposition. All propositions are either universal or particular; either positive or negative; either necessary or actual or contingent; either reciprocating or not reciprocating; either essential or accidental; either answering to the first question in the categories, or to one of the other nine.<sup>1</sup> But nowhere is any attempt made to combine and systematise these various points of view.

In the theory of reasoning the simple proposition is taken as a starting-point; but instead of deducing the syllogism

<sup>1</sup> *Anal. Pr.*, I., i., *sub in.*; ii., *sub in.*; *Top.*, I., viii., Bekker (in the Tauchnitz ed., vi.).

from the synthesis of two premises, Aristotle reaches the premises through the conclusion. He tells us, indeed, that reasoning is a way of discovering from what we know, something that we did not know before. With him, however, it is really a process not of discovery but of proof. He starts with the conclusion, analyses it into predicate and subject or major and minor, and then, by a further analysis, introduces a middle term connecting the two. Thus, we begin with the proposition, 'Caius is mortal,' and prove it by interpolating the notion humanity between its two extremes. From this point of view the premises are merely a temporary scaffolding for bringing the major and minor into connexion with the middle term; and this is also the reason why Aristotle recognises three syllogistic figures only, instead of the four admitted by later logicians. For, the middle may either be contained in one extreme and contain the other, which gives us the first figure; or it may contain both, which gives the second figure; or be contained in both, which gives the third; and this is an exhaustive enumeration of the possible combinations.<sup>1</sup>

We have here, also, the secret of that elaborate machinery devised for the very unnecessary purpose of converting syllogisms of the second and third figure into syllogisms of the first, which is one of the Stagirite's principal contributions to logic. For it is only in the first figure that the notion by which the extremes are either united or held apart is really a middle term, that is to say, really comes between the others. The distinction between perfect and imperfect syllogisms also serves to illustrate Aristotle's systematic division between the necessary and the contingent. The method of proof by inclusion corresponds in its unconditioned and independent validity to the concentric arrangement of the supernal spheres; the second and third figures, with their conversions and reductions, to the sublunary sphere in its helpless dependence on

<sup>1</sup> *Anal. Pr.*, I., xxiii., 41, a, 11 (in the Tauchnitz ed., xxii., 8).

the celestial revolutions, and its transformations of the elements into one another.

The rules which Aristotle gives us for the conversion of propositions are no doubt highly instructive, and throw great light on their meaning ; but one cannot help observing that such a process as conversion ought, on his own principles, to have been inadmissible. With Plato, the copulation of subject and predicate corresponded to an almost mechanical juxtaposition of two self-existent ideas. It was, therefore, a matter of indifference in what order they were placed. Aristotle, on the other hand, after insisting on the restoration of the concrete object, and reducing general notions to an analysis of its particular aspects, could not but make the predicate subordinate to, and dependent on, the subject—a relation which altogether excludes the logical possibility of making them interchangeable with one another.<sup>1</sup>

The antithetical structure of the whole system is reproduced even in the first syllogistic figure, where there is a similar opposition between the first mood, by which alone universal affirmatives can be obtained, and the remaining three, whose conclusions are either negative or particular, or both. And the complicated rules for testing the validity of those syllogisms in which the premises are distinguished as necessary, actual, and possible, are still more obviously based on Aristotle's false metaphysical distinctions ; so that with the overthrow of those distinctions large portions of the *Analytics* lose their entire value for modern students.

On the other hand, a theory of reasoning based on the relations of concepts, instead of on the relations of judgments, necessarily leaves out of account the whole doctrine of hypothetical and disjunctive propositions, together with that of the syllogisms based on them ; since the elements of which they are composed are themselves propositions. And this inevitable omission is the more remarkable because alterna-

<sup>1</sup> This point is well brought out in F. A. Lange's *Logische Untersuchungen*.

tive and, to a less extent, hypothetical arguments form the staple of Aristotle's own dialectic ; while categorical reasoning never occurs in it at all. His constant method is to enumerate all possible views of a subject, and examine them one after the other, rejecting those which are untenable, and resting content with the remainder. In other words, he reaches his positive conclusions through a series of negative premises representing a process of gradual elimination. The *First Analytics* is itself an admirable instance of his favourite method. Every possible combination of terms is discussed, and the valid moods are sifted out from a much greater number of illegitimate syllogisms. The dialectic of Socrates and Plato followed the same procedure. It was essentially experimental—a method of trial, elimination, and selection. On going back still further, we find that when there is any reasoning at all in Homer, it is conducted after the same fashion. Hector, in his soliloquy before the Scaean Gate, imagines three alternative courses, together exhausting the possibilities of the situation. He may either retreat within the walls, or offer terms of peace to Achilles, or fight. The first two alternatives being rejected, nothing remains but the third. This is the most elaborate example ; but on many other occasions Homer's actors are represented as hesitating between two courses, and finally deciding on one of them.

Disjunction is, in truth, the primordial form of all reasoning, out of which the other forms are successively evolved ; and, as such, it is common to man with the lower animals. You are taking a walk in the country with your dog. You come to a stream and jump over it. On measuring the distance with his eye, the animal is afraid to follow you. After waiting a little, he first runs up stream in search of a crossing, and, finding none, returns to look for one in the opposite direction. Failing there also, he comes back once more, and either ventures on the leap or makes his way home by some other route. Now, on considering the matter a little more

closely, we shall find that hypothetical reasoning takes its rise from the examination of each separate alternative presented by a disjunctive premise. A plurality of courses being open to us, we consider what will ensue on the acceptance or rejection of each. The dog in our illustration thinks (after a canine fashion) that if he jumps he may fall in; if he does not, he will be left behind. Hector will not take refuge within the walls, because, if he does, Polydamas will triumph over him; nor will he offer terms of peace, because, if he does, Achilles will refuse them. Once more, categorical reasoning is developed out of hypothetical reasoning by the necessity of deducing consequences from a general rule. Hector must have argued from the known characters of Polydamas and Achilles, that in certain circumstances they would act after a certain manner. We may add, that this progress of conscious reasoning is a reproduction of the unconscious logic according to which life itself is evolved. All sorts of combinations are spontaneously produced, which, in consequence of the struggle for existence, cannot all survive. Those adapted to the conditions of life are selected, on trial, at the expense of the rest; and their adaptation or non-adaptation is determined in accordance with categorical laws. Furthermore, the framing of a disjunctive proposition necessitates the systematic distribution of possibilities under mutually exclusive heads, thus involving the logical processes of definition, division, and classification. Dialectic, as Plato understood it, consisted almost entirely in the joint performance of these operations;—a process which Aristotle regards as the immediate but very imperfect precursor of his own syllogistic method.<sup>1</sup> You cannot, he says, prove anything by dividing, for instance, all living things into the two classes, mortal and immortal; unless, indeed, you assume the very point under discussion—to which class a particular species belongs. Yet this is how he constantly reasons himself; and even demonstrative reason-

<sup>1</sup> *Anal. Pr.*, I., xxxi.; *Anal. Post.*, II., v.



ing, as he interprets it, implies the possession of a ready-made classification. For, according to him, it consists exclusively of propositions which predicate some essential attribute of a thing—in other words, some attribute already included in the definition of the subject; and a continuous series of such definitions can only be given by a fixed classification of things.

## VII.

We have endeavoured to show that Aristotle's account of the syllogism is redundant on the one side and defective on the other, both errors being due to a false analysis of the reasoning process itself, combined with a false metaphysical philosophy. The same evil influences tell with much greater effect on his theory of applied reasoning. Here the fundamental division, corresponding to that between heaven and earth in the cosmos, is between demonstration and dialectic or experimental reasoning. The one starts with first principles of unquestionable validity, the other with principles the validity of which is to be tested by their consequences. Stated in its most abstract form, the distinction is sound, and very nearly prefigures the modern division between deduction and induction, the process by which general laws are applied, and the process by which they are established. Aristotle, however, committed two great mistakes; he thought that each method corresponded to an entirely different order of phenomena: and he thought that both were concerned for the most part with definitions. The *Posterior Analytics*, which contains his theory of demonstration, answers to the astronomical portion of his physics; it is the doctrine of eternal and necessary truth. And just as his ontology distinguishes between the Prime Mover himself unmoved and the eternal movement produced by his influence, so also his logic distinguishes between infallible first principles and the truths derived from them, the latter being, in his opinion, of inferior

value. Now, according to Aristotle, these first principles are definitions, and it is to this fact that their self-evident certainty is due. At the same time they are not verbal but real definitions—that is to say, the universal forms of things in themselves as made manifest to the eye of reason, or rather, stamped upon it like the impression of a signet-ring on wax. And, by a further refinement, he seems to distinguish between the concept as a whole and the separate marks which make it up, these last being the ultimate elements of all existence, and as much beyond its complex forms as *Nous* is beyond reasoned truth.

Such a view was essentially unfavourable to the progress of science, assigning, as it did, a higher dignity to meagre and very questionable abstractions than to the far-reaching combinations by which alone we are enabled to unravel the inmost texture of visible phenomena. Instead of using reason to supplement sense, Aristotle turned it into a more subtle and universal kind of sense; and if this disastrous assimilation was to a certain extent imposed upon him by the traditions of Athenian thought, it harmonised admirably with the descriptive and superficial character of his own intelligence. Much was also due to the method of geometry, which in his time had already assumed the form made familiar to us by Euclid's *Elements*. The employment of axioms side by side with definitions, might, indeed, have drawn his attention to the existence and importance of judgments which, in Kantian terminology, are not analytic but synthetic—that is, which add to the content of a notion instead of simply analysing it. But although he mentions axioms, and states that mathematical theorems are deduced from them, no suspicion of their essential difference from definitions, or of the typical significance which they were destined to assume in the theory of reasoning, seems ever to have crossed his mind; otherwise he could hardly have failed to ask how we come by our knowledge of them, and to what they correspond in Nature. On the whole,

it seems likely that he looked on them as an analysis of our ideas, differing only from definition proper by the generality of its application; for he names the law of contradiction as the most important of all axioms, and that from which the others proceed;<sup>1</sup> next to it he places the law of excluded middle, which is also analytical; and his only other example is, that if equals be taken from equals the remainders are equal, a judgment the synthetic character of which is by no means clear, and has occasionally been disputed.<sup>2</sup>

We cannot, then, agree with those critics who attribute to Aristotle a recognition of such things as 'laws of nature,' in the sense of uniform co-existences and sequences.<sup>3</sup> Such an idea implies a certain balance and equality between subject and predicate which he would never have admitted. It would, in his own language, be making relation, instead of substance, the leading category. It must be remembered also that he did not acknowledge the existence of those constant conjunctions in Nature which we call laws. He did not admit that all matter was heavy, or that fluidity implied the presence of heat. The possession of constant properties, or rather of a single constant property—circular rotation—is reserved for the aether. Nor is this a common property of different and indefinitely multipliable phenomena; it characterises a single body, measurable in extent and unique in kind. Moreover,

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.*, IV., iii., *sub in.*

<sup>2</sup> *Anal. Post.*, I., x.

<sup>3</sup> 'Die Wissenschaft soll die Erscheinungen aus ihren Gründen erklären, welche näher in den allgemeinen Ursachen und Gesetzen zu suchen sind' (Zeller, p. 203). 'Induction is the method of proceeding from particular instances to general laws' (Wallace, p. 13). 'It seems to have been his [Aristotle's] idea that after gathering facts up to a certain point, a flash of intuition would supervene, telling us "This is a law"' (Grant, p. 68). *Apropos* of the discussion whence this last passage is extracted, we may observe that Sir A. Grant is quite mistaken in saying that Aristotle 'omits to provide for verification.' Aristotle is, on the contrary, most anxious to show that his theories agree with all the known facts. See in particular his memorable declaration (*De Gen. An.*, III., x., p. 760, b, 27), that facts are more to be trusted than reasonings.

The emphasis laid by Aristotle on concepts as distinguished from laws is noticed by J. H. v. Kirchmann, in his German translation of the *Metaphysics*, p. 13.

we have something better than indirect evidence on this point; we have the plain statement of Aristotle himself, that all science depends on first principles, about which it is impossible to be mistaken, precisely because they are universal abstractions not presented to the mind by any combination,<sup>1</sup>—a view quite inconsistent with the priority now given to general laws.

Answering to the first principles of demonstration in logic, if not absolutely identical with them, are what Aristotle calls causes in the nature of things. We have seen what an important part the middle term plays in Aristotle's theory of the syllogism. It is the vital principle of demonstration, the connecting link by which the two extreme terms are attached to one another. In the theory of applied logic, whose object is to bring the order of thought into complete parallelism with the order of things, the middle term through which a fact is demonstrated answers to the cause through which it exists. According to our notions, only two terms, antecedent and consequent, are involved in the idea of causation; and causation only becomes a matter for reasoning when we perceive that the sequence is repeated in a uniform manner. But Aristotle was very far from having reached, or even suspected, this point of view. A cause is with him not a determining antecedent, but a secret nexus by which the co-existence of two phenomena is explained. Instead of preceding it intercedes; and this is why he finds its subjective counterpart in the middle term of the syllogism. Some of his own examples will make the matter clearer. Why is the moon eclipsed? Because the earth intervenes between her and the sun. Why is the bright side of the moon always turned towards the sun? Because she shines by his reflected light (here light is the middle term). Why is that person talking to the rich man? Because he wants to borrow money of him. Why are those two men friends? Because they have the same enemy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *De An.*, III., vi., *sub in.*, taken together with *Anal. Post.*, I., vi.

<sup>2</sup> *Anal. Post.*, I., xxxiv.; II., ii.

Aristotle even goes so far as to eliminate the notion of sequence from causation altogether. He tells us that the causes of events are contemporary with the events themselves ; those of past events being past ; of present events, present ; and of future events, future. 'This thing will not be because that other thing has happened, for the middle term must be homogeneous with the extremes.'<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that such a limitation abolishes the power of scientific prediction, which, if not the only test of knowledge, is at any rate its most valuable verification. The Stagirite has been charged with trusting too much to deductive reasoning ; it now appears that, on the contrary, he had no conception of its most important function. Here, as everywhere, he follows not the synthetic method of the mathematician, but the analytic method of the naturalist. Finally, instead of combining the notions of cause and kind, he systematically confuses them. It will be remembered how his excellent division of causes into material, formal, efficient, and final, was rendered nugatory by the continued influence of Plato's ideas. The formal cause always tended to absorb the other three ; and it is by their complete assimilation that he attempts to harmonise the order of demonstration with the order of existence. For the formal cause of a phenomenon simply meant those properties which it shared with others of the same kind, and it was by virtue of those properties that it became a subject for general reasoning, which was interpreted as a methodical arrangement of concepts one within another, answering to the concentric disposition of the cosmic spheres.

Owing to the slight importance which Aristotle attaches to judgments as compared with concepts, he does not go very deeply into the question, how do we obtain our premises ? He says, in remarkably emphatic language, that all knowledge is acquired either by demonstration or by induction ; or rather, we may add, in the last resort by the latter only, since demon-

<sup>1</sup> *Anal. Post.*, II., xii., p. 95, a, 36.

stration rests on generals which are discovered inductively but his generals mean definitions and abstract predicates of subjects, rather than synthetic propositions. If, however, his attention had been called to the distinction, we cannot suppose that he would, on his own principles, have adopted conclusions essentially different from those of the modern experiential school. Mr. Wallace does, indeed, claim him as a supporter of the theory that no inference can be made from particulars to particulars without the aid of a general proposition, and a having refuted, by anticipation, Mill's assertion to the contrary. We quote the analysis which is supposed to prove this in Mr. Wallace's own words :—

We reason that because the war between Thebes and Phocis was a war between neighbours and an evil, therefore the war between Athens and Thebes, being also a war between neighbours, will in all probability be also an evil. Thus, out of the one parallel case—the war between Thebes and Phocis—we form the *general* proposition, All wars between neighbours are evils; to this we add the minor, the war between Athens and Thebes is a war between neighbours—and thence arrive at the conclusion that the war between Athens and Thebes will be likewise an evil.<sup>1</sup>

On the strength of this Mr. Wallace elsewhere observes :—

His [Aristotle's] theory of syllogism is simply an explicit statement of the fact that all knowledge, all thought, rests on universal truths or general propositions—that all knowledge, whether 'deductive' or 'inductive,' is arrived at by the aid, the indispensable aid, of general propositions. We in England have been almost charmed into the belief that reasoning is perpetually from particular to particular, and a 'village matron' and her 'Lucy' have been used to express the truth for us in the concrete form adapted to our weaker comprehension (Mill's *Logic*, bk. ii. ch. 3). We shall next be told forsooth, that oxygen and hydrogen do not enter into the composition of water, because our village matron 'perpetually' drinks it without 'passing through' either element, and the analysis of the chemist will be proved as great a fiction as the analysis of the logician. Aristotle has supplied the links which at once upset all such superficial

<sup>1</sup> Wallace's *Outlines*, p. 14.

analysis. He has shown that even in analogy or example, which *apparently* proceeds in this way from one particular instance to another particular instance, we are only justified in so proceeding in so far as we have transformed the particular instance into a general proposition.<sup>1</sup>

Now, there is this great difference between Aristotle and Mill, that the former is only showing how reasoning from examples can be set forth in syllogistic form, while the latter is investigating the psychological process which underlies all reasoning, and the real foundation on which a valid inference rests—questions which had never presented themselves clearly to the mind of the Greek philosopher at all. Mill argues, in the first instance, that when any particular proposition is deduced from a general proposition, it is proved by the same evidence as that on which the general itself rests, namely, on other particulars ; and, so far, he is in perfect agreement with Aristotle. He then argues that inferences from particulars to particulars are perpetually made without passing through a general proposition : and, to illustrate his meaning, he quotes the example of a ‘village matron and her Lucy,’ to which Mr. Wallace refers with a very gratuitous sneer.<sup>2</sup>

However, as we have seen, he is not above turning it against Mill. The drift of his own illustration is not very clear, but we suppose it implies that the matron unconsciously frames the general proposition : My remedy is good for all children suffering from the same disease as Lucy ; and with equal unconsciousness reasons down from this to the case of her neighbour’s child. Now, it is quite unjustifiable to call Mill’s analysis superficial because it leaves out of account a hypothesis incompatible with the nominalism which Mill professed. It is still more unjustifiable to quote against it

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface, pp. viii.-ix.

<sup>2</sup> As if Mill wrote exclusively for Oxford tutors, and as if other philosophers had not constantly elucidated their arguments by concrete examples. One does not see why the village matron should be more deserving of contempt than Aristotle’s Thebans and Phocians.

the authority of a philosopher who perfectly agreed with those who disbelieve in the possibility of unconscious knowledge,<sup>1</sup> and contemptuously rejected Plato's opinion to the contrary. Nor is this all. The doctrine that reasoning is from particulars to particulars, even when it passes through general propositions, may be rigorously deduced from Aristotle's own admissions. If nothing exists but particulars, and if knowledge is of what exists, then all knowledge is of particulars. Therefore, if the propositions entering into a chain of reasoning are knowledge, they must deal with particulars exclusively. And, quite apart from the later developments of Aristotle's philosophy, we have his express assertion, that all generals are derived from particulars, which is absolutely incompatible with the alleged fact, that 'all knowledge, all thought, rests on universal truths, on general propositions; that all knowledge, whether "deductive" or "inductive," is arrived at by the aid, the indispensable aid, of general propositions.' To Aristotle the basis of knowledge was not 'truths' of any kind, but concepts; and in the last chapter of the *Posterior Analytics* he has explained how these concepts are derived from sense-perceptions without the aid of any 'propositions' whatever.

We are here confronted with an important and much disputed question, Was Aristotle an empiricist? We hold most decidedly that he was, if by empiricist is meant, what alone should be meant—one who believes that the mind neither anticipates anything in the content, nor contributes anything to the form of experience; in other words, who believes knowledge to be the agreement of thought with things imposed by things on thought. We have already shown, when discussing Sir A. Grant's view to the contrary, that Aristotle was in no sense a transcendental idealist. The other half of our position is proved by the chapter in the *Posterior Analytics* already referred to, the language of which is *primâ facie* so much in favour of our view that the burden of proof

<sup>1</sup> That is, knowledge which has never been actualised.



rests on those who give it another interpretation. Among these, the latest with whom we are acquainted is Zeller. The eminent German historian, after asserting in former editions of his work that Aristotle derived his first principles from the self-contemplation of the *Nous*, has now, probably in deference to the unanswerable arguments of Kampe, abandoned this position. He still, however, assumes the existence of a rather indefinable *à priori* element in the Aristotelian noology, on the strength of the following considerations:—In the first place, according to Aristotle, even sense-perception is not a purely passive process, and therefore intellectual cognition can still less be so (p. 190). But the passages quoted only amount to this, that the passivity of a thing which is raised from possibility to actuality differs from the passivity implied in the destruction of its proper nature; and that the objects of abstract thought come from within, not from without, in the sense that they are presented by the imagination to the reason. The pure empiricist need not deny either position. He would freely admit that to lose one's reason through drunkenness or disease is a quite different sort of operation from being impressed with a new truth; and he would also admit that we generalise not directly from outward experience, but from that highly-abridged and representative experience which memory supplies. Neither process, however, constitutes an anticipation of outward experience or an addition to it. It is from the materialist, not from the empiricist, that Aristotle differs. He believes that the forms under which matter appears are separable from every particular portion of matter, though not from all matter, in the external world; and he believes that a complete separation between them is effected in the single instance of self-conscious reason, which again, in cognising any particular thing is identified with that thing *minus* its matter. Zeller's next argument is that the cognition of ideas by the *Nous* is immediate, whereas the process of generalisation from experience described by Aristotle

is extremely indirect. Here Zeller seems to misunderstand the word *ἀμεσος*. Aristotle never applies it to knowledge, but only to the objective relations of ideas with one another. Two terms constitute an 'immediate' premise when they are not connected by another term, quite irrespective of the steps by which we come to recognise their conjunction. So with the terms themselves. They are 'immediate' when they cannot be derived from any ulterior principle; when, in short, they are simple and uncaused. Finally, the objection that first principles, being the most certain and necessary of any, cannot be derived from sensible experience, which, dealing only with material objects, must inherit the uncertainty and contingency of matter,—is an objection, not to the empiricist interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy, but to empiricism itself; and it is not allowable to explain away the plain words of an ancient writer in order to reconcile them with assumptions which he nowhere admits. That universality and necessity involve an *à priori* cognition or an intellectual intuition, is a modern theory unsupported by a single sentence in Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> We quite agree with Zeller when he goes on to say that in Aristotle's psychology 'certain thoughts and notions arise through the action of the object thought about on the thinking mind, just as perception arises through the action of the perceived object on the percipient' (p. 195); but how this differs from the purest empiricism is more than we are able to understand.

It is remarkable that Aristotle, after repeatedly speaking of induction as an ascent from particulars to generals, when he comes to trace the process by which we arrive at the most general notions of any, does not admit the possibility of such a movement in one direction only. The universal and the individual are, according to him, combined in our most elementary sense-impressions, and the business of scientific

<sup>1</sup> It is a mistake to translate *νόησις*, as the Germans do, by *Anschauung*. The *Nous* does not intuit ideas, but is converted into and consists of them.

experience is to separate them. Starting from a middle point, we work up to indivisible predicates on the one hand and down to indivisible subjects on the other, the final apprehension of both extremes being the office, not of science, but of Nous. This theory is equally true and acute. The perception of individual facts is just as difficult and just as slowly acquired as the conception of ultimate abstractions. Moreover, the two processes are carried on *pari passu*, each being only made possible by and through the other. No true notion can be framed without a firm grasp of the particulars from which it is abstracted; no individual object can be studied without analysing it into a group of common predicates, the idiosyncrasy of which—that is, their special combination—differentiates it from every other object. What, however, we wish to remark is the illustration incidentally afforded by this striking aperçu of Aristotle's analytical method, which is also the essentially Greek method of thought. We saw that, for our philosopher, syllogism was not the subsumption of a particular case under a general law, but the interpolation of a mean between two extremes; we now see that his induction is not the finding of a law for the particular phenomenon, but its analysis into two elements—one universal and the other individual—a solution of the mean into the extremes. And the distinctive originality of his whole system was to fix two such extremes for the universe—a self-thinking thought in absolute self-identity at one end of the scale, and an absolutely indeterminate matter at the other; by combining which in various proportions he then re-constructed the whole intermediate phenomenal reality. In studying each particular class of facts, he follows the same method. The genus is marked by some characteristic attribute which one species—the prerogative species, so to speak—exhibits in its greatest purity, while the others form a graduated scale by variously combining this attribute with its opposite or privation. Hence his theory, since revived by Goethe, that

the colours are so many different mixtures of light and darkness.

It has, until lately, been customary to speak as if all that Aristotle knew about induction was contained in a few scattered passages where it is mentioned under that name in the *Analytiks*. This, no doubt, is true, if by induction we mean simple generalisation. But if we understand by it the philosophy of experimental evidence—the analysis of those means by which, in the absence of direct observation, we decide between two conflicting hypotheses—then the *Topics* must be pronounced as good a discussion on the subject as was compatible with his general theory of knowledge. For he supposes that there are large classes of phenomena, including, among other things, the whole range of human life, which, not being bound by any fixed order, lie outside the scope of scientific demonstration, although capable of being determined with various degrees of probability; and here also what he has in view is not the discovery of laws, but the construction of definitions. These being a matter of opinion, could always be attacked as well as maintained. Thus the constant conflict and balancing of opposite forces, which we have learned to associate with the sublunary sphere, has its logical representative no less than the kindred ideas of uncertainty and vicissitude. And, in connexion with this side of applied logic, Aristotle has also to consider the requirements of those who took part in the public debates on disputed questions, then very common among educated Athenians, and frequently turning on verbal definitions. Hence, while we find many varieties of reasoning suggested, such as Reasoning by Analogy, Disjunctive Reasoning, Hypothetical Reasoning (though without a generalised expression for all its varieties), and, what is most remarkable, three out of Mill's four Experimental Methods,<sup>1</sup> we do not find that any interesting or

<sup>1</sup> For Analogy, see *Top.*, II., x., *sub in.*; Disjunction, II., vi., *sub in.*; Hypothetical Reasoning, II., x., p. 115, a 15; Method of Differences, II.,

useful application is made of them. Even considered as a handbook for debaters, the *Topics* is not successful. With the practical incompetence of a mere naturalist, Aristotle has supplied heads for arguments in such profusion and such utter carelessness of their relative importance that no memory could sustain the burden, except in the probably rare instances when a lifetime was devoted to their study.

### VIII.

We have now concluded our survey of the first great mental antithesis, that between reason on the one hand, and sense and opinion on the other. The next antithesis, that between reason and passion, will occupy us a much shorter time. With it we pass from theory to practice, from metaphysics and logic to moral philosophy. But, as we saw in the preceding chapter, Aristotle is not a practical genius; for him the supreme interest of life is still the acquisition of knowledge. Theorising activity corresponds to the celestial world, in which there can be neither opposition nor excess; while passion corresponds to the sublunary sphere, where order is only preserved by the balancing of antithetical forces; and the moderating influence of reason, to the control exercised by the higher over the lower system.

The passions themselves, and the means by which they can be either excited or controlled, are described in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* with wonderful knowledge of human nature in the abstract, but with almost no reference to the art for whose purposes the information is ostensibly systematised; while in the *Ethics* they are studied, so to speak, statically, in their condition of permanent equilibration or disequilibration; the virtues and vices being represented as so many different

xi., *sub in.*; Method of Residues, VI., xi., *sub in.*; Concomitant Variations, II., x., p. 114, b, 37; V., viii., *sub in.*; VI., vii., *sub in.* The Method of Agreement occurs *An. Prior.*, II., xxvii., *sub fin.*; and *An. Post.*, II., xiii., p. 97, b, 7.

aspects of those conditions. It is obvious that such an extremely artificial parallelism could not be carried out without a considerable strain and distortion of the facts involved. The only virtue that can, with truth, be described as a form of moderation is temperance; and even in temperance this is accidental rather than essential. Elsewhere Aristotle deduces the extremes from the mean rather than the mean from the extremes; and sometimes one of the extremes is invented for the occasion. To fit justice, confessedly the most important virtue, into such a scheme, was obviously impracticable without reinterpreting the idea of moderation. Instead of an equilibrium between opposing impulses in the same person, we have equality in the treatment of different persons; which again resolves itself into giving them their own, without any definite determination of what their own may be.<sup>1</sup> It cannot even be said that Aristotle represented either the best ethical thought of his own age, or an indispensable stage in the evolution of all thought. The extreme insufficiency of his ethical theory is due to the fancied necessity of squaring it with the requirements of his cosmological system. For no sooner does he place himself at the popular point of view than he deduces the particular virtues from regard to the welfare of others, and treats them all as so many different forms of justice.<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle has sometimes been represented as an advocate of free-will against necessity. But the question had not really been opened in his time. He rejected fatalism; but it had not occurred to him that internal motives might exercise a constraining power over action. Nor has his freedom anything to do with the self-assertion of mind, its extrication from the chain of physical antecedents. It is simply the element of

<sup>1</sup> It may possibly be urged that the fifth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is of doubtful authenticity. Still the dilemma remains that Aristotle either omitted the most important of all moral questions from his ethics, or that he treated it in a miserably inadequate manner.

<sup>2</sup> *Eth. Nic.*, V., iii.; *Rhet.*, I., vi., p. 1362, b, 28; ix., p. 1366, b, 4.

arbitrariness and uncertainty supposed to characterise the region of change and opposition, as distinguished from the higher region of undeviating regularity.

It is only in this higher region that perfect virtue can be realised. The maintenance of a settled balance between rival solicitations, or between the excess and defect of those impulses which lead us to seek pleasure and avoid pain, is good indeed, but neither the only nor the chief good. The law of moderation does not extend to that supremely happy life which is related to our emotional existence as the aether to the terrestrial elements, as soul to body, as reason to sense, as science to opinion. Here it is the steady subordination of means to ends which imitates the insphering of the heavenly orbs, the hierarchy of psychic faculties, and the chain of syllogistic arguments. Of theoretic activity we cannot have too much, and all other activities, whether public or private, should be regarded as so much machinery for ensuring its peaceful prosecution. Wisdom and temperance had been absolutely identified by Socrates; they are as absolutely held apart by Aristotle. And what we have had occasion to observe in the other departments of thought is verified here once more. The method of analysis and opposition, apparently so prudent, proved, in the end, unfruitful. Notwithstanding his paradoxes, Socrates was substantially right. The moral regeneration of the world was destined to be brought about, not by Dorian discipline, but by free Athenian thought, working on practical conceptions—by the discovery of new moral truth, or rather by the dialectic development of old truth. And, conversely, the highest development of theoretic activity was not attained by isolating it in egoistic self-contemplation from the world of human needs, but by consecrating it to their service, informing it with their vitality, and subjecting it, in common with them, to that law of moderation from which no energy, however godlike, is exempt.

The final antithesis of conscious life is that between the

individual and the state. In this sense, Aristotle's *Politics* is the completion of his *Ethics*. It is only in a well-ordered community that moral habits can be acquired; and it is only in such a community that the best or intellectual life can be attained, although, properly speaking, it is not a social life. Nevertheless, the *Politics*, like every other portion of Aristotle's system, reproduces within itself the elements of an independent whole. To understand its internal organisation, we must begin by disregarding Aristotle's abortive classification (chiefly adapted from Plato) of constitutions into three legitimate—Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Republic; and three illegitimate—Democracy, Oligarchy, and Tyranny. Aristotle distinguishes them by saying that the legitimate forms are governed with a view to the general good; the illegitimate with a view to the interests of particular classes or persons. But, in point of fact, as Zeller shows,<sup>1</sup> he cannot keep up this distinction; and we shall better understand his true idea by substituting for it another—that between the intellectual and the material state. The object of the one is to secure the highest culture for a ruling caste, who are to abstain from industrial occupations, and to be supported by the labour of a dependent population. Such a government may be either monarchical or aristocratic; but it must necessarily be in the hands of a few. The object of the other is to maintain a stable equilibrium between the opposing interests of rich and poor—two classes practically distinguished as the few and the many. This end is best attained where supreme power belongs to the middle class. The deviations are represented by oligarchy and tyranny on the one side, and by extreme democracy on the other. Where such constitutions exist, the best mode of preserving them is to moderate their characteristic excess by borrowing certain institutions from the opposite form of government, or by modifying their own institutions in a conciliatory sense.

<sup>1</sup> P. 753.



In the last chapter we dealt at length with the theories of art, and especially of tragic poetry, propounded in Aristotle's *Poetics*. For the sake of formal completeness, it may be mentioned here that those theories are adapted to the general scheme of his systematic philosophy. The plot or plan of a work answers to the formal or rational element in Nature, and this is why Aristotle so immensely over-estimates its importance. And, just as in his moral philosophy, the ethical element, represented by character-drawing, is strictly subordinated to it. The centre of equilibrium is, however, not supplied by virtue, but by exact imitation of Nature, so that the characters must not deviate very far from mediocrity in the direction either of heroism or of wickedness.

## IX.

Notwithstanding the radical error of Aristotle's philosophy—the false abstraction and isolation of the intellectual from the material sphere in Nature and in human life—it may furnish a useful corrective to the much falser philosophy insinuated, if not inculcated, by some moralists of our own age and country. Taken altogether, the teaching of these writers seems to be that the industry which addresses itself to the satisfaction of our material wants is much more meritorious than the artistic work which gives us direct aesthetic enjoyment, or the literary work which stimulates and gratifies our intellectual cravings; while within the artistic sphere fidelity of portraiture is preferred to the creation of ideal beauty; and within the intellectual sphere, mere observation of facts is set above the theorising power by which facts are unified and explained. Some of the school to whom we allude are great enemies of materialism; but teaching like theirs is materialism of the worst description. Consistently carried

out, it would first reduce Europe to the level of China, and then reduce the whole human race to the level of bees or beavers. They forget that when we were all comfortably clothed, housed, and fed, our true lives would have only just begun. The choice would then remain between some new refinement of animal appetite and the theorising activity which, according to Aristotle, is the absolute end, every other activity being only a means for its attainment. There is not, indeed, such a fundamental distinction as he supposed, for activities of every order are connected by a continual reciprocity of services; but this only amounts to saying that the highest knowledge is a means to every other end no less than an end in itself. Aristotle is also fully justified in urging the necessity of leisure as a condition of intellectual progress. We may add that it is a leisure which is amply earned, for without it industrial production could not be maintained at its present height. Nor should the same standard of perfection be imposed on spiritual as on material labour. The latter could not be carried on at all unless success, and not failure, were the rule. It is otherwise in the ideal sphere. There the proportions are necessarily reversed. We must be content if out of a thousand guesses and trials one should contribute something to the immortal heritage of truth. Yet we may hope that this will not always be so, that the great discoveries and creations wrought out through the waste of innumerable lives are not only the expiation of all error and suffering in the past, but are also the pledge of a future when such sacrifices shall no longer be required.

The two elements of error and achievement are so intimately blended and mutually conditioned in the philosophy which we have been reviewing, that to decide on their respective importance is impossible without first deciding on a still larger question—the value of systematic thought as such, and apart from its actual content. For Aristotle was perhaps the greatest master of systematisation that ever lived. The

framework and language of science are still, to a great extent, what he made them ; and it remains to be seen whether they will ever be completely remodelled. Yet even this gift has not been an unmixed benefit, for it was long used in the service of false doctrines, and it still induces critics to read into the Aristotelian forms truths which they do not really contain. Let us conclude by observing that of all the ancients, or even of all thinkers before the eighteenth century, there is none to whom the methods and results of modern science could so easily be explained. While finding that they reversed his own most cherished convictions on every point, he would still be prepared by his logical studies to appreciate the evidence on which they rest, and by his ardent love of truth to accept them without reserve. Most of all would he welcome our astronomy and our biology with wonder and delight, while viewing the development of modern machinery with much more qualified admiration, and the progress of democracy perhaps with suspicious fear. He who thought that the mind and body of an artisan were alike debased by the exercise of some simple handicraft under the pure bright sky of Greece, what would he have said to the effect wrought on human beings by the noisome, grinding, sunless, soulless drudgery of our factories and mines ! How profoundly unfitted would he have deemed its victims to influence those political issues with which the interests of science are every day becoming more vitally connected ! Yet slowly, perhaps, and unwillingly, he might be brought to perceive that our industry has been the indispensable basis of our knowledge, as supplying both the material means and the moral ends of its cultivation. He might also learn that there is an even closer relationship between the two : that while the supporters of privilege are leagued for the maintenance of superstition, the workers, and those who advocate their claims to political equality, are leagued for its restraint and overthrow. And if

he still shrank back from the heat and smoke and turmoil amid which the genius of our age stands, like another Heraclitus, in feverish excitement, by the steam-furnace whence its powers of revolutionary transmutation are derived, we too might reapply the words of the old Ephesian prophet, bidding him enter boldly, for here also there are gods.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.











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