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THE RELIGION OF PLUTARCH

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# THE RELIGION OF PLUTARCH

*A PAGAN CREED OF APOSTOLIC TIMES*

AN ESSAY

BY

JOHN OAKESMITH, D.LITT., M.A.

Διὸ καὶ φιλόμυθος ὁ φιλόσοφος πῶς ἐστιν.

ARIST., *Meta.*, i. 2.

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1902

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE following pages are practically a reprint of a volume which was issued for private circulation some twelve months ago, under the title "The Religion of Plutarch as expounded in his 'Ethics.'" The main difference between the present volume and its predecessor consists in the translation or removal of various quotations from Greek and Latin sources which were given in full in the first edition of the book. The references to these sources have, of course, been retained. Verbal corrections have been made here and there, and a few pages of new matter have been introduced into the "Preface." In other respects the two impressions are substantially the same.

I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without expressing my gratitude to J. E. Sandys, Esq., Litt.D., Public Orator in the University of Cambridge, and Examiner in Greek at the University of London, who kindly placed at my disposal his own copy of the original essay, in which he had made numerous suggestions on points of style, and on questions of

scholarship in general. These suggestions have, for the most part, been adopted in the preparation of the present edition. My thanks are also owing to my colleagues in the Civil Service, especially to those in the General Post Office, London, to whose encouragement it is largely due that this essay, in its present form, is able to see the light.

As the *Athenæum*, in reviewing the original edition (*Athenæum*, 2nd of August, 1902), suggested that "the present essay is probably the forerunner of a larger and more elaborate book," it may be desirable to explain that the following pages do not constitute "the larger and more elaborate book" which the *Athenæum* is right in forecasting.

JOHN OAKESMITH.

## P R E F A C E

WHEN the student of Plutarch leaves the familiar ground of the "Parallel Lives," and turns, for the first time, to the less thoroughly explored region of the "Ethics," he is struck with wonder at the many-sided excellence of the writer whose special gift he has been accustomed to regard as consisting in the composition of biographies more remarkable for the presentation of moral truths than for the accurate narration of historical facts. He learns with surprise that Plutarch has bequeathed to posterity a mine of information respecting the period in which he himself lived, as valuable and as interesting as the view presented in his "Lives" of that higher antiquity in which his classic heroes moved and worked. Even the actual bulk of Plutarch's contribution to what may be called "general literature" is noteworthy. Apart from the "Lives," the so-called "Catalogue of Lamprias" contains the titles of nearly two hundred works attributed, ostensibly by his son, to Plutarch,<sup>1</sup> and some fourscore of these have been handed down

<sup>1</sup> See the Heading of the Lamprian Catalogue: BERNARDAKIS, vol. vii. p. 473.

to our time under the general, but somewhat misleading, title of "Ethica" or "Moralia."

Among these surviving essays are to be found contributions, of a surprising vitality and freshness, to the discussion of Education, Politics, Art, Literature, Music, Hygiene; serious and studied criticisms and appreciations of the great philosophic schools of Greece and their founders; short sermons on minor morals, illustrated by vivid sketches of character both typical and individual; conversations on Love and Marriage, and on other topics perpetually interesting to civilized societies. The longest work of all, the "Symposiacs," or "Table Talk," besides containing a wealth of material used by Plutarch and his friends in the discussion of current problems of scientific, literary, and social interest, gives a picture of Græco-Roman Society in the first Christian century, which, both from its general character and from the multitude of details it contains on matters of fact, is of the utmost importance for the accurate study of the period and its complicated problems. All these various works are interpenetrated with the character of the writer to such a vivid degree of personality that their study, from this point of view alone, would probably cast more light upon Plutarch's methods as a writer of history than innumerable minute and difficult inquiries into his "sources," and the manner in which he used them in writing his "Lives."

Fascinating, however, as is the study of the "Ethics" in these various aspects, it soon becomes evident that the point of paramount importance for a proper

appreciation of Plutarch's attitude towards life and its problems in general, is to be found in the position which he assumed in face of the religious questions which perplexed the thinking men of his time and country. What was Plutarch's view of that ancient and hereditary faith which was not only the official creed of the Empire, but which was still accepted as a sufficient spiritual satisfaction by many millions of the Empire's subjects? Was it possible that a man so steeped in the best literature, so keen a student of the greatest philosophies, could be a believer, to any serious extent, in those traditions which appear so crude and impossible in the light of our higher modern ideals? And if he could think them worthy of credit, by what method of interpretation was this consummation facilitated? How could he persuade himself and others to find in them at once the sanction and the inspiration of virtuous conduct? These are some of the questions which are constantly before the mind of the reader as he turns the pages of the "Ethics," and they are constantly before the mind of the reader because the author is constantly supplying materials for answering them. The most important of Plutarch's general writings are devoted to the full discussion, from a variety of standpoints, of religious questions, not only those handed down by the popular tradition, or embodied in ceremonial observances and legalized worships, but also those more purely theological conceptions presented in the various systems of Greek Philosophy. Around Plutarch's Religion revolves his conception of life; his numerous contributions to the

discussion of other subjects of human interest unfold their full significance only when regarded in the light supplied by a knowledge of his religious beliefs.

Such, at any rate, is the experience of the present writer after a close study of the "Ethics" during several years; and it is with the hope of contributing in some degree to the clearer appreciation of Plutarch's manifold activities in other directions, that an investigation into his religious views has been made the special object of the following pages.

The text which has been used for the purposes of this essay is that issued at intervals between the years 1888 and 1896 by Mr. G. N. Bernardakis, the director of the Gymnasium at Mytilene.<sup>1</sup> The editor has postponed, for discussion in a subsequent work, many questions bearing upon the authority of his MSS., and the principles which he has applied to them in the choice of his readings; his efforts in the *editio minor* having been almost wholly confined to presenting the results of his labours in the shape of a complete and coherent text. Although, as Dr. Holden has said, "until the appearance of the promised *editio major* it is premature to pronounce an opinion on the editor's qualifications as a textual critic,"<sup>2</sup> yet Mr. Bernardakis has exhibited so much combined accuracy and acumen in the preliminary discussion of various questions connected with his collation of MSS., and has disposed so completely, as Dr. Holden admits, of the charges

<sup>1</sup> PLUTARCHI CHÆRONENSIS *Moralia* recognovit GREGORIUS N. BERNARDAKIS (Leipzig. Teubner. 7 vols. and Appendix).

<sup>2</sup> *Classical Review*, vol. iv. (1890), p. 306.



of inaccuracy brought against him by Professor von Wilanowitz-Moellendorff of Berlin,<sup>1</sup> that the more general student of Classical Literature may, perhaps, feel some amount of confidence that in this edition he sees the actual work of Plutarch himself, and not the ingenious and daring conjectures of some too brilliant critic. This feeling of confidence will not be diminished by the evident anxiety displayed by Mr. W. R. Paton, an English scholar working in the same field, "to induce Mr. Bernardakis to assist and correct" him in editing a text of the "*De Cupiditate Divitiarum*,"<sup>2</sup> and it will be increased by the discovery that, greatly different as the text of Bernardakis is from that of any other previous edition, the difference frequently consists in the substitution of plain sense for undiluted absurdity, or total want of meaning.

Indebtedness to other sources of criticism and information is, the writer hopes, fully acknowledged in the footnotes as occasion arises. There has yet been published no work in English dealing with Plutarch's "Ethics" at all similar in scope and character either to Volkmann's "*Leben, Schriften und Philosophie des Plutarch von Chæroneæ*,"<sup>3</sup> or to Gréard's "*La Morale de Plutarque*."<sup>4</sup> Archbishop Trench, who speaks

<sup>1</sup> (Then of Goettingen.) See the *Prefatio* to BERNARDAKIS' Second Volume.

<sup>2</sup> The Treatise of PLUTARCH, *De Cupiditate Divitiarum*, edited by W. R. PATON. (David Nutt. 1896.) We have also consulted Mr. Paton's *Plutarchi Pythici Dialogi tres* (Berlin, 1893). (An emendation of Mr. Paton's is noted *infra*, p. 90.)

<sup>3</sup> *Leben, Schriften und Philosophie des Plutarch von Chæroneæ*, von R. VOLKMANN (Berlin, 1869).

<sup>4</sup> *De la Morale de Plutarque*, par OCTAVE GRÉARD (Paris, 1866).

slightingly of Gréard's interesting study, has himself contributed one or two "Lectures" to some general observations on this sphere of Plutarch's activity,<sup>1</sup> while the Rev. J. P. Mahaffy has given two chapters to the subject in his "Greek World under Roman Sway."<sup>2</sup> Chap. xiii., which is headed "Plutarch and His Times—Public Life," is devoted partly to Apuleius, and partly to Plutarch himself, and exhibits, in continuous form, a number of that author's best-known and most frequently quoted statements and opinions on the subjects of Politics and Religion, some ten pages being set apart for the presentation and criticism of his views on the latter topic. Chap. xiv. is entitled "Plutarch and His Times—Private Life," and intersperses with comments a number of extracts from the evidence furnished by Plutarch on various matters appertaining to the social and domestic life of his epoch, giving the gist of passages selected from the "Table Talk," from various essays on Education, and from several tracts on Minor Morals and other themes of general interest.

Although Professor Mahaffy's prolonged and extensive researches into every available sphere of Greek life and thought occasionally enable him to help out his author's descriptions by aptly chosen illustrations from other sources, yet, in dealing with a writer at once so voluminous and so full of interest as Plutarch, the

<sup>1</sup> *Plutarch, his Life, his Parallel Lives, and his Morals.* Five Lectures by RICHARD CHENEVIX TRENCH, D.D., &c. (London, 1873).

<sup>2</sup> *The Greek World under Roman Sway, from Polybius to Plutarch.* by J. P. MAHAFFY, D.D., &c. (London, 1890).

historian is hampered by the necessary limits of his appointed task, no less than by his own diffusive and gossiping style. Mr. Mahaffy's *Clio* has always appeared to us in the light of an amiable and cultured hostess presiding at Afternoon Tea, gliding graciously hither and thither among her guests, and introducing topics of conversation which have only a superficial interest, or which she presents only in their superficial aspects; while, perhaps unconsciously, conveying the impression that she reserves for discussion among a few chosen intimates the more profound and sacred issues of human life. These two chapters on Plutarch furnish an excellent example of Professor Mahaffy's method. They are entertaining in the sense that all well-conducted gossip is entertaining. A trait of character is chosen here; a smart saying, or a foolish one, is selected there; a piquant anecdote is retold elsewhere: but the searchlight is never stationary, and the earnest student who trusts solely to its assistance will vainly attempt to see Plutarch steadily and see him whole.

It is, of course, the fact, as already suggested, that, in these chapters, Professor Mahaffy is dealing with Plutarch only so far as he furnishes material illustrative of the conception which the historian has formed as to the character of the age in which his subject lived. This fact is conspicuously evident in the brief account of Plutarch's Religion given in the ten pages from page 311 onwards, where Professor Mahaffy accepts the belief of so many of his predecessors, that the age was an age of religious decadence, and not an age of

religious revival; and that, moreover, it was blame-worthy in Plutarch that "he never took pains to understand" Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Further, it must be added, that the historian's natural desire to illustrate Plutarch's times, rather than to display Plutarch himself, has led him to commit serious injustice by his uncritical acceptance of certain spurious tracts as the genuine workmanship of Plutarch.

The conclusion at which Professor Mahaffy arrives, that Plutarch was "a narrow and bigoted Hellenic,"<sup>2</sup> is intelligible enough to those who accept the view which we have endeavoured to combat in Chapter III. of the following essay, a view which is simply a belated survival of the ancient prejudice which consigns to eternal perdition the followers of other Religions, because they are wilfully blind to the light with which our own special Belief has been blessed in such splendour. But the man who, after even the most casual study of Plutarch's utterances on Religion, can seriously describe him as "narrow and bigoted" will maintain, with equal serenity, that it is the practice of the sun to shine at midnight. Professor Mahaffy, indeed, in using such expressions, is at variance with his own better judgment, inasmuch as he elsewhere concedes that, "had Plutarch been at Athens when St. Paul came there, he would have been the first to give the Apostle a respectful hearing."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MAHAFFY, p. 321. How Plutarch could possibly have "*taken pains to understand*" Christianity when, in Professor Mahaffy's own words (p. 349), he "*seems never to have heard of it,*" we must leave it to Professor Mahaffy to explain.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 321.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 349.

The subject of Plutarch's "Moralia" has also been touched in a few contributions to the current Literature of the Reviews. The article on "Plutarch" appearing over Paley's initials in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," and giving a brief statement of the subjects dealt with in the different tracts in the "Moralia," almost entirely exhausts the short list of English literary contributions to the treatment of this portion of Plutarch's work. Paley declared in the article in question that the "Moralia" were "practically almost unknown to most persons in Britain, even to those who call themselves scholars." This sweeping assertion is not by any means true to-day, although it is still the case that, so far as the literary presentment of results is concerned, the "Ethics" of Plutarch are a neglected field of research.

Volkman, in the "Leben und Schriften" part of his work, carefully discusses the authenticity of each tract in the generally recognized list of Plutarch's writings, while in the volume dealing with the "Philosophie" he gives an exhaustive analysis of the greater portion of them. Recognizing that Plutarch had no special philosophical system of his own, Volkman endeavours to remedy this deficiency by the application of a systematic method of treatment with regular branches of "synthetic" and "analytic" investigation. The "synthetic" branch of Volkman's method is devoted to a discussion of Plutarch's philosophic standpoint; to an examination of his polemic against the Stoics and Epicureans; and to the consideration of his relation to Plato, which Volkman

regards as the foundation of Plutarch's Philosophy. The function of Volkmann's "analytic" method is to discover how, on the philosophic basis thus laid down by the "synthetic" method, Plutarch arranges his positive conclusions in a coherent relationship with his negative polemic. It is, according to Volkmann, a natural result of the successful operation of this twofold system, that the circumstances of Plutarch's life lose their external character, and attain to an essential connexion with his philosophical conceptions. This last assertion is made by way of criticism directed against Gréard's "natural and simple" method of arranging Plutarch's philosophical utterances under headings descriptive of the various spheres of life to which they seem appropriate—"la vie domestique," "la cité," "le temple," &c. Volkmann thinks that under this arrangement the sense of internal unity is lost; that Plutarch's views are presented in it as goodnatured and benevolent, but somewhat rambling, reflections on the separate aspects of human life, instead of being treated as the outcome of a consistent philosophy taking ethical phenomena into systematic consideration.<sup>1</sup> This criticism has considerable force, though it does not detract from the truth and charm of M. Gréard's book. Volkmann himself undoubtedly errs in the opposite direction. Gréard was quite justified in retorting on his critic, "*Il arrive même qu'en voulant établir trop rationnellement la philosophie de Plutarque, M. Volkmann se trouve conduit à lui prêter une sorte de système, bien qu'il sache comme personne que*

<sup>1</sup> VOLKMANN, vol. ii. cap. 1.

*nul moins que le sage de Chéronée n'a porté dans ses écrits une pensée systématique.*"<sup>1</sup> Volkman, in our opinion, attaches far too much importance both to Plutarch's discipular relation to Plato, and to his polemic against the Stoics and Epicureans. Plutarch's opposition to Plato is frequently as strongly marked as his opposition to Stoics and Epicureans; and his indebtedness to Stoics and Epicureans is frequently as strongly marked as his indebtedness to Plato.

Volkman's work had been preceded in 1854 by an interesting and well-written Thesis, entitled "*De Apologetica Plutarchi Chæronensis Theologia.*"<sup>2</sup> The author, C. G. Seibert, gives a brief review of Greek Philosophy, with the object of showing the attitude assumed by each of the great schools to the gods of the national tradition. He demonstrates conclusively, and Volkman follows in his steps, that Plutarch owed something to all the Schools, to Stoics, to Peripatetics, and to Epicureans. Yet he, too, insists that Plutarch's attitude towards the popular religion was identical with that assumed by Plato—*eadem ratione (qua Plato)*

<sup>1</sup> GRÉARD, Preface to Third Edition, p. iii.

<sup>2</sup> *De Apologetica Plutarchi Chæronensis Theologia* (Marburg, 1854). Seibert refers to two other authors who had dealt with some aspects of his own subject—*Absoluto demum opusculo Schreiteri commentationem de doctrina Plutarchi theologica et morali scriptam . . . necnon Nitzchii Kiliensis de Plutarcho theologo et philosopho populari disquisitionem 1849 editam conferre licuit.*—We have been unable to see a copy of either of these dissertations, although Trench also alludes to Schreiter's work. They did not, in Seibert's opinion, render his work unnecessary; but *he* enjoyed the inestimable advantage of the friendship of Zeller, who helped him "*libris consilioque.*"

*Platonis discipuli theologiam tractarunt, e quibus præ cæteris Plutarchus magistri divini vestigia secutus est.* This, indeed, is the orthodox tendency in the appreciation of Plutarch, and it has been carried to the extent of claiming Plutarch as the founder of that special kind of Platonism distinguished by the epithet "New." "Plutarch," says Archbishop Trench, "was a Platonist with an oriental tinge, and thus a forerunner of the New Platonists."—"He might be described with greater truth than Ammonius as the Founder of Neo-Platonism," wrote Dr. H. W. J. Thiersch, who, however, had not freed himself from the idea (the truth of which even so early a writer as Dacier had doubted, and the legendary character of which M. Gréard has proved beyond a doubt) that Plutarch received consular honours at the hands of Trajan.<sup>1</sup>—"In this essay" (the *De Oraculorum Defectu*), thinks Mr. W. J. Brodrigg, "Plutarch largely uses the Neo-Platonic Philosophy."<sup>2</sup> Even those who do not insist that Plutarch is a Neo-Platonist, or a "forerunner" of Neo-Platonism, are so anxious to label him with some designation, that they will hardly allow him to speak for himself. It may, perhaps, argue presumption on the part of an *homo incognitus nulliusque auctoritatis* to suggest that Plutarch faces the teaching of his predecessors with an

<sup>1</sup> *Politik und Philosophie in ihrem Verhältniss, &c.*, by H. W. J. THIERSCH (Marburg, 1853).—Damals stand Plutarch, dem bereits Trajan consularische Ehren bewilligt hatte, auf der höchsten Stufe des Ansehens. (For M. Gréard's destruction of this Legend see his first chapter.—*Légende de Plutarque.*)

<sup>2</sup> *The Essays of Plutarch*, by W. J. BRODRIGG. *Fortnightly Review*. vol. 20, p. 629.



independent mind; that he is *nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri*; that he tries Plato's teachings, not from Plato's point of view, but from his own.<sup>1</sup>

Such, however, is the view maintained in the pages of the following essay. It seems to us that, in order to discover the principle which gives coherence and internal unity to Plutarch's innumerable philosophic utterances, it is not necessary to start with the assumption that he belongs to any particular school. Philosophy is to him one of the recognized sources of Religion and Morality. Tradition is another source, and Law or recognized custom another. Plutarch assumes that these three sources conjointly supply solid sanctions for belief and conduct. They are the three great records of human experience, and Plutarch will examine all their contributions to the criticism of life with a view to selecting those parts from each which will best aid him and his fellow citizens to lead lives of virtue and happiness. The great philosophical schools of Greece are regarded from this point of view—from the point of view of a moralist and a philosopher, not from the point of view of a Platonist, an anti-Stoic, or an anti-Epicurean. Plutarch is indebted, as even Volkmann himself shows, to all the Schools alike. Then why call him a Platonist, or a Neo-Pythagorizing Platonist, as Zeller has done? Plutarch's teaching is too full of logical inconsistencies to be formalized into

<sup>1</sup> "He cared not for the name of any sect or leader, but pleaded the cause of moral beauty in the interests of truth only."—Merivale's "Romans under the Empire," cap. 60, where there is an excellent, but unfortunately too brief, account of our author.

a system of Philosophy. But the dominating principle of his teaching, the paramount necessity of finding a sanction and an inspiration for conduct in what the wisdom of the past had already discovered, is so strikingly conspicuous in all his writings that his logical inconsistencies appear, and are, unimportant. It is this desire of making the wisdom and traditions of the past available for ethical usefulness which actuates his attempt to reconcile the contradictions, and remove the crudities and inconsistencies, in the three sources of religious knowledge. This is the principle which gives his teaching unity, and not any external circumstances of his life, or his attitude in favour of or in opposition to the tenets of any particular school.

There is no English translation of Plutarch's "Ethics" which can claim anything approaching the character of an authorized version. Almost every editor of Plutarch has felt it necessary to find fault with his predecessors' attempts to express Plutarch's meaning through the medium of another language. Amyot's translation is, in the opinion of the Comte Joseph de Maistre, repellent to "ladies and foreigners." Wytttenbach, who makes numerous alterations of Xylander's Latin version, also says of Ricard's French translation, that "it skips over the difficulties and corruptions in such a manner as to suggest that the translator was content merely to produce a version which should be intelligible to French readers."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres Morales de Plutarque*, traduites du grec par DOMINIC RICARD (1783-1795).—"Rapprochée du texte, la version de Ricard est, dans sa teneur générale, d'une élégance superficielle et d'une

Wytttenbach himself is reprehended in the following terms by the editor of the Didot text of the "Moralia"—

"Of the Latin version, in which we have made numerous corrections, it must be admitted that Xylander and Wytttenbach, in dealing with corrupt passages, not infrequently translated conjectures of their own, or suggested by other scholars, which we have been unable to adopt into the Greek Text." In the preface to his English translation of the "De Iside et Osiride," the Rev. Samuel Squire, Archdeacon of Bath in 1744, has some excellent critical remarks on the style of previous translators of Plutarch, and he somewhat pathetically describes the difficulties awaiting the author who endeavours to translate that writer—*"To enter into another man's Soul as it were, who lived several hundred years since, to go along with his thoughts, to trace, pursue, and connect his several ideas, to express them with propriety in a language different from that they were conceived in, and lastly to give the copy the air and spirit of an original, is not so easy a task as it may be perhaps deemed by those who have never made the attempt. The very few good translations of the learned authors into our own language, will sufficiently justify the truth of the observation—but if any one still doubts it, let him take the first section of the book before him, and make the experiment himself."* M. Gréard is briefer but equally emphatic—*"Toute traduction est une œuvre délicate, celle de Plutarque plus que toute autre peut-être."*

fidélité peu approfondie."—GRÉARD. TRENCH also severely condemns some of the translations in the edition issued in Dryden's name.

Whatever may be the cause of the perpetuation of this ungracious tradition of fault-finding, whether the general difficulty specified by Archdeacon Squire, or the more particular obstacle of a corrupt text described by other commentators, we do not feel that we are called upon to make any departure from so long-established a custom. The quaint charm of most of the translations forming the basis of Dr. Goodwin's revision no one will be inclined to deny, although the reviser's own remarks make it clear that little dependence is to be placed upon their accuracy in any instance of difficulty.<sup>1</sup> The two volumes contained in the well-known "Bohn" series of translations are utterly misleading, not only as regards the colour which they infuse into Plutarch's style, but also as regards their conspicuous incorrectness in many particular instances.<sup>2</sup> To other translations of individual tracts reference has been occasionally made in the notes.

In view of the fact that no dependence was to be placed upon the accuracy of any translation yet furnished of that portion of our author's work with which we were dealing, it was necessary, before

<sup>1</sup> *Plutarch's Morals*, translated from the Greek by several hands, corrected and revised by W. W. GOODWIN, Ph.D. (London, 1870).—"It may have been a fortunate thing for some of our translators that Bentley was too much occupied with the wise heads of Christ Church to notice the blunders of men who could write notes saying that the Parthenon is a 'Promontory shooting into the Black Sea, where stood a chappel dedicated to some virgin godhead, and famous for some Victory thereabout obtain'd.'"—Editor's Preface.

<sup>2</sup> *Plutarch's Morals. Theosophical Essays*. Translated by the late C. W. KING, M.A. (London, 1889). *Ethical Essays*, translated by A. R. SHILLETO, M.A. (London, 1888).

undertaking this essay, to make full translations of considerable portions of the "Ethics" from the text of Bernardakis; and these translations, or paraphrases based upon them, are largely employed in the following pages. Mere references to the text in support of positions assumed, or statements made, would have been useless and misleading in the absence of clear indications as to the exact interpretation placed upon the words of the text. The writer cannot hope to have succeeded where, in the opinion of competent judges, there have been so many failures. But he has, at any rate, made a conscientious attempt to understand his author, and to give expression to his view of his author's meaning, without any prejudice born of the assumption that Plutarch belonged to a particular school, or devoted his great powers of criticism and research to the exposition and illustration of the doctrines of any single philosopher.

JOHN OAKESMITH.

BATTERSEA,

*September, 1902.*



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# THE RELIGION OF PLUTARCH

## CHAPTER I.

*General character of Modern European Religions: their cardinal appeal to Emotion—Roman Religion: its sanctions chiefly rational: the causes of its failure: its place as a factor in Morality taken by Greek Philosophy—Early Greek Morality based partly on Religion, partly on Reason, which, in the form of Philosophy, eventually supplies the main inspiration to Goodness—Gradual limitation of Philosophy to Ethics.*

THE various religious revivals which the European world has witnessed during the prolonged course of the Christian era; the great attempts which the modern conscience has made from time to time to bring itself into a more intimate and fruitful relation with the principles that make for goodness of character and righteousness of life: have, in general, taken the form less of reasoned invocations to the cultivated intelligence than of emotional appeals to the natural passions and prepossessions of humanity. The hope of reward, the fear of punishment, a spontaneous love of certain moral qualities, and of certain personalities imagined as embodying these qualities; a heartfelt

hatred of certain moral defects, and of certain personalities imagined as embodying these defects:—such are the feelings that have formed the strength of every movement which has in turn agitated the religious life of the Western world from St. Paul to Wesley, from St. Augustine to Cardinal Newman. What is felt to be goodness is loved with a personal adoration which is convinced that nothing in the world is of import compared with the hope of one day touching the mere hem of that garment of holiness, the mystic effluence of which has already power to irradiate life with a strange beauty and meaning. Any sanction which imaginative piety or legendary authority can lend to Virtue is credited, not because it makes Virtue natural, intelligible, and human, but because it places her on a pedestal beyond the reach of unaided mortal effort, and thus compels a still more determined recourse to emotional and supernatural sanctions in order to ensure her fruitful cultivation. Hence Tertullian will glory in the Crucifixion of Christ, because in the eyes of reason it is shameful; and he will proclaim the Resurrection as certain, because reason condemns it as impossible.<sup>1</sup> Hence Augustine will believe first, postponing the grave question whether belief is likely to be supported by proof.<sup>2</sup> Hence that

<sup>1</sup> TERTULLIAN: *De Carne Christi*, 5.—“Crucifixus est Dei filius; non pudet, quia pudendum est. Et mortuus est Dei filius; prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est. Et sepultus resurrexit; certum est, quia impossibile est.”

<sup>2</sup> ST. AUGUSTINE: *Confessiones*, vi. 5.—“Ex hoc tamen quoque jam præponens doctrinam Catholicam, modestius ibi minimeque fallaciter sentiebam juberi ut crederetur quod non demonstrabatur (sive esset

conception of saintliness which the world owes to Catholic Christianity, a type of character which, while maintaining a marvellous purity of life, is devoid of that robust intelligence without which purity runs into asceticism; which carries virtue to such an extravagant pitch that its results may be more disastrous than those of extravagant vice, inasmuch as the latter may serve morality by demonstrating the repulsiveness of iniquity, while the former tends to evil by exhibiting the impossibility of goodness.<sup>1</sup>

quid demonstrandum, sed cui forte non esset, sive nec quid esset), quam illic temeraria pollicitatione scientiæ credulitatem irrideri; et postea tam multa fabulosissima et absurdissima, quia demonstrari non poterant, credenda imperari.”—The principle inherent in the five italicized words is identical with that which the writer exposes as an example of the absurd credulity of the Manichæans. The difference is merely one of degree.

<sup>1</sup> Attempts have, of course, been made at various times to rationalize a Religion whose cardinal principle is Faith. Paley and Butler are conspicuous examples in the history of Anglican Christianity but neither the one nor the other supplied any widespread inspiration to the religious life of the day. Butler, “who had made it his business, ever since he thought himself capable of such sort of reasoning, to *prove* to himself the being and attributes of God,” who “found it impossible to dissociate philosophy from religion in his own mind,” and “would have agreed with South that what is nonsense upon a principle of Reason will never be sense upon a principle of Religion,” was yet compelled to admit that “it was too late for him to try to support a falling Church;” and it is a matter of national history that Wesley, with his direct appeal to the principle of “justification by *faith*,” did more to reinvigorate the religious life of England than all the cultured rationalists who adorned the English Church in those days. And in these later days Butler has not escaped the charge of “having furnished, with a design directly contrary, one of the most terrible of the persuasives to Atheism that has ever been produced.” (Butler, by the Rev. W. Lucas Collins, M.A.) Paley likewise

This "*extravagance du christianisme*"<sup>1</sup> is, of course, utterly at variance with the general character of the efforts by which either a Greek or a Roman directed his steps in the ways of goodness. Neither Aristotle nor Horace, neither Plato nor Seneca, would have admitted many of the most lauded virtues of modern ethical systems to be virtues at all. Least of all would they have hailed as a virtue that passionate excess of enthusiasm which makes Virtue independent of Reason, and greets intellectual impossibilities as the trials and tests of the "virtue" of Belief.<sup>2</sup> Speaking in a general sense, and with a tacit recognition of certain exceptions to be noticed in their proper place, it may be premised that Pagan goodness of character found its inspiration, not in any kind of emotional enthusiasm, but in methods of thought and action selected and controlled

thought it a just opinion "that whatever renders religion more rational renders it more credible," and devoted his genius to the task of making religion more rational, but has done little more than furnish a school text-book for theological students. Further, what Christian, in his heart of hearts, and at those moments which he would regard as his best, does not respond more readily to the sublime sentiment of Tertullian than to the ratiocinations of the *Analogy* or the *Evidences*?

<sup>1</sup> M. CONSTANT MARTHA'S *Études morales sur l'Antiquité*, from which we have taken this just and striking phrase of Bossuet, gives an interesting account of the passionate and anguished manner in which the calm precepts of the famous "Golden Verses of Pythagoras" were applied by Christianity:—"Le philosophe, si sévère qu'il fût, se traitait toujours en ami; . . . le chrétien au contraire, . . . passe souvent par des inquiétudes inconnues à la sereine antiquité." (*L'Examen de Conscience chez les Anciens.*)

"Belief is a virtue, Doubt is a sin."—Quoted by J. A. Froude, *Short Studies*, vol. i. p. 243.

by the operation of reason and intelligence.<sup>1</sup> Horace's opinion respecting the viciousness of the man who indulges in a too excessive love of virtue is the opinion, if not of a Greek, at any rate of a Roman who is saturated with Greek philosophy;<sup>2</sup> but the early character of the poet's countrymen, as evinced not less in their Religion than in their general outlook on life, is as little disposed to extravagance as the strongest advocate of *aurea mediocritas* could well desire. Roman Religion, influenced to some extent as it was by the gloomy terrors of Etruscan superstition, found its value and its meaning, from the gods of the Indigitamenta downwards, in the fact that it was an appeal to the intelligence of the citizen. That this appeal operated in a narrow sphere of duties and was not unaffected by mean and sordid considerations does not militate against its general character as an address to the reason rather than an invocation to the passions. Ancient critics found for the word "*Religio*" a derivation which pointed to carefulness and regularity as qualities inherent in its essential meaning;<sup>3</sup> and that avoidance of disordered excess, which tends to compromise, was as conspicuous in early Roman religious practice as it was in the sternest of Greek philosophies when transplanted to Roman soil, and interpenetrated with the Roman character.<sup>4</sup> This spirit of compromise was

<sup>1</sup> Certain emotional aspects of Greek Religion are dealt with in the subsequent analysis of Plutarch's teaching.

<sup>2</sup> HORACE: *Epist.* i. 6, 15, 16.

<sup>3</sup> GASTON BOISSIER: *De la Religion Romaine*, vol. i. p. 21. Cf. CICERO: *De Natura Deorum*, ii. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the remark of SENECA: *Epistolæ ad Lucilium*, i. 21.—"Quod

based upon a recognition that the actual demands of practical life were of greater importance than the maintenance of a rigid conformity to the letter of religious precepts. Virgil, who was a participant in the work of religious reform inaugurated by Augustus, and who everywhere breathes a spirit of the most careful reverence towards the ancient traditions of the national faith, gives emphatic expression to this view of the dominant claims of practical life, and of the tolerant attitude which Religion assumes with regard to them :—

“ Quippe etiam festis quædam exercere diebus  
 Fas et jura sinunt; rivos deducere nulla  
 Religio vetuit, segeti præterdere sæpem,  
 Insidias avibus moliri, incendere vepres,  
 Balantumque gregem fluvio mersare salubri.”<sup>1</sup>

This recognition of the principle that Duty has claims which even Religion must concede is prominently written on every page of Roman History. It indicates the operation, in one direction, of that influence of Reason on Religion which, in another direction, leads

fieri in senatu solet, faciendum ego in philosophia quoque existimo. Quum censuit aliquis, quod ex parte mihi placeat, jubeco illum dividere sententiam, et sequor.”—For a summary of interesting examples of the manner in which this spirit of compromise worked out in practical religious questions, see Boissier, pp. 22, sqq.

<sup>1</sup> VIRGIL: *Georgics*, 1. 268-272.—Cf. the note of Servius on this passage: “Scimus necessitati religionem cedere.” On the general character of Roman Religion, cf. CONSTANT DE REBECQUE: *Du Polythéisme Romain*.—“On dirait que les dieux ont abjuré les erreurs d'une jeunesse fougueuse pour se livrer aux occupations de l'âge mûr. La religion de Rome est l'âge mûr des dieux, comme l'histoire de Rome est la maturité de l'espèce humaine.”



to the admission of a real divinity in the gods adored by foreign peoples. The famous formula of Roman Religion, which appealed to the protecting gods of Carthage and its people to leave that city to its fate, is an early anticipation of that hospitable tolerance, so strange to modern sects, which welcomed Greek and barbarian deities to the Roman Pantheon, and never persecuted from religious motives.<sup>1</sup> This spirit had its apotheosis in the endeavours of the reformers of the age of Plutarch to establish the triumph of Reason in a general recognition of the Unity of God beneath the different names which expressed Him to different peoples.<sup>2</sup>

Although we cannot accept as actual history the particulars given by Dionysius Halicarnassensis respecting the manner in which Romulus established the principles of Roman religious and political administration, considerable value may be conceded to such an account, because it is calculated to explain, from the writer's point of view, the existence of certain actual characteristics of Roman civic and sacred polity.<sup>3</sup> Romulus is

<sup>1</sup> MACROBIUS: *Saturnalia*, iii. 9.—“Si deus, si dea est, cui populus civitasque Carthaginensis est in tutela, teque maxime ille,” etc.

<sup>2</sup> PLUTARCH: *De Iside et Osiride*. (Passages subsequently quoted.) Cf. DION CHRYSOSTOM: *De Cognitione Dei*. (Vol. i. p. 225, Dindorf's Text.)

<sup>3</sup> DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS: *De Antiquitatibus Romanorum*, ii. 18.—Though Livy's account of the administrative measures of Numa is written in a totally different spirit from that of Dionysius, it may be noted that Numa is depicted as introducing religion as an aid to political stability.—“Ne luxuriarentur otio animi, quos metus hostium disciplinaque militaris continuerat, *omnium primum*, rem ad multitudinem imperitam et illis sæculis rudem efficacissimam

recorded as subjecting Religion to the selective power of reason and good taste. Reason decides what it is becoming for the Divine Nature to be, and everything inconsistent with this salutary notion is rigidly excluded from the State Religion. Romulus teaches the Romans that the gods are good, and that their goodness is the cause of man's happiness and progress; he instructs them in Temperance and Justice, as the bases of civic concord, and of the advantages resulting therefrom; he inculcates military Fortitude as the best means of securing the undisturbed practice of the other virtues, and the social blessings springing from such practice; and he concludes that Virtue is not a matter of chance, or the result of supernatural inspirations, but the product of reasonable laws when zealously and faithfully carried into practice by the citizens. Reason is here clearly represented as the lawgiver of Religion, and the cause and origin of the practical virtues. Dionysius may, as we have suggested, be endeavouring to explain, by an *ex post facto* piece of history, the existence of certain characteristics of the Roman constitution as exhibited in its later developments, but these features are not the less evident and essential parts of the system because we cannot accept any particular account of the time and manner in which they were incorporated with it.

Further, the Roman administrative authority deliberately repressed the exhibition of religious enthusiasm

Deorum metum injiciendum ratus est." (LIVY, i. 19.) Cicero confesses that the auspices had been retained for the same reason. (*De Div.*, ii. 33.)

as dangerous to the stability of the Republic; the State could brook no rival in her affections: the devotion of Regulus<sup>1</sup> and the suppression of the Bacchanalia bear equal witness to a firm insistence on the control of personal emotion as a cardinal principle of Roman administration.<sup>2</sup> The apparently paradoxical and casuistical position assigned in the "De Natura Deorum" to Cotta, who believes in the national religion as a Roman while denying it as a philosopher, is sufficiently lucid and rational when regarded in the light

<sup>1</sup> The indignant phrases with which Horace scathes the degeneracy of his own times in this respect clearly indicate the religious aspect of the patriotic self-immolation of Regulus:—

"Milesne Crassi conjuge barbara  
Turpis maritus vixit et hostium  
    (Proh curia inversique mores!)  
    Consenuit socerorum in armis  
Sub rege Medo Marsus et Apulus  
Anciliorum et nominis et togæ  
    Oblitus æternæque Vestæ  
Incolumi Jove et urbe Roma?" (Od., iii. 5.)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BOISSIER: *De la Religion Romaine*, vol. i. p. 17.—"Non-seulement la religion romaine n'encourage pas la dévotion, mais on peut dire qu'elle s'en méfie. C'est un peuple fait pour agir; la rêverie, la contemplation mystique lui sont étrangères et suspectes. Il est avant tout ami du calme, de l'ordre, de la régularité; tout ce qui excite et trouble les âmes lui déplaît." Boissier quotes as the remark of Servius on *Georgics*, 3. 456, the words, "*Majores religionem totam in experientia collocabant*;" but what Servius really wrote was, "*Majores enim expugnantes religionem, totum in experientia collocabant*," and he gives an apt reference to Cato's speech on the Catilinarian conspiracy as reported by Sallust:—"Non votis neque suppliciiis muliebribus auxilia deorum parantur: vigilando, agendo, *bene consulendo*, prospere omnia cedunt." Propertius (iii. 22) boasts that Rome is free from the more extravagantly emotional legends of Greek mythology.

of the religious administration of Rome, which had never claimed to enslave the intelligences of men, so long as that elaborate ritual, with which the safety of the State was involved, received due and reverential attention.<sup>1</sup>

The ancient Roman Religion, revolving round the State in this way, and moulding the life of every individual citizen into rigid external conformity with the official ideal, showed its strength in the production of a type of moral character which was perfect within the iron limits fixed by the civic authority.<sup>2</sup> It was dignified, austere, self-controlled, self-reverent. In the absence of great temptations, such as assail the secret strongholds of the human heart and lie beyond the influence of any external power, the ancient *Virtus Romana* was equal to all the demands which a somewhat restricted code of ethics made upon it. But, when a wider knowledge of the world brought with it a weakening of the chain which bound the citizen to the central power; when, at the same time, a wider possession of the world and a richer enjoyment of its

<sup>1</sup> CICERO: *De Nat. Deor.* lib. iii.—Cf. the “theory of Twofold Truth,” which was “accepted without hesitation by all the foremost teachers in Italy during the sixteenth century,” who “were careful to point out, they were philosophers, and not theologians.”—*The Skeptics of the Italian Renaissance*, by John Owen (p. 186, second edition).

<sup>2</sup> CICERO: *Tusc. Disp.* i. 1.—“Iam illa quæ natura, non literis, adsecuti sunt, neque cum Græcia neque ulla cum gente sunt conferenda; quæ enim tanta gravitas, quæ tanta constantia, magnitudo animi, probitas, fides, quæ tam excellens in omni genere virtus in ullis fuit, ut sit cum majoribus nostris comparanda?”

pleasures increased to an enormous extent the temptations directed against the purity and completeness of the moral character:<sup>1</sup> then it became alarmingly clear to thoughtful men that, unless the moral life was to run to seed in vicious weeds of self-indulgence, it was necessary to invoke the aid of a subtler and stronger influence than that of the State, an influence capable of varying its appeal in accordance with the infinitely varying moral needs of individual men.<sup>2</sup> It was with the hope of finding inspiration of this character that Lucretius and Cicero turned the attention of their countrymen to Greek Philosophy; it was there that they wished to find an ampler and more direct sanction in reason for cultivating a life of virtue. Reason, which had not been devoid of effect in the narrow sphere of Roman Religion, was now to be made the basis

<sup>1</sup> A situation forecast in the well-known passage of Plato's *Republic*, 619 C, in reference to the soul who has chosen for his lot in life "the most absolute despotism he could find."—"He was one of those who had lived during his former life under a well-ordered constitution, and hence a measure of virtue had fallen to his share, *through the influence of habit, unaided by philosophy.*" (Davis and Vaughan's translation.) What could more accurately describe the character of early Roman morality than these words?

<sup>2</sup> It was inability to grasp this truth that explained the "patriotic" opposition of the Elder Cato to the lectures of Carneades, Critolaus, and Diogenes. He was "unwilling that the public policy of Rome, which for the Roman youth was the supreme norm of judgment and action, and was possessed of unconditional authority, should, through the influence of foreign philosophers, become subordinated, in the consciousness of these youths, to a more universal ethical norm." UEBERWEG: *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Morris and Porter's translation, p. 189, vol. i.). (Cf. M. MARTHA: *Le Philosophe Carnéade à Rome.*)

of morality in general; but it was reason directed to the purification and enlargement of the springs of personal conduct, and calling into play qualities which had lain dormant, or had been restricted, during the long dominance of the State over the individual citizen. To Regulus, his religion was the State; to Cicero, the State and its demands form but a small fraction of the moral life. A revival of Religion was to Cicero a revival of Philosophy; Reason, the parent of Philosophy, was also to be the parent of Conduct; the first of all virtues is the virtue of Knowledge, of intelligent discrimination between the things that make for morality and happiness and the things that make for immorality and misery.<sup>1</sup> Starting from this standpoint, Cicero, though approaching Greek Philosophy more in the spirit of the student than in that of the religious reformer, though participating, as his Letters show, in that general carelessness on religious matters which marked Roman Society during the later years of the Republic, was, nevertheless, the means of giving a powerful stimulus to that movement in the direction of deliberate personal morality, which became conspicuous in the Græco-Roman world of the Early

<sup>1</sup> CICERO: *De Officiis*, i. 43.—“*Princepsque omnium virtutum illa sapientia quam σοφίαν Græci vocant—prudentiam enim, quam Græci φρόνησιν, aliam quandam intellegimus, quæ est rerum expetendarum fugiendarumque scientia; illa autem sapientia quam principem dixi rerum est divinarum et humanarum scientia, in qua continetur deorum et hominum communitas et societas inter ipsos—ea si maxima est, ut est certe, necesse est quod a communitate ducatur officium id esse maximum.*”—He is here emphasizing the social duties of the individual man.

Empire, and culminated under the fostering care of Trajan and the Antonines. It then became clear that Cicero had not looked in vain to Greek Philosophy to save his countrymen from that moral degradation and disorder which, in his own words, it demanded the most earnest endeavours of every individual citizen to check and restrain.<sup>1</sup>

In Greece, Religion and Philosophy had early enjoyed mutual relations of an intimate character. The force of the weighty invocations which the poet of the "Works and Days"<sup>2</sup> addresses to his dishonourable brother Perses lies less in the conventional theology which alludes to the wrath of "broad-sighted Zeus" as tracking the footsteps of the wicked, than in the reasoned choice which the sinner is invited to make between Injustice as leading inevitably to ruin, and Virtue leading as inevitably to prosperity;<sup>3</sup> and the claims of individual judgment, the right of every man

<sup>1</sup> *De Divinatione*, ii. 2.—"Quod enim munus reipublicæ afferre majus meliusve possumus, quam si docemus atque erudimus juventutem? his præsertim moribus atque temporibus, quibus ita prolapsa est, ut omnium opibus refrænenda ac coercenda sit."—We shall venture to believe that personally Cicero was not a religious man, in spite of the religious usefulness of his philosophic work, and also notwithstanding Trollope's contention that "had Cicero lived a hundred years later I should have suspected him of some hidden knowledge of Christian teaching." (TROLLOPE'S *Life of Cicero*, chapter on "Cicero's Religion.") Cicero's Letters have as much religion in them as Lord Chesterfield's—and no more.

<sup>2</sup> HEROD. ii. 53.

<sup>3</sup> HESIOD: *Works and Days*, 280 sqq. (cf. 293-326). Here also is to be found that famous description of the hard and easy roads of Virtue and of Vice. The reward held out to progress in Virtue is that this road, too, becomes pleasant and easy at last.

to subject everything to the test of his own intelligence, never found finer expression than in the verse which assigns the palm of moral perfection to him who has the courage to think for himself.<sup>1</sup> Pindar, the most religious poet of antiquity, applies the test of reason to the established myths of Hellas when he refuses to credit such legends as depict the gods in unseemly situations, or under the influence of degrading passions.<sup>2</sup> Xenophanes thought that the claims of Religion and Morality could be best advanced by cleansing the moral atmosphere of the gods whose recorded lives were so flagrantly in opposition to the dictates of purity, reason, and honour; a strain of criticism which found its most striking and notorious expression in the famous Second and Third Books of Plato's "Republic," but which had not been without its exponents among more whole-hearted adherents of the national Religion. But, meanwhile, the national Religion, as embodied, at least, in the national liturgy, had been coming to terms with the growing strength of Philosophy, and the vestibules of the Temple at Delphi were inscribed with those famous philosophical apophthegms, whose presence there subsequently enabled Plutarch to claim that Apollo was not only a God and a Seer, but a Philosopher.<sup>3</sup> The popular morality of the days of Socrates, which supplied his cross-examinees with

<sup>1</sup> Οὗτος μὲν πανάριστος ὃς αὐτῷ πάντα νοήσῃ. (HESIOD: *Works and Days*, 293.)—It is not surprising that Aristotle quotes this verse with approval, or that it commended itself to the genius of Roman writers. (Cf. LIVY, xxii. 29; CICERO: *Pro Cluentio*, c. 31.)

<sup>2</sup> PINDAR: *Olymp.*, I, v. 28, sqq. (Christ's *Teubner* Edition).

<sup>3</sup> PLUTARCH: *De E apud Delphos*, 385 B.D.



ready-made answers to questions on the nature of Vice and Virtue, and of the vices and the virtues, was composed as much of Philosophy as of Religion in the narrower sense of the term.<sup>1</sup> The Theogonies of Homer and Hesiod furnished the external machinery of the supernatural world, but the moral utterances of these two poets, and not of these only, but of Simonides and Solon, of Theognis and the "Seven Sages," contained many striking lessons, and many emphatic warnings, touching the necessity and advantages of a life of virtue. It became, in fact, quite evident, though not, of course, explicitly asserted, or perhaps even consciously admitted, that the gods, as represented in the Homeric poems and as existing in the popular imagination, were quite impossible as a foundation for Morality, though surpassingly splendid as the material of Art. It is hardly too much to say that, after the establishment of the great philosophic schools in the fourth century, all the conscious inspiration to a life of Virtue, and all the consolations which it is the more usual function of Religion to administer, were supplied by Philosophy. Sudden conversions from Vice to Philosophy mark the history of the philosophic movement in Greece as religious movements have been marked among other peoples and in other periods. An edifying discourse under a Stoic Portico, or in an Academic School, has been as effective in its practical results as a religious oration by Bossuet, or a village preaching by Whitfield.<sup>2</sup> Religion and Philosophy are

<sup>1</sup> See *The Ethics of Aristotle*, by Sir ALEXANDER GRANT, Essay II.

<sup>2</sup> Horace's "Mutatus Polemon" is well known. The details of

identified, because both are identical with **Morality**; the lives of some Greek Philosophers furnish the nearest parallel attained in antiquity to the modern ideal of saintliness.

This application of Philosophy to the spiritual requirements of the individual man, this independence of supernatural sanctions for goodness, was aided by the almost purely liturgical character of the Greek Religion. Greek Religion made no special appeal to the individual conscience with a view to awakening that sense of personal responsibility for every part of one's life and conduct which is the very soul and centre of Religion as understood in modern days. To attend the traditional religious festivals; to fulfil the rites prescribed for certain occasions by the sacerdotal laymen who represented the State on its religious side; to hold a vague conventional notion respecting the existence of the gods and of their separate personalities; to listen quietly, and respond reverently, while the purple-robed, myrtle-crowned, altar-ministrant intoned with solemn resonance the ancient formulæ embalming the sacred legends of some deity whose "Mysteries" were specially fostered and honoured by the State; to aid in giving effect to the dreadful imprecations pronounced against those guilty of sacrilege or parricide; to respond, in a word, to all the external demands of

the story are given in practically the same form by Diogenes Laertius, Valerius Maximus (vi. 6. 15), and by Lucian in his dramatic version in the *Bis Accusatus* (16, 17). Philostratus—*Lives of the Sophists*, i. 20—gives an intensely *modern* account of the conversion of the sophist Isæus. (See also *Note* on p. 28.)

the national faith as a political institution: represented the religious duty of a good and patriotic citizen. A beautiful and impressive liturgy is, indeed, not without effect in surrounding with a quiet atmosphere of goodness a class of minds whose temptations are mercifully proportioned to their weakness; but real moral worth must spring from internal sources, and these internal sources were not to be found in the Greek national Religion. Hence a wider field for Philosophy in the lives of a people whose eagerness in the pursuit of virtue was as marked, if not so successful, as their aspirations after perfection of art and profundity of knowledge.

We do not ignore, in attributing this importance to Philosophy as the inspiration of goodness, either that fortunate class of people who, in Plato's beautiful expression, are "good by the divine inspiration of their own nature,"<sup>1</sup> or that more numerous section of society who were directed into a certain common conventional goodness by the moral influence of the purer myths, and who were taught, like the youth in Browning's poem, "whose Father was a scholar and knew Greek," that

" Their aim should be to loathe, like Peleus' son,  
A lie as Hell's Gate, love their wedded wife,  
Like Hector, and so on with all the rest."<sup>2</sup>

But there was another side to the myths, a side less favourable to the development of morals, and one which had been brought forward so conspicuously in

<sup>1</sup> PLATO: *Laws*, 642 C. (Jowett's translation.)

<sup>2</sup> BROWNING'S *Asolando*, "Development." (P. 129, first edition.)

the adverse criticisms of the philosophers that no one could pretend to ignore its existence.<sup>1</sup> The prevailing tendency of Greek myth was not moral, and it was only after the most careful pruning, such, for example, as that which Plutarch applies to it in his educational essays, that myth became safely available as a factor in ethical progress. The mainsprings of Conduct, of personal and private Morality, are to be found in Philosophy, and so great an importance did Philosophy acquire as the instrument of goodness, that that particular branch of Philosophy which exercised surveillance over the realm of Conduct became eventually recognized as Philosophy *par excellence*; the overwhelming significance attached by Greek philosophers, from the Sophists onwards, to the practical element in their teaching, led to a restriction of the terms "Philosophy" and "Philosopher" to an almost purely ethical connotation. The argument in the

<sup>1</sup> For the influence of the Greek Myths in this direction, cf. PROPERTIUS, Book iii. 32.

" Ipsa Venus, quamvis corrupta libidine Martis,  
Nee minus in cælo semper honesta fuit,  
Quamvis Ida palam pastorem dicat amasse  
Atque inter pecudes accubuisse deam.

Die mihi, quis potuit leetum servare pudicum,  
Quæ dea eum solo vivere sola deo?"

St. Augustine's criticism of the famous passage in the *Eunuchus* of Terence (Act iii. sc. 5), where Chærea is encouraged in his clandestine amour by a picture of Jupiter and Danaë, is, of course, painfully justified by the facts as reported by the dramatist. (*Confessiones*, lib. i.)

“Phædo” that, without Philosophy, Virtue is nothing more than a mere rough sketch, is so strongly emphasized in other quarters that there is formed a general conviction that the sole sphere of Philosophy is the sphere of human conduct.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PLATO: *Phædo*, 69 B.

## CHAPTER II.

*Importance of the ethical tendency in pre-Socratic Philosophy generally under-estimated—Development of this tendency from Thales to the Sophists, and from the Sophists to the Stoics and Epicureans—Special influence of these two Schools, aided by the failure of political interest, in establishing a practicable ideal of PERSONAL virtue—This ideal, conspicuous in Plutarch's "Ethics," and inculcated by the philosophers of the early Græco-Roman Empire generally.*

IT will be interesting and useful briefly to trace the growth of the ethical tendency in Greek Philosophy, not only as a preparation for the study of Plutarch's position as an ethical and religious teacher, but also because the prominence of this tendency in the pre-Socratic systems appears to have been greatly underestimated.<sup>1</sup> It has been found so easy, for purposes of historical narrative, to describe a certain philosophical

<sup>1</sup> "Before the fifth century, philosophy had been *entirely* physical or metaphysical."—Sir A. GRANT: *Aristotle*. (Essay already quoted.) The word italicized is surely too sweeping. (The thought is repeated with some qualification on page 67.) Cf. DIOGENES LAERTIUS: i. 18, and i. 13. CICERO: *Tusc. Quæst.*, v. 4; *Acad.*, i. 4, 15. ARISTOTLE speaks with greater truth and moderation.—*Metaph.*, i. 6. The distinction between Socrates and previous philosophers lies not so much in the fact that they were not ethical philosophers as that he was not a physical philosopher.

tendency as "physical," and a certain other as "meta-physical," that the purely general character of these descriptions has been overlooked. Thales was a natural philosopher, an astronomer, and, if we may trust the "general belief of the Greeks" to which Herodotus alludes in his account of the crossing of the river Halys by Croesus, a great mechanical engineer as well.<sup>1</sup> But he was something more than this. He was distinguished for great political insight, and was acknowledged to be the greatest of the group of practical philosophers who were known as the Seven Sages.<sup>2</sup> To this group are assigned those famous dicta which, whether inscribed by priests on the walls of temples, or embodied by philosophers in their ethical systems, conveyed a profound moral significance to every member of a Hellenic community. Although no special one of these sayings is ascribed to Thales by name, it would surely be absurd to suppose him deficient in those very qualities which brought fame to the men at whose head he was universally placed. A man who was confessedly a trusted counsellor in Politics would assuredly, in those days, have had something to say on that branch of Politics which was destined eventually to be separated from its parent

<sup>1</sup> HEROD. i. 75. Cf. the amusing story told by Plutarch (*De Sollertia Animalium*, 971 B, C), in which a mule laden with salt lightens its load in crossing a river by soaking its packages well under the water. Thales enters the ranks against the clever mule, and comes off easy winner by giving him a load of sponges and wool.

<sup>2</sup> HEROD. i. 170. Cf. PLUTARCH: *Cum Principibus Viris Philosopho esse disserendum*, 779 A.

stem, and to become a distinct branch of philosophical investigation. Anaximander cannot, at this distance of time, be directly associated with the practical problems of human life, but must ever remain wrapped up in his "infinity," which is neither Air nor Water, nor any other element, but "something that is different from all of them."<sup>1</sup> It is not, however, without significance in this connexion, that the most striking fragment of his Philosophy that has reached our times is couched in ethical phraseology: "That out of which existing things have their birth must also, *of right*, be their grave when they are destroyed. For they must, by the dispensation of time, *give a just compensation for their injustice.*"<sup>2</sup> We are in equal ignorance of any special ethical teaching of Anaximenes. Heraclitus, however, has a distinctly ethical aspect, in spite of the physical nature of most of his philosophical speculations. Self-knowledge, which is alien to the multitude, who are under the sway of the poets,<sup>3</sup> is already, in Heraclitus, the basis of self-control, as it is in Socrates the basis of all moral excellence.<sup>4</sup> An ordered self-control is the highest of all virtues; even the Sun must not transgress the limits of his sphere, or the Erinnyes, the Ministers of *Justice*, will find him out.<sup>5</sup> Anaxagoras, whom Sextus Empiricus will one day describe as "the

<sup>1</sup> RITTER and PRELLER, p. 10. (Quoting SIMPLICIUS: *Physica*, 6, a.)

<sup>2</sup> SIMPLICIUS: *Physica*. (Quoted by RITTER and PRELLER, p. 10.)

<sup>3</sup> "Heraclitus used to say that Homer, and Archilochus as well, ought to be expelled from the Contests and cudgelled."—*D. L.*, ix. 1.

<sup>4</sup> See PLUTARCH: *Adversus Coloten*, 118 C; and STOBÆUS: *Anthologion*, v. 119, and iii. 84. (Vol. i. pp. 94 and 104.—*Tauchnitz* Edition.)

<sup>5</sup> PLUTARCH: *De Exilio*, 604 A.



most *physical*” of all the philosophers, began his book on Nature with the words “All things were in confusion together; then came Intelligence, and gave them order and arrangement;” thus laying the foundation of his Natural Philosophy in a principle which could not fail of early application to the sphere of Conduct.<sup>1</sup> The denial of blind Chance, or of immutable Fate, in the realm of physical phenomena easily leads to its repudiation in the sphere of Ethics, and to a recognition of the personal responsibility of the individual mind for the consequences of its own decisions.<sup>2</sup> It was probably a conviction of the ethical fruitfulness of the principle thus laid down by Anaxagoras in the sphere of Physics which induced Aristotle, the greatest of all ethical philosophers, to assert that its author, as compared with his predecessors, was a sober thinker by the side of random babblers.<sup>3</sup> The physical investigations of Democritus were utilized by the Epicureans to free man from superstitious fears of another world, in order that he might direct all his powers to making the best of this world, in a moral, infinitely more than in a physical, sense. He specifically discussed Virtue, and concluded that happiness consisted in Temperance and Self-Control.<sup>4</sup> In a book which he wrote under the significant title of “Tritogeneia,” or “Minerva,” he

<sup>1</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS, ii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> ALEX. APHROD: *De Fato*, ii., quoted by RITTER and PRELLER, p. 28. Cf. PSEUDO-PLUTARCH: *De Placitis Philosophorum*, 885 C, D.

<sup>3</sup> ARISTOTLE: *Metaphysics*, i. 3.

<sup>4</sup> RITTER and PRELLER, p. 52.—Cf. UEBERWEG on Leucippus and Democritus, “The ethical end of man is happiness, which is attained through justice and culture.”

appears to have applied the principle of Intelligence to the domain of Ethics, as Anaxagoras had applied it to the realm of Physics, pointing out that there wanted three things to the perfection of human society—"to reason well, to speak well, and to do one's duty;" and that these three powers all spring from the directing influence of Intelligence. The author of the "Magna Moralia" says that Pythagoras was the first to discuss Virtue, and indicates in what manner the Pythagoreans attempted to apply their theory of Number to the sphere of Ethics. Their method was wrong, according to the "Magna Moralia," since there is a special and appropriate method for the analysis and discussion of the virtues, and "Justice is not a number evenly even."<sup>1</sup> Such a definition, thus crushed by way of a point-blank negative, has, of course, nothing but a metaphorical significance as applied to Ethics; but the metaphorical conception of Justice as a perfect number will not be totally devoid of inspiration to justice of conduct in the mind of one who loves perfection even when represented by an arithmetical abstraction; and if by this definition "it was designed to express the correspondence between action and suffering,"<sup>2</sup> a fruitful, though incomplete, ethical principle is embodied in

<sup>1</sup> *Magna Moralia*, i. 1, and i. 34. Cf. ARISTOTLE: *Eth. Nich.*, v. 5.—"The Pythagoreans defined the just to be simply retaliation—and Rhadamanthus (in Æschylus) appears to assert that justice is this: 'that the punishment will be equitable when a man suffers the same thing as he has done.'" (Thomas Taylor's translation of *The Works of Aristotle*.)

<sup>2</sup> UEBERWEG, p. 47. See also citations in last note.

their mathematical phrasing.<sup>1</sup> In a more general sense, Epicharmus has sung how the Pythagorean Doctrine of Number may be applied to the domain of practice :—

“Man’s life needs greatly Number’s ordered sway :  
His path is safe who follows Number’s way.”<sup>2</sup>

But the Pythagorean doctrine of Transmigration probably had a greater ethical value than the metaphysical conceptions of Number which constituted the Pythagorean *οὐσία* ; although it is not impossible that the dogma, when carelessly held or unphilosophically interpreted, might have a vicious rather than a virtuous effect.<sup>3</sup> The “Golden Verses of Pythagoras,” whether composed by any individual member of the school, or officially embodying the teaching of the sect, or representing the actual work of some philosopher not formally a Pythagorean, have been universally recognised to express a Pythagorean ideal ;<sup>4</sup> and thus

<sup>1</sup> *How* fruitful, the whole Attic Tragedy demonstrates.

<sup>2</sup> RITTER and PRELLER, p. 79 (from CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. MARLOWE’S *Dr. Faustus* :—

“Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul?  
Or why is this immortal that thou hast?  
Ah, Pythagoras’ metempsychosis, were that true  
This soul should fly from me, and I be changed  
Unto some brutish beast! All beasts are happy,  
For when they die,  
Their souls are soon dissolved in elements;  
But mine must live still to be plagued in hell.”

<sup>4</sup> MARTHA: *L’Examen de Conscience chez les Anciens* (“études morales sur l’Antiquité”).—“Ce poème, attribué par les uns à Pythagore lui-même, par d’autres à Lysis, son disciple, par d’autres encore ou à Philolaüs ou à Empédocele, ne remonte pas sans doute à une si haute

exhibit in the doctrine of the Italian School a far more vigorous and fruitful ethical tendency than any study of its official doctrines—so far as they are available for study—would lead us to suppose. And, indeed, the followers of this Philosophy were conspicuous, even in Plato's time, for a special manner of life, the preparation for which involved a strenuous devotion to a strict and lofty ethical ideal, an ideal which subsequently formed no small part of the strength of that last school of Greek Philosophy which nominally sheltered under the ægis of Plato.<sup>1</sup>

Among the philosophers of the Eleatic School we find an equally marked tendency in the direction of

antiquité, mais il est certainement antérieur au christianisme, puisque des écrivains qui ont vécu avant notre ère, entre autres le Stoïcien Chrysippe, y ont fait quelquefois allusion . . . Hierocles dit formellement que les *Vers d'or* ne sont pas l'œuvre d'un homme, mais celle de tout le sacré collège pythagoricien."—The author of the verses is, doubtless, unknown, but their general attribution in antiquity to a Pythagorean source is in harmony with the universal recognition that they cohere with the ethical doctrine of the school. M. Martha subjects ancient philosophers and critics to a severe reprehension on the ground that they saw in these verses a mere inculcation of the practice of the memory—"Un certain nombre d'anciens sont tombés dans la plus étrange méprise. Ils ont cru qu'il s'agissait ici d'un exercice de mémoire." But, giving all the force which M. Martha assigns to the passages he quotes in support of this view, we must not leave out of consideration the important part which a good memory was believed to subserve in practical ethics. See the pseudo-Plutarchic tract *De Educatione Liberorum*, 9 F. Cf. EPICTETUS, lib. iii. cap x.

SENECA (*De Ira*, 3, cap. 36) learned the practice inculcated by the golden verses from Sextus, who was claimed as a Pythagorean (RITTER and PRELLER, 437).

<sup>1</sup> PLATO: *Republic*, 600 B.

Ethics. The very basis of the anti-theistic propaganda of Xenophanes is that the gods in their traditional character do not display those virtues which are incumbent on even ordinarily decent men. To his strenuous sincerity the removal of the gods from the sphere of human conduct meant the introduction of a stricter and better reasoned sanction for morality. Even Parmenides and Melissus and Zeno were not so absorbed in the creation of abstract metaphysical conceptions but that Plutarch is able to mention them together, not only as distinguished for their contributions to the practical wisdom of their time, but as evincing by the manner of their death their constancy to a lofty ethical conception of the duties of life.<sup>1</sup> Empedocles is included in the same category as having conferred great material and political benefits upon his fellow-citizens, to whom he also addressed a poem inculcating a pure and noble manner of life based on the doctrine of Transmigration.

This brief review of the pre-Socratic and pre-Sophistic Philosophers appears to indicate that, if their ethical doctrines were not formulated with the scientific detail and precision of later schools, their speculations had a strongly ethical cast, and tended to work out into practical morality in the sphere of daily conduct. In spite of the numerous systems of Ethics which have been propounded in ancient and modern days, a scientific basis of Morality has not yet been truly laid,

<sup>1</sup> PLUTARCH: *Adversus Coloten*, 1126; cf. *D. L.*, ix. 23. See also PLATO'S *Parmenides*, and cf. UEBERWEG on Parmenides.

and it was, perhaps, a recognition of the difficulties menacing attempts in this direction, aided by a feeling that "moral progress has not to wait till an unimpeachable system of Ethics has been elaborated,"<sup>1</sup> which led the early Greek Schools to confine their utterances on Morals to "rugged maxims hewn from life," which compensated for their lack of scientific precision by the inspiration they applied to the work of actual life.

It must, however, be admitted that with the Sophists the concerns of practical life began to assume that predominant place in philosophical speculations which they afterwards wholly usurped; and the claim of the Sophists (whether or not Socrates is to be reckoned among them) to be regarded as the founders of Ethical Philosophy is not weakened by the fact that, when Philosophy and Ethics were identified,<sup>2</sup> the term Sophist was assigned to men whose lives were in diametrical opposition to everything connoted by the designation philosopher.<sup>3</sup> The Sophists of the Socratic

<sup>1</sup> LESLIE STEPHEN: *The Science of Ethics* (concluding sentence).

<sup>2</sup> For a brief expression of this identity, see DION. CH. *De Exilio*, xiii. p. 249.—"To seek and strive earnestly after Virtue—that is Philosophy." Cf. SENECA: *Epist.*, i. 37; *et passim*.

<sup>3</sup> See MARTHA: *La prédication morale populaire* ("Les moralistes sous l'empire romain," pp. 240, 241).—"A cette époque la philosophie était une espèce de religion qui imposait à ses adeptes au moins l'extérieur de la vertu. Les sophistes se reconnaissent à leur mœurs licencieuses et à leurs manières arrogantes, les philosophes à la dignité de leur conduite et de leur maintien. On entra dans la philosophie par une sorte de conversion édédifiante: on ne pouvait en sortir que par une apostasie scandalense." See the passages referred to by M. MARTHA, and, in addition, DION's account of his "conversion" in *Oratio* xiii. (*De Exilio*), and his comparisons between the

age, whose varied teachings were lacking in any philosophical principle to give them unity and dignity, brought the business of common life into so marked a prominence, and recognized Conduct as so much larger a fraction of life than it had hitherto been consciously recognized, that the necessity of finding a scientific basis for Conduct became apparent, and a sphere was thus opened to the genius of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

It is not necessary to linger in demonstrating the important part played by Ethics from this point onward in the development of Greek Philosophy. "I hold that Socrates, as all are agreed, was the first whose voice charmed away philosophy from the mysterious phenomena over which Nature herself has cast a veil, and with which all philosophers before his time busied themselves, and brought it face to face with social life, so as to investigate virtue and vice, and the general distinction between Good and Evil, and led it to pronounce its sentence that the heavenly bodies were either far removed from the sphere of our knowledge, or contributed nothing to right living, however much the knowledge of them might be attained."<sup>1</sup> Although

sophist and the peacock, and the philosopher and the owl, in *Oratio* xii. (*De Dei Cognitione*).

<sup>1</sup> CICERO: *Acad. Poster.*, i. 4. (Reid's translation.) Cf. RITTER and PRELLER: sec. 204, note "a" on XENOPHON: *Memorabilia*, iv. 3. 1, and i. 4. 4.—"Socratem quodam modo naturæ studuisse vel ex nostro loco luculenter cernitur, ubi deprehendis eum teleologicam quæ dicitur viam ingressum, quæ ratio transiit ad Socraticos. Inde corrigendus Cicero *Acad. Poster.*, i. 4." Cf. BENWELL'S Preface to his edition of the *Memorabilia*: "Quam graviter de Dei providentia et de

this well-known passage from Cicero's "Academics" has been criticized for the too great emphasis which it lays on the alienation of Socrates from Natural Philosophy, and, moreover, as an attempt has been made to show above, it lays in like manner too much stress on the alienation of previous thinkers from Moral Philosophy, or, at any rate, from empirical Ethics, it expresses with great clearness the surpassing importance which the common life of humanity, as illumined by the light of virtuous ideals, was henceforward to assume as the end and aim of philosophical investigations and discussions. The overwhelming importance of Ethics in the philosophical system of Plato is directly or indirectly apparent in all his teaching; and where he, too, indulges in physical speculations, it is with the warning that probability is all that can be expected from such investigations, and that they constitute a wise and moderate recreation in the course of severer and more legitimate studies.<sup>1</sup> But it must be conceded that, while no writer has composed more beautiful panegyrics in praise of Virtue; while no teacher has depicted its surpassing importance to humanity with greater devotion of spirit or subtler charm of language; yet the severity of the intellectual processes which alone lead to a comprehension of what, in the Platonic system, Virtue is, has had the effect of

admirabili corporis humani structura Soeratem disserentem inducit! "—It must be conceded, however, that in Xenophon's account Socrates is described as discussing natural phenomena still with a view to ethical edification. (*Memorab.*, iv. 3.)

<sup>1</sup> PLATO: *Timæus*, 59 C.



making Virtue herself appear almost "too bright and good for human nature's daily food;" too lofty and afar for the common man to attain; a mere abstraction to be preserved as a field appropriate to the gymnastics of metaphysicians, and to be shielded from the harsh contact of the common world and common men by the *chevaux de frise* of dialectical subtlety. Excess of Reason in Plato has produced a similar result to that produced by excess of Emotion in modern Religion, and it is not without Justice that a great writer of the nineteenth century has described Plato as "putting men off with stars instead of sense," and as teaching them to be anything but "practical men, honest men, continent men, unambitious men, fearful to solicit a trust, slow to accept, and resolute never to betray one."<sup>1</sup> The accessibility of Virtue to the common heart is conditioned in Plato's system by its intelligibility to the common reason. The dialectic processes by which the Ideas of the Good, the True, the Beautiful are pursued are merely repellent to the average man, who does not care for Metaphysics, but wishes to be good and pure and just in his dealings with his fellow-men.<sup>2</sup> "Plato acknowledges that the morality of the

<sup>1</sup> W. S. LANDOR: *Diogenes and Plato (Imaginary Conversations)*.—"Draw thy robe around thee; let the folds fall gracefully, and look majestic. That sentence is an admirable one, but not for me. I want sense, not stars." Cf. Dr. MARTINEAU: *Plato (Types of Ethical Theory)*.—"The perfection which consists in contemplation of the absolute, or the attempt to copy it, may be the consummation of Reason, but not of character."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. LANDOR: *loc. cit.*—"The bird of wisdom flies low, and seeks her food under hedges; the eagle himself would be starved if he

multitude must be utilitarian, since none other is attainable save by the highly trained metaphysician.”<sup>1</sup> Even when the multitude accept the teachings of the philosopher, it is not because they are capable of the knowledge of ideal truth, but because the philosopher has compelled them to recognize, from utilitarian reasons, that it is better to be virtuous than to be vicious. But this acknowledgment of the inability of the multitude to be virtuous in the highest sense, and the assertion that they must submit themselves as clay to be moulded by the philosopher, who alone has a knowledge of ideal goodness, do not help in a world where the philosophers are not autocrats, but where every teacher must submit his claims to the intelligence of the multitude. It may accordingly be questioned whether Plato’s Ethics have furnished inspiration for goodness except to those who have already had a predilection for virtue as an appanage of the highest intellect, or to those more general lovers of the Beautiful whose taste is gratified by fascinating descriptions of a quality which, in itself, has no special charm for them, but which, when depicted by this “master of the starry spheres” in its atmosphere of cold but radiant splendour, has transfigured their moral life with beams that do not “fade into the common light of day.” Plato’s teaching, indeed, has something monastic, exclusive, aristocratic in its import, and the

always soared aloft and against the sun. The sweetest fruit grows near the ground, and the plants that bear it require ventilation and lopping.”

<sup>1</sup> ARCHER-HIND: *The Phædo of Plato*, Appendix I.

“esoteric” doctrines which were taught in the grove of Academus to students already prepared by a special course of instruction to receive them stand at the very opposite pole of Philosophy to those homely conversations which Socrates would hold with the first chance passer-by in the streets of a busy city. “Let no one enter here who has not studied Mathematics” was a phrase which summed up in a dogmatic canon of the school the views of the master touching the exclusion of the multitude from direct participation in Virtue and Philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle brings us into a world where there is less of poetry and beautiful imagery, but in which the common man can see more clearly. If the landscapes are not so lovely, the roadways are better laid and the milestones are more legible. The contrast has been often enough already elaborated. Its essence seems to lie in the recognition by Aristotle that men are men, and not ideal philosophers. It hardly needed those famous passages in the “Ethics,” in which Aristotle subjects the Theory of Ideas to a most searching

<sup>1</sup> Cf. MARTINEAU: “Types of Ethical Theory”: *Plato*, p. 97, vol. i.—“For the soul in its own essence, and for great and good souls among mankind, Plato certainly had the deepest reverence; but he had no share in the religious sentiment of democracy which dignifies man *as man*, and regards with indifference the highest personal qualities in comparison with the essential attributes of common humanity.—He rated so high the difficulty of attaining genuine insight and goodness that he thought it much if they could be realized even in a few; and had no hope that the mass of men, overborne by the pressure of material necessity and unchastened desires, could be brought, under the actual conditions of this world, to more than the mere beginnings of wisdom.”

criticism, to emphasize that predilection for the practical concerns of daily life, as not only the proper sphere of Ethics, but their foundation and material, which is conspicuous in the general character of his work. Over and over again he insists that happiness depends upon action, not contemplation; <sup>1</sup> and so convinced is he that Ethics, like every other science, must start from knowledge of actual facts, that he denies the claim of those to be students of Moral Philosophy who are inexperienced in the actions of life.<sup>2</sup> And it is, surely, in allusion to the demand of the Platonic Philosophy that the multitude shall permit themselves to be moulded by the Platonist potter even into that inferior form of virtue of which alone they are capable, that Aristotle reverts to the famous saying of Hesiod that he is second best only who "obeys one who speaks well," while assigning the moral supremacy to the man who makes his own practical experience of life the basis of his ethical theories and the mainspring of his moral progress.

Thus it seems that Aristotle is the true successor of Socrates, inasmuch as Philosophy, which under the spells of Platonism had withdrawn again to the empyrean, is charmed down once more by the Stageirite to the business and bosoms of mankind. To use the expressive metaphor of Aristotle himself, though not, of course, in this connexion, if the creator of the "Republic" shines as one of "the most beautiful and the

<sup>1</sup> ARISTOTLE: *Ethics*, i. cap. 3. Cf. i. 6 and i. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ethics*, i. 3, 4, where also the verse from the *Works and Days* is quoted; cf. sec. 6.

strongest" present at the Olympian Games, the author of the "Ethics" is one of the "Combatants" who have been crowned, because they have descended into the arena, and by right action have secured what is noble and good in life.<sup>1</sup> After Aristotle, it was improbable that Philosophy would ever again render itself obnoxious to the reproach levelled against Plato by some of his contemporaries that "they went to him expecting to hear about the chief good, but he put them off with a quantity of remarks about numbers and things they could not understand."<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary with the work of Aristotle and his insistence upon the necessity that each individual man should seek for the chief good in the sphere of his own actual experience, occurred the relaxation of the dominant claims of the State to the best part of the energies and activities of the citizen. The change in the political condition of Greece consequent upon the Macedonian conquest had turned the Greek citizen back upon his own soul for inspiration to guide his steps aright. The philosophical tendency was thus aided by external conditions, and the joint operation of both these influences established in Stoicism and Epicureanism the satisfaction of the moral requirements of the individual man as the aim and end of Philosophy.

Whatever importance the leaders of the Stoics attached to Logic and Physics—and different philosophers formed different estimates of their value<sup>3</sup>—all

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics*, i. 8.

<sup>2</sup> GRANT'S *Aristotle*, vol. i. p. 155.

<sup>3</sup> See RITTER and PRELLER, sec. 392, for the authorities on this head.

were agreed that these parts of Philosophy were only useful in so far as they enabled mankind to lead a virtuous life; a life in harmony with nature and its laws; a life which placed them above the domination of "*Fear and hope and phantasy and awe, And wistful yearning and unsated loves, That strain beyond the limits of this life.*"<sup>1</sup> The Epicureans repudiated Dialectic,<sup>2</sup> and, as already stated, studied Physics with a view only to freeing the mind of man from those supernatural fears which hampered him in his attainment of terrestrial virtue and happiness:—

" Nam veluti pueri trepidant atque omnia cæcis  
 In tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus  
 Interdum nilo quæ sunt metuenda magis quam  
 Quæ pueri in tenebris pavitant finguntque futura.  
 Hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necesse est  
 Non radii solis neque lucida tela diei  
 Discutiant, sed naturæ species ratioque."

Lucretius, whose great poem is devoted to an exposition of the physical side of Epicureanism, *i.e.* of the Atomic Philosophy of Democritus,<sup>3</sup> is only on the same ground with Epicurus himself when he makes it clear, not merely by the general complexion of his argument, but by a large number of particular passages, and those, too, the most strikingly beautiful in the poem, that the

<sup>1</sup> *A Voice from the Nile*, by JAMES THOMSON. An Epicurean would have heartily responded to the verse following those quoted in the text from this fine poem—"And therefore Gods and Demons, Heaven and Hell."

<sup>2</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS (RITTER and PRELLER, 380. Cf. CIC.: *De Finibus*, i. 7).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PSEUDO-PLUTARCH: *De Placitis Philosophorum*. 877 D.

investigation of natural phenomena is to serve only as a means of freeing the life of humanity from those cares and vices which are hostile to its peace:—

“Denique avarities et honorum cæca cupido  
 Quæ miseros homines cogunt transcendere fines  
 Juris et interdum socios scelerum atque ministros  
 Noctes atque dies niti præstante labore  
 Ad summas emergere opes, hæc vulnera vitæ  
 Non minimam partem *mortis formidine* aluntur.”

The investigation of nature with a view to eliminating the fear of death as a factor in human conduct, clearly enounced as it is in the poem of the Roman Epicurean, is still more emphatically expressed in a “fundamental maxim” of Epicurus himself: “If we did not allow ourselves to be disturbed by suspicious fears of celestial phenomena; if the terrors of death were never in our minds; and if we would but courageously discuss the limits of our nature as regards pain and desire: we should then have no need to study Natural Philosophy.”<sup>1</sup>

The exclusion of Dialectics,<sup>2</sup> and the subordination of Physics to Ethics, restricted—if, indeed, it were a restriction—the scope of character and intelligence to the sphere of conduct, and it is in the light of this limitation that the full significance of the Epicurean definition of Philosophy lies—“Philosophy is an active principle which aims at securing Happiness by Reason

<sup>1</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS, x. 142. Cf. CIC.: *De Finibus*, i. 19.—“Denique etiam morati melius erimus quum didicerimus quid natura desideret.” (RITTER and PRELLER, p. 343).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the statement of SENECA (*Epist.*, 89. 9).—“Epicurei duas partes philosophiæ putaverunt esse. naturalem atque moralem: rationalem removerunt.”

and Discussion." Here we have in practical completion that identification of Philosophy with Ethics towards which the whole tendency of Greek speculation had been consciously or unconsciously working, and which was fully consummated in the later development of the Stoic and Epicurean systems. The combined effect of this principle of Epicureanism, and of the contemporaneous failure of political interest, was to direct attention to those less ostentatious, but, for happiness, more effective virtues, which flourish in private society and in the daily intercourse of mankind. Because it excluded Dialectics, and because it was excluded from Politics, the gospel of the Garden established an ideal of homely virtue which lay within the reach of the average man, who, like Epicurus himself, was repelled by Plato's distance from life, and did not feel called upon to cherish impracticable schemes of ameliorating society under the dominion of a Demetrius the Liberator, but was willing to content himself with a humbler range of duty, with being temperate and chaste in his habits, simple and healthy in his tastes, cheerful and serene in his personal bearing, amiable and sympathetic with his friends, and cultivating courteous relations in those slightly more extended social circles where comity and tact take the place of the more intimate and familiar virtues of household life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Through the great weight which, both in theory and in their actual life with each other, was laid by the Epicureans on Friendship (a social development which only became possible after the dissolution of the bond which had so closely united each individual citizen to the Civil Community), Epicureanism aided in softening down the asperity



By the method of placing in continuous order certain common and well-known indications, we have endeavoured to illustrate the view that the natural development of Greek Philosophy led in the direction of Ethics, and that the natural development of Ethics led in the direction of a popular scheme of conduct, which, fragmentary and incomplete as it might be in a scientific sense, had yet the advantage that it was founded upon the common daily life of the ordinary man, and placed before the ordinary man in his common daily life an ideal of virtue which, by efforts not beyond his strength, he might realize and maintain. This type of character, partly the growth of the circumstances of the time, but strengthened and expanded by the manner in which Epicureanism adapted itself to those circumstances, reacted upon the sterner conception of the Stoic ideal of private virtue, and when we reach the revival of Religion and Philosophy in the Græco-Roman world of the Empire, it is this ideal which is the aim and end of every philosopher from Seneca to Marcus Aurelius, from Plutarch to Apuleius, no matter what the particular label they may attach to their doctrines to indicate their formal adhesion to one of the great classical schools.<sup>1</sup> To take an extreme example

and exclusiveness of ancient manners, and in cultivating the social virtues of companionableness, compatibility, friendliness, gentleness, beneficence, and gratitude, and so performed a work whose merit we should be careful not to under-estimate."—UEBERWEG: *Grundriss*. Cf. HORACE: *Sat.*, I. iv. 135—"dulcis amicis." The other elements of the Epicurean ideal are also realized in Horace's character, as his writings have left it to us.

<sup>1</sup> This breaking away of the barriers between the teaching of

of a truth which will subsequently be illustrated from Plutarch, Seneca, who is a Stoic of the Stoics, is full of praise for the noble and humane simplicity of the Epicurean ideal of life, and in those inspiring letters through which he directs the conscience of his friend Lucilius into the pure and pleasant ways of truth and virtue, it is an exceptional occurrence for him to conclude one of his moral lessons without quoting in its support the authority of the Master of the Garden. The absorbing interest of Plutarch as a moral philosopher lies mainly in the fact that though, as a polemical writer, he is an opponent, and not always a fair or judicious opponent, both of the Porch and the Garden,<sup>1</sup> he collects from any quarter any kind of

various schools was, doubtless, largely due to the increasing importance which they universally attached to Ethics. The fact, at any rate, is indisputable. Every history of Greek philosophy, from the Third Century onward, is freely scattered with such phrases as these from Ueberweg:—"The new Academy returned to Dogmatism. It commenced with Philo of Larissa, founder of the Fourth School. . . . His pupil, Antiochus of Ascalon, founded a Fifth School, by combining the doctrines of Plato with certain Aristotelian, and more particularly with certain Stoic theses, thus preparing the way for the transition to Neo-Platonism."—"In many of the Peripatetics of this late period we find an approximation to Stoicism."

<sup>1</sup> As regards Epicureanism, see the *Adversus Coloten*, the *De latenter vivendo*, and the *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*. Plutarch's polemic against Stoicism is specially developed in the three tracts, *Stoicos absurdiora Poetis dicere*, *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis*, and *De communibus Notitiis*. Plutarch's attitude is purely critical: he is by no means constructive. His criticism has been severely dealt with by H. Bazin in his dissertation, *De Plutarcho Stoicorum Adversario*. It is worthy of note that Plutarch deals entirely with the founders of the two schools, not with the later developments of their teachings.

teaching which he hopes to find useful in inculcating that ideal of conduct which he believes most likely to work out into virtue and happiness; and though his most revered teacher is Plato, the ideal of conduct which he inculcates is one which Epicurus would have wished his friend Metrodorus to appropriate and exemplify.<sup>1</sup> This ideal Plutarch thought worth preservation; it is the last intelligible and practicable ideal presented to us by Paganism; and the attempts which Plutarch made to preserve it are interesting as those of a man who stood at a crisis in the world's history, and endeavoured to find, in the wisdom and strength and splendour of the Past, a sanction for purity and goodness, when a sanction for purity and goodness was being mysteriously formed, in comparison with which the wisdom and strength and splendour of the Past were to be regarded but as weakness and darkness and folly. The experiment was not without success for a considerable time; and had Paganism been defended

<sup>1</sup> Thiersch, who regards Plutarch as the inaugurator of that moral reformation which, as we attempt to show in the next chapter, was operating before he was born, asserts that at the time when Plutarch began his work, the prevailing manner of life was based upon an Epicurean ideal. (*Der Epikureismus war die Popularphilosophie des Tages, denn in ihr fand die herrschende Lebensweise ihren begrifflichen Ausdruck.*—THIERSCH: *Politik und Philosophie in ihrem Verhältniss, etc.*, Marburg, 1853.) If this be so, and we willingly make the admission, there was little need for reform here, although, as Seneca found (*Ad Lucilium*, xxi. 9), it may have been necessary to explain to a misunderstanding world what Epicureanism really was. Whatever Plutarch, as nominal Platonist, may polemically advance against Epicureanism, the ideal of Epicurus and Metrodorus is realized in the conduct of the group of people whose manner of life is represented in the *Symposiaca*.

by Julian in the pliant form which Plutarch gave it, and in the spirit of tolerance which he infused into his defence of it, it is probable that the harmonious co-operation, and perhaps the complete union, of the classical tradition and the Christian faith would have been the early and beneficial result.<sup>1</sup> With a view to observing some of the factors which contributed to the success of Plutarch's work, we propose to give a brief glance at the ethical condition of the epoch in which it was carried on.

<sup>1</sup> For some considerations on this subject see the concluding chapter.

### CHAPTER III.

*Ethical aspect of Græco-Roman Society in the period of Plutarch : difficulty of obtaining an impartial view of it—Revival of moral earnestness concurrent with the establishment of the Empire: the reforms of Augustus a formal expression of actual tendencies—Evidences of this in philosophical and general literature—The differences between various Schools modified by the importance of the ethical end to which all their efforts were directed—Endeavour made to base morality on sanctions already consecrated by the philosophies and religious traditions of the Past—Plutarch's "Ethics" the result of such an endeavour.*

**F**EW ages have left to posterity a character less easy to define, or more subjected to the ravages of mutually destructive schools of criticism, than that which gave the Religion of Christ to the Western world, and witnessed the moulding of Pagan Religion and Philosophy—or rather of Pagan religions and philosophies—into that systematized shape which they afterwards presented against the progress of Christianity. Many ancient and some modern apologists of Christianity have appeared to think it essential to the honour and glory of their Creed that the world, before its rise, should be regarded as sunk in iniquity to such a depth that nothing but a Divine Revelation could serve to

elevate and purify it.<sup>1</sup> It has been maintained, on the other hand, and that too by Christian writers, that no epoch of Western civilization has been so marked, not only by the material well-being of the mass of mankind, but "by virtue in the highest places and by moderation and sobriety in the ranks beneath," as that during which the new Creed was generally regarded as a base and superstitious sort of Atheism.<sup>2</sup> It may be conceded that the original authors of this period who have been most read in modern times have easily been construed into vigorous and effective testimony in support of the former position. The poets and rhetoricians of the Empire have had their most exaggerated phrases turned into evidence against the morals of their own days, and their less emphatic expressions have been regarded as hinting at the perpetration of vices too

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Dr. August Tholuck.—At the termination of an article, "*Ueber den Einfluss des Heidenthums aufs Leben*," in which he ransacks classical authors and Christian fathers for anything which may serve to exhibit the degradation of Pagan society, he quotes the words of Athanasius to give expression to the conclusion referred to in the text. The whole of Champagny's brilliant and fascinating work on the Cæsars is dominated by the same spirit, a spirit utterly inconsistent with that attitude of philosophical detachment in which history should be written. (*Études sur l'Empire Romain*, tome iii., "*Les Cæsars*.") Archbishop Trench, too, says of our period that it "was the hour and power of darkness; of a darkness which then, immediately before the dawn of a new day, was the thickest." (*Miracles*, p. 162.) Prof. Mahaffy, in the same uncritical spirit, refers to the "singular" and "melancholy" spectacle presented by Plutarch in his religious work, "*clinging to the sinking ship, or rather, trying to stop the leak and declare her seaworthy*." (*Greeks under Roman Sway*, p. 321.)

<sup>2</sup> See Dean Merivale, *Romans under the Empire*, vol. vii.

monstrous to be more clearly indicated. If, by chance an author has left writings marked by a lofty conception of morality, and breathing the purest and most disinterested love of virtue, this very fact has been sufficient to justify a denial of their Pagan origin, and the assertion that the true source of their inspiration must have been Judæa. Hence the curious struggles of many intelligent men to establish a personal connexion between Paul and Seneca, and to demonstrate that the Ethics of Plutarch are coloured by Christian modes of thought.<sup>1</sup> Other authors of the period who

<sup>1</sup> See "St. Paul and Seneca" (Dissertation ii. in Lightfoot on "Philippians") for a full account of the question from the historical and critical standpoints. The learned and impartial Bishop has no difficulty in proving that the resemblances between Stoicism and Christianity were due to St. Paul's acquaintance with Stoic teaching, and not to Seneca's knowledge of the Christian faith.

Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, in Syria (consecrated A.D. 420), appears to have been the first to assert the operation of Christian influences on Plutarch:—"Plotinus, Plutarch, and Numenius, and the rest of heir tribe, who lived after the Manifestation of our Saviour to the Gentiles, inserted into their own writings many points of Christian Theology." (Theodoretus, *Græcarum affectionum curatio*—Oratio ii., De Principio.) In another place he makes a still more definite assertion: "Plutarch and Plotinus undoubtedly heard the Divine Gospel." (Oratio x., De Oraculis.) Rualdus, in the ninth chapter of his *Vita Plutarchi*, given towards the end of the first volume of the Paris edition of 1624, dare not be so emphatic as Theodoret:—"There are, in the writings of Plutarch, numerous thoughts, drawn from I cannot say what hidden source, which, from their truth and importance, could be taken for the utterances of a Christian oracle. I do not hesitate, therefore, to say of him, as Tertullian said of Seneca, that he is 'often our own man.'" And he even goes so far as to admit that, though Plutarch never attacked the Christian faith, and might have read the New Testament as well as the Old, it is quite impossible to claim him as a believer.—Brucker, in a slight account of Plutarch in his *Historia Critica Philosophiæ*, takes a more critical view.—"The fact that

furnish material for correcting this one-sided impression have been less known to the multitude and less consulted by the learned. Even were the worst true that Juvenal, and Tacitus, and Martial, and Suetonius, and Petronius have said about Roman courts and Roman society; even were it not possible to supply a corrective colouring to the picture from the pages of Seneca, and Lucan, and Pliny, and Persius, and even Juvenal himself: yet it should be easy to remember that, just as the Palace of the Cæsars was not the City, so the City was not the Empire. *Exeat aula qui volct esse pius* is a maxim that could with advantage be applied to the sphere of historical criticism as well as to that of practical Ethics; and if we leave the factions and scandals of the Court and the City under the worst of the Emperors, and follow Dion into the huts of lonely

Plutarch, in his numerous writings, nowhere alludes to the Christians, I do not know whether to attribute to his sense of fairness, or even to actual favour, or whether to regard it as an indication of mere neglect and contempt." That Brucker is inclined to the alternative of contempt is shown by a comment in a footnote on Tillemont's assertion (*Histoire des Empereurs*), that Plutarch ignored the Christians, "not daring to speak well, not wishing to speak ill." "It appears to me," says Brucker, "that the real reason was contempt for the Christians, who were looked upon as illiterate."

Of modern examples of this tendency one may be sufficient. In the introduction to an American translation of the *De Sera Numinis Vinlictu*, the editor, after enumerating the arguments against any connexion between Plutarch and Christianity, concludes:—"Yet I cannot doubt that an infusion of Christianity had somehow infiltrated itself into Plutarch's ethical opinions and sentiment, as into those of Seneca." ("Plutarch on the Delay of the Divine Justice," translated, with an introduction and notes, by ANDREW P. PEABODY. Boston, 1885.)



herdsmen on the deserted hills of Eubœa, or linger with Plutarch at some modest gathering of family friends in Athens or the villages of Bœotia, we shall find innumerable examples of that virtue which the Republican poet sarcastically denies to the highest rulers. Even after the long reign of Christianity, vice has been centralized in the great capitals of civilization; and Rome and Alexandria and Antioch are not without their parallels among the cities of Modern Europe. In Alexandria itself, the populace who could listen to discourses like those of Dion must have been endowed with a considerable capacity for virtue; the tone of the orator, indeed, frequently reminds us of those modern preachers who provoke an agreeable sensation of excitement in the minds of their highly respectable audiences, by depicting them as involved in such wickedness as only the most daring of mankind would find courage to perpetrate.<sup>1</sup> We propose to deal elsewhere with the testimony of Plutarch as to the moral character of the age in which he lived, and at present confine our observations to the assertion that his "Ethical" writings are crowded with examples of the purest and most genuine virtue; not such virtue as shows itself on striking and public occasions only, but such also as irradiates the daily life of the common people in their homes and occupations. And although he is, perhaps, in some of his precepts, a little in advance of the general trend of his times, inculcating, in these instances,

<sup>1</sup> See DION: *Ad Alexandrinos*, p. 410 (Dindorf). See also p. 402. Cf. PHILOSTRATUS: *Vitæ Sophistarum*, i. 6.

virtues which, though not unpractised and unknown, are still so far limited in their application that he wishes to draw them from their shy seclusion in some few better homes, and to establish them in the broad and popular light of recognized customs;<sup>1</sup> yet it is clear to every one of the few students of his pages that the virtues he depicts are the common aim of the people he meets in the streets and houses of Chæronea, and that the failings he corrects are the failings of the good people who are not too good to have to struggle against the temptations incident to humanity. The indications conveyed by Plutarch and Dion respecting the moral progress of obscure families and unknown villagers point to the widespread existence through the Empire of that same strenuous longing after goodness, which had already received emphatic expression in the writings of philosophers and poets whose activities had been confined to Rome.

For there can be no doubt that the establishment of the Empire had been accompanied by a strenuous moral earnestness which is in marked contrast to the flippant carelessness of the last days of the Republican Era. The note of despair—despair none the less because its external aspect was gay and *debonnaire*—so frequently raised by Ovid and Propertius and Tibullus; the reckless cry, *Interca, dum fata sinunt, jungamus amores; Iam veniet tenebris Mors adoperta caput*, is the

<sup>1</sup> E.g., *Conjugalia Præcepta*, 140 A.—“Those who do not associate cheerfully with their wives, nor share their recreations with them, teach them to seek their own pleasures apart from those of their husbands.”

last word of a dying epoch.<sup>1</sup> These three great poets utter the swan song of the moribund Republic. Their beliefs are sceptical, or frankly materialistic; they shut their eyes at the prospect of death to open them on the nearer charms of the sensual life: devoting their days and their genius to the pleasures of a passionately voluptuous love of women. In their higher moods they turn to the Past, but with an antiquarian interest only, like Ovid and Propertius, or, like Tibullus, to delight in the religious customs that still linger in the rural parts of Italy, the relics of a simpler and devouter time. If they turn their thoughts to the Afterworld at all, it is to depict in glowing verses the conventional charms of the classic Elysium, or to find occasion for striking description in the fabled woes of Ixion and Tantalus.<sup>2</sup> Even these descriptions change by a natural gradation into an appeal for more passionate devotion on the part of Corinna, or Delia, or Cynthia.<sup>3</sup> If Propertius thinks of death, it is but to hope that Cynthia will show her regard for his memory by visiting his tomb in her old age; to regret, with infinite pathos, the thousands of "dear dead women" who have become the prey of the Infernal Deities—*sunt apud infernos tot milia formosarum*; to lament that his deserted mistress will call in vain upon his scattered

<sup>1</sup> TIBULLUS: *Eleg.*, i. 1. Cf. PROPERTIUS: *Eleg.*, iii. 15. "Dum nos fata sinunt, oculos satiemus amore: Nox tibi longa venit, nec reditura dies."

<sup>2</sup> TIBULLUS: *Eleg.*, i. 3. "Quod si fatales iam nunc explevimus annos," to the end of the Elegy.

<sup>3</sup> TIB., i. 3 (sub finem).

dust; or to postpone all consideration of such matters until age shall have exhausted his capacity for more passionate enjoyment. If he mentions the mighty political events of his time, it is with the air of one who watches a triumphal procession while resting his head on his mistress's shoulder.<sup>1</sup> But these poets, wrapped in all the physical pleasures which their age had to supply, are not ignorant of the malady from which it suffers; they know that their despair and their materialism are born of the misery of long years of sanguinary strife; and Tibullus, in one of the sweetest of his Elegies, utters a wish which is the Ave of the storm-tossed Republic to the approaching peace of the Empire:—*At nobis, Pax alma, veni.*<sup>2</sup>

*Cum domino Pax ista venit.*<sup>3</sup> Virgil and Horace are poets of the Empire, and strike the dominant note of the new epoch. It was not the mere courtly complaisance of genius for its patrons that led Virgil and Horace to identify their muse with the religious and moral reforms of Augustus. It was rather a conscious recognition of the spiritual needs of the new age which led poets and statesmen alike to further this joint work. It is the custom to regard the labours of Augustus as resulting in the superimposition on the social fabric of mere forms and rituals which would have been appropriate were society only a fabric, but which were utterly inadequate to serve as anything better than a superficial ornament to an expanding and

<sup>1</sup> PROPERTIUS: *Eleg.*, ii. 13, 28; iv. 5, 23 sqq.; iv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> TIB., i. 10.

<sup>3</sup> LUCAN: *Pharsalia*, i. 670.

developing organism.<sup>1</sup> But, taken in conjunction with the poems of Virgil and Horace, they show their real character as outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace. It is true that Horace at times attributes the disasters from which his countrymen have suffered to their disregard of the ancient religious ceremonies; to their neglect of the *templa ædesque labentes deorum et fæda nigro simulacra fumo*;<sup>2</sup> but in the six famous Odes which stand at the head of Book III he emphasizes the national necessity of chastity, fidelity, mercy, loyalty to duty; and he utters not less emphatic warnings against the general danger from avarice, ambition, luxury. The essentially religious character of the *Æneid* is evident to every reader. That is no mere formalism which inspires with moral vigour the splendid melodies of the Sixth Book.<sup>3</sup> Although the Poet uses the conventional machinery of Elysium and Tartarus to emphasize the contrast between Virtue and Vice by contrasting the fates that

<sup>1</sup> The basis of the work of Augustus, and of the religious reforms inaugurated or developed by him, is laid in the recognition of a fact noted by Balbus in Cic., *De Nat. Deorum*, lib. ii. 3. "Eorum imperiis rempublicam amplificatam qui religionibus paruissent. Et si conferre volumus nostra cum externis, ceteris rebus aut pares aut etiam inferiores reperiemur; religione, id est, cultu deorum, multo superiores." Cf. HORACE: *Od.*, iii. 6, vv. 1-4; LIVY, xlv. 39.

<sup>2</sup> HOR: *Od.*, iii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> See BOISSIER: *Religion Romaine*, vol. i. cap. 5.—*Le Sixième Livre de l'Énéide*. St. Augustine must surely have felt the religious influence of the *Æneid* when he experienced the emotion which he describes in the well-known passage in the First Book of the Confessions—*plorare Didonem mortuam (cogebur), quia se occidit ob amorem: cum interea meipsum morientem, Deus Vita mea, siccis oculis ferrem miserimus*. (Lib. i. cap. xiii.)

await them hereafter; yet justice, piety, patriotism, chastity, self-devotion; fidelity to friend and wife and client; filial and fraternal love: never received advocacy more strenuous and sincere, never were sanctioned by praise more eloquent, or reprehension more terrible, than in those immortal verses which it is an impertinence to praise. The question which presented itself to Augustus, to his ministers and to his poets, was how to re-invigorate and preserve those qualities by her practice of which Rome had become *puleherrima rerum*. And we cannot wonder that an important part of their answer to this question lay in the direction of restoring those ancient religious ceremonies and moral practices which had been most conspicuously displayed when Rome was making her noblest efforts to accomplish her great destiny. The sanction of antiquity is the most permanent of all appeals that are ever made to humanity; and, even in times of revolution, its authority has been invoked by those most eager to sweep away existing institutions. *Pro magno teste vetustas creditur*.<sup>1</sup> But if Augustus and his friends appealed to antiquity, it was not merely to recall the shadows of the ancient forms and customs, but to revivify them with the new life of virtue that was welling up in their time, and which, in its turn, received external grace and strength by its embodiment in the ancestral forms.

The strong chord of moral earnestness struck by Horace and Virgil grows more resonant as the new era

<sup>1</sup> OVID: *Fasti*, 4, 203; cf. *Meta.*, i. sec. 8.

advances, until, in literature at least, it attains the persistence of a dominant. Juvenal is so passionately moral that he frequently renders himself liable to Horace's censure of those who worship virtue too much; but, in his best moods, as in the famous lines which close the Tenth Satire, he depicts the virtuous man in a style which is not the less earnest and sincere because it is also dignified and calm. Persius, whose disposition was marked by maidenly modesty and gentleness, and who is also described as *frugi et pudicus*, shows, even when hampered by a disjointed style which only allows him to utter his thought in fragments, that devotion to the highest moral aims which we should expect from a writer brought up under the influences which he enjoyed;<sup>1</sup> and though he, too, exhibits some of the savage ferocity of Juvenal in his strictures of vice, he yet pays, in his Fifth Satire, that tribute to virtue in the person of Cornutus which "proves the goodness of the writer and the gracefulness with which he could write."<sup>2</sup> Lucan, too, whose youth, like that of Persius, had the inestimable advantage of receiving a share of the wisdom which Cornutus had gained by nights devoted to philosophic studies, exhibits a spirit of the loftiest morality under the rhetorical phrasing of his great Republican Epic.<sup>3</sup> Looking back, with something of regret, to the days of a dominant

<sup>1</sup> See the Life of Persius, included, with the Lives of Terence, Horace, Juvenal, Lucan, and Pliny the Elder, in the writings of Suetonius.

<sup>2</sup> MACLEANE'S *Persius*.—Introduction.

<sup>3</sup> PERSIUS: *Sat.*, v. 62-64.—*At te nocturnis jurat impallescere chartis, Cultor enim jurecum purgatas inseris aures Fruge Cleanthea.*

oligarchy, he does not conceal the licentiousness which society harboured beneath the sway of the later Optimates, and he turns mostly to Cato as the type which he would fain accept as representative of the true Roman patrician :—

“ Nam cui crediderim Superos arcana daturus  
Dieturosque magis quam sancto vera Catoni ? ”<sup>1</sup>

The noble lines in which Cato refuses to consult the Libyan oracle—*Non exploratum populis Ammonia relinquens*—are well known, and express a highly ethical view of the divine administration of the world :—

“ Hæremus cuncti superis, temploque tacente  
Nil facimus non sponte Dei : nec vocibus ullis  
Numen agit : dixitque semel nascentibus auctor  
Quicquid scire licet : steriles nec legit arenas  
Ut caneret paucis, mersitque hoc pulvere verum.  
Estne Dei sedes nisi terra et pontus et aer  
Et cælum et virtus ? Superos quid quærimus ultra ?  
Juppiter est quodeunque vides quocunque moveris.”<sup>2</sup>

His biting sarcasms on those who exercise the art of Magic are conceived in the same spirit of lofty reverence for the Divine Nature,<sup>3</sup> and he would fain believe

<sup>1</sup> *Pharsalia*, ix. 554-555.

<sup>2</sup> *Pharsalia*, ix. 570. We have not been able to refrain from quoting these—as other—well-known verses in the text. They are the highest expression of the Stoic Pantheism. “*Virtus*” has the appearance of a rhetorical climax ; but has it been noticed that the great modern poet of Pantheism—for what else was Wordsworth?—also makes humanity the highest embodiment of that “presence . . . Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, And the round ocean and the living air, And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ?”

<sup>3</sup> *Quis labor hic superis*, &c., vi. 490. *et passim*.



in the immortality of the soul as a stimulus to virtue and self-abnegation in the present life.<sup>1</sup>

The philosophers are marked by the same strenuous seriousness as the poets. The letters of Seneca to Lucilius are still an *Enchiridion* for those that love virtue, and though there were, doubtless, in the ranks of the philosophers some who deserved the ferocity of Juvenal; some who laid themselves open to the sarcasms of Seneca's friend, Marcellinus;<sup>2</sup> some like Euxenus, an early teacher of Apollonius of Tyana, "who did not care much to conform the actions of his life" to the tenets of the philosophy he professed;<sup>3</sup> some who resembled the Cynics who haunted the streets and temple gates of Alexandria, and did nothing, as Dion said, "but teach fools to laugh at Philosophy;"<sup>4</sup> yet it is beyond controversy that philosophers at this time were generally recognized as the moral teachers of society, and contributed largely, both as domestic chaplains like Fronto, and evangelistic preachers like Apollonius of Tyana, to the spread of that virtue whose praise and admiration are so conspicuous and sincere in the Greek and Roman writers of the period. The contrast presented by the Sophists, with their artificial graces and their luxurious lives, only served to emphasize the worth of the true philosopher, and when a

<sup>1</sup> *Felices errore suo*, &c., i. 459.

<sup>2</sup> *Scrutabitur scholas nostras, et obiiciet philosophis congiaria, amicas, gulam: ostendet mihi alium in adulterio, alium in popina, alium in aula.*—SENECA: *Epist.*, i. 29.

<sup>3</sup> PHILOSTRATUS, i. 7. The quaint turn of the version in the text is from BLOUNT'S 1681 translation of the *Life of Apollonius*.

<sup>4</sup> DION: *Oratio* 32, pp. 402-3 (Dindorf).

Sophist turned round upon his career, and determined to lead a virtuous life, he joined the ranks of those who professed philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most frequently recurrent signs of the essential love of virtue exhibited by this age is the constant and strenuous insistence that practice must conform to profession; and that hypocrisy is almost in the condition of a cardinal vice. It may, of course, be asserted that the passionate eagerness displayed touching the importance of being true in act to the explicit utterances of Philosophy is but a sign of conscious weakness in well-doing; and that a truer virtue would have given effect to itself without all this noisy preaching. But a recognition of one's own feebleness has subsequently become one of the most lauded elements of the saintly character, and it is given to very few to blossom gently and naturally into that goodness which does neither strive nor cry. Juvenal's diatribes against the Egnatii of Rome are not very different in language, and hardly different at all in spirit, from the attacks of New Testament writers on hypocritical members of the Churches. So far as Greece was concerned, this love of sincerity was but a return—from a somewhat distant lapse—to the ideal of personal openness presented in the famous words of Achilles:—

<sup>1</sup> See DIOX: *De Cognitione Dei* (pp. 213-4) for an interesting comparison between the owl and the philosopher on the one hand, and the sophist and the peacock on the other. (Cf. *Ad Alexandrinos*, p. 406, where the sufferings of the faithful philosopher are in implied contrast to the rewards that await the brilliant sophist.)

“ For like hell mouth I loath

Who holds not in his words and thoughts one indistinguished troth.”<sup>1</sup>

And not only is practice regarded as the culmination of theory, the habit formed upon the active principle, Philosophy, but the question of personal honour is involved in the harmony between creed and deed; and one mark of distinction between sophist and philosopher is that the external apparatus of the former—“his contracted brows and studied gravity of aspect”—do not indicate the possession of the virtues which are the pride of the latter.<sup>2</sup>

Plutarch frequently lays strenuous weight on this point;<sup>3</sup> Seneca, Dion, Aurelius, Epictetus, Apuleius, are crowded with sermons on its importance.<sup>4</sup> And if pure professions are to be carried out into pure actions,

<sup>1</sup> *Iliad*, ix. 312-3 (Chapman's translation). This actual text is quoted in PHILOSTRATUS' *Lives of the Sophists* (i. 25) as a criticism on some of the false and fantastic exercises of the Sophists. The “distant lapse” referred to in the text is constantly evident in the dramas of the best Athenian period. And history shows that there was a strong tendency in the Hellenic character agreeing with that indicated by the evidence of the dramatists, notwithstanding the outcry raised when Euripides summed up the whole matter in his famous line in the *Hippolytus* (*Hipp.* 612).

<sup>2</sup> PHILOSTRATUS: *Vitæ Sophistarum*, lib. i. sec. 24.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., *De Stoic. Repug.*, 1033 A, B; *De Audiendo*, 43 F.

<sup>4</sup> See frequent passages in Seneca's letters to Lucilius, e.g. *Ep.* i. 16, 20. Cf. *De Vita Beata*, cap. 18, where Seneca defends himself and other philosophers against the charge “*aliter loqueris: aliter vivis.*” He will not be deterred from the pursuit of virtue by any truth human weakness may have to admit in the charge.

This note is well marked in both Aurelius and Epictetus (ii. 19. Cf. AULUS GELLIUS, xvii. 19). The praise of Ulysses at the end of the *De Deo Socratis* of Apuleius is couched in the same strain.

there is a growing sense that neither may impure words be indulged in, even by those whose lives are pure. Even so far as the composition of light verse was concerned, a new sensitiveness was making itself evident. Catullus had said in the old days that a chaste and pious man might legitimately write verses of a licentious character, and the catchword had been repeated by all the society poets down to Martial.<sup>1</sup> But, even when addressing Domitian, Martial, who asserts that his life is pure, begs the Emperor to regard his lightest epigrams with the toleration due to the licence of a court jester. Pliny, the excellent and respectable Pliny, could not read his naughty hendecasyllables "merely to a few friends in my private chamber" without subjecting his compositions to serious criticisms in the homes of these friends, criticisms which he strives to meet by a long display of great names who have sinned in the same direction; but beneath this display his uneasiness peeps forth at every word.<sup>2</sup>

The moral reformation officially inaugurated by Augustus appears, in the light of these indications, as corresponding to an increased tendency to virtue

<sup>1</sup> CATULLUS, xvi. 4, 5; OVID: *Tristia*, ii. 353-4; MARTIAL, i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> PLINY: *Ep.* v. 3. Plutarch, also, is legitimately offended at the loose language of the founders of Stoicism (see *De Stoic. Repug.*, 1044 B), and his expressions, as are those of Pliny's friends, are quite in harmony with the modern attitude on the question. Apuleius defends himself against a similar charge to that brought against Pliny by a similar display of great names.—"*Fecere tamen et alii talia*" (*De Deo Socratis*).

actually leavening Græco-Roman society. The formal acts of the Cæsar, the policy of his ministers, the religious sentiment of Horace and Virgil, the Stoic fervour of Seneca and Lucan, the martyr spirit of the Thraseas and the Arrias, the tyrannizing morality of Juvenal, the kindly humanity of Pliny the Younger, the missionary enthusiasm of Dion, the gentle persuasiveness of Plutarch, are all common indications of the good that still interfused the Roman world; all point, as indeed, many other signs also point, to the existence of a widespread belief that virtuous ideals and virtuous actions were an inheritance of which mankind ought not to allow itself to be easily deprived. Philosophers and politicians, as they were at one in recognizing the value of this heritage, so they were also at one touching the general means by which its precious elements were to be invigorated and maintained. As we have already suggested, it is a remarkable characteristic of the philosophic writers of this period—of Seneca and Dion, of Plutarch, and even of Epictetus—that there is in them no pedantic adhesion to the fixed tenets of a particular school. The half-playful boast of Horace at one end of the period—*nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri*<sup>1</sup>—is reiterated with something of sarcastic emphasis in Epictetus at the other: “Virtue does not consist in having understood Chrysippus.”<sup>2</sup> Seneca gives expression to this prevalent spirit of compromise with great courage and

<sup>1</sup> HORACE: *Ep.*, i. 1, 14.

<sup>2</sup> EPICTETUS: *Encheir.*, 49: *Discourses*, iii. 2; i. 17.

clearness. After quoting *suo more* a certain *nobilis sententia* of Epicurus, he says: "You must not regard these expressions as peculiar to Epicurus; they are common property. The practice which obtains in the Senate should, I think, be adopted in Philosophy. When a speaker says something with which I partly agree, I ask him to compromise, and then I go with him."<sup>1</sup> Anything in the whole gathered wealth of the Past which promised support to a man in his efforts to regulate his life in accordance with the dictates of reason and virtue was welcomed and made available for the uses of morality by the selective power of Philosophy. Hence Plutarch levies contributions on philosophers, poets, legislators; on Hellenic and Barbarian Religions; on Mysteries, Oracles, private utterances; on the whole complex civilization of the Græco-Roman world, and the civilizations which it had absorbed or dominated; on everything, in fact, which, from its antiquity, or its possession of national or individual authority, could be made available for establishing the practice of virtue on the sanction of an ancient and

<sup>1</sup> SENECA: *Epist. ad Lucilium*, i. 21. Here are a few of the *egregia dicta* which Seneca takes from the teachings of Epicurus, or Metrodorus, or *alicujus ex illa officina*.—" *Honesta res est lata paupertas*," " *Satis magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus*," " *Philosophiæ servitus oportet ut tibi contingat vera libertas*," " *Si cui sua non videntur amplissima, licet totius mundi dominus sit, tamen miser est*," " *Quid est turpius, quam senex vivere incipiens?*" " *Is maxime divitiis fruitur, qui minime divitiis indiget*," " *Immodica ira gignit insaniam*," " *Sic fac omnia, tanquam spectet Epicurus*," " *Initium est salutis, notitia peccati*," &c. Yet Seneca was the *acerrimus Stoicus* of Lactantius (*Div. Inst.*, i. 5).

inalienable foundation. The object of the following pages is to scrutinize the results of this appeal to the Past, as they are presented in the "Ethics" of Plutarch, and to arrange in some kind of order the various elements of which they are composed.

## CHAPTER IV.

*Plutarch's attitude towards Pagan beliefs marked by a spirit of reverent rationalism—The three recognized sources of Religion: Poetry, Philosophy, and Law or Custom—The contribution of each to be examined by Reason with the object of avoiding both Superstition and Atheism: Reason the "Mystagogue" of Religion—Provisional examples of Plutarch's method in the three spheres—His reluctance to press rationalism too far—His piety partly explained by his recognition of the divine mission of Rome—Absence of dogmatism in his teaching.*

THE question which meets us on the very threshold of an inquiry into the religious views and moral teachings of Plutarch is that involved in a definition of his attitude towards the popular faith. His desire to form a consistent body of doctrine out of its heterogeneous and chaotic elements is not so intense as to blind him to the difficulties of the task. Poets, legislators, and philosophers have jointly contributed to the formation of the "ancient and hereditary Faith," and Philosophy, Law, and Poetry, avoid reconciliation to as great a degree as, in the days of Solon, the famous Attic factions of the Paraloi, the Epakrioi, and the Pedieis, to the pacification of whose internecine animosities the policy of that statesman was directed. The gods of the philosophers are like the Immortals of Pindar:—



“ Not death they know, nor age, nor toil and pain,  
And hear not Acheron's deep and solemn strain.”<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy, too, rejects the Strifes, the Prayers, the Terrors, and the Fears, which Homeric poesy elevates to the divine rank.<sup>2</sup> Its teachings, moreover, are often at variance with religious practices established or recognized by Law and Prescription, as when Xenophanes chid the Egyptians for lamenting Osiris as a mortal, while yet worshipping him as a god. Poets and legislators, in their turn, refuse to recognize the metaphysical conceptions—“ Ideas, Numbers, Unities, Spirits”—which philosophers—Platonists, Pythagoreans, and Stoics—have put in the place of Deity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fragment 120 in Bergk's third edition, 144 in his fourth edition, and 107 in Böckh's edition. W. Christ includes it in his selections —ἐξ ἀδήλων εἰδῶν (No. 4).

<sup>2</sup> *Iliad*, ix. 498; xi. 3, 73; iv. 440.

<sup>3</sup> *Amatorius*, 763 C, sqq.; cf. *De Placitis Philosoph.*, lib. i. 879-880 A. This tract cannot be quoted as authority for Plutarch's views; it is in several places distinctly, even grossly, anti-Platonic, and in other places even more distinctly Epicurean. As an example of the reverence with which Plutarch constantly alludes to Plato, the first conversation in the Eighth Book of the *Symposiacs* may be quoted. The conversation arises out of a celebration of Plato's birthday, and Plutarch gives a sympathetic report of the remarks of Mestrius Florus, who is of opinion that those who impute the philosopher's paternity to Apollo do not dishonour the God. Cf. this and hundreds of other similar examples with the bitterly contemptuous expressions in the *De Placitis*, 881 A, a section which concludes with an emphatic exposition of that Epicurean view which Plutarch exerts himself so strenuously to confute in the *De Sera Numinis Vindicta*. Bernardakis “stars” the *De Placitis*, though Zimmerman quotes it as evidence against the sincerity of Plutarch's piety (*Epistolu ad Nicolaum Nonnen*, cap. 7: “aperte negat providentiam”). Wytttenbach says the *De Placitis* was “c perditis quibusdam germanis libris compilatum.” Christopher Meiners (*Historia Doctrinæ de Vero Deo*, p. 246) attacks

This clashing of discordant elements in the mass of the popular tradition is audible in Plutarch's exposition of his own views; a fact which is less to be wondered at when we accept the hint furnished in the allusion to Osiris just quoted, and note that Plutarch will not confine his efforts, as "arbitrator between the three Factions which dispute about the nature of the Gods," to the sphere of Græco-Roman Mythology.<sup>1</sup> But although he will sit in turn at the feet of poets, philosophers, and legislators, borrowing, from Science, Custom, Tradition alike, any teaching which promises ethical usefulness, he frequently insists, both in general terms and in particular discussions on points of practical morals, that Reason must be the final judge of what is worthy of selection as the basis of moral action. Philosophy, in his beautiful metaphor, so full of solemn meaning to a Greek ear, must be our Mystagogue to

the boldness of the writer, "quâ decorum numen et providentiam impugnavit, quæque a Plutarchi pietate et moribus longe abhorret." Corsini seems to think that the incredible labour involved in the compilation makes it worthy of Plutarch. His edition, with notes, translation, and dissertations, makes a very handsome quarto, which is a monument of combined industry and simplicity. He makes no comment on the anti-Platonic expressions alluded to above (CORSINIUS: *Plutarchi De Placitis Philosophorum*, libri v., Florence, 1759), nor does Mahaffy either, who regards the *De Placitis* as genuine, though he calls it jejune. I have been unable to see a copy of Beck's 1787 edition, which Volkmann highly praises. It may be observed with regard to the passage referred to at the head of this note that Plutarch would never have limited the contribution of philosophy to the knowledge of God to τὸ φυσικόν. Dion Chrysostom (*De Dei Cognitione*, 393, sq.) mentions the same three sources of the knowledge of the Divine nature as Plutarch, but also postulates a primeval and innate cognition of God.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Pseudo-Plutarchic *De Placit. Phil.*, 880 A.

Theology: we must borrow Reason from Philosophy, and take her as our guide to the mysteries of Religion, reverently submitting every detail of creed or practice to her authority.<sup>1</sup> We shall then avoid the charge that we take with our left hand what our teachers—our legislative, mythological, philosophic instructors—have offered with their right. The selecting and controlling power of Reason, applied to philosophical discussions, will enable us to attain to a becoming conception of the nature of the Deity; applied to the matter of Mythology, it will enable us to reject the narratives, at once discreditable and impossible, which have become current respecting the traditional gods; and, in the sphere of Law and Custom, it will enable us correctly to interpret the legal ordinances and established rules connected with sacrifices and other religious celebrations. The assumption which inspires all Plutarch's arguments on matters of Religion is that these three sources supply a rational basis for belief and conduct: but that superstition on the one hand, and atheistic misrepresentation on the other, have done so much to obscure the true principles of belief that Philosophy must analyse the whole material over again, and dissociate the rational and the pure from crude exaggerations and unintelligent accretions.<sup>2</sup> It must

<sup>1</sup> Λόγον ἐκ φιλοσοφίας μυσταγωγῶν ἀναλαβόντες. *De Iside et Osiride*, 378 A, B. "Un lien pieux se formait entre le myste et son mystagogue, lien qui ne pouvait plus se rompre sans crime."—Maury, vol. ii. cap. xi. For the saying of Theodorus about "taking with the left hand what is offered with the right," see *De Tranquillitate Animi*, 467 B.

<sup>2</sup> *De Iside et Osiride*, and *De Superstitione*, passim.

be admitted that he applies no definite rules of criticism, constructs no scientifically exact system of analysis, propounds no infallible dogmas. His canon is the general taste and good sense of the educated man; a canon which, vague as it may seem, is based upon an intelligent knowledge of the practical needs of life, and produces results which are applicable in a remarkable degree to the satisfaction of such needs. As provisional illustrations of Plutarch's method in the three spheres of Philosophy, Mythology, and National Custom, we may note the discussion on the nature of God in the "De E apud Delphos," the criticism of the great national poets of Greece in the "Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat," and the remarks in the "De Iside et Osiride" concerning certain religious practices in the worship of these two Egyptian deities.

In the first-named tract the ostensible subjects of discussion are the nature and attributes of Apollo; but it soon becomes quite clear that the argument is concerned with the nature of Deity itself rather than with the functions of the traditional god. "We constantly hear theologians asserting and repeating in verse and in prose that the nature of God is eternal and incorruptible, but that this nature, by the operation of an intelligent and inevitable law, effects certain changes in its own form. At one time God reduces all nature to uniformity by changing His substance to fire; and, again, in a great variety of ways, under many forms, enters into the phenomenal world.<sup>1</sup> . . . Philosophers,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *DIOG. LAERT.* vii. 134 (*RITTER and PRELLER*, sect. 404).—"God, by transformation of His own essence, makes the world."—

in their desire to conceal these high matters from the common herd, call God's transmutation into fire by two names—Apollo, to express His unity; Phœbus, to describe His clear-shining purity. To denote God's suffering the change of His nature into air and water and earth and stars, and the various species of plants and animals, they figuratively tell of 'tearings asunder' and 'dismemberings,' and in these aspects He is variously called Dionysus, Zagræus, Nyktelius, and Isodaites, and His 'destructions' and 'disappearances,' His 'death' and His 'resurrection,' are inventions, enigmas, and myths, fittingly expressing, for the general ear, the true nature of the changes in God's essence in the formation of the world."<sup>1</sup> Plutarch here represents himself as the speaker; and while Ammonius, who was Plutarch's master,<sup>2</sup> and is always spoken of by him with the greatest reverence, is subsequently introduced as taking a different view of the processes by which God produced the world of phenomena, yet neither does he depart from the rational standpoint in his view of the terms under discussion.<sup>3</sup> In allusion to these

Grant's *Aristotle*, Essay vi., "The Ancient Stoics." Cf. PLUT: *De Stoic. Repugn.* 1053.

<sup>1</sup> *De E apud Delphos*, 388 F.

<sup>2</sup> *Quomodo Adulator*, 78 E. Cf. EUNAPIUS on *Historians of Philosophy*. "No one has written any careful account of the lives of philosophers, among whom we count not only Ammonius, teacher of divinest Plutarch, but also Plutarch himself, the darling and delight of all Philosophy." Eunapius thinks that the *Parallel Lives* were Plutarch's finest work, but adds that "all his writings are thickly sown with original thoughts of his own, as well as with the teachings of his Master."

<sup>3</sup> 393 E.

terms, as explained by Plutarch from the Stoical view of the Divine Nature,<sup>1</sup> he says, "Surely God would be a less dignified figure than the child in the poem,<sup>2</sup> since the pastime which the child plays with mere sand, building castles to throw them down again, God would thus be ever playing with the universe. On the contrary, God has mysteriously cemented the universe together, overcoming that natural weakness in it which tends perpetually to annihilation. It is the function of some other god, or, rather, of some dæmon, appointed to direct nature in the processes of generation and destruction, to do and suffer these changes." In both these views the literal acceptance of the mythological names is repudiated, and the two differ only in that the Stoics quoted in Plutarch's speech make the Supreme Ruler modify His essence to the production of phenomena, while Ammonius relegates that function to a subordinate power; keeping his Platonic Demiurgus pure from these undignified metamorphoses. It will subsequently appear, when we come to deal with the Dæmonology of Plutarch, that the latter view is the

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch elsewhere comments upon the *εἰρησιλογία* of the Stoics in finding explanations of the various names of the popular Deities (*Quomodo Adolescens*, 31 E.). CICERO (*De Natura Deorum*, iii. 24) represents Cotta as charging the Stoics with supporting the crudest superstitions of the popular faith by the skill which they displayed in finding a mysterious significance in the current names and legends:—"Atque hæc quidem et ejusmodi ex vetere Græcia fama collecta sunt; quibus intelligis resistendum esse, ne perturbentur religiones. Vestri autem non modo hæc non repellunt, verum etiam confirmant, interpretando quorsum quidque pertineat."

<sup>2</sup> *Iliad*, xv. 362-4.

one he also actually accepted. The discussion, at any rate, furnishes a capital instance of what Plutarch means by his assertion that Reason must be Mystagogue to Theology. Mythological terms must be examined by Reason before their meaning can be accepted as an element in religious teaching. The particular view taken of the expressions is left to the taste or philosophic bent of the individual critic: to Academic or Stoic reasonings; the only essential is that the crude literal meaning of the terms shall be repudiated as discordant with a rational estimate of the Divine Nature.<sup>1</sup>

In the critical essay, "Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat," the same method is applied to the whole religious and moral teaching of the national poets. However great Plutarch's admiration for Plato as man and philosopher may be, his sound sense of what is practicable in common life prevents him from subjecting the ancient poetry of Greece, as an element in ethical culture, to the impossible standard of the "Republic," and he therefore, on this question, opposes Stoic and Peripatetic wisdom to the teaching of a Master with whose sublime views he often finds himself in agreement.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the whole work he

<sup>1</sup> In another place Plutarch expresses the view that the original Creator of the world bestowed upon the stuff of the phenomenal world a principle of change and movement by which that stuff often dissolves and reshapes itself under the operation of natural causes without the intervention of the original Creator (*De Defectu Orac.*, 435-6).

<sup>2</sup> Plutarch, in this Essay, distinctly places himself in opposition to Plato, whose views, for the purposes of contrast, may be summarized from two well-known passages of the *Republic*. In 337 B, C, the

applies the touchstone of common sense to all the beauties and all the barbarities of the traditional

greater part of the myths current in the popular poets are repudiated. Then, after that famous series of criticisms applied to particular passages taken from Homer and Hesiod and other poets, after his analysis of the various kinds of "narration," and his implicit inclusion of the great poets of Greece among the masters of that kind of imitative narration which a man will the more indulge in, the more contemptible he is, Plato concludes with that ironical description of the reception which a Homer or a Hesiod would have to meet in a state founded on the Platonic ideal. "*We shall pay him reverence as a sacred, admirable, and charming personage; we shall pour perfumed oil upon his head and crown him with woollen fillets; but we shall tell him that our laws exclude such characters as he, and shall send him away to some other city than ours.*"—398 A, B (Davies and Vaughan's translation). Plutarch, however, takes the world as it is. He admits that poetry is a siren, but refuses to stop the cars of the young people who listen to her fascinating strains. Lycurgus was mad in thinking he could cure drunkenness by cutting down the vineyards; he should rather have brought the water-springs nearer to the vines. It is better to utilize the vine of poetry by checking and pruning its "fanciful and theatrical exuberance" than to uproot it altogether. We must mingle the wine with the pure water of philosophy, or, to use another image, poetry and philosophy must be planted in the same soil, just as the mandragora, which moderates the native strength of the wine, is planted in vineyards (*Quomodo Adolescens*, 15 E).

August Schlemm, in his *De fontibus Plutarchi Commentationum De Aud. Poetis et de Fortuna* (Göttingen, 1893), subjects the structure of the *De Audiendis* to a very close and careful analysis, and comes to the conclusion that the main sources of Plutarch's material are to be found in the writings of Stoic and Peripatetic philosophers. He notes that Plutarch's examples are taken from the same Homeric verses as Plato's, and adds, "*Quæ cum ita sint, quomodo hæc Plutarchum inter et Platonem similitudines ortæ sint dubium jam esse non potest. Plutarchus, ut in eis quæ antecedunt, ita etiam hic, usus est libro Peripatetici cujusdam, qui, ut criminationes a Platone poetis factas repelleret, hujus modi fictiones in natura artis poeticæ positas esse demonstravit et commentationi suæ inseruit*



legends as embodied in Epic and Tragic poetry. Reason and common sense admit the high value of imaginative literature in ethical education, and reason and common sense decide what practical advice shall be given to youthful students of fiction, in order that moral lessons may be driven home, immoral incidents, descriptions, and characters made harmless, or even beneficial, while, at the same time, even purely æsthetic considerations are not neglected.

At the commencement of the "De Iside et Osiride" Plutarch deals fully with numerous examples of religious practices coming under his third description of the sources of religious belief, that, namely, of Law or established Custom. He discusses their meaning in the light of a principle which he states as follows:—"In the religious institutions (connected with the worship of Isis and Osiris) nothing has become established which, however it may appear irrational, mythical, superstitious, has not some moral or salutary reason, or some ingenious historical or physical explanation."<sup>1</sup> He is not always successful in his search after a moral meaning, or even an ingenious

poetarum versus a Platone vituperatos." Chrysippus had composed a work on *How to study Poetry*, Zeno one entitled *On Poetical Study*, and Cleanthes another, called *On the Poet*.

The opinion of so conscientious a scholar on Plutarch's "appropriations" is worth quoting:—"tenendum est . . . Plutarchum non cum fuisse qui more compilatorum libros aliorum ad verbum exscriberet sed id egisse ut ea quæ legisset atque collegisset referret, sed ita ut modo sua intermiseret, modo nonnulla omitteret vel mutaret."

<sup>1</sup> *De Iside et Osiride*, 353 E.

historical or physical explanation, in the customs which he subjects to analysis. The rational attitude, however, is unmistakable, and these introductory remarks, personal as they may be to the priestess Clea, and detached from the main body of the work, yet stand in a true harmony with what we shall hereafter see to be its essential purpose, to show, namely, that while Philosophy can grasp the Highest without the intervention of myth or institution, it can also aid a pure conception of the Highest by studying the myths and institutions which foreign peoples have discovered and created as intermediaries betwixt themselves and the Highest.

But in spite of the important part thus assigned to Reason in settling disputed matters of faith, and arbitrating on points of national and individual ethics, Plutarch makes it clear that Piety and Patriotism have claims in this matter which are actually enforced by Reason in her selecting and purifying *rôle*. If he had seen, as his age could not see, and as we can see, that Reason can only be the Mystagogue to Religion in a very limited degree, he would probably have been patriot first and philosopher afterwards, or would, perhaps, have accepted the compromise of Cotta, and played each part in turn as public or private necessities dictated. But the crux does not arise, and Plutarch's position never really has the inconsistency which, carelessly considered, it appears to have, because he is honestly convinced that what Reason rejects in the national faith, it is good for the national faith that it should be deprived of. Hence it is possible to

give examples of Plutarch's views in this direction without assuming that he forgot what prospect lay in exactly the opposite direction. Hence he can quote Ammonius as beautifully tender in his expressions towards those who are bound up in the literal realisms of the Hellenic faith. "Yet must we extend gratitude and love to those who believe that Apollo and the Sun are the same, because they attach their idea of God to that which they most honour and desire of anything they know. They now see the God as in a most beautiful dream: let us awaken them and summon them to take an upward flight, so that they may behold his real vision and his essence, though still they may revere his type, the Sun, and worship the life-giving principle in that type; which, so far as can be done by a perceptible object on behalf of an invisible essence, by a transient image on behalf of an eternal original, scatters with mysterious splendour through the universe some radiance of the grace and glory that abide in His presence."<sup>1</sup> Not only through

<sup>1</sup> *De E apud Delphos*, 393 D. Cf. *De Defectu*, 433 E. Ammonius is here evidently referring to a remark made (386 B) by "one of those present" to the effect that "practically all the Greeks identify Apollo with the Sun." The words of Ammonius quoted in the text are strikingly similar in spirit to the famous verses in the "In Memoriam:"—

"O thou that after toil and storm  
 May'st seem to have reached a purer air,  
 Whose faith has centre everywhere,  
 Nor cares to fix itself to form,  
 "Leave thou thy sister when she prays,  
 Her early Heaven, her happy views;  
 Nor thou with shadowed hint confuse  
 A life that leads melodious days.

the dramatic medium of another personality, but also when speaking his own thought directly, Plutarch alludes with a sincere and touching sympathy to the duties and practices of the ancient faith. The first hint of consolation conveyed to his friend Apollonius on the death of his son is given in words which feelingly depict the youth as embodying the ancient Hellenic ideals in his attitude towards the gods, and his conduct towards his parents and friends.<sup>1</sup> The converse of this attitude is indicated in many passages where he deprecates a too inquisitive bearing in the face of questions naturally involved in the doubt clouding many ancient traditions of a religious character. The great discussion on "The Cessation of the Oracles" commences with a reproof directed at those who "would test an ancient religious tradition like a painting, by the touch," and in the "Amatorius" full play is allowed to the exposition of a similar view, a view, indeed, which dominates the whole of this fascinating dialogue. Pemptides, one of the speakers, who rails lightly at

"Her faith through form is pure as thine,  
Her hands are quicker unto good:  
Oh, sacred be the flesh and blood  
To which she links a truth divine!"

<sup>1</sup> *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, 102 A.—"He was a very sage and virtuous youth, conspicuous for the reverence which he paid to the gods, to his parents, and to his friends." This is nearly the old Hellenic ideal as expressed, *e.g.*, in the lines from the "Antiope" of Euripides, preserved by Stobæus, "On Virtue"—

"There be three virtues for thy practice, child:  
Honour the gods, revere thy loving parents,  
Respect the laws of Greece."

love as a disease, is willing to learn what was in the minds of those who first proclaimed that passion as a god. He is answered by the most important speaker in the conversation, a speaker whose name is not given in the report, which is represented as furnished by one of this speaker's sons from their father's account. "Our father, addressing Pemptides by name, said, 'You are, in my opinion, commencing with great rashness to discuss matters which ought not to be discussed at all, when you ask a reason for every detail of our belief in the gods. *Our ancient hereditary faith is sufficient, and a better argument than this could not be discovered or described.* But if this foundation and support of all piety be shaken, and its stability and the honoured beliefs that cling to it be disturbed, it will be undermined and no one will regard it as secure. And if you demand proofs about every one of the gods, laying a profane hand on every temple, and bringing sophistical smartness to bear on every shrine, nothing will be safe from your peering eyes and prying fingers. What an abyss of Atheism opens beneath us, if we resolve every deity into a passion, a power, or a virtuous activity!'"<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, an extreme conventional view, but the fact, that it is put so fully, at least argues Plutarch's sympathy with it, though he would not, in his own person, have pinned himself down to so unqualified an expression of it. It will be noted that in this part of the dialogue the gods only are under discussion, whereas in regard to tradition on other elements in the ancient

<sup>1</sup> *Amatorius*, 756 B.

faith the same speaker subsequently represents himself as neither altogether a believer nor a disbeliever, and he proceeds to search, in Plutarch's own special way, for "faint and dim emanations of truth dispersed about among the mythologies of the Egyptians."<sup>1</sup> Plutarch's lofty idea of the passion of Love may have induced him in this, as his strenuous moral aim did in so many other instances, to emphasize for the moment any particular aspect of the ancient faith which appeared likely to furnish inspiration to the realization of noble ethical ideals. He is anxious, at all events, that his purely rational arguments shall not carry him too far, as, on one occasion, after a long disquisition, the undoubted purport of which is to refer oracular inspiration to subterraneous fumes and exhalations, or, as one of the speakers says, "to accident and natural means," Plutarch ("Lamprias" here is clearly a thin disguise of Plutarch himself) is disturbed and confused that he should be thought desirous of refuting any "true and religious" opinions recognized with respect to the Deity; and he forthwith proceeds to prove that it is quite possible to investigate natural phenomena for secondary causes, while recognizing a final cause in the creative Deity.<sup>2</sup> Not only does Plutarch sympathize with those who accept with pious simplicity the tenets of the "ancient and hereditary Faith;" not only does he deprecate too severe a handling of religious questions; but he is also eager to support his view of a subject by showing that it is not out of harmony with the

<sup>1</sup> *Anatorius*, 762 A.

<sup>2</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 435 E.

traditions or prescriptions of the national belief. Concluding that consolatory letter to his wife upon the death of their little daughter, which is the most humane and natural expression of sympathy left us by antiquity, he tries to show that those who die young will earlier feel at home in the other world than those whose long life on earth has habituated their souls to a condition so different from that which exists "beyond the gates of Hades," and he says that this is a truth which becomes clearer in the light of the ancient and hereditary customs.<sup>1</sup> No libations are poured for the young that are dead. They have no share in earth, nor in the things of earth. The laws do not allow mourning for children of such tender years, "*because they have gone to dwell in a better land, and to share a diviner lot.*" And he adds, "I know that these questions are involved in great uncertainty; but since to disbelieve is more difficult than to believe, in external matters let us act as the laws enjoin, while within we become more chaste, and holy, and undefiled."<sup>2</sup> It must not be overlooked that Plutarch was long a priest of the Delphian Apollo, and that the duties of this position responded to some internal need of his soul, and were not regarded by him as a merely official dignity, is proved by the manner in which he alludes to the subject. He is speaking on one occasion of the many indications which the shrine gives of resuming its former "wealth, and splendour, and

<sup>1</sup> *Consolatio ad Uxorem*, 612. Cf. *De Defectu Orac.*, 437 A.

<sup>2</sup> Supplying, as Bernardakis does after Wyttenbach, *καὶ οὐκ ἀγρωῶ ὅτι ταῦτα πολλὰς ἔχει ἀπορίας.*

honour," and he congratulates himself on the zealous and useful part he has taken in aiding the work of this revival.<sup>1</sup> He mentions two friends as co-workers in the sacred task, and appears also to felicitate a certain Roman Governor of Achaia on similar grounds. But he reverently proceeds to make it quite clear that it is the god himself who is the ultimate cause of these returning blessings. "But it is not possible that so great a transformation should have taken place in so short a time through human activity, unless the god were present and continuing to inspire his oracle," and he concludes by censuring those who, in their inability to discern the motive actuating the divine methods with mankind, "depart condemning the god, instead of blaming us or themselves, that they cannot, by reason, discover the intention of the god."<sup>2</sup>

Plutarch's attitude of more than tolerance to the "ancient and hereditary Faith," an attitude which is, of course, not inconsistent with his desire to place that Faith on a rational basis, is partly explicable in the light of his emphatic gratitude to the existing political constitution of the Græco-Roman world. He would have been an admirable co-worker with Mæcenas—*πρόθυμος καὶ χρήσιμος*<sup>3</sup>—in carrying out the religious reforms of

<sup>1</sup> *De Pythiæ Orac.*, 409 C. Cf. *De Rep. Ger.*, 792 F.

<sup>2</sup> Plutarch puts these words into the mouth of Theon, a literary man, and a most intimate friend of his own. But Theon is here a mere modest disguise of Plutarch, just as "Lamprias" is in the *De Defectu Oraculorum*. The argument is, in any case, not affected—the statement is clearly Plutarch's own. (See the note on that dialogue in a subsequent chapter.)

<sup>3</sup> *De Pythiæ Orac.*, 409 B.



Augustus. He regarded the welfare of Society and the State, of the family and the individual citizen, as bound up with a belief in the gods whose agency was so clearly visible in bringing the world to that state of perfection which it now enjoyed, and which promised to be eternal. No one now even dreamed of doubting the identity of the gods of Rome with those of Greece, and Plutarch carries the identification to the extent of including the gods of almost every people constituting the Roman Empire.<sup>1</sup> These universal powers had the world in their providential care, and Rome was the divinely chosen instrument of their beneficent purposes. The Emperor is the depository of the sacred governing power of the world.<sup>2</sup> When Tiberius shut himself up in Capreæ, this divine potency never left him. And though expressions of this kind may be interpreted as a merely formal recognition of the official dignity of the Head of the World, Plutarch's many eloquent descriptions of the blessings of the *Pax Romana* leave us in no doubt respecting the character of his views on this subject. "I welcome and approve," says Theon, "the present position of affairs, and the subjects about which we now consult the oracle. For there now reigns among us a great peace and calm.

<sup>1</sup> The antiquarian regret of Propertius for the old simple worships of Rome—"Nulli cura fuit externos quærere divos Cum tremere patrio pendula turba sacro" (*Eleg.*, v. 1)—touched a chord which very few Romans would have responded to in Plutarch's time.

<sup>2</sup> *De Exilio*, 602 E. This recognition of the sacred character of the Emperor does not preclude criticisms of individual rulers, e.g., Nero: *De Sera Num. Vindicta*, 567 F; and Vespasian: *Amatorius*, 771 C.

War has ceased. Expulsions, seditions, tyrannies, are no more, and many other diseases and disasters which tormented Greece, and demanded powerful remedies, are now healed. Hence the oracle is no longer consulted on matters difficult, secret, and mysterious, but on common questions of everyday life. Even the most important oracles addressed to cities are concerned with crops and herds, and matters affecting the public health.<sup>1</sup> In the "Præcepta Gerendæ Reipublicæ" he is still more outspoken in his praise of the Roman administration, and in his recognition of the opportunities which it gives for the culture of the individual character within the limits of a greatly generous sway. Plutarch, as is well known, was gifted with a patriotic regard for the old achievements of the Hellenic name, but he recognizes with so keen an insight the great work being accomplished by Rome in the fostering of municipal institutions, and the establishment of a peace which meant the undisturbed happiness of millions of obscure families,<sup>2</sup> that, in the sphere of practical politics, he deliberately turns away from the group of inspiring ideas connected with ancient Hellenic patriotism. He alludes coldly, perhaps even sneeringly, to such of his contemporaries as fancied they could apply the ancient traditions of glory to those late and unseasonable times, like little children who would try to wear their father's sandals ;<sup>3</sup> counsels a complete

*De Pythiæ Orac.*, 408 B.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the fate of Chæroncia under Antony, as told by Plutarch's grandfather (see *Life of Antony*, 948 A, B).

<sup>3</sup> 814 A.

submission to the duly appointed Roman authorities; fully persuaded that within the limits of their supremacy there is as much freedom as a reasonable man could desire to enjoy; and honestly claims to find scope, in a little Bœotian township, for such political ambition as could be safely and wisely indulged.<sup>1</sup> It is not difficult to sneer at the prudential limitation of patriotism to such petty, insignificant, and meagre efforts as the superintendence of bricks and mortar and the carting of municipal rubbish; but the wiser thing is to note that Plutarch's opposition to vain fancies of the revival of the ancient Hellenic splendour, except perhaps in such a form as a Hadrian might be inclined to revive it in an artificial Panhellenium, is based on the conviction that happiness depends upon the free development of individual character, the unrestricted enjoyment of domestic peace, the undisturbed intercourse of social life; and he knew that the Roman sway made it possible, for Greeks at any rate, to enjoy these blessings to a degree never previously known in their chequered history.<sup>2</sup> With a clear recognition of the historical causes of the political decadence of Hellenism, he regards civic discord as the evil which most demands the attention of those who still seek opportunities for public action, and he is particularly grateful

<sup>1</sup> *Præcepta Reip. Ger.*, 813, et passim:—He insists, however (814 E, F), that subservience must not go too far, and he is also careful to point out such brilliant openings for political ambition as are left by the peculiar conditions of the time (805 A, B).

<sup>2</sup> Plutarch states that the aim of his political advice is to enable a man not only to become "a useful citizen," but also "to order his domestic affairs with safety, honour, and justice" (*De Unius in Repub.*, &c., 826 C).

to the strong hand of Rome for controlling the internecine animosities of Greek cities. "Consider," says he, "our position with regard to those blessings which are counted as the greatest that a city can enjoy: Peace, Freedom, Fertility of Soil, Increase of Population, Domestic Concord. As regards Peace, our peoples have no present need of politicians. Every Greek war, every Barbarian war, has vanished from among us. For Freedom, our peoples enjoy as much as their rulers allow them, *and a greater share would perhaps not be any better for them.* For fine seasons and plentiful harvests, for families of 'children like their sires,' and for gracious aid to the new-born child, the good man in his prayers will invoke the gods on behalf of his fellow-citizens."<sup>1</sup> As for civic concord, that, he says, is in our own power, and those who desire a life of political activity could not do better than devote themselves to the task of spreading harmony and friendship among their fellow-citizens. The peace which the Romans have established in the world makes it possible to develop character on these social lines, and he recognizes, in a pregnant comparison, that the freedom which the Greeks enjoy is sufficient to allow the fullest play to the development of their own moral character. The drama is composed and staged: the prompter stands behind the scene ready with the cue: but the player can give his own interpretation of the character he represents, though remembering that a slip *may* meet with a worse fate than mere hissing in the audience.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Præcepta Reip.*, 824 C.

<sup>2</sup> *Præcepta Reip.*, 813 F.

Plutarch is clearly of opinion that this state of things is best for his fellow-countrymen. He is as firmly convinced of the divine mission of Rome as ever was Virgil or any other patriotic Roman.<sup>1</sup> In his tract "De Fortuna Romanorum," he discusses the question whether the greatness of Rome was due to Τύχη or Ἀρετή, or, as he expresses the antithesis in another place, to Τύχη or Πρόνοια—to Chance or to Providence, we may translate, if we recognize that here Chance is the divine element, and Providence the human.<sup>2</sup> In other words, is the grandeur of Rome the result of human virtue and forethought, or is it a direct gift of the Deity to mankind? He decides in the latter sense, though conceding much to the valour of individual Romans; and his incidental expressions of opinion bear as much evidence to the divinely inspired and divinely guided character of Roman administration as is borne by his definite conclusion. He says that, whichever way the question is decided, it can only redound to the glory of Rome to be the subject of a discussion which has hitherto been confined to the great

<sup>1</sup> PROPERTIUS, iv. 11. "Hæc Di considerant, hæc Di quoque mœnia servant." Plutarch's essay reads like an exposition of this text of the Roman poet.

<sup>2</sup> "Et hoc verbo monere satis est, Τύχης nomine contineri omnem rerum actionumque efficientiam, quæ a Virtute disjuncta, nec in hominis potestate posita est; sive illa ut casus et temeritas, sive ut divina providentia informetur."—WYTTENBACH. Schlemm says that this tract and the *De Alexandri sive virtute sive fortuna* are "meræ exercitationes rhetoricæ in quibus certam quandam philosophiam persequi in animo non habebat." Yet the rhetoric of the *De Fortuna Romanorum* is in wonderful harmony with Plutarch's mature opinion as deliberately expressed in the *De Republica Gerenda*.

natural phenomena of the universe—the earth, the sea, the heavens, and the stars. His very words are curiously reminiscent of Virgil's *rerum pulcherrima, Roma* (τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἔργων τὸ κάλλιστον),<sup>1</sup> as he tells how Time, in concert with the Deity, laid the foundations of Rome, harmonizing to that end the influence of Fortune and Virtue alike, thus establishing for all the nations of mankind a sacred hearth, a harbour and a resting-place, “an anchorage from the wandering seas” of human stress and turmoil, a principle of eternity amid the evanescence and mutability of other things. He describes with great vigour of language the instability of the world under the domination of other Empires, until Rome acquired her full strength and splendour, and brought peace and security and permanence among these warring elements.<sup>2</sup>

Being so satisfied with the constitution of the world, it is natural that Plutarch should have nothing but reverent words for the eternal powers whose guidance had led to so happy a disposition of human affairs. However much Philosophy should endeavour to free

<sup>1</sup> VIRGIL: *Georgics*, ii. 534; PLUT: *De Fortuna Romanorum*, 316 E. This may be a conscious reminiscence of Virgil's line. If Plutarch had not read Virgil, he may have heard so famous a verse quoted by his friends at Rome. He himself translates a passage from “the poet Flaccus” in his *Life of Lucullus* (518 C—HORACE: *Ep.*, i. 6, 45). The question of Plutarch's acquaintance with Latin is very important for investigations into the historical sources of his “Lives;” but it lies beyond our present limits. It is fully dealt with by WEISSENBERGER in his *Die Sprache Plutarchs* (1895). He exculpates Plutarch from some of the grosser mistakes in Latinity imputed to him by Volkmann.

<sup>2</sup> 317 B, C.

the mind from the crude and vulgar elements in the "ancient and hereditary Faith," she must never be tempted to profess other than the most pious belief in its fundamental truth and right; and the ultimate aim of Philosophy must be to strengthen and revive the ancient Religion by freeing it from inconsistencies and crudities which, so long as they appeared to be an essential part of the system, only existed to shock the pious and to encourage atheism.

Plutarch's attitude towards the ancient Faith may thus be defined as one of patriotic acceptance modified by philosophic criticism; not that criticism which tries everything from the fixed standpoint of a set of rules logically irrefutable: but that which is really the spirit of rationalism pervading all philosophies alike. If Plutarch's attitude is that of a Platonist, it is that of a Platonist whose experience of ordinary human affairs, and whose recognition of their importance in Philosophy, have compelled him to modify the genuine teaching of the Master into something like the spirit of compromise characterizing the later Academies. His teaching is not the philosophic despotism of Plato; it might easily be characterized as "plebeian,"<sup>1</sup> as Epicureanism was by Cicero, or "commonplace," as Aristotle has been described by Platonists. It breathes that free spirit of truth which bids every man, whether he is a practised philosopher or not, or even if he has not studied mathematics, to give a reason for the faith that is in him: to apply the touchstone of his own practical

<sup>1</sup> CICERO: *Quæst. Tusc.*, i. 23.

experience and native intelligence to the domain of Ethics and Religion as to the domain of every-day life, because, as a matter of fact, the domain of every-day life is the domain of Religion and Ethics. The dictum of Hesiod, enforced by Aristotle and applied in practice by the Epicureans, and by the Stoics, is the keynote of the teaching of Plutarch:—"He is most excellent of all, who judges of all things for himself."



## CHAPTER V.

*Plutarch's Theology—His conception of God not a pure metaphysical abstraction, his presentment of it not dogmatic—General acceptance of the attributes recognized by Greek philosophy as essential to the idea of God—God as UNITY, ABSOLUTE BEING, ETERNITY—God as INTELLIGENCE: PERSONALITY of Plutarch's God intimately associated with his Intelligence—God's Intelligence brings him into contact with humanity: by it he knows the events of the Future and the secrets of the human heart—From his knowledge springs his Providence—God as Father and Judge—the DE SERA NUMINIS VINDICTA—Immortality of the Soul.*

IT will readily be understood that on no question of Religion is Plutarch more willing to act as "Arbitrator" than on that concerned with the Nature and Attributes of the Deity. He knows and, as we have seen, recognizes to the full the discordant nature of the elements which, by force of circumstances, have been driven into some kind of cohesion in the formation of the popular belief, and it must be admitted that his efforts to harmonize them into a rational consistency are not completely successful. His own conception of the Divine nature resembles the popular notion in being a compound of philosophy, myth, and legalized tradition. From Philosophy he accepts the Unity of

God ; from popular Mythology he accepts certain names of deities, and certain traditional expressions, which he understands, however, in a sense quite different from any interpretation current in the popular views, while, at the same time, he never uses these names and expressions without an air and attitude of the most pious regard. The philosophical part of his teaching on the nature of God is largely Greek, but by no means entirely so, and neither is it the teaching of any particular school of Greek philosophy. The Demiurgus of the *Timæus*: the One and Absolute of the Pythagoreans: the *Πρῶτον κινούν*, the *νόησις*, *νοήσεως νόησις* of Aristotle; the material immanent World-Soul—the *λόγος ὁ ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ*—of the Stoics:—one and all contribute qualities to the Plutarchic Deity, and show how irresistible the necessity for unity had become in the spiritual, as in the political, world. The metaphysical Deity thus created from these diverse elements is made personal by the direct ethical relation into which He is brought with mankind (as in the punishment of sin), while the suggestion of personality is aided by the use of the Greek popular names of the deities to describe the attributes of the One Supreme God. Thus it has already been noted that while Plutarch is ostensibly discussing the attributes of Apollo he is actually defining his position with reference to abstract Deity. This ill-harmonizing combination of metaphysics and popular belief is further placed in contact with views originated by Oriental creeds, with Zoroastrianism, with Manichæism, with “certain slight and obscure hints of the truth, which are to be found scattered here

and there in Egyptian Mythology,"<sup>1</sup> the whole presenting a strange conglomeration, which appears to defy any attempt to make a consistent theology of it, until we see Plutarch's method conspicuously emerging with its twofold aim, of proving that all these different views of God are merely different ways of striving after belief in the same Supreme Power, and of inculcating a sympathetic and liberal attitude of mind, which is far more conducive to unity than a detailed agreement on points of minor importance.<sup>2</sup> This endeavour after unity is supported by a strenuous and sincere belief in what at first sight appears to be a principle of diversity—the belief, namely, in Dæmons—but which Plutarch uses to great effect in his attempts after unity, by assigning, with Pythagoras,<sup>3</sup> every recognized tradition unworthy of the Highest to these subordinate beings

<sup>1</sup> *Amatorius*, 762 A.

<sup>2</sup> One need scarcely go so far as Professor Lewis Campbell, who says that the main result of the "Ethics" of Plutarch is to show "how difficult it was for a common-sense man of the world to form distinct and reasonable opinions on matters of religion in that strangely complicated time" (*Religion in Greek Literature*, 1898). But Professor Campbell is also of opinion that "the convenient distinction between gods and demons, which he (*i.e.* Plutarch) and others probably owed to their reading of Plato, is worth dwelling on *because it was taken up for apologetic purposes by the early Christian fathers.*" Surely its religious value to an age which did not anticipate the coming of "the early Christian fathers" makes the distinction worth study from a point of view quite different from that represented in Christian apologetics.

<sup>3</sup> See MAURY, vol. i. p. 352.—"Pythagore admet l'existence de démons bons et mauvais comme les hommes, et tout ce qui lui paraissait indigne de l'idée qu'on devait se faire des dieux, il en faisait l'œuvre des démons et des héros." (For a fuller discussion of this question see the chapters on Dæmonology.)

whose influence is everywhere felt in nature and in human life, and whose presence, at any rate, interpenetrates and overruns the whole of Plutarch's views on religion.<sup>1</sup>

It is no unfitting circumstance in a priest of Apollo that his noblest utterances respecting the nature of

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch devotes so much of his work to an exposition of his views of the Divine character, that one feels inclined to regard him less as a philosopher in the general sense than as a theologian. A kindly piece of description of his own (see *De Defectu Orac.*, 410 A), in which he mentions Cleombrotos of Lacedemon as "a man who made many journeys, not for the sake of traffic, but because he wished to see and to learn," and says that as a result of his travels and researches he was compiling a practically complete *corpus* of philosophical material, the end and aim of philosophy being, as he used to put it, "*Theology*"—may be spoken with equal truth of Plutarch himself. We cannot, perhaps, do better than apply the term *Θεόσοφος* to him, and support the appellation with an interesting passage from M. Maury, in which he deals with the distinction between theosophs and philosophers in the early stages of Greek philosophy and religion:—"Les uns soumettant tous les faits à l'appréciation rationnelle, et partant de l'observation individuelle, pour expliquer la formation de l'univers substituaient aux croyances populaires un système créé par eux, et plus ou moins en contradiction avec les opinions du vulgaire: c'étaient les philosophes proprement dits. Les autres acceptaient la religion de leurs contemporains, . . . ils entreprenaient au nom de la sagesse divine, dont ils se donnaient pour les interprètes, non de renverser mais de réformer les notions théologiques et les formes religieuses, de façon à les mettre d'accord avec leurs principes philosophiques" (MAURY, vol. i. p. 339). (Cf. C. G. SEIBERT, *De Apologetica Plutarchi Theologia* (1854):—"Finis autem ad quem tendebat ipsa erat religio a majoribus accepta, qua philosophiæ ope purgata æqualium animos denuo implere studebat." He thinks Plutarch was a theologian first and a philosopher after. (In the passage quoted above from the *De Defectu* it is difficult not to regard Mr. Paton's emendation of *φιλόθεος μὲν οὖν καὶ φιλόμαντις* as more in accordance with the character of Cleombrotos than the *φιλοθεάμων καὶ φιλομαθῆς* of Bernardakis' text, although, of course, he was a great traveller and an ardent student.)

God should be contained in discourses connected more or less with the temples and traditions of the god. In the discussion, for instance, on the syllable "E" written over the narrow entrance of the Amphictyonic Temple at Delphi, Ammonius is represented as expressing views of the Divine Nature which are unsurpassed for sublimity in any other part of Plutarch's writings, or even in Greek literature generally. We quote them here as embodying Plutarch's beliefs on the Unity, Eternity, and Absoluteness of the Divine Nature. "Not then a number, nor an arrangement, nor a conjunction or any other part of speech, do I think the inscription signifies. It is rather a complete and concise form of address, an invocation of the God, bringing the speaker with the very word, into a conscious recognition of His power. The God salutes each of us, as we approach His shrine, with the great text, 'Know thyself,' which is His way of saying *χαίρει* to us; and we in our turn, replying to the God, say *εἶ*—'Thou art,' thus expressing our *belief in His true and pure and incommunicable virtue of absolute being.*<sup>1</sup> . . . Now we must admit that God absolutely *is*; not that he *is* with reference to any period of time, but with reference to an immovable, immutable, timeless eternity, before which there was nothing, after which there is nothing, in respect to which there is neither future nor past, than which there is nothing older or younger. But being Unity, the Unity that he is *now* is the same Unity with which he occupies eternity; and nothing

<sup>1</sup> *De E*, 392 A. Cf. PLATO: *Laches*, 240 C.

really exists but that which is endowed with the same absolute existence as he—neither anything that has come into existence, nor shall come into existence, nor anything which had a beginning, or shall have an end. In worshipping him, therefore, we ought assuredly to salute and address him in a manner corresponding to this view of him; as, *e.g.*, in the phrase already used by some ancient philosophers, the phrase, ‘Thou art one.’ For the Divine principle is not many, as we are, each of us compacted of countless different passions, a mingled and varying conglomerate of assembled atoms. But Being must necessarily be Unity, and Unity must be Being. It is Diversity—that is, the principle of discrepancy from Unity—which issues to the production of non-Being, whence the three names of the God are one and all appropriate. He is *Apollo* (ὁ πολύς), because he repudiates and excludes the many (τὰ πολλὰ); *Ieius* (ἴος = εἶς) because he is Unity and Solitude; and *Phæbus*, of course, was the name given by the ancients to anything that was pure and unsullied. . . . Now Unity is pure and unsullied; defilement comes by being mixed with other elements, as Homer says that ivory dipped in purple dye ‘is defiled,’ and dyers say that colours mixed are colours ‘corrupted,’ the process being called ‘corruption.’ A pure and incorruptible substance must therefore be one and whole.”<sup>1</sup> —“The Inscription εἶ seems to me to be, as it were, at once the antithesis and the completion of the inscription, ‘Know thyself.’ The one is addressed in reverence

<sup>1</sup> 393 A-D.

and wonder to the God as eternally existent, the other is a reminder to mortality of the frail nature that encompasseth it.”<sup>1</sup>

Nowhere is the necessity which Plutarch feels for believing in one supreme ruler of all the imaginable universe more apparent than in a passage in which he is seeking a regulating Intelligence for an admitted plurality of worlds, to account for whose administration a Greek of almost any period would have been constrained to resort to the hypothesis of a plurality of gods, supreme as each individual god might be in his own individual world. The passage in question initiates a discussion on this subject somewhat episodic to the main argument of the “*De Defectu Oraculorum*.” Plutarch himself is the speaker, though he represents his interlocutors as addressing him by the name of Lamprias.<sup>2</sup> He is inclined to agree that there may be more worlds than one, though repudiating an infinity of worlds. “It is more consonant with reason to assert that God has made more than one world. For He is perfectly good, and deficient in no virtue whatsoever, least of all in those virtues that are associated with Justice and Friendship, which are the fairest of all virtues, and those most appropriate to the divine nature. And as God is not wanting in any respect, so also He possesses no redundant or superfluous characteristics. There must exist, therefore, other gods and other worlds than ours, whose companionship furnishes a sphere for the exercise of these

<sup>1</sup> 394 C.

<sup>2</sup> *De Defectu*, 413 D.

social virtues. For it is not upon Himself, nor upon a part of Himself, but upon others, that He discharges the claims of justice, kindness, goodness. Hence it is not probable that He is unneighbourd and unfriended, or that this world of ours floats alone in the emptiness of infinite space.”<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, however, is merely on tentative ground here; the plurality of worlds was an abstract academic question no less in those days than in these. Admitting a plurality of worlds, it does not necessarily follow that each should be under the dominion of a separate Deity. “What objection,” he asks, in answer to the Stoics, “what objection is there to our asserting that all the worlds are beneath the sway of the Fate and Providence of Zeus, and that He bestows His superintendence and direction among them all, implanting in them the principles and seeds and ideas of all things that are brought about therein? Surely it is no more impossible that ten, or fifty, or a hundred worlds should be animated by the same rule of Reason, or should be administered in accordance with one and the same principle of action, than that a public assembly, an army, or a chorus, should obey the same co-ordinating power. Nay, an arrangement of this kind is in special harmony with the Divine Character.”<sup>2</sup> Plutarch cannot get away from his fixed belief in the absolute Unity of God, and with God’s Unity, as we have already seen, his Eternity and Immutability are involved. But Plutarch re-asserts this truth in various

<sup>1</sup> 433 D, E.

<sup>2</sup> 426 B.



places and forms. In the tract "De Stoicorum Repugnantiis," though chiefly dealing polemically with the inconsistencies and self-contradictions of Chrysippus and other early Stoics, he clearly exhibits his own views in several passages. In one place<sup>1</sup> he asserts that even those who deny the benevolence of God, as the Jews and the Syrians, do not imagine him as other than eternally and immutably existent, and quotes with approval a sentence from Antipater of Tarsus, to the effect that God is universally regarded as uncreate and eternal. A little later in the development of the argument<sup>2</sup> he adopts the Stoic position—which Chrysippus is represented as contradicting—that the idea of God includes the ideas of happiness, blessedness, self-sufficiency, which qualities are elsewhere shown to exist absolutely and independently of all conceivable causes of opposition.<sup>3</sup> "They are wrong who assert that the Divine Nature is eternal because it avoids and repels anything that might tend to its destruction. Immutability and Eternity must necessarily exist in the very nature of the Blessed One, requiring no exertion on his part to preserve and defend them."

The intermingling of the doctrines of various philosophic sects is interestingly conspicuous throughout these discussions on the nature of God; and not less than elsewhere in the noble observations of the Platonist Ammonius, which have been quoted from the "De E apud Delphos." It is equally interesting to

<sup>1</sup> 1051 E.

<sup>2</sup> 1052 E.

<sup>3</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 420 E.

note that all the speakers in that dialogue, while looking with their mind's eye far beyond any individual member of the Olympian Pantheon to that divine power whose functions correspond with the essential requirements of the loftiest monotheism, yet use the name of Apollo as the professed nucleus of their religious beliefs, and thus bring themselves into formal harmony with the demands of the "ancient and hereditary Faith." The same tendency, at once orthodox and unifying, is visible in the philosophic import attached, in accordance with the Stoic practice, to the popular names for the god in his various functions. In other tracts and essays the same aim is conspicuous, the same method of treatment is applied. In his fascinating account of the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris—which will be dealt with later from the material which it furnishes for investigating Plutarch's attempts to identify foreign gods with the gods of Greece—he uses both these divine names as a means of approach to the Divine Nature, that One Eternal, Absolute Being, which is the real object of the philosopher's clarified insight—*πολλῶν ὀνομάτων μορφῆ μία*.<sup>1</sup> The true object of the service of Isis, for example, is "the knowledge of that First and Supreme Power which is compact of Intelligence; that Power whom the goddess (Isis) bids her servants seek, since He abides by her side and is united with her. The very name of her temple expressly promises the knowledge and the understanding of *Being*, inasmuch as it

<sup>1</sup> ÆSCHYLUS: *Prometheus Vincit*, 210.

is called the Ision (εἰς—ἰδὼν), indicating that we shall know *Being* if we *enter* with piety and intelligence into the sacred rites of the goddess."<sup>1</sup>

The passage just quoted shows the intimate connexion between *Being* and *Intelligence*—the "Supreme Power is compact of Intelligence;" and we are left in little doubt respecting Plutarch's views on this second aspect of the Divine Nature. The conception of the Deity as νοῦς, an ancient abstraction in Greek philosophy, is at once strengthened and brought nearer to the intelligence of humanity by Plutarch's simple treatment of it, and by his connecting it, wherever possible, with the traditions of the popular creed. God is not only Intelligence, but intelligent. "The Divine Nature," says he, "is not blessed in the possession of silver and gold, nor mighty through the wielding of thunders and thunderbolts, but in the enjoyment of knowledge and understanding; and of all the things that Homer has said concerning the gods, this is his finest pronouncement:—

'Yet both one goddess formed  
And one soil bred, but Jupiter precedence took in birth  
And had more knowledge'<sup>2</sup>

—a pronouncement in which he gives the palm for

<sup>1</sup> *De Iside et Osiride*, 352 A. We need not here trouble with Plutarch's fanciful philology, almost as fanciful as that of some modern Aryanists. His meaning is clear—Absolute Being is the object of the worship of Isis—cf. MAX MÜLLER: *Selected Essays*, vol. i. p. 467: "Comparative philologists have not yet succeeded in finding the true etymology of Apollo." (Plato's derivations are given in the *Cratylus*, 266 C.)

<sup>2</sup> *Iliad*, xiii. 354. (Chapman's translation.)

dignity and honour to the sovereignty of Jove, inasmuch as he is older in knowledge and wisdom. And I am of opinion that the blessedness of that eternal life which belongs to God consists in the knowledge which gives Him cognizance of all events; for take away knowledge of things, and the understanding of them, and immortality is no longer *life*, but mere *duration*.”<sup>1</sup> The free, unfettered exercise of intelligence is therefore a function of the Divine Nature; but although Plutarch is clearly thinking of the *νοῦς* of Anaxagoras as embodied by Plato in his conception of the Chief Good, yet he succeeds in bringing the Divine Nature, by the exercise of intelligence, into an intimate relation with humanity which the Platonic Demiurgus never attains. The true successors of Plato in the realm of Idealism were the neo-Platonists, who maintained that “the sum total of the Ideas exists in the Divine *nous*, not outside of it, ‘like golden statues,’ which God must search and look up to before He can think. It is not to be supposed that He must needs run about in search of notions, perhaps not finding them at all, perhaps not recognizing them when found. This is the lot of man, whose life is spent often in the search, sometimes in the vain search, after truth. But to the Deity all knowledge is always equally present.”<sup>2</sup> The vicious weakness of Platonism, whether Old or New, lies in the fact that no real reason exists why God should ever leave the contemplation of “worlds not realized” to create

<sup>1</sup> *De Iside et Osiride*, 351 E.

<sup>2</sup> *Neoplatonism*, by C. BIGG, D.D. (“Chief Ancient Philosophies”), p. 216.

this world after an eternally existing pattern, in the intellectual contemplation of which he was already happy.<sup>1</sup> The "absence of envy" is not a philosophic reason: it is a Platonic leap over an unbridged chasm. The aloofness of the Epicurean gods in their *sedes quietæ* is the logical outcome of this aspect of Platonism. Plutarch gives the Divine Intelligence an interest in the beings He has created. Apollo (here again the popular name is used for the Divine Being) knows all the difficulties that trouble the public and private lives of humanity, and he knows their solutions also. "In private matters we inquire of Apollo as a seer, in public matters we pray to him as a god. In the philosophic nature of the soul he is the author and inspirer of intellectual difficulties and problems, thus creating therein that craving which has its satisfaction in the discovery of Truth;"<sup>2</sup> e.g., "when the oracle was given out *that the altar of Delos should be doubled*, the god, as Plato says, not only conveyed a particular command, but also indicated his desire that the Greeks should study geometry; the task assigned involving an operation of the most advanced geometrical character."<sup>3</sup> In another place this paternal interest in the doings of mankind is attributed to the Deity direct without the intrusion of any traditional name for a particular god. "It is not, as Hesiod supposes,<sup>4</sup> the work of human wisdom, but of God's, to discriminate and distinguish

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the *De Placitis Philosophorum*, 881 B.

<sup>2</sup> *De E apud Delphos*, 384 F.

<sup>3</sup> 386 E.

<sup>4</sup> Alluding to HESIOD—*Works and Days*, 735 sq.

predilections and antipathies in character before they become conspicuous to the world by breaking out into gross evil-doing under the influence of the passions. *For God is assuredly cognizant of the natural disposition of every individual man, being, by His nature, more fitted to perceive soul than body: nor does He await the outbreak of actual sin before He punishes violence, profanity, obscenity.*"<sup>1</sup> Thus, although Plutarch accepts the philosophic phrasing current respecting the nature of the Deity, his ardent, sympathetic temperament brings down the philosophers' Deity from its majestic isolation, and makes it "meet halfway" the gods of the popular faith, so that both may be of service to humanity, the latter being purified and elevated, the other actualized and humanized. We discern with sympathy Plutarch's attempt to satisfy the eternal craving of men for a mediator between themselves and the unapproachableness of the Highest; and we are prepared for his exposition of the doctrines of Dæmonology. This tendency to give warmth and life to philosophic abstractions is occasionally visible in an unconscious attempt to assimilate the qualities possessed by the Deity to those displayed in a less degree by mankind. Thus, he implicitly accepts the Platonic position that Eternity is all present to God,<sup>2</sup> a position which is also accepted by modern European Theology: but he elsewhere regards the Deity (formally using the name of Apollo) as a scientific observer, with infallibly acute reasoning powers directed upon phenomena

<sup>1</sup> *De Sera Numinis Vindicta*, 562 B.

<sup>2</sup> *De E*, 393 A.

retained in an unshakable memory. His predictions of events are, therefore, really predictions, not statements of present facts; and the "rigorous certainty and universality" which they possess are the certainty and universality attaching to the human discoveries of the laws of geometry and the law of causation, and not to a divine insight which is omniscience because it is always regarding events as present, whether they are actually past, present, or to come. "Apollo is a prophet, and prophecy is the art of ascertaining the future from the present or the past. Now nothing exists without a cause, and prediction, therefore, depends upon reason. The present springs inevitably from the past, the future from the present. The one follows naturally upon the other by a succession which is unbroken from beginning to end, and, accordingly, he who knows the natural causes of past, present, and future events, and can connect their mutual relationships, can predict the future, knowing, in the words of Homer, 'things that are now, things that shall be, and things that are over.' The whole art of Dialectics consists in the knowledge of the Consequent."<sup>1</sup>

Already in these passages, which represent philosophers as discussing God in the terms familiar in Greek philosophy, we can discern a gradual breaking down of that metaphysical exclusiveness which had hitherto marked the philosophic conception of the Deity. We see God again becoming personal, and reverting to that interest in the affairs of mankind

<sup>1</sup> *De E.* 387 B. C.

from which the philosophers, starting with Xenophanes, had, in their revulsion from the anthropomorphic realisms of the Epic traditions, excluded him. We can already note that Plutarch believes in the "goodness" of God in a sense quite distinct from the "absence of envy" distinguishing the Platonic Creator, or even from the sense involved in Plato's admission that the gods love the just, since one always loves that which is made in one's own image.<sup>1</sup> We can see him going further, indeed, than Aristotle, who compares the love of men for the gods to the love of children for their parents, a love which is based upon a recognition of their goodness and superiority, and of their having been the authors of the greatest benefits to humanity.<sup>2</sup> But we are not left without many explicit texts asserting the goodness of God to mankind in emphatic phrases. Plutarch agrees with those statesmen and philosophers who assert that the majesty of the Divine Nature is accompanied by goodness, magnanimity, graciousness and benignity in its attitude towards mankind.<sup>3</sup> We have already seen that Justice and Love are regarded by Plutarch as the most beautiful of all virtues, and those most in harmony with the Divine Nature,<sup>4</sup> and many isolated sentences could be quoted to demonstrate how firmly the belief in God's goodness to man was fixed in Plutarch's mind. We are fortunate, however, in possessing a special tract in which the personal character of the Divine Goodness is so clearly exhibited that a modern translator of the tract, writing from a

<sup>1</sup> PLATO: *Philebus*, 39 E.

<sup>3</sup> *De Superstitione*, 167 E.

<sup>2</sup> ARISTOTLE: *Ethics*, viii. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 423 E.



“Theological Institution,” is able to say, “I am not aware, indeed, that even Christian writers who have attempted to defend the same truth within the same limits of natural theology, have been able to do anything better than to reaffirm his position, and perhaps amplify and illustrate his argument.”<sup>1</sup> The tract referred to is, of course, the famous production known as the “*De Sera Numinis Vindicta*.” It is a bold and beautiful attempt to reconcile the existence of an actively benevolent Deity with the long-continued, often permanent, impunity of wickedness in this world; an endeavour to solve the question raised, especially by Epicureans, but not unfraught with solicitude for philosophers of other schools, respecting the patent fact that human virtue and human vice have no natural and necessary connexion with human happiness on the one hand and human misery on the other. Christian translators of the piece, from Amyot down to the writers just quoted, have hailed it as an effective vindication of the ways of God to man, and Comte Joseph de Maistre, whose paraphrase is designed, as he says, to please “ladies and foreigners,” is quite convinced that such a justification could not possibly have been written by one who was not a Christian.<sup>2</sup> Even

<sup>1</sup> PLUTARCH ON *The Delay of the Deity in Punishing the Wicked*: revised edition, with notes, by Professors H. B. Hackett and W. S. Tyler. (New York, 1867.)

<sup>2</sup> *Sur les Délais de la Justice Divine dans la punition des coupables*, par le Comte JOSEPH DE MAISTRE. (Lyons et Paris, 1856.)—“*J’ai pris*,” says de Maistre, “*j’ai pris quelques libertés dont j’espère que Plutarque n’aura point se plaindre*;” and, speaking of the *jeunesse surannée* of Amyot’s style, he adds: “*Son orthographe égare l’œil*.”

Wytttenbach, whom de Maistre attacks for repudiating this view, is willing, with all his scholarly caution, to admit that Plutarch, in this tract, touches the excellences of the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup>

The position which Plutarch sets himself to overthrow is that which is expressed most concisely in the famous verses of Ennius:—

“Ego deum genus esse semper dixi et dicam cœlitum,  
Sed eos non curare opinor quid agat humanum genus;  
Nam si curent, bene bonis sit, male malis, quod nunc abest”

—a sentiment in exact harmony with the Epicurean view of the matter.<sup>2</sup> While, however, establishing the providence and goodness of God as against the practical

*l'oreille ne supporte pas ses vers: les dames surtout et les étrangers le goûtent peu.*” Another French critic justly remarks on these “liberties” of de Maistre: “*C'est trop de licence. Plutarque n'est pas un de ces écrivains qui laissent leurs pensées en bouton*” (Gréard, p. 274). Yet it is upon de Maistre's “paraphrase” that Gréard bases his own analysis!

<sup>1</sup> WYTTTENBACH: *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* (Præfatio). It is pleasant to repeat the praise which Christian writers have poured on this tract. “*Diese Schrift,*” says Volkmann, “*gehört meines Erachtungs unbedingt mit zu dem schönsten, was aus der gesammten nachclassischen Litteratur der Griechen überhaupt auf uns gekommen ist.*” (VOLKMANN, vol. ii. p. 265.) One may wonder a little, perhaps, at the limitation conveyed in the *nach* of *nachclassischen*.—Trench says that some of Plutarch's arguments “would have gone far to satisfy St. Augustine, and to meet the demands of his theology.”

<sup>2</sup> The Epicurean author of the *De Placitis*, still inveighing against “that tall talker, Plato,” is bitterly emphatic on this point.—“*If there is a God, and human affairs are administered by His Providence, how comes it that baseness prospers, while the refined and good fall into adversity?*” And he instances the murder of Agamemnon “*at the hands of an adulterer and an adultress,*” and the death of Hercules, that benefactor of humanity, “*done to death by Dejaniras drugs.*” (881 D.)

Atheism of the Epicureans, it will be seen that he is equally temperate, and equally consistent with himself, in avoiding the exaggerated zeal of those Stoics who, in their eager desire to do something for the honour of Providence, had subjected the minutest and commonest actions of life to the jealous watching of an arbitrary omniscience, so that, as Wyttenbach puts it, "that most gracious name of Providence was exposed to ridicule and contempt, being alternately regarded as a *fortune-telling old crone*, and as a *dreadful spectre to alarm and terrify mankind*."

Let us see in what way Plutarch establishes the providential benevolence of God without detracting from his majesty.

A company of philosophic students, Plutarch himself; Patrocleas, his son-in-law;<sup>1</sup> Timon, his brother; and Olympichos, a friend;<sup>2</sup> are found, at the opening of the dialogue, regarding each other in silence beneath a Portico of the Delphic Temple, in wonder at the discourtesy of an Epicurean who has suddenly disappeared from the party, after expounding the doctrines of his school in the manner, doubtless, of Velleius in the "De Natura Deorum," though with a more limited scope as expressed by the famous line of Ennius already quoted. According to Plutarch, he had "gathered together, from various sources, an undigested mass of confused observations, and had then scattered them in one contemptuous stream of spleen and anger upon Providence." The company, deprived of their legitimate

<sup>1</sup> *Symposiacs*, 642 C, 700 E.

<sup>2</sup> *Symposiacs*, 654 C.

opportunity for reply, determined to discuss the question of Providence as if the departed opponent were still present, although it cannot be doubted that his absence, and the consequent want of direct necessity to "score off" him, lead to a more thorough and impartial discussion of the topic. Patrocleas, at any rate, states the difficulty with almost Epicurean boldness. "The delay of the Deity in punishing the wicked seems to me to be a strange and mysterious thing. The wicked are so eager and active in their wickedness, that they, least of all, ought to be the object of inactivity on the part of God. Thucydides rightly said that the advantage of delay was on the side of evil-doers.<sup>1</sup> Present immunity from the punishment due to crime encourages the criminal, and depresses the innocent sufferer. Bias knew that a certain reprobate of his days would be punished, but feared that he would not live to see it. Those whom Aristocrates betrayed at the Battle of Taphrus were all dead when his treachery was punished twenty years after. So with Lyciscus and the Orchomenians.<sup>2</sup> This delay encourages the wicked. The fruit of injustice ripens early and is easily plucked, but punishment matures long after the fruit of evil has been enjoyed." This demand of the natural man to see their deserts meted out to the wicked is reinforced in a more philosophical manner by Olympichos, who maintains that delay in the punishment of sin deprives

<sup>1</sup> THUCYD., iii. 38. Cleon's famous speech on the Mytilenean question.

<sup>2</sup> "Hujus rei aut omnino Lyeisci ne vestigium quidem uspiam reperi."—WYTTENBACH.

it of that salutary effect which its immediate infliction would have upon the sinner, who regards it as accidental, and not necessarily connected with his crimes. The fault of a horse is corrected if bit and lash be applied at once; but all the beating and backing and shouting in the world at a later time will only injure his physique without improving his character. "So that I am quite unable to see what good is done by those Mills of God<sup>1</sup> which are said to grind so late, since their delay brings justice to naught, and thus deprives vice of its restraining fear."<sup>2</sup>

Plutarch, before replying to these weighty arguments, preaches a short and eloquent sermon on the text, "God moves in a mysterious way." His thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. We must imitate the philosophic caution of the Academy. Men who never saw a battle may talk of military affairs, or discuss music who never played a note; "but it is a different thing for mere men like ourselves to peer too closely into matters that concern Divine Natures; just as if unskilled laymen were to try to penetrate the intention of an artist, the meaning of a physician's treatment, the inner significance of a legal enactment, by fanciful guesses and surmises. . . . It is easier<sup>3</sup> for a mortal to make no definite assertion about the gods, but just this—that *He*<sup>4</sup> knows best the proper

<sup>1</sup> In allusion, of course, to the famous verse of an unknown poet:—

Ὅψ' ἔθεῶν ἀλέουσι μύλοι, ἀλέουσι δὲ λεπτά.

<sup>2</sup> 549 E.

<sup>3</sup> Deleting ἢ after ῥάδιον with BERNARDAKIS. 549 F.

<sup>4</sup> Note the change of number: θεῶν—εἰδῶς.

time to apply His treatment to wickedness. He can truly discriminate in the character of the punishment required by each offence." These preliminary observations are in the proper Academic style; they are designed to indicate that the end of a discourse on such intricate matters can only be the modification of doubt by probability, not its settlement by absolute logical certainty.<sup>1</sup> The assumption of the Platonic attitude is appropriately followed by a Plutarchic reading of the teaching of Plato, who is understood as asserting that God, when he made Himself the universal pattern for all beautiful and noble things, granted human virtue to those who are able to follow Him, in order that they might thus in some wise grow like unto Him.<sup>2</sup> Further, as Plato says,<sup>3</sup> the universal nature took on order and arrangement by assimilation to and participation in the Idea and in the Virtue of the Divine Nature. Again, according to Plato, Nature gave us eyes that our soul might behold the order and harmony of the heavenly bodies, and become harmonious and ordered herself, free from flighty passions and roving propensities.<sup>4</sup> Becoming like God in this way, we shall emulate the mildness and forbearance

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the well-known passage in the *Timæus* (*Timæus*, 29 C, D).

<sup>2</sup> 550 D. "Etsi hæc sententia disertis verbis in Platone, quod sciam, non exstet, ejus tamen ubique sparsa sunt vestigia." WYTTENBACH adds: "Summam autem hominum virtutem et beatitudinem in eo consistere, ut imitatione Deorum eis similes evadant, communis fere omnium Philosophorum fuit sententia."

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch has another well-known passage of the *Timæus* in his memory here.—*Timæus*, 29 D.

<sup>4</sup> "Neque hoc disertis verbis in Platone legere me memini; sed cum variis locis . . . confer."—WYTT.

with which He treats the wicked ; shall eradicate from our minds the brutish passion for revenge ; and shall wait to inflict our punishments until long consideration has excluded every possibility that we may repent after the deed is done. The purport of this argument, and of the examples which Plutarch, always rich in illustration, furnishes in support of it, is clearer than the need of attaching it to the Platonic scheme of creation. Plutarch believes that " God is slow to anger " ; because gentleness and patience are part of His nature, and because by speedy punishment, He would save a few, but by delaying His justice He gives help and admonition to many. God, moreover, knows how much virtue He originally implanted in the heart of every man. He knows the character and inclination of every guilty soul ; and His punishments are, therefore, different from human penalties, in that the latter regard the law of retaliation only, while the former are based on a knowledge of character which does not quench the smoking flax, but gives time and opportunity for a repentant return to the path of virtue.<sup>1</sup> The world, too, would have been deprived of many a virtuous character, lost the advantage of many a noble deed, had prompt punishment for early sins been inflicted. There is, moreover, a soul of good in things evil ; the careers of great tyrants have been prolonged, and the world has been the better for the movements which their tyranny compelled. Evil is a " dispensation of Providence " in Plutarch's eyes, as in those of many modern Christians.

<sup>1</sup> 551 D.

“As the gall of the hyæna, and the rennet of the seal, both disgusting animals in other respects, possess qualities useful for medicinal purposes, so upon certain peoples who need severe correction God inflicts the implacable harshness of a tyrant or the intolerable severity of a magistrate, and does not take away their trouble and distress until they are purified of their sins.” Sometimes, too, the Deity delays His vengeance in order that it may take effect in a more strikingly appropriate manner.<sup>1</sup>

But these external punishments are not the most terrible that can be inflicted on the sinner. It would be difficult, even in Christian literature, to find so striking a tribute to the power of conscience in inflicting its immaterial tortures on the criminal who has escaped material recompense. Plutarch bases his observations on this head on a repudiation of Plato's statement<sup>2</sup> “that punishment is a state that follows upon injustice,” asserting, as he finds in Hesiod, that the two are contemporaneous and spring up from the same soil and root; a view which he supports by many conspicuous and terrible examples from history, the force of which may be summarized in the fine and truthful phrase—the antithetical effect of which would be destroyed by translation—*οὐδὲ γηράσαντες ἐκολάσθησαν*

<sup>1</sup> 553 A, 553 F.

<sup>2</sup> *Laws*, 728 C. The reference is to HESIOD: *Works and Days*, 265, 266, though Plutarch quotes verse 265 in a form different from the vulgate. GOETTLING (*Ap. Paley*) thinks Plutarch's version “savours more of antiquity.” ARISTOTLE: *Rhetoric*. iii. 9, quotes the vulgate.



ἀλλ' ἐγήρασαν κολαζόμενοι.<sup>1</sup> The conclusion which Plutarch arrives at by considering this aspect of the case is that "there is no necessity for any god, or any man, to inflict punishment on evildoers, but it is sufficient that their whole life is tormented and destroyed by their sense of their impiety;" and that the time cannot but come when the glamour and the tinselled glory of successful crime will be torn away, and nothing shall remain but the base and dreadful memory to torture awakening conscience with the pangs of an unquenchable remorse.<sup>2</sup>

A fresh perplexity as to the goodness and justice of God is here raised by Timon, who cannot see that it is in harmony with these divine qualities that the sins of the fathers should, as Euripides complained, be visited upon the children.<sup>3</sup> The punishment of the innocent is no compensation for the escape of the guilty. God, in this case, would be like Agathocles, the tyrant of Syraeuse, who ravaged Coreyra because the Homeric Coreyreans had given a welcome to Odysseus, and retorted the blinding of the mythical Cyclops upon the Ithacensians when they complained that his soldiers had looted their sheepfolds. "Where, indeed," asks Timon, "is the reason and justice of this?"<sup>4</sup> Plutarch

<sup>1</sup> 554 D. Literally, "they were not punished when they grew old, but grew old in punishment."

<sup>2</sup> 555 E, F.

<sup>3</sup> STOBÆUS: *Anthologion*, Tit. 79, 15.

<sup>4</sup> 557 D. Cf. the sarcasm of the Academic CORA in the *De Natura Deorum*, iii. 38: "Dicitis eam vim Deorum esse ut, etiam si quis morte pœnas sceleris effugerit, expetantur eæ pœnæ a liberis, a nepotibus, a posteris. O miram æquitatem Deorum!"

can only reply that, if the descendants of Hercules and Pindar are held in honour on account of the deeds of their progenitors, there is nothing illogical in the descendants of a wicked stock being punished. But he knows that he is on difficult ground, and repeats the Academic caution against too much dogmatism in these intricate matters. He falls back upon natural causes here, as if seeking to exonerate the Deity from direct responsibility for a striking injustice. An hereditary tendency to physical disease is possible, and may be transmitted from ancestors who lived far back in antiquity. Why should we marvel more at a cause operating through a long interval of time, than through a long interval of space? If Pericles died, and Thucydides fell sick, of a plague that originated in Arabia, why is it strange that the Delphians and Sybarites should be punished for the offences of their ancestors? <sup>1</sup> Moreover, a city is a continuous entity with an abiding personality; just as child, and boy, and man are not different persons, but are unified by the consciousness of identity;—nay, less marked changes take place in a city than in an individual. A man would know Athens again after thirty years of absence, but a far shorter period serves to obliterate the likenesses of our personal acquaintance. A city rejoices in the glory and splendour of its ancient days; it must also bear the burden of its ancient ignominies. And if a city has this enduring personality which makes it a responsible agent throughout its existence, the members of the same family are

<sup>1</sup> 558 F.

much more intimately connected. There would, therefore, have been less injustice inflicted had the posterity of Dionysius been punished by the Syracusans than was perpetrated by their ejection of his dead body from their territories. For the soul of Dionysius had left his body, but the sons of wicked fathers are often dominated by a good deal of their parents' spirit.<sup>1</sup>

We are conscious of some artificial straining of the argument in this place, and shortly perceive that the mention of the soul of Dionysius is intended to prepare the way for a discussion on the immortality of the soul. Plutarch cannot believe that the gods would show so much protective care for man—would give so many oracles, enjoin so many sacrifices and honours for the dead—if they knew that the souls of the dead perished straightway, leaving the body like a wreath of mist or smoke, as the Epicureans believed.<sup>2</sup> He shrinks from the thought that the Deity would take so much account of us, if our souls were as brief in their bloom as the

<sup>1</sup> 559 E.

<sup>2</sup> 560 C. WYTTENBACH quotes LUCRETIIUS, iii. 437 and 456: "Ergo dissolvi quoque convenit omnem animai Naturam ceu fumus in altas aeris auras." He might have added, iii. 579, sqq.: "Denique, cum eorpus nequeat perferre animai Discidium, quin id tetro tabescat odore, Quid dubitas quin ex imo penitusque eörta, Emanarit uti fumus diffusa animæ vis?" Plutarch is probably thinking of Plato's "intelligent gardener" (PHÆDRUS, 276 B), although, as Wytttenbach says, "*Horti Adonidis proverbii vim habent.*" The English reader will think of Shakespeare's beautiful lines—

*"Thy promises are like Adonis' gardens,*

*That one day bloom'd, and fruitful were the next."*

*Henry VI., Pt. 1, act i. sc. 6.*

forced and delicate plants that women grow in their fragile flower-pots, their short-lived Gardens of Adonis. He is convinced that the belief in the after-existence of the soul stands or falls with the belief in the Providence of God.<sup>1</sup> If there is a Providence, there is existence after death; and if there is existence after death, then there is stronger reason for supposing that every soul receives its due reward or punishment for its life on Earth. But here Plutarch, after just touching one of the cardinal principles of Christian teaching, the dogma of Heaven and Hell, starts away from the consequence which almost seems inevitable, and which Christianity accepted to the full—the belief that our life here should be modelled in relation to the joys and penalties that await us in the other world. He clearly believed that their ethical effect upon life is small.<sup>2</sup> The rewards and punishments of the soul hereafter are nothing to us here. Perhaps we do not believe them, and in any case we cannot be certain that they will come. This is the position at which Plutarch arrives in the course of rational argument, and he at once returns to the sphere of our present life to find surer sanctions for goodness. Such punishments as are inflicted in this world on the descendants of an evil race are conspicuous to all that come hereafter, and deter many from wickedness. Besides, God does not punish indiscriminately. He has a watchful care even over the children of those who have been notorious for evildoing, and instead of delaying the punishment in their case, early checks

<sup>1</sup> 560 F.

<sup>2</sup> 561 A.

their hereditary disposition to vice by appropriate restraints born of His intimate knowledge of the character and inclination of the human heart. But if, in spite of this, a man persists in the sinful courses of his ancestors, it is right that he should inherit their punishment as he has inherited their crimes.

The dialogue concludes with a myth of the type of *Er the Armenian*, in which, after the manner of Plato, Plutarch embodies views on the state of the soul after death, for which no place could be found in the rational argumentation of mere prose. *Thespesius of Soli*, an abandoned profligate, has an accident which plunges him into unconsciousness for three days. In this period his soul visits the interstellar spaces, where the souls of the dead are borne along in various motion; some wailing and terror-struck; others joyous and delighted; some like the full moon for brightness; others with faint blemishes or black spots like snakes. Here, in the highest place, was *Adrastea*, the daughter of *Zeus* and *Ananke*, from whom no criminal could hope ever to escape. Three kinds of justice are her instruments. *Poena* is swift to punish, chastising those whose sin can be expiated while they are still on earth. Those whose wickedness demands severer penalties are reserved for Justice in the afterworld. The third class of sinners, the irretrievably bad, are cast by Justice into the hands of *Erinnys*, "the third and most terrible of the servants of *Adrastea*," who pursues them as they wander hither and thither in reckless flight, and finally thrusts them all with pitiless severity into a place of

unspeakable darkness.<sup>1</sup> In these acts of immortal justice the soul is bared utterly, and her sins and crimes are relentlessly exposed. All this is explained to Thespesius by a kinsman who recognizes him. He is then shown various wonders of the afterworld: the place of Oblivion, a deep chasm by which Dionysus and Semele had ascended into heaven, above which the souls hovered in rapture and mirth, caused by the fragrance of the odours which were breathed by a soft and gentle air that issued from the "pleasing verdure of various herbs and plants" which adorned the sides of this wonderful chasm. He sees the light of the Tripod of the Delphic oracle, or would have seen it had he not been dazzled with the excess of its brightness; and hears the voice of the Pythia uttering various oracles. Then follow Dantesque scenes of the punishments allotted to various kinds of wickedness, among which it is interesting to note that hypocrisy is tortured with greater severity than open vice. A lake of boiling gold, a lake of frozen lead, a lake of iron, with attendant Dæmons to perform the usual functions, are allotted to the punishment of avarice.<sup>2</sup> But the most terrible fate is that of those whose punishment never ends, who are constantly retaken into the hands of Justice; and these, it is important to note, in the light of the argument which preceded the story, are those whose posterity have been punished for their transgressions. We can see how little Plutarch is satisfied

<sup>1</sup> 564 C.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Timon of Athens*, act iii. sc. 1: "*Let molten coin be thy damnation.*"

with his own reasonings on this point; they are, as Wytttenbach says, *acutius quam verius dicta*: the punishment of the children for the sins of the fathers clearly leaves the advantage, so far as concerns this world, on the side of the transgressors. Plutarch, with his firmly pious belief in the justice and goodness of God, feels driven to assert that the balance must be redressed somewhere, and he invokes the aid of Myth to carry him, in this case, whither Reason refuses to go; and taking the myth as a whole, and in relation to the tract in which it is embodied, we cannot doubt that its object is to enforce that doctrine of rewards and punishments in the Hereafter, from which Plutarch, as we have seen, shrinks when an occasion arises for pressing it from the standpoint of Reason. The punishments which Thespesius has witnessed in his visit to the Afterworld have the effect of turning him into a righteous man in this world, and Plutarch clearly hopes that the story will likewise convince those who are not convinced by his reasons. We may gather, however, that inclined as he was to believe that the providence of God extended into the Afterworld, his attitude, as fixed by reason and probability, is summed up in the words already referred to—"Such rewards or punishments as the soul receives for the actions of its previous career are nothing to us who are yet alive, being disregarded or disbelieved."<sup>1</sup> But whatever may be the

<sup>1</sup> 561 A.—In the long extract, preserved by Stobæus, from Plutarch's *De Anima* (*Anthologion*: Tit. 120, 28.—The Tauchnitz edition of 1838, however, ascribes this passage to Themistius, perhaps by confusion with extract No. 25), Plutarch allows his imagination

condition of the soul after death, and its relation to the Deity in that condition, Plutarch has made it quite certain that he believes in the goodness of God as safeguarding the interests of humanity in this world. It is clear in every part of this interesting dialogue that the God whom Plutarch believes in is a personal deity, a deity full of tender care for mankind, supreme, indeed,

to play freely with the fortunes of the soul in the afterworld. In a beautiful passage, Timon compares death to initiation into the Great Mysteries—an initiation in which gloom and weariness and perplexity and terror are followed by the shining of a wondrous light, which beams on lovely meadows, whose atmosphere resounds with sacred voices that tell us all the secret of the mystery, and whose paths are trod by pure and holy men. Timon concludes with Heraclitus that, if the soul became assuredly convinced of the fate awaiting it hereafter, no power would be able to retain it on earth. But Plutarch himself is not convinced: he is charmed and seduced, but Reason holds him back from accepting as certainties the “airy subtleties and wingy mysteries” of Imagination. Under the stress of a desire to console his wife for the loss of her little daughter, he reminds her that the “hereditary account” and the Mysteries of Dionysus—in which, he says, both of them were initiated—equally repudiate the notion that the soul is without sensation after death (*Consolatio ad Uxorem*, 611 D). In his polemic against the Epicureans he chiefly emphasizes the emotional aspect of the desire for immortality;—the Epicurean denial of immortality destroys “the sweetest and greatest hopes of the majority of mankind”—one of these “sweetest and greatest hopes” being that of seeing retribution meted out to those whose wealth and power have enabled them to flout and insult better men than themselves; it robs of its satisfaction that yearning of the thoughtful mind for unstinted communion with the great masters of contemplation; and deprives the bereaved heart of the pleasant dream of meeting its loved and lost ones in another world (*Non posse suav.*, 1105 E). There is no doubt that Plutarch wished to believe in the immortality of the soul, but the evidence is not conclusive that he did; at the most it is with him a “counsel of perfection,” not an “article of faith.”



by virtue of his omnipotence and justice, but supreme also by virtue of his infinite patience and mercy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "It is not clear from the writings of Plutarch to what extent he was a monotheist." This is the opinion of Charles W. Super, Ph.D., LL.D., and it is supported by the irrefragable proof that Plutarch "uses *θεοις* both with and without the article." This judgment is given, of all places in the world, at the conclusion of a translation (a very indifferent one, by the way) of the *De Sera Numinis Vindicta*. ("Between Heathenism and Christianity:—Being a Translation of Seneca's *De Providentiâ* and Plutarch's *De Sera Numinis Vindicta*," by Charles W. Super, Ph.D., LL.D., Chicago, 1899.)

## CHAPTER VI.

*Plutarch's Dæmonology—Dæmonology as a means of reconciliation between the traditional Polytheism and philosophic Monotheism—Dæmonlore in Greek philosophers and in the popular faith—Growth of a natural tendency to identify the gods of the polytheistic tradition with the Dæmons—Emphasis thus given to the philosophic conception of the Deity—Dæmons responsible for all the crude and cruel superstitions attaching to the popular gods—Function of the Dæmons as mediators between God and man.*

HOW, then, does Plutarch reconcile this lofty conception of a Deity who is Unity, Eternity, and Supreme Intelligence, with the multitude of individual deities which form so essential a part of the "hereditary Faith" of Græco-Roman civilization, and which are universally admitted as displaying qualities discrepant from even a far lower notion of God than that which Plutarch actually maintained? Further, since the Empire includes other nationalities than the Greeks, and the Roman Pantheon is not the exclusive habitation of native-born deities, how shall he find a place in his theological scheme for the gods of other peoples, so that there may be that Catholic Unity in faith which shall correspond to the one political dominion under which the world dwells in so great a peace and concord?

The difficulty of reconciling Polytheism with philosophic Monotheism was, of course, not new. In earlier days it had been necessary for philosophers to secure their monotheistic speculations from the charge of Atheism by finding in their systems a dignified position for the popular gods. And even those philosophers who sincerely believed in the existence of beings corresponding to the popular conceptions felt the need of accounting, in some more or less specious way, for the ill deeds that were traditionally attributed to so many of them. The ancient doctrine of Dæmons, emanating from some obscure source in Antiquity,<sup>1</sup> had been

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch himself is ignorant of its origin, and does not know whether it was Magian, Orphic, Egyptian, or Phrygian. (*De Defectu Orac.*, 415 A. Cf. *Isis and Osiris*, 360 E, "following the Theologians of old.") Those who believed, like Rualdus, that Plato had read the Old Testament (see note, page 45), had no difficulty in assigning the doctrine of Dæmons to a Jewish source. Wolff, speaking of the systematic demonology constructed by the neo-Platonists, alludes to this passage in Plutarch, and says:—"Hæc omnia artificiosa interpretatione ex Platonis fluxerunt fabulis; ex oriente fere nihil assumebatur. Namque Judæi ab aliis principiis, ac reliqui, profecti decem dæmonum genera constituerant; Chaldæi vetustiores non dæmonum genera, sed septem archangelos planetis præfectos colebant; nec credendum Plut., *De Defectu Orac.*, 415 A. Studebat enim Plutarchus, præsertim in *Comm: de Iside et de Socratis dæmonio, Græcorum placita ad Ægypti Asiæque revocare sapientiam, et quum ab Orpheo et Atti sancta quædam mysteria dicerentur profecta esse, arcanis his ritibus summam de diis doctrinam significari suspicabatur*" (Wolff, *op. cit.*).—Volkmann, who had carefully studied Plutarch's relationship both to his philosophical predecessors and to foreign forms of religious faith, had previously arrived at a different conclusion from that embodied in the words italicized above.—"Er war darum kein Eklektiker oder Synkretist, and was man nun gar von seiner Vorliebe für Orientalische Philosophie und Theologie gesagt hat gehört lediglich in das Gebiet der Fabel. Plutarchs philosophisch-allegorische Auslegung aber

adopted by the Pythagoreans in the latter sense,<sup>1</sup> while Plato, who believed in none of these things, had, on one or two occasions, by the use of philosophic "myth" replete with more than Socratic irony, described these beings as playing a part between God and man which might be tolerantly regarded as not greatly dissimilar from that popularly assigned to the lesser deities of the Hellenic Olympus.<sup>2</sup> In the "Statesman," the creation-myth, to which the Stranger invites the

der Ägyptischen Mythen von Isis und Osiris geht von der ausdrücklichen Voraussetzung aus *dass diese Gottheiten wesentlich Hellenische sind*" (Volkmann, vol. ii. p. 23). But these varying views are simply two different ways of regarding the real fact, which is that Plutarch regards foreign myths and Greek alike as different expressions of the conception of Divine Unity—such Unity not being either Hellenic or Egyptian, but simply absolute (see subsequent analysis of the *De Iside et Osiride*).

<sup>1</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS, viii. 32. RITTER and PRELLER also refer to APULEIUS' *De Deo Socratis*: "Atenim Pythagoricos mirari oppido solitos, si quis se negaret unquam vidisse Dæmonem, satis, ut reor, idoneus auctor est Aristoteles." (Below this passage in my edition of Apuleius (the *Delphin*, of 1688) appears the note "Idem scribit Plutarch. in libello περί θαυμασίων ἀκουσμάτων." This *libellus* I cannot identify with any enumerated in the catalogue of Lamprias.)

<sup>2</sup> "Plato, ne Anaxagoræ aut Socratis modo impietatis reus succumberet, præterea ne sanctam animis hebetioribus religionem turbaret, intactos reliquit ritus publicos et communem de diis dæmonibusque opinionem; quæ ipse sentiat, significat quidem, sed, ut solet in rebus minus certis *et a mera dialectica alienis*, obvoluta fabulis" (WOLFF, *De Dæmonibus*, loc. cit.). Is it permissible to suppose that the third consideration—that expressed in the italicized words—operated more strongly on Plato than either or both of the first two? Aristotle, at any rate, takes up a much firmer attitude in face of the popular mythology, which he regards as *fabulously introduced for the purpose of persuading the multitude, enforcing the laws, and benefiting human life* (*Metaphysics*, xi. (xii.) 8, T. Taylor's translation). This famous passage is as outspoken as Epicureanism.

younger Socrates to give his entire attention, "like a child to a story," describes how the Deity himself tended men and was their protector, while Dæmons had a share, after the manner of shepherds, in the superintendence of animals according to genera and herds.<sup>1</sup> Another story which Socrates, in the "Banquet," says that he heard from Diotima, that wonderful person who postponed the Athenian plague for ten years, tells how Eros is a great Dæmon; how Dæmons are intermediate between gods and mortals; how the race of Dæmons interpret and transmit to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and interpret and transmit to men the answers and commands of the gods.<sup>2</sup> For God, we are told, is not directly associated with man; but it is through the mediation of the Dæmons, who are many and various, that all communion and converse take place between the human and the Divine.

But apart altogether from the philosophic use of Dæmonology, there are evidences that the belief in Dæmons was held in some sort of loose combination with the popular polytheistic faith. The Hesiodic poems were a compendium of early Hellenic theology,<sup>3</sup> and Hesiod, according to Plutarch himself, was the first to indicate with clearness and distinctness the existence of four species of rational beings—gods, *dæmons*, heroes, and men.<sup>4</sup> In the passage of Hesiod

<sup>1</sup> PLATO: *Politicus*, 271 D. A similar "dispensation" is provided in the *Laws*, 717 A.

<sup>2</sup> PLATO: *Symposium*, 202 E.

<sup>3</sup> HERODOTUS: ii. 53.

<sup>4</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 415 B.

referred to (*Works and Days*, 109 sqq.) two kinds of Dæmons are described. The dwellers in the Golden Age are transformed, after their sleep-like death on earth, into Terrestrial Dæmons:—

“When earth’s dark breast had closed this race around,  
Great Jove as demons raised them from the ground;  
*Earth-hovering spirits*, they their charge began,  
The ministers of good, and guards of man.  
Mantled with mist of darkling air they glide,  
And compass earth and pass on every side;  
And mark, with earnest vigilance of eyes,  
Where just deeds live, or crookèd wrongs arise.”<sup>1</sup>

They are virtuous, holy beings, endowed with immortality—“Jove’s immortal guardians over mortal men.”<sup>2</sup> The races of the Silver Age become Subterranean powers, blessed beings, but inferior in honour to the former class, and distinctly described as mortal.<sup>3</sup> Hesiod says nothing about Evil Dæmons, although the disappearance of the Brazen Race furnished an opportunity for their introduction into his scheme of supernatural beings. But once the existence of beings inferior to the gods in the celestial hierarchy obtained a recognition in popular tradition, however vague the recognition might be, the conception would tend to gather strength and definiteness from the necessity,

<sup>1</sup> HESIOD: *Works and Days*, 122-125 (Elton’s translation).

<sup>2</sup> *Works and Days*, 253. Cf. the beautiful fragment from Menander preserved by Plutarch, *De Tranquillitate Animi*, 474 B:—

“By every man, the moment he is born,  
There stands a guardian Dæmon, who shall be  
His *mystagogue* through life.”

<sup>3</sup> *Works and Days*, 141-2.

first expressed by the philosophers, but doubtless widely spread among the people, of safeguarding the sanctity of the gods, while at the same time recognizing the substantial validity of tradition. This tendency would be also probably aided by the fact that in Homer, as Plutarch points out, and in the dramatists and prose writers generally, as is well known, the designations of "gods" and "dæmons" were mutually interchanged.<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, at all events, who boldly uses the Dæmons to perform such functions, and to bear the blame for such actions, as were inappropriate to the divine character, is enabled to make one of his *dramatis personæ*—Cleombrotus, the traveller, who was specially devoted to the study of such matters—assert that "it can be demonstrated by unexceptionable testimony from antiquity that there do exist beings of a nature intermediate between that of God and man, beings subject to mortal passions and liable to inevitable changes, but whom we must, *in accordance with the established custom of our fathers*, regard and invoke as Dæmons, giving them all due reverence."<sup>2</sup> It is natural, therefore, in the light of these indications, to believe that, side by side with the popular gods, there existed, in the popular imagination, subordinate beings of two kinds, both described as Dæmons: the first class comprising the good and benevolent Dæmons

<sup>1</sup> *De Defectu Oraculorum*, 415 B.—Plato, too, though perhaps not quite with the innocent purpose of Homer, gives "dæmons" as an alternative to "gods"—*Timæus*, Sec. 16. (A passage charged with the most mordant irony against the national religious tradition.)

<sup>2</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 416 C.

of Hesiod, the second including Dæmons of an evil character and disposition, the belief in which had developed naturally out of the Hesiodic conception, from the necessity of fixing the responsibility of evil deeds on supernatural beings different in nature from the purity and goodness of Deity.<sup>1</sup> Such a classification of supernatural beings—gods, Dæmons, and evil Dæmons—could not, of course, be rigidly maintained; the more the good Dæmons were discriminated from their evil brethren, the more they would tend to become identified with the gods of the popular tradition, and the line of demarcation between the divine and the dæmonic nature would be broken down,<sup>2</sup> Dæmons and gods would be identified, and the splendour and purity of the Supreme God of all would shine out more fully when contrasted with those other gods, who, after all, were only Dæmons. Such, at least, is the process

<sup>1</sup> Cf. WOLFF: "Neque diserepat hac in re communis religio: multi enim dæmones mali Græcorum animos terrebant, velut Acco, Alphito, Empusa, Lamia, Mormo, sive Mormolyce," &c.—Considering the numerous references made to the subject of Dæmonology by Greek poets and philosophers from Hesiod and Empedocles downwards, with all of which, as is clear from the citations made in our text, Plutarch is perfectly familiar, Prof. Mahaffy's note on this point is a little mysterious.—"Mr. Purser points out to me that Plutarch rather popularized than originated this doctrine, and himself refers it to various older philosophers." (Mahaffy, p. 313.)—It needs no very close study of Plutarch to see for one's self that he does not claim to have originated the doctrine, and that he knows himself to be dealing with a long-standing and widespread tradition.

<sup>2</sup> For a similar process, cf. the quotation from Dr. JACKSON'S *Treatise on Unbelief*, given by Sir WALTER SCOTT in *Demonology and Witchcraft*, p. 175, note: "Thus are the Fyries, from difference of events ascribed to them, divided into good and bad, when it is but one and the same malignant fiend that meddles in both."



which appears to be taking place in the numerous contributions which Plutarch makes to the subject of Dæmonology. He is evidently a sincere believer in the existence of Dæmons, not a believer in the Platonic sense, and not a believer merely because he wishes to come to terms with popular ideas. But the final result, so it appears to us, is that the popular gods become identified with Dæmons, and are prepared, even in Pagan times, to take that position which was assigned to them with such whole-hearted sincerity by the early Christian Fathers;<sup>1</sup> to become the fiends and devils and sprites of another dispensation; to aid Saladin in excluding the Crusaders from the Holy Land; to "drink beer instead of nectar" as day labourers in German forests; or to shine with a sinister splendour on the lives of monks and peasants in the rural districts of France.<sup>2</sup>

Plutarch gives emphatic indications of his own attitude on the subject by drawing attention to such expressions of the earlier philosophers as pointed to the recognition of two opposite descriptions of Dæmons—

<sup>1</sup> Cf. GÖTTE: *Das Delphische Orakel*: "In Zeiten, wo dasselbe keine Bedeutung mehr hatte, wo es nur dazu dienen konnte, den finstersten Aberglauben fortzupflanzen und zu erhalten, und die Menschen über die wahre Leitung der Dinge in der Welt, über die wahren Mittel, durch welche sich Jeder sein Glück bereitet, zu täuschen, wurde das Orakelwesen von den frommen Vätern unserer Kirche für die Ausgubrt des Teufels angesehen," &c.—*T.* also, 1 Corinthians x. 20-22.

<sup>2</sup> See, for these illustrations, SCOTT'S *Dæmonology and Witchcraft*. PATER'S *Apollo in Picardy*, and HEINE'S *Gods in Exile*. ("Unter solchen Umständen musste Manche, dessen heilige Haine konfisciert waren, bei uns in Deutschland als Holzhäcker tagelöhnern und Bier trinken statt Nektar.")

the virtuous and the vicious. In one place, as we have seen, he admits that Homer does not distinguish between the terms "Gods" and "Dæmons," and in his historical *résumé* of Dæmonology in the "Isis and Osiris,"<sup>1</sup> he is compelled to make a parallel admission that the Homeric epithet derived from Dæmons is indiscriminately applied to good and bad actions. He makes this admission, however, the basis of a subtle conclusion to the effect that Homer wished to imply that the Dæmons had a confused and ill-defined character, involving the existence of both good and bad specimens of the race. Nothing definitely distinguishing between the two sorts of Dæmons is to be obtained from Plato,<sup>2</sup> and Plutarch accordingly dwells with special emphasis upon the views of Empedocles and Xenocrates, who maintained, the one, that Dæmons who had been guilty of sins of commission or omission were driven about between earth and sky and sea and sun, until this purifying chastisement restored them to their natural position in the dæmonic hierarchy;<sup>3</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> 361 A. sqq.

<sup>2</sup> The author of the *De Placitis* (882 B.) gives a very vague and slight account of the history of Dæmonology, probably from motives of Epicurean contempt, if one may judge from the curt sentence which concludes his brief note:—"Epicurus admits none of these things."—He merely says that Thales, Pythagoras, Plato, and the Stoics asserted the existence of spirits called "Dæmons," and adds that the same philosophers also maintained the existence of Heroes some good, some bad. The distinction between good and bad does not apply to the Dæmons. The identical words of this passage in the *De Placitis* are used by Athenagoras (*Legat: pro Christ.*, cap. 21) to express a definite statement about Thales, who is asserted to have been the first who made the division into God, dæmons, heroes.

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch has here preserved some very beautiful verses of

other, that certain disgraceful and ill-omened sacrificial observances "are not properly connected with the worship of the *gods or of good Dæmons*,<sup>1</sup> but that there are surrounding us certain beings, great and potent, but malignant too, and hateful, who rejoice in such repulsive ceremonies, and are thereby restrained from the perpetration of greater evils." Democritus and Chrysippus are elsewhere quoted as supporters of the same view.<sup>2</sup>

Plutarch, accordingly, faithful to his principle of making Philosophy Mystagogue to Religion, has obtained from the philosophers a conviction that there are two kinds of dæmonic beings, two sets of supernatural characters with attributes inferior to those of the Divine Nature, and yet superior to those displayed by the human family. It has already been shown how naturally the good Dæmons would tend to become identified with the gods: a passage has just been quoted in which we can see this process of identification taking place. But Plutarch furnishes still more emphatic testimony to the necessity of such a consummation.

The group of philosophers gathered together at Delphi to discuss the cessation of the oracles have fallen

Empedocles, in which this punishment is described. Another fragment of verse from Empedocles (*De Exilio*, 607 C) depicts with equal force and beauty the punishment by the Dæmons of one who has been handed over to them to atone for his crimes.

<sup>1</sup> Here should be noted the tendency to assimilate the good Dæmons to the gods—a tendency to which reference has already been made.

<sup>2</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 419 A.

into an argument on the nature of Dæmons, and certain considerations have been introduced which indicate a liability to vice and death as inherent in their nature. This conclusion shocks one of the speakers, but the pious Cleombrotus wants to know in what respect Dæmons will differ from gods if they are endowed with immortality and immunity from sin.<sup>1</sup> It is most significant, however, that the famous and beautiful story which Cleombrotus tells in support of his belief in the mortality of Dæmons, the story of the death of "the great Pan," is actually concerned with an announcement of the death of one whom the popular faith accepted as a deity.<sup>2</sup> Demetrius, who had just come from Britain, near which were many scattered desert islands, some of them named after Dæmons and heroes, gives an authentic account of the death of a Dæmon in the island of Anglesea.<sup>3</sup> Cleombrotus then shows how

<sup>1</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 419 A.

<sup>2</sup> 419.—Mrs. Browning could hardly have read the *De Defectu* when she stated that her fine poem "The Dead Pan" was "partly founded on a well-known tradition mentioned in a treatise of Plutarch (*De Oraculorum Defectu*'), according to which, at the hour of the Saviour's agony, a cry of 'Great Pan is dead!' swept across the waves in the hearing of certain mariners,—and the oracles ceased." (It was one of the mariners who uttered the cry, "The great Pan is dead!" having been thrice requested by a supernatural voice to do so. But such errors of detail are unimportant in view of the fact that the whole spirit of the story is misunderstood by the poetess.)

<sup>3</sup> So one may conjecture from the description given by Demetrius, who "sailed to the least distant of these lonely islands, which had few inhabitants, and these all held sacred and inviolable by the Britons." Plutarch's Demetrius has been identified with "Demetrius the Clerk" who dedicated, "to the gods of the Imperial Palace," a bronze tablet now in the Museum at York.—See King's translation of the *Theosophical Essays* in the "Bohn" series, p. 22.

a belief in the nativity and mortality of the Dæmons is not unknown in Greek philosophy, "for the Stoics," says he, "maintain this view, *not only with regard to the Dæmons but also with regard to the gods*—holding one for the Eternal and Immutable, while regarding the remainder to have been born, and to be subject to death."<sup>1</sup> The whole course of the argument, even though the speakers are represented as unconscious of the fact, leads to the identification of the popular deities with the Dæmons. This strain of thought elsewhere loses the unconscious quality, and becomes as definitely dogmatic as Plutarch's Academic bent of mind would allow. In the "Isis and Osiris," for example, he argues for the probability of the view which assigns the legends of these two deities not to gods or men, but to Dæmons;<sup>2</sup> and proceeds still further to breach the partition wall between the two natures by introducing into his Dæmonology such legends as have raised Osiris and Isis, on account of their virtue, from the rank of good Dæmons to that of the gods,<sup>3</sup> and describes them as receiving everywhere the combined honours of gods and Dæmons; and he appropriates the argument to Greek religion by comparing this promotion to those of Herakles and Dionysus; by identifying Isis with Proserpine, and subsequently Osiris with Dionysus.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 420 B.

<sup>2</sup> 360 D.

<sup>3</sup> 361 E. We shall see elsewhere that, just as a good Dæmon may be promoted to the rank of a god, so a good man may be lifted to the status of a Dæmon, like Hesiod's people of the Golden Age. (*De Dæmonio Socratis*, 593 D. Cf. *De Defectu Orac.*, 415 B.)

<sup>4</sup> 361 F. 364 E.

But whatever may have been the views explicitly maintained by Plutarch in this connexion, it is his constant practice to shift on to the shoulders of the Dæmons the responsibility for all those legends, ceremonies, and practices, which, however appropriate and necessary parts of the national faith they may be, are yet inconsistent with the qualities rightly attributable to Deity.<sup>1</sup> We have already noticed his unwillingness to impugn the immutability of the Creator by regarding His essence as capable of metamorphosis into the phenomena of the created world.<sup>2</sup> "It is," says Ammonius, "the function of some other god to do and suffer these changes—or, rather, of some Dæmon appointed to direct Nature in the processes of generation and destruction." This relationship of the Dæmons to the supreme power as conceived by philosophy is more completely stated in the short tract, "De Fato,"<sup>3</sup> where we are told that (1) there is a first and supreme Providence which is the intelligence of the First Deity, or,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. APULEIUS, *De Deo Socratis*.—"Neque enim pro majestate Deum cælestium fuerit, ut eorum quisquam vel Annibali somnium pingat, vel Flaminio hostiam conroget, vel Accio Nævio avem velificet, vel sibyllæ fatiloquia versificet, etc. Non est operæ Diis superis ad hæc descendere. Quæ cuncta" (he says elsewhere) "cælestium voluntate et numine et auctoritate, sed Dæmonum obsequio et opera et ministerio fieri arbitrandum est."

<sup>2</sup> *De E apud Delphos*, 394 A.

<sup>3</sup> *De Fato*, 572 F, sqq.—Bernardakis "stars" this tract as doubtfully Plutarch's. But the passage quoted, at any rate, is not discrepant from Plutarch's views elsewhere, though expressing them more concisely, and with more appearance of system than usual with him. The similarity to Plato's tripartite division of the heavenly powers in the *Timæus* is, of course, evident, but the text has a note of sincerity which is lacking in the Platonic passage.

as one may regard it, His benevolent will towards all creatures, in accordance with which all *divine* things universally received the most admirable and perfect order; (2) the second Providence is that of the second gods, who move through the sky, by which *human* affairs are duly ordered, including those relating to the permanence and preservation of the various species; (3) the third Providence may properly be regarded as the superintendence of the Dæmons who are situated near the earth, observing and directing the actions of men. But, as we have already noted, this formal distinction between (2) and (3) is not maintained in practice. Cleombrotus, who knows more about these things than most people, insists that it is not possible that the gods could have been pleased with festivals and sacrifices, "at which there are banquets of raw flesh and victims torn in pieces, as well as fastings and loud lamentations, and often 'foul language, mad shrieks, and tossing of dishevelled hair,'" but that all such dread observances must have had the object of pacifying the anger of the mischievous Dæmons.<sup>1</sup> It was not to the gods that human sacrifices were welcome; it was not Artemis who demanded the slaughter of Iphigenia;<sup>2</sup> these were the deeds of "fierce and violent Dæmons," who also perpetrated those many rapes, and inflicted those pestilences and famines which are anciently attributed to the gods. "All the rapes here, and the wanderings there, that are celebrated in legends

<sup>1</sup> *De Defectu*, 417 C. (For the verse quoted in the original, cf. W. CHRIST'S *Pindar*, p. 232.)

<sup>2</sup> 417 D.

and sacred hymns, all the hidings and flights and servitudes, *do not belong to the gods*, but represent the chances and changes incident to the careers of Dæmons." It was not "holy Apollo" who was banished from Heaven to serve Admetus;—but here the speech comes to an end with a rapid change of subject, as if Cleombrotus shrinks from the assertion that a Dæmon was the real hero of an episode with which so many beautiful and famous legends of the "hereditary Faith" were connected. When some of the most celebrated national myths concerning the gods are assigned to Dæmons, we are not far away from the identification of the former with the latter, and the consequent degradation of the gods to the lower rank. It is true that the various speakers on the subject do not, in so many words, identify the Dæmons with the gods of the Mythology.<sup>1</sup> They deprive the gods of many of their attributes, and give them to the Dæmons; they deprive them of others, and give them to the One Eternal Deity.

<sup>1</sup> The nearest approach to this identification is made by the mysterious stranger whom Cleombrotus finds near the Red Sea, who appeared once every year among the people living in that neighbourhood, and who gave the pious traveller much information concerning Dæmons and their ways; which he was well fitted to do, as he spent most of his time in their company and that of the pastoral nymphs. He said that Python (whom Apollo slew) was a dæmon; that the Titans were dæmons; that Saturn may have been a dæmon. He then adds the significant words, "There is nothing to wonder at if we apply to certain Dæmons the traditional titles of the gods, since a Dæmon who is assigned to a particular god, deriving from him his authority and prerogatives, is usually called by the name of that same god" (421 E). But this somewhat daring testimony is, we are not surprised to find, preceded by a hint that in these matters we are to drink from a goblet of mingled fact and fancy.—(421 A.)



It is difficult to see how the Gods could maintain their existence under this twofold tendency of deprivation, supported as they might be by formal classifications which assigned them a superior place. Even the Father of Gods and Men—the Zeus of Homer—turns his eyes “no very great way ahead from Troy to Thrace and the nomads of the Danube, but the true Zeus gazes upon beauteous and becoming transformations in many worlds.”<sup>1</sup> To contrast the Zeus “of Homer” with the “true” Zeus is to do little else than to place the former in that subordinate rank proper not to the Divine, but to the Dæmonic character. Plutarch is perfectly consistent in applying this method of interpretation to the gods of other nations no less than to the gods of Greece. In the “Isis and Osiris,” he inclines to the belief that these great Egyptian Deities are themselves only Dæmons, although he refuses to dogmatize on the point, and gives a series of more or less recognized explanations of the Egyptian myth. He cannot refrain, however, from using so appropriate an occasion of denouncing the absurdity of the *Greeks* in imputing so many terrible actions and qualities to their gods—“For the legends of Giants and Titans, handed down among the Greeks, the monstrous deeds of Cronus, the battle between Pytho and Apollo, the flight of Dionysus, the wanderings of Demeter, fall not behind the stories told of Osiris and Typhon, and other legends that one may hear recounted by mythologists without restraint.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 426 D.

<sup>2</sup> *Isis and Osiris*, 360 E.

Such, then, is the relation in which the Dæmons stand to the Divine nature : they are made the scape-goat for everything obscene, cruel, selfish, traditionally imputed to the gods ; and the Supreme Deity rises more conspicuously lofty for its freedom from everything that can tend to drag it down to the baseness of human passions. For Plutarch makes it very clear that it is the human element in these mixed natures that originates their disorderly appetites. Although the Dæmons “ exceed mankind in strength and capacity, yet the divine element in their composition is not pure and unalloyed, inasmuch as it participates in the faculties of the soul and the sensations of the body, is liable to pleasure and pain, and to such other conditions as are involved in these vicissitudes of feeling, and bring disturbance upon all in a greater or less degree.”<sup>1</sup> It is by virtue of this participation in the “ disturbing ” elements of human nature that they are fitted to play that part between God and man which Plutarch, after Plato, calls the “ interpretative ” and the “ communicative.”<sup>2</sup> This enables the Dæmons to play a loftier part than that hitherto assigned them ; to respond, in fact, to that universal craving of humanity for some mediator between their weakness and the eternal splendour and perfection of the Highest. The whole question of inspiration and revelation, both oracular and personal, is bound up with the Dæmonic function, and to both these spheres of its operation, the public

<sup>1</sup> *Isis and Osiris*, 360 F.

<sup>2</sup> *Isis and Osiris*, 361 C. The passage in the “ Banquet ” referred to has been already quoted (see p. 123).

and the private, Plutarch gives the fullest and most earnest consideration. Previous, therefore, to discussing this aspect of the Dæmonic character and influence, it will be necessary to ascertain what were Plutarch's views on the subject of inspiration and prophecy, and what was his attitude to that question of Divination which exercised so great a fascination on the mind of antiquity.

## CHAPTER VII.

*Necessity for a Mediator between God and Man partly met by Oracular Inspiration—General failure of Oracles in the age of Plutarch—Plutarch's "Delphian Essays"—The DE PYTHLÆ ORACULIS: nature of Inspiration: oracles not verbally inspired—The DE DEFECTU ORACULORUM—Various explanations of Inspiration—Plutarch inclines to accept that which assumes an original Divine afflatus placed under the superintendence of Dæmons, whose activities are subject to the operation of natural causes.*

AN age which attempts to reinvigorate its own ethical life by draughts of inspiration from springs hallowed by their duration from an immemorial antiquity, will naturally regret that currents, which once ran full, now flow no longer in their early strength, but have dwindled to insignificant rills, or are dried up altogether in their courses. And there is no source of religious inspiration so greatly held in honour as that which comes from the communication of mankind with the Divine Being.<sup>1</sup> Visions, dreams, incantations,

<sup>1</sup> It would be otiose to illustrate by examples the universal and splendid fame of the Delphic oracle. One may perhaps be given which is not commonly quoted. Pliny the elder, who in one passage sneeringly includes the *oraculorum præscita* among the *fulgurum monitus, auruspicum prædicta, atque etiam parva dicta, in anguriis*

inspired writings, omens, and prophecies have been valued as means of bringing man into communication with God, and as furnishing an unerring way of indicating the Divine will to humanity. But it would be difficult to mention any institution or practice having this ostensible aim which has had such absolute sway over the minds of those who came within reach of its influence, as the group of oracles which were celebrated in the ancient Hellenic world. It is no wonder, therefore, that in the age of Plutarch the present silence of the oracles was a common topic of speculation, of anxious alarm to the pious, of ribald sarcasm to the profane. Juvenal<sup>1</sup> satirically describes the meaner methods which the cessation of the Oracle at Delphi has imposed upon those who yet wish to peer through the gloom that hides the future. Lucan laments the loss which his degenerate time suffers from this cause: "*non ullo secula dono Nostra carent majore Deum, quam Delphica sedes Quod siluit;*"<sup>2</sup> and speculates as to the probable reason for the failure of

*sternutamenta et offensiones pedum*, by means of which men have endeavoured to discover hints of divine guidance, nevertheless, in another passage, quotes two wise oracles as having been "*velut ad castigandam hominum vanitatem a Deo emissa.*" (Lib. ii. cap. 5, and vii. cap. 47.)—The political, religious, and moral influence of the Delphic oracle has been exhaustively dealt with by Wilhelm Götte in the work already cited (see p. 127, *note*), and by Bouché-Leclercq in the third volume of his "*Histoire de la Divination dans l'Antiquité.*" On the general question of divination it would, perhaps, be superfluous to consult anything beyond this monumental work, with its exhaustive references and its philosophic style of criticism.

<sup>1</sup> JUVENAL: *Sat.* vi. 555.

<sup>2</sup> LUCAN, v. 111. sq.

the ancient inspiration.<sup>1</sup> That Plutarch should have shown solicitude on this aspect of the ancient faith is natural, and one cannot but be grateful that the chances of time have preserved the exhaustive tracts in which he and his friends are represented as discussing various questions connected with the inspiration of the Delphic Oracle, and the manner in which this inspiration was conveyed to humanity. No extant work gives us so intelligible and natural an explanation of the significance which oracular institutions possessed for the ancient world, nor so close an insight into the workings of the minds of educated men at one of the most important periods of human history, in face of one of the most interesting and, perhaps, most appalling of human problems. We have already made copious quotations from the two tracts in question; we now propose to use them mainly for the light which they cast on the question of oracular inspiration. We refer to the tracts known as the "De Pythiæ Oraculis" and the "De Defectu Oraculorum." These two tracts (together with the one entitled the "De E apud Delphos")<sup>2</sup> purport to be reports of conversations held

1

—*"Muto Parnassus hiatu*

*Conticit, pressitque Deum : seu spiritus istas  
Destituit fauces, mundique in devia versum  
Duxit iter : seu barbarica cum lampade Pytho  
Arsit, in immensas cineres abiere cavernas,  
Et Phœbi tenuere viam : seu sponte Deorum  
Cirrha silet fatigue sat est arcana futuri  
Carmine longævæ vobis commissa Sibyllæ :  
Seu Pæan solitus templis arcere nocentes,  
Ora quibus solvat nostro non invenit ævo."*

<sup>2</sup> The main argument of the third and shortest of the Delphic

by philosophical friends and acquaintances of Plutarch at the shrine of Apollo at Delphi.

tracts has been already given. A brief description of its contents is added by way of note, to show its connexion with the two larger tracts. The tract takes the form of a letter from Plutarch to Scrapion, who acts as a means of communication between Plutarch and other common friends. Its object is to ascertain why the letter  $\epsilon$  was held in such reverence at the Delphic shrine. A series of explanations is propounded, probably representing views current on the subject, varying, as they do, from those proper to the common people to those which could only have been the views of logicians or mathematicians. Theon, a close friend of Plutarch's, maintains that the syllable is the symbol of the logical attributes of the God, Logic, whose basis is  $\epsilon\iota$  ("if"), being the process by which philosophical truth is arrived at. "If, then, Philosophy is concerned with Truth, and the light of Truth is Demonstration, and the principle of Demonstration is Connexion, it is with good reason that the faculty which includes and gives effect to this process has been consecrated by philosophers to the god whose special charge is Truth." . . . "Whence, I will not be dissuaded from the assertion that this is the *Tripod of Truth*, namely, Reason, which recognizing that the consequent follows from the antecedent, and then taking into consideration the original basis of fact, thus arrives at the conclusion of the demonstration. How can we be surprised if the Pythian God, in his predilection for Logic, is specially attentive to this aspect of Reason, to which he sees philosophers are devoted in the highest degree?" This connexion of Reason with Religion, a familiar process in Plutarch, is followed by a "list of the arithmetical and mathematical praises of the letter  $\epsilon$ " involving Pythagorean speculations, and the culmination of the whole piece lies in the splendid vindication by Ammonius of the Unity and Self-Existence and Eternity of the Deity. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of his argument is the assignation to Apollo of the functions of the Supreme Deity: an easy method of bringing Philosophy and Mythology to terms; a mode of operation perhaps not unaffected by that Mithraic worship which, on its classical side, was to culminate in Julian's famous prayer to Helios. The tract also furnishes, as already stated, a clear example of the method by which the literal terms known in the worship of Dionysus and Apollo are refined from their grosser elements and idealized by the subtleties of the philosophic intellect, which then accepts them as appropriate

The dialogue, briefly called "On the Pythian Responses," deals, as the Greek title indicates, with the fact that the Pythia at Delphi no longer uses verse as the instrument of her inspired utterances. It takes the form of a conversation in the Delphic temple, between Philinus, Diogenianus, Theon, Serapion, and Boethus—the first of whom reports the conversation to his friend Basilocles, who has grown quite weary of waiting while the rest of the party conduct Diogenianus, a visitor, on a tour of inspection among the sacred offerings in the Temple.<sup>1</sup> Philinus<sup>2</sup> tells how "after

designations for the various functions of the God. The pleasant seriousness, too, of all the interlocutors is worthy of note, as presenting a type of religious discussion of whose calmness and dignity the modern world knows little. It would be interesting, for example, to hear a group of classical philosophers discuss the excommunication of Professor Mivart by Cardinal Vaughan, or of Tolstoi by Pobedonostzeff.

<sup>1</sup> This Diogenianus does not appear to be identical with the Diogenianus of Pergamos, twice mentioned in the *Symposiacs*, although Bernardakis does not distinguish them in his Index.

<sup>2</sup> Philinus was an intimate friend of Plutarch's (*Symposiacs*, 727 B; *De Sollertia Animalium*, 976 B); and, except in this Dialogue and in the *De Soll. Anim.*, appears only as taking his part in the social intercourse of the *Symposiacs*, and as contributing his share to the discussion of the various quaint and curious problems forming so large a portion of the "Table Talk" of Plutarch and his friends. He has Pythagorean tendencies; eats no flesh (727 B); objects to a rich and varied diet, being of opinion that simple food is more easily digestible (660 F); explains somewhat crudely why Homer calls salt *θειος* (685 D); proves that Alexander the Great was a hard drinker (623 E); explains why Pythagoras advised his followers to throw their bedclothes into confusion on getting up (728 B, C); and tells a story of a wonderful tame crocodile which lay in bed like a human being (*De Soll. Anim.*, 976 B). A very charming account of Plutarch's friends has been given by M. A. Chenevière, in his "*De Plutarchi familiaribus*," written as a Litt.D. thesis for a French University in 1886.



the Ciceroni (οἱ περιηγηταὶ) had gone through their wonted programme, disregarding our requests that they would cut short their formal narratives and their explanations of most of the inscriptions," the conversation had turned by a series of natural gradations from the interesting objects, that so strongly attracted the attention of visitors, to the medium through which the oracles of the God had been conveyed to humanity.<sup>1</sup> Diogenianus had noted that "the majority of the oracular utterances were crowded with faults of inelegance and incorrectness, both of composition and metre." Serapion, to whom previous reference has been made, and who is here described as "the poet from Athens," will not admit the correctness of this impious indictment.<sup>2</sup> "You are of opinion, then," said he, "that, believing these verses to be the work of the god, we may assert that they are inferior to those of Homer and Hesiod? Shall we not rather regard them as being the best and most beautiful of all compositions, and reconstitute, by the standard which they supply, our own taste and judgment, so long corrupted by an evil tradition?" Boethus, "the geometrician," who has lately joined the Epicureans, uses a neat form of the *argumentum ad hominem* in refutation of Serapion, paying him a polished compliment at the same time.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 395 A.

<sup>2</sup> 396 D. Cf. *Symposiacs*, 628 A.

<sup>3</sup> 396 E. Boethus, a genial and witty man, with whom, notwithstanding his Epicureanism, Plutarch lives on terms of intimate social intercourse. In *Symposiacs*, 673 C, Boethus, now described as an Epicurean *sans phrase*, entertains, in Athens, Plutarch, Sossius Senecio, and a number of men of his own sect. After dinner

“Your own poems,” says he, “grave, indeed, and philosophic in matter, are, in power and grace and finish, much more after the model of Homer and Hesiod than of the Pythia;” and he gives concise expression to the two opposing mental attitudes in which questions of this kind are universally approached. “Some will maintain that the oracles are fine poems because they are the god’s, others that they cannot be the god’s because they are not fine poems.” Serapion emphatically re-asserts the former of these two views, maintaining that “our eyes and our ears are diseased. We have become accustomed, by long indulgence in luxury and effeminacy, to regard sweetness as identical with beauty.”<sup>1</sup> Theon<sup>2</sup> is the exponent of a compromise not unknown in modern discussions on the “Inspiration of the Scriptures”—“Since these verses are inferior to those of Homer, it cannot be maintained that the god is their author. He supplies the primary inspiration to the prophetess, who gives expression thereto in accordance with her natural aptitude and capacity. He only suggests the images, and makes the light of the future shine in her soul.” The conversation then turns upon certain events which had accompanied, or been preceded by, portents and wonders happening to statues and

the company discuss the interesting question why we take pleasure in a dramatic representation of passions whose exhibition in real life would shock and distress us. At another time he appears, together with Plutarch and a few other friends, at a dinner given by Ammonius, then *Strategos* at Athens for the third time, and explains, upon principles of Epicurean Science (*Symposiacs*, 720 F), why sounds are more audible at night than by day.

<sup>1</sup> 396 F.

<sup>2</sup> See note, p. 149.

other gifts consecrated in the Temple. On this subject Philinus asserts his firm belief that "all the sacred offerings at Delphi are specially moved by divine forethought to the indication of futurity, and that no fragment of them is dead and irresponsive, but all are filled with divine power." Boethus, as a newly converted Epicurean, makes a mock of this view, this "identification of Apollo with brass and stone, as if chance were not quite competent to account for such coincidences," and he subsequently enlarges his view as follows:—"What possible condition of temporal affairs, my friend, cannot be assigned to natural causes? What strange and unexpected event, occurring by sea or by land, to cities or to individual men, could one predict without some chance of hitting the mark?<sup>1</sup> Yet you would hardly call this prediction; it would be merely assertion, or, rather, the dissemination at random, into the abyss of infinity, of bare words without any guiding principle leading them to a particular end, words which, as they wander about, are sometimes met by chance events which correspond with them." And Boethus continues to insist that, though some predictions may have by accident come true, the original assertions were not the less false on that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CICERO: *De Divinatione*, ii. 59.—"*Quis est enim, qui totum diem jaculans, non aliquando collineet? Totas noctes dormimus; neque ulla fere est, qua non somniamus: et miramur, aliquando id, quod somniamus, evadere? Quid est tam incertum quam talorum jactus? tamen nemo est quin, sæpe jactans, venereum jaciatur aliquando, nonnumquam etiam iterum, ac tertium,*" &c. Also ii. 971.—"*Casus autem innumerabilibus pæne sæculis in omnibus plura mirabilia quam in somniorum visis effecerit.*"

account. Serapion admits that this may be true about vague predictions, but maintains that such detailed prophecies as those he proceeds to quote from history do not owe their accomplishment to chance.<sup>1</sup>

The attention of the disputants—if these calm and dignified colloquies can be called disputes—is here again attracted to the objects of artistic and historical interest surrounding them, among which the guide takes occasion to point out the place where formerly had reposed the iron spits dedicated by the courtesan Rhodopis under the circumstances detailed by Herodotus.<sup>2</sup> Diogenianus warmly protests against such offerings having ever been admitted into the Temple, but Serapion draws his attention to the golden statue of the more notorious Phryne, “that trophy of Greek incontinence,”—as Crates had called it—and condemns the inconsistency of these objections in people who see, without a protest, the temple crowded with offerings made by the Greek cities for victories in their internecine warfare. “It were fitting,” exclaims he, “that kings and magistrates should consecrate to the god offerings of justice, temperance, and magnanimity, and not tributes of a golden and luxurious wealth, which the most evil livers often abound in.”<sup>3</sup>

The concluding portion of this somewhat discursive tract is devoted to a speech by Theon on the question with which the title only has so far dealt, the cessation of the oracle to use verse. Theon, as we have seen, believes that the god inspires the thought, and not the

<sup>1</sup> 399.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. HERODOTUS: ii. 135.

<sup>3</sup> 401 E.

expression, of the Pythia, and his explanation of the change of medium is purely natural, being based upon the general tendency towards prose which early became evident in Greek Literature and Philosophy. Besides, the matters on which the oracle is now consulted are not such as to require the mystery and magnificence of verse.<sup>1</sup> "In these cases it would be absurd to employ the diction, metre, and imagery of poetry, when what is required is a simple and concise reply. It would be like a vain Sophist to turn an oracle finely for the sake of show. The Pythian priestess, moreover, is noble and virtuous in her own character, and when she mounts the tripod and approaches the god, she is more intent on truth than appearance, more regardful of the god's message than of the praise or blame of men."<sup>2</sup> "In old days," continues Theon, "were not wanting those who accused the oracles of uncertainty and ambiguity, and there are now those who accuse them of excessive simplicity. But the ways of such persons are childish and silly: for just as children take more delight in looking at rainbows and aureoles and comets than at the sun and moon, so do these desire enigmas and allegories and metaphors to fill the heart of man with wonder and mystery. In their ignorance of the true reason of the change (in the oracle's mode of expression), they

<sup>1</sup> "Pyrri temporibus iam Apollo versus facere desierat."—CICERO: *De Div.*, ii. 56. Plutarch, however, is able to say, "Even nowadays some oracles are published in verse," and to cite a very interesting instance (*De Pyth. Orac.*, 404 A).

<sup>2</sup> 408 C, D.

depart, blaming the god instead of charging the defect to the weakness of our human intellect, which cannot comprehend the purposes of the Deity.”<sup>1</sup>

In this defence of the Deity Theon has apparently committed himself to a view of the manner in which the process of inspiration takes place. “The body employs many organs, while the soul employs the body and its parts. The soul, in like manner, is God’s instrument. Now the virtue of an instrument consists in imitating, subject to its natural limitations, the power that makes use of it, and in exhibiting the thought of that power in operation. This it cannot do to the extent of reproducing the purity and perfection of the Divine Creator, but its work is mixed with alien matter. The Moon reproduces the splendour of the Sun, but in a dim and weak form. These images are representations of the way in which the Pythia reproduces for the service of mankind the thoughts of God.”<sup>2</sup> We may be tempted, while reading this explanation, to assert that Plutarch wishes to maintain that the inspiration of the Pythia by the Deity is direct. But these illustrations are intended only to explain why the Pythian verses are not divinely perfect. They come through a human soul, which has the weakness of an instrument, and is prevented by its limitations from expressing the purity and beauty of the divine thought. The manner of this inspiration is more fully discussed in the following dialogue, the “*De Defectu Oraculorum.*”

<sup>1</sup> 409 D.

<sup>2</sup> 404 C.

This tract is in the form of a letter addressed to Terentius Priscus, and although the person speaking as "I" in the dialogue is alluded to as "Lamprias"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Lamprias*. The writer of this letter to "Terentius Priscus" is addressed by the name of "Lamprias" in the course of the dialogue (413 F). This Terentius is not mentioned elsewhere by Plutarch, but one may venture the guess that he was one of the friends whom, as in the case of Lucius the Etrurian, and Sylla the Carthaginian, Plutarch had met at Rome (*Symposiacs*, 727 B). Sylla and Lucius, whom we know to have been on intimate terms with Plutarch, are interlocutors in the dialogue *De Facie in Orbe Lunæ*, and one of them uses the same form of address to the writer of that dialogue as is employed by Ammonius in this passage (940 F). There is not the faintest doubt as to the genuineness of either of these two dialogues, and it is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that Plutarch, desiring perhaps to pay a compliment to a relative, veils his own personality in this way: "Omnium familiarium et propinquorum ante ceteros omnes Lampriam fratrem, et ejusdem nominis avum Lampriam, eos imprimis fuisse qui Plutarchi amicitiam memoriamque obtinuerint, nobis apparet" (*De Plutarchi Familiaribus*—CHENEVIÈRE). He pays a similar compliment to his friend Theon, who sums up and concludes the argument of the *De Pythiæ Oraculis*. (For the closeness of Theon's intimacy with Plutarch, see especially *Consolatio ad Uxorem*, 610 B, and *Symposiacs*, 725 F.) Cf. GRÉARD'S *La Morale de Plutarque*, p. 303: "Plutarque a ses procédés, qu'on arrive à connaître. D'ordinaire ils consistent à accorder successivement la parole aux défenseurs des systèmes extrêmes et à réserver la conclusion au principal personnage du dialogue. Or ce personnage est presque toujours celui qui a posé la thèse; et le plus souvent il se trouve avoir avec Plutarque lui-même un lien de parenté."—Plutarch delights to such an extent to bring his friends into his works, that it has even been suggested that no work is authentic without this distinguishing mark. Readers of Plutarch know that one characteristic of his style is the avoidance of hiatus, and that he puts himself to all kinds of trouble to secure this object. In this connexion, Chenevière remarks: "Mirum nobis visum est quod, ne in uno quidem librorum quos hiatus causa G. Benseler Plutarcho abjudicavit, nullius amici nomen offenditur. Scripta autem quæ nullo hiatu fœdata demonstrat, vel amico cuidam dicata. vel nominibus amicorum sunt distincta." (The work by Benseler

by the other speakers, it is clearly Plutarch himself who is modestly represented under this guise. After a warning, characteristic of Plutarch both as regards its purport and the manner in which it is conveyed (by means of a historical reminiscence), that these questions are not to be tested "like a painting by the touch," the writer brings a party of philosophers together at Delphi "shortly before the Pythian games held under Callistratus." Two of these philosophers are already known to us. Like the eagles or swans of the ancient legend they had met at Delphi coming from opposite quarters of the globe;<sup>1</sup> Demetrius, of Tarsus, returning home from Britain, and Cleombrotus, of Lacedæmon, from prolonged journeyings by land and sea, in Egypt and the East. Cleombrotus, being possessed of a competence, employed his means and his leisure in travel, for the purpose of accumulating evidence to form the basis of that branch of philosophy whose end and aim, as he expressed it, was Theology.<sup>2</sup> A preliminary discussion takes place respecting the "everlasting lamp" which Cleombrotus had been shown

referred to is, of course, his *De Hiatu in Oratoribus Atticis et Historicis Græcis.*)

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch does not, of course, wish to convey the suggestion that Apollo's shrine is still the centre of the earth, and that Britain is as far away in one direction as the Red Sea is in another. The oracle's repulse of Epimenides, who wished to be certain on the point, indicates that the question is one surrounded with difficulty, and that the wise man will do best to leave it alone. Bouché-Leclercq has a startling comment: "*Plutarque ajoute que, de son temps, la mesure avait été vérifiée par deux voyageurs partis l'un de la Grande Bretagne et l'autre du fond de la mer Rouge*" (*La Divination*, iii. p. 80).

<sup>2</sup> 410 A, B. Cf. note, p. 90.



in the Temple of Ammon, a discussion involving abstract consideration of Mathematics and Astronomy. In this conversation, Plutarch's three favourite characters, doubtlessly representing three common types of the day, are again depicted in the pious belief of Cleombrotus, the scepticism of Demetrius, and the judicial pose of the Academic Ammonius. The mention of the Temple of Ammon naturally leads Plutarch to raise the question of the present silence of that famous oracle.<sup>1</sup> Demetrius diverts this particular topic into a general inquiry respecting the comparative failure of oracles all the world over.<sup>2</sup> Bœotia, for example, once so renowned in this respect, suffers from an almost total drought of oracular inspiration. While Demetrius is speaking, the party—Demetrius, Cleombrotus, Ammonius, and Plutarch—had walked from the shrine

<sup>1</sup> 411 E.

<sup>2</sup> The cessation of the oracles was only comparative. WOLFF, in his *De Novissima Oraculorum Ætate*, examines the history of each oracle separately, and comes to a conclusion that the oracles were not silent even in the age of Porphyry (born A.D. 232): "*Noudum obmutuisse numina fatidica Porphyrii tempore. Vera enim ille deorum responsa censuit; quæ Christianis opposuit, ne soli doctrinam divinitus accepisse viderentur.*" Strabo alludes to the failure of the oracle at Dodona, and adds that the rest were silent too (STRABO: vii. 6, 9). Cicero alludes with great contempt to the silence of the Delphic oracles in his own times: "*Sed, quod caput est, cur isto modo jam oraule Delphis non eduntur, non modo nostrâ ætate, sed jandiu; ut modo nihil possit esse contemptius? Hoc loco quum urgentur evanuisse aiunt vetustate vim loci ejus, unde anhclitus ille terræ fieret, quo Pythia, mente incitata, oracula ederet. . . . Quando autem ista vis evanuit? An postquam homines minus creduli esse ceperunt*" (*De Div.*, ii. 57). When Cicero wrote this passage he had probably forgotten the excellent advice which the oracle had once given him when he went to Delphi to consult it (PLUT.: *Cicero*, cap. 5).

towards the "doors of the Hall of the Cnidians,<sup>1</sup> and," proceeds Plutarch, "entering therein we came upon our friends sitting down and waiting for us." Demetrius playfully suggests that their listless attitude and idle expression do not indicate attention to any important subject of discussion; but Heracleon of Megara retorts sharply upon the grammarian that people who try to solve trifling questions of grammar and philology naturally contract their brows and contort their features;<sup>2</sup> but there are subjects of importance which people discuss with their eyebrows composed in their natural way. "Such," amiably replies Cleombrotus, "such is the subject we now propose to discuss;" and, the two groups having joined company, he proceeds to explain the topic to his hearers. His observations excite the cynic Didymus, surnamed Planetiades, in a

<sup>1</sup> 412 D.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these points of grammar which attracted the scorn of Heracleon were whether βάλλω loses a λ in the future; and what were the positives from which the comparatives χείρον and βέλτιον, and the superlatives χεῖριστον and βέλτιστον were formed (412 E).—"Quelques années après les guerres médiques, le pinceau de Polygnote couvrit la Lesché des Cnidiens à Delphes de scènes empruntées au monde infernal." (Bouché-Leclercq: iii. 153.)—It would have been more interesting to a modern student if Heracleon had replied that the pictures of Polygnotus were quite sufficient to keep one mentally alert, and had seized the opportunity to give us an exact description of the scenes depicted and the meaning they conveyed to the men of his time. "'Not all the treasures,' as Homer has it, 'which the stone threshold of the Far-darter holds safe within, would now,' as Mr. Myers says, 'be so precious to us as the power of looking for one hour on the greatest work by the greatest painter of antiquity, the picture by Polygnotus in the Hall of the Cnidians at Delphi, of the descent of Odysseus among the dead.'"

remarkable manner.<sup>1</sup> Striking his cynic's staff upon the ground, he inveighs against the wickedness of the times, and wonders that the Divine Providence has not gathered up its oracles on every side and taken its departure long ago, like the Aidos and Nemesis of Hesiod. "I would suggest for your discussion the question why some god has not repeated the feat of Hercules and shattered the tripod, filled to overflowing, as it has been, with disgraceful and atheistical requests. Some of us have questioned the god as if he were a sophist, anxious to show off his rhetorical skill. Some of us have appealed to him about riches and treasures; some about legacies; some about unlawful marriages. Surely Pythagoras was utterly wrong when he said that men were at their best when approaching the gods. Do we not expose, naked and unashamed, to the eyes of the god such vices and diseases of the soul as we should shun mentioning even in the presence of an old and experienced man?"<sup>2</sup> He was

<sup>1</sup> Didymus, "surnamed Planetiades," is a picturesque figure, evidently drawn from life. It is interesting to compare his attitude with that imposed upon the ideal cynic of Epictetus: "It is his duty then to be able with a loud voice, if the occasion should arise, and appearing on the tragic stage to say, like Socrates, 'Men, whither are you hurrying? what are you doing, wretches? Like blind people you are wandering up and down: you are going by another road, and have left the true road: you seek for prosperity and happiness where they are not, and if another shows you where they are you do not believe him'" (LONG'S *Epictetus*, p. 251). Planetiades certainly endeavours to play this rôle on the occasion in question, though he is doubtless as far below the stoic ideal as he is above the *soi-disant* cynics whom Dion met at Alexandria.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BLOUNT: *Apollonius of Tyana*, p. 37. Blount collects a number of ancient and modern parallels to the thought of Plutarch

going to add more, when Heracleon twitched his cloak, "but I," writes Plutarch, "being on more familiar terms with him than were the others, said to him, 'My dear Planetiades, cease your efforts to provoke a god who is really amiable and gentle, and who has been, as Pindar says,

"Adjudged exceeding mild to mortal men."

And whether he is the sun, or lord and father of the sun and of the whole perceptible world, it is not right to believe that he would deprive the men of to-day of the help of his utterances, for he is the author and supporter of our life, and the master of our intelligence. Nor is it reasonable to suppose that Providence, which, like a kind and tender mother, has given us all that we possess, should wish to punish us in one single point alone—by taking away from us that prophetic aid which was once given to us. Just as if the wicked were not as numerous when the oracles were firmly established in many parts of the earth! Sit down again, and, in honour of the Pythian games, make a truce for once with vice, which you are always eager to chastise, and help us to find out the cause of the failure of the oracles.' The only result of my remarks was that Planetiades went out-of-doors in silence.<sup>1</sup> After a brief silence, Ammonius turned to me and said, 'Come, Lamprias, we must be careful not to deprive the god of all agency in this matter. For if we

here. HORACE, *Epist.* i. 16. 59, readily occurs to the memory. (For the Pindaric fragment, see W. Christ, p. 225.)

<sup>1</sup> 413 D.

maintain that the cessation of the oracles is due to any other cause than the will of God, we can hardly escape the conclusion that their foundation also was not His work. If the prophetic power of the oracles is, indeed, the work of God, we can imagine no greater or stronger power than that required to destroy it. Planetiades' remarks were displeasing to me, particularly on account of the inconstancy which he attributes to God in His attitude towards men's wickedness, now punishing and now protecting it, as if God were some king or tyrant excluding vicious men at one door while welcoming and rewarding them at another. We ought to start with the principle that God's action is always marked by an adaptation of means to ends, that He does not furnish an excess of what is not required, and should then observe that Greece has shared in a particular degree that general depopulation which wars and revolutions have effected in all parts of the world, to such an extent, indeed, that the whole of Greece could now barely furnish the 3000 hoplites which were Megara's contingent to Plataea.<sup>1</sup> If we were to do this we should accurately display our own judgment; for how could the god leave his oracles with us for the mere purpose of marking the desolation of our land? For who would be the better if its ancient oracle were still left to Tegyra, or at Ptoum, where after searching whole days you can hardly find a single herdsman tending his

<sup>1</sup> "Plutarch does not mean to say that Greece was not able at all to furnish 3000 men capable of arms, but that if burgher armies of the old sort were to be formed they would not be in a position to set on foot 3000 hoplites."—MOMMSEN.

cattle? Even this most ancient and famous oracle at Delphi is related to have been for a long period reduced to a state of desolation and inaccessibility by a terrible monster in the shape of a serpent. But this desolation is not rightly explained. The solitude brought the serpent, not the serpent the solitude. But when, in the great purpose of God, Greece again grew strong in its cities, and the land was replenished with mankind, the temple was served by two priestesses, who took alternate duties on the tripod, and a third was appointed to be available in case of emergency. But now there is but one Pythia; and her we find enough for all our needs. For the prophetic inspiration that yet remains is sufficient to send all comers away with their requirements satisfied. Agamemnon employed nine heralds; and even so he was hard put to it to control the assembly of the Greeks, so numerous it was. But within a few days you will have an opportunity of observing that one voice will easily reach the ears of everybody in the Theatre here. In a similar manner the prophetic influence of the god issued by a greater number of voices when the population was greater. But as things at present are, the real cause for astonishment would be that the god should allow the prophetic agency to waste like water, or his voice to sound in vain like the cries of shepherds and sheep re-echoing among the rocky solitudes.' <sup>1</sup> Ammonius ceased, and I remained silent. But Cleombrotus, turning to me, said: 'Was it not you who, just now, maintained that

<sup>1</sup> 414 C.

it is the god himself who not only gives, but also takes away the oracles?' 'No, indeed,' replied I, 'on the contrary, I assert that the god has taken away neither oracle nor sacred shrine. But just as the god bestows upon us many other things which are subject to decay and destruction by natural processes—or, rather, the original substance, containing a principle of change and movement in its own nature, often dissolves itself and reshapes itself without the intervention of the original creator—so in like manner, I think, the oracles undergo darkenings and declines, being included in the truth of the statement that the god bestows many fair gifts on men, but not one of them to last for ever; or, as Sophocles has it, "the gods immortal are, but not their works."'"—"The foundation of oracles is rightly assigned to God," continues Plutarch, "but the law of their existence and its operation we must seek for in nature and in matter. For it is nothing but the most childish folly to look upon God as a sort of ventriloquist: like the fellows once called Eurycleis and nowadays Pythons, inserting Himself into the bodies of the prophets, using their mouths and vocal chords as instruments of His messages. For he who puts God into this personal contact with human weaknesses and necessities, sins against His glory, and deprives Him of the excellence and grandeur of His Virtue." This strong insistence upon the splendour of the Divine Nature is, as we know, one of the most characteristic elements of Plutarch's philosophy, and, so long as he can preserve this intact, he is not careful of consistency in his arguments on less important points of doctrine.

We have seen him shrinking in conversation from too close an identification with Rationalism; and we are also prepared to find him giving importance to a view which introduces a supernatural element even into the operation of secondary causes. Hence Cleombrotus is represented as saying how difficult it is to draw the line exactly at the direct interposition of Providence in human affairs; since those who exclude God from second causes, and those who see Him everywhere, are equally in error. Hence the pious student of Theology is permitted to give a full exposition of the doctrines of Dæmonology as applied to the question of Oracles and Inspiration. "Plato delivered Philosophy from many difficulties when he discovered Matter as the substratum of phenomenal qualities; but those who invented the science of Dæmonology have solved greater difficulties still." We are already familiar with the nature and activities of the Dæmons; it remains to see how their existence is applied to the question under discussion. "Let us not listen," says Cleombrotus, "to those who say that oracles are not divinely inspired, or that religious rites and ceremonies are disregarded by the gods: nor, on the other hand, let us approve of the view that God is actively, personally, and directly concerned in these matters; but let us believe that the Dæmons are superintendents of, and participators in, the sacred sacrifices and mysteries, justly assigning these functions to Lieutenants of the gods, as it were to Servants and Secretaries, while others go about and punish great and notorious acts of injustice."<sup>1</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> 417 A, B. Cf. *De Facie in Orbe Lunæ*, 941 C, D.



belief, in the opinion of Cleombrotus, furnishes an explanation of the silent periods of the oracles. "I am not afraid to say, as many others have said before me, that when the Dæmons who have been appointed to administer prophetic shrines and oracles leave them finally, then the shrines and oracles finally decline. If these guardians flee and go elsewhere, and then return after a long interval, the oracles, silent during their absence, become again, as of old, the means of conveying responses to those who come to consult them." "But," says Demetrius, "it is impossible to assert that the oracles are silent owing to their desertion by the Dæmons, unless we are first reassured respecting the method by which the Dæmons, when in actual superintendence of the oracles, make them actively inspired."<sup>1</sup> Plutarch here introduces a rationalistic argument imputing prophetic inspiration to subterrestrial exhalations, and draws down upon himself the reproof from Ammonius that he has followed up the abstraction of Divination from the gods by now depriving the Dæmons of that power and referring it to "exhalations, winds, and vapours." Plutarch, however, though adhering to Rationalism to the extent of insisting on the operation of secondary causes, saves his piety by explicitly placing them under the superintendence of the Dæmons. "There are two causes of generation: the Zeus of the ancient poets and theologians, and the physical causes of the natural philosophers. The study of either of these sets of causes, to the exclusion

<sup>1</sup> 431 B.

of the other, leads to defective philosophy. But he who first made use of both these principles, combining creative Reason with created Matter, freed us from fear of criticism either on the ground of impiety or unreason. For we deprive prophetic inspiration neither of God nor of Reason when we allow as its material the human soul, and assign as its instrument the inspiring exhalation.<sup>1</sup> The Earth, indeed, breeds these exhalations, but he that implants in the earth its tempering and transforming power—I mean the Sun—is regarded as a god in our ancestral religion. Then, if we leave the Dæmons as presidents and attendants and guardians, to secure the due harmonizing of the various elements of the inspiring exhalation, now slackening and now tightening it, now restraining its excessive power of phrensy and confusion, and gently tempering its stimulating force so that it becomes harmless and painless to those under its influence—if we adopt these views, we shall be in perfect harmony with reason and possibility.”<sup>2</sup>

The one thing that is conspicuously evident throughout these discussions on important questions of Religion is the earnest sincerity with which they are universally approached. We notice everywhere that combination of piety with philosophy, which is characteristic of Plutarch's own genius, and which appears to be no less characteristic of the society in which he constantly moves. Even the Epicurean Boethus, an excellent man with his witty stories and courtly compliments, finds it

<sup>1</sup> 436 F.

<sup>2</sup> 437 F.

somehow in his power to defend the dignity of the prophetic God against those who would "mix Him up with every piece of stone or brass," while those who are most solicitously inclined to a pious reverence of the ancient faith—Serapion for a prominent example—never for long forget that spirit of critical detachment proper to the inquiring philosopher.<sup>1</sup> "There is no one here present," says Heracleon, "who is profane and uninitiated, and holds views of the gods inconsistent with our own; but we must take care that we ourselves do not unconsciously admit absurd and far-reaching hypotheses in support of our arguments."<sup>2</sup> But it is Plutarch himself who, shunning the "falsehood of extremes," most conspicuously represents this spirit of compromise. It is Theon-Plutarch who finds a middle way between the views of Boethus and those of Serapion on the subject of prophecy, and it is Lamprias-Plutarch who, knowing that these things involve many contentions and are open to numerous contradictions, combines the belief in an original divine inspiration, with a recognition of the scientific importance of subsidiary causes, moving unchecked in the sphere of Nature. "The power of the exhalation which inspires the Pythia is in truth divine and dæmonic, but it is not exempt from the operation of causes that bring silence, age, decay and destruction on all that lives between the earth and moon."<sup>3</sup> Plutarch here strikes with clear emphasis a note not out of harmony with the

<sup>1</sup> *De Pythiæ Orac.*, 398 B.

<sup>2</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 418 E.

<sup>3</sup> *De Defectu Orac.*, 438 D.

spirit of modern Theology ; and had he pushed this view to its logical conclusion, as the Epicurean Boethus<sup>1</sup> did, the Dæmons would have disappeared, and their places would have been wholly occupied by natural causes operating under the Divine impetus inspired by the great First Cause. But the necessity for a *personality*, human on one aspect, Divine on the other, to stand between God and man, was too strongly felt by Plutarch to enable him to accept without qualification the conclusions of pure rationalism. The blank between the Creator and His creatures is occupied, therefore, partly by natural causes, partly by the Dæmons, whose existence and mode of operation are now involved in the working of natural causes regarded as under their superintendence, and now appear as supernatural agencies vaguely dependent upon the will of the Supreme Power.

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, in reply to Boethus the Epicurean, uses an interesting example to illustrate the two opposite views maintained on this point. "Even you yourself here are beneficially influenced, it would seem, by what Epicurus wrote and spoke three centuries ago; and yet you are of opinion that God could not supply a Principle of Motion or a Cause of Feeling, unless He took and shut Himself up in each individual thing and became an intermingled portion of its essence" (398 B, C).

## CHAPTER VIII.

*Sincerity of Plutarch's belief in Dæmons—Function of the Dæmons as Mediators not confined to oracular inspiration—Dæmons in their personal relationship with the human soul—The DE DÆMONIO SOCRATIS—This tract not a formal treatise on Dæmonology—Various explanations of the Socratic "Dæmon"—Ethical value of the conception of Dæmons as spiritual guardians of individual men—"Men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things"—Dangers of the conception—Superstition: Plutarch's general attitude towards that Vice.*

THE evident sincerity of Plutarch's piety—his attitude of more than toleration towards everything consecrated by the religious tradition of his age and country—render it impossible for us to regard his system of Dæmonology as a mere concession made by Rationalism to Superstition.<sup>1</sup> But it is not the less clear

<sup>1</sup> "As to Plutarch's theology, he was certainly a monotheist. He probably had some vague belief in inferior deities (demons he would have called them) as holding a place like that filled by angels and evil spirits in the creed of most Christians; yet it is entirely conceivable that his occasional references to these deities are due merely to the conventional rhetoric of his age" (ANDREW P. PEABODY: Introduction to a translation—already referred to—of the *De Sera Numinis Vindicta*). It is a little difficult to be patient with the ignorance displayed in the italicized part of this citation. That Plutarch's "references to these deities" are not "occasional" is a matter of fact; that they are not "due merely to conventional rhetoric" it is hoped that the analysis in

that Plutarch thinks he has found in the existence of Dæmons not only a means of communication between God and man, but a means of reconciliation between Philosophy and Piety, between Boethus and Serapion. It is a very happy circumstance for a man's moral progress when he finds Religion and Reason in an agreement so plausible; and when Reason has in some way furnished the very means of agreement—for was it not Plato himself to whom most people had gone for their Dæmonology?—the resulting tendency will have the strength of two harmonizing influences, instead of the halting weakness of a compromise between two mutually conflicting elements.<sup>1</sup> Plato's Dæmonology is a trick of fence: an ironical pose of sympathetic

the text—incomplete as it may be in other respects—has at least made sufficiently clear. It is, however, gratifying to find that this American translator, unlike Dr. Super, of Chicago, recognizes that Plutarch “was certainly a monotheist.”

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch found the existence of the Dæmons recognized in each of the three spheres which contributed to the formation of religious beliefs—in philosophy, in popular tradition, and in law. ΣΤΟΒÆΥΣ: *Tit.* 44, 20 (“*On Laws and Customs*”—*Tauchnitz* edition of 1838, vol. ii. p. 164) has an interesting quotation, headed “*Preamble of the Laws of Zaleucus*,” in which the following passage occurs:—“If an Evil Dæmon come to any man, tempting him to Vice, let him spend his time near temples, and altars, and sacred shrines, fleeing from Vice as from an impious and cruel mistress, and let him pray the gods to deliver him from her power.” Zaleucus may, of course, have been embodying the teaching of his Pythagorean colleagues, but the fact remains that the belief in the influence of Dæmons on human life received the authority of a celebrated system of law, unless we are to be more incredulous than Cicero himself—*Quis Zaleucum leges scripsisse non dixit?* (*Ad Atticum*, vi. 1).—(“His code is stated to have been the first collection of written laws that the Greeks possessed.”—*Smaller Classical Dictionary*, Smith and Marindin, 1898.)

agreement with popular ideas: but Plutarch does not see this, and can honestly think himself a Platonist, a philosopher, even on a question whose settlement demands philosophical concessions all along the line. It is true that there was one gain for Philosophy which, in Plutarch's mind, would compensate for even greater sacrifices than it was actually called upon to make: the gain, namely, that each concession to the belief in Dæmons would bring into greater prominence the pure splendour and naked simplicity of the idea of God. As God was withdrawn not only from participation in the ignoble adventures of the Homeric legends, but also from the direct inspiration of oracular and prophetic phrensy, His character would become more worthy of the adoration of the Best, while His omnipotence would be maintained by virtue of the controlling power exercised by Him over all subordinate powers. The gain for a philosophic conception of the Deity was so great in this direction, that we are without surprise in seeing Plutarch proceed still further on the same path. The Dæmons by their divine alloy come into close contact with the nature of God: they perform many functions as interpreters of the Divine Will to humanity. But by virtue of the human element in their character, they are fitted for assuming a personal relationship with individual men, and for becoming the instruments by means of which God enters into those ethical relations with humanity which we have seen described in the "*De Sera Numinis Vindicta*." The hint for this aspect of their work and influence Plutarch has found in the Hesiodic people of the golden age, whose death

promoted them to the duty of keeping watch over the actions of men. We have seen him already develop this hint in an assertion that the Dæmons, in addition to attending on shrines and religious ceremonies, are endowed with punitive authority over great sinners; and the ethical value of the doctrine is enforced in a passage in which the love of justice, the fear of dishonour, the adoration of virtue, the amenities and graces of civilized life, are intimately associated with the belief that good deities and Dæmons keep a watch upon our career.<sup>1</sup> This belief in an intimate personal relation between men and Dæmons received its most notorious expression in the famous philosophic tradition of the Dæmon of Socrates, and it is naturally in a tract with this title that we have the fullest information respecting Plutarch's view of the personal connexion between Dæmons and men. The essay, "On the Dæmon of Socrates," does not, however, contain an exhaustive and scientific discussion of this interesting aspect of Theology similar to that given by Apuleius in his tract with the same designation. At first we find ourselves plunged into the midst of a most dramatically told piece of history—the famous Return of the Theban Exiles under Pelopidas after the treacherous seizure of the Cadmea by the Spartans. In the pauses of the plot the Thebans—averse from such studies as their character

<sup>1</sup> *Adversus Coloten*, 1124 D. The religious value of the belief in Dæmonology is indicated in an interesting passage in the "*De Iside et Osiride*," in which Isis, by her sufferings, is described as "having given a sacred lesson of consolation to men and women involved in similar sorrows." 361 E. (In the next sentence she and Osiris are raised from the dæmonic rank to the divine.)



is supposed to have been—discourse on these high questions of religious philosophy, and one would almost guess that Plutarch's subsidiary intention was to indicate, by the broken character of the discussion, the difficulty of attaining to a complete and final view of the subject. Various rational and supernatural explanations of the well-known Socratic expression are suggested, explanations which vary in harmony with the different types of character, or mental attitude, already familiar in Plutarch. Galaxidorus takes the extreme rationalistic view. He rebukes Philosophy for promising to pursue scientific methods in the investigation of "the Good and the Expedient," and then, in contempt of Reason, falling back upon the gods as principles of action, thus relying on dreams instead of demonstrations.<sup>1</sup> He thinks the Dæmon of Socrates was nothing but the "last straw" which inclines, in one direction or the other, a man whose close and experienced study of every aspect of the case has not enabled him to come to a practical decision. A sneeze might be the grain which turned the balance. Phidolaus will not allow so "great a phenomenon of prophetic inspiration" to be explained by a sneeze, a method of divination which "is only jestingly used by common people in small matters."<sup>2</sup> A statement of Simmias to the effect that he had heard Socrates often inveighing against those who asserted they had seen a divine vision,

<sup>1</sup> Accepting Bernardakis' first emendation—*εἰς θεοὺς ἐπαναφέρει τὰς τῶν πράξεων ἀρχὰς*. 580 A.

<sup>2</sup> 581 F.—Phidolaus would not have been at home among Xenophon's troops (*Anabasis*, iii. 2, 9).

while he always listened sympathetically to those who said they had heard a voice, leads to a general surmise that the Dæmon may have been "not an apparition, but the perception of a voice or the interpretation of a word, which had occurred to him under extraordinary circumstances, just as in a dream there is no actual voice, but we have fancies and notions of words, and imagine that we can hear people speaking."<sup>1</sup> Archidamas, who is narrating the dialogue and its events to Caphisias, here expounds his own views on the subject in the light of the foregoing explanation. He thinks that the voice, or the perception of a voice, which influenced Socrates, was the speech of a Dæmon, who, without the intermediation of audible sound, made this direct appeal to the mind of the pure and passionless sage;<sup>2</sup> it was the influence of a superior intelligence and of a diviner soul, operating upon the soul of Socrates, whose calm and holy temper fitted him "to hear this spiritual speech which, though filling all the air around, is only heard by those whose souls are freed from passion, and its perturbing influence."<sup>3</sup> Here we have the extreme religious view placed, as usual, in contrast with the sceptical rationalism of Galaxidorus, which has also been indirectly opposed by a narrative of the events, involving the hearing of a Dæmonic voice, connected with the death and burial of a Pythagorean philosopher, Lysis, from which it appears that the Pythagoreans believed that a few men only were under

<sup>1</sup> 588 C, D.<sup>2</sup> 588 E.<sup>3</sup> 589 D.

the guardian care of the Dæmons.<sup>1</sup> These two opposing views having been fully expounded by their respective defenders, we should now expect the dialogue to be concluded, in the usual manner of Plutarch, with a compromise between the rationalistic and the religious attitudes. But on this occasion we are disappointed. Plutarch abandons the *rôle* of rationalist and gives himself up entirely to the view of Dæmonic influence expounded by Archidamas, taking Myth for his guide again whither Philosophy refuses to go. He is careful, however, as in the parallel case in the "De Sera Numinis Vindicta," at once to still the suspicion of the philosopher and to put the pious reader on his guard, by suggesting a contrast between Myth and Reason before entering on the narrative, a warning which is strongly emphasized by the fact that even Theocritus, "the Soothsayer," can only claim for Myth, that it is not to be depended upon for scientific accuracy, but only sometimes comes in contact with Truth.<sup>2</sup> The Myth in this case describes the experiences in the Cave of Trophonius of the young philosopher Timarchus, a friend of Socrates, who desired to ascertain the true nature of the "Dæmon" of that great man. The story is told with considerable beauty of imagery, an example of Plutarch's skill in which we have already seen in the similar story of Thespesius of Soli. The soul of the philosopher leaves his body through the sutures of the cranium. In the subterranean regions he stays two nights and a day, receiving from an invisible spirit much information concerning the

<sup>1</sup> 586 A.<sup>2</sup> 589 F.

afterworld and the beings who inhabit it. The main object of the story seems to be to establish and elucidate the ethical value of the doctrine of Dæmonology, while at the same time we note that a mystical significance now begins to be attached to certain principles long the topic of discussion in the schools. Timarchus is informed by the invisible spirit that there are four principles which operate throughout the universe: the first of Life, the second of Motion, the third of Generation, the fourth of Corruption. The sphere of Life is united to the sphere of Motion by the *Monad* in the world of invisibility; the sphere of Motion is united to the sphere of Generation by *Nous* in the Sun; the sphere of Generation is united to the sphere of Corruption by *Nature* in the Moon. Over each of these unions a Fate presides. The other "islands" are peopled by gods: but the Moon is inhabited by Epichthonian Dæmons, being raised only a little above Styx, which is "the way to Hell,"<sup>1</sup> Styx periodically seizes upon many of these souls in the Moon, and they are swallowed up in Hell. Other souls, at the end of their participation in the life of generation, are received into the Moon from below, except such as are "polluted and unpurified," these being driven away from her by thunder and lightning to undergo another period of generation. As in the myth of Thespesius, there is a chasm through which the souls pass and repass to and from the life of earth. "What," asks Timarchus, "are these stars that dart about the chasm, some descending

<sup>1</sup> 591 A.

into its depths, others arising from it?" "These are Dæmons," he is told; and we can only conclude that they are identical with the souls already described as inhabiting the Moon. These Dæmons are incarnated in mankind. Some are altogether dominated by the passions and appetites of the body, others enter into it only partly, retaining the purest portion of their substance unmingled with the human frame. "It is not dragged down, but floats above the top of the head of a man, who is, as it were, sinking in the depths, but whose soul is supported by the connexion so long as it is submissive to this influence, and is not controlled by its bodily passions. The part beneath the waves in the body is called the soul; but the eternal, uncorrupted part is called the mind, by those who think it is within the body.—Those who rightly judge, know it to be outside, and describe it as a Dæmon." The point of this narrative is emphasized by Theanor, who expresses his belief that "there are very few men whom God honours by addressing his commands directly to them. The souls of such men, freed from the domination of passion and earthly desires, become Dæmons, who act as guardian angels to certain men, whose long-continued struggles after the good excite their attention, and at last obtain their assistance." Each of these Dæmons loves to help the soul confided to its care, and to save it by its inspirations. The soul who adheres to the Dæmon, and listens to its warnings, attains a happy ending; those who refuse to obey are abandoned by it, and may expect no happiness.<sup>1</sup> "The connexion which

<sup>1</sup> 594.

attaches the Dæmon to the soul is, as it were, a restraint upon the irrational part thereof. When Reason pulls the chain it gives rise to repentance for the sins which the soul has committed under the influence of passion, shame for illicit and immoderate indulgences, and finally produces a tendency to submit in quiet patience to the better influence of the Dæmon. The condition of absolute submission does not come all at once, but those who have been obedient to their Dæmon from the very beginning constitute the class of prophets and god-inspired men." The Dæmons have here assigned to them a protective care of humanity; they assist the souls who struggle after goodness, and desert those who refuse to obey their injunctions. A few good men, specially honoured by the deity, may themselves become Dæmons, and act as guardian angels to others. Plutarch repeats this view more systematically elsewhere, giving it a more general application. "It is maintained by some that . . . just as water is perceived to be produced from earth, from water, air, and from air, fire, in a constantly ascending process, so also the better souls undergo a transformation from men to heroes, from heroes to dæmons, and from dæmons, some few souls, being purified through prolonged practice of virtue, are brought to a participation in the divine nature itself." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *De Defectu*, 415 B, C. In the *De Facie quæ apparet* the connexion between mankind and the dæmons is described in similar terms to those employed in the *De Dæmonio Socratis*. The Dæmons do not spend all their time on the moon; they take charge of oracles, assist at initiatory rites, punish evildoers, help men in battle and at sea, and for any want of fairness or competence in the discharge of these

This examination of the story of Timarchus lends a strong support to the statement already made respecting Plutarch's use of myth. In the "De Sera Numinis Vindicta" we saw that he could not accept as a subject of rational demonstration the theory of rewards and punishments in a future life; but so convinced is he of the ethical value of that belief that he has recourse to a most solemn myth, which he clearly hopes will operate for goodness through the imagination if not through the intellect. The myth embodied in the "De Dæmonio Socratis" has a similar origin and an identical aim. How important to a man in his efforts after goodness to know that he is under the observation of a Being whose half-human, half-divine nature, fits him equally to feel sympathy and administer aid! That is an aspect of Plutarch's teaching which requires no emphasis to-day. . . . With the Plutarchean doctrine of Dæmons is also involved the sublimely moral notion of eternal endeavour after a higher and more perfect goodness. The human being who earnestly strives to be good within the limits of his present opportunities will have a larger sphere of activity thrown open to him as a Dæmon in the Afterworld. The human soul transfigured into the strength and splendour of this higher nature has work to perform which may develop such qualities as will bring their owner into closer proximity with the Highest Divine. The doctrine of Dæmons, as expounded by Plutarch, involves the

duties they are punished by being driven again to earth to enter human bodies once more (944 D; cf. 944 C).

profound moral truth that there is no limit to the perfectibility of human nature; and we can surely forgive much that is irrational and fantastic in a scheme which embodies so effective an inspiration to goodness.<sup>1</sup>

But the value and moral dignity of any principle depend upon the method of its interpretation and application. That sense of personal dependence upon a benevolent supernatural power which Plutarch associates with the teachings of Dæmonology may be identical with the purest and loftiest religion, or may degenerate into the meanest and most degrading superstition, according to its development in the mind of the individual believer. If this intercourse is regarded as spiritual only, the communion of soul with soul in the "sessions of sweet, silent thought," high religious possibilities issue which no form of faith can dispense with. Any attempt to degrade this intercourse to material ends, or to appeal to it through material channels, involves recourse to magical rites, and superstitious practices of the grossest description. It is necessary, too, that even where there is no recourse to materialistic avenues of access to the spiritual world, the mind should cultivate a belief in the benevolence of the Higher Powers so that it may maintain a rational dignity and fearlessness in its communion with them.

<sup>1</sup> That this truth is one which appeals to the Imagination more cogently than to the Reason, resembling in that respect the belief in the soul's immortality, is evident to Plutarch. It is on this account that he illustrates it by Myth instead of arguing it by Reason, and takes every precaution to prevent his readers from regarding it as a complete and final presentation of a logically irrefutable belief.



Plutarch is aware of these dangers. He knows that Dæmonology, and even Theology, may involve Superstition, and he takes pains to close those avenues to its approach, which a misunderstanding of the subject, a mistaken mental attitude towards it, may easily throw widely open. He seldom misses an opportunity of inculcating the proper attitude of mind to assume in face of questions of Religion, or of placing such questions in an atmosphere of clear and rational daylight, which is equally unlike the dim gloom of Superstition, and the blinding glare of Atheism. In a word, he continues to make Reason his Mystagogue to Religion. Polemically, as against the Epicureans, he is inclined to argue that Atheism is an unmixed evil, since it deprives mankind of Hope, Courage, and Pleasure, and leaves us no refuge in God from the sorrows and troubles of life.<sup>1</sup> He adds that Superstition should be removed as a dimming rheum from before our eyes; but, if that is impossible, we must not knock the eye out for the sake of removing the rheum, or turn the sight of Faith to the blindness of Atheism in order to destroy false ideas of the Deity. Although he admits that there are some men for whom it is best to be in fear of God; although he knows that a much greater number combine with their honour and worship of the Deity a certain superstitious fear and dread of Him; yet he insists most strongly that these feelings are totally eclipsed by the hope and joy that attend their communion with God.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Non posse suaviter*, &c., 1101 B, C.

<sup>2</sup> 1101 D.

He draws a beautiful picture of the happiness accompanying participation in divine services, asserting, in a lofty strain of religious feeling, that it is from a recognition of the presence of God in these services that the sense of happiness proceeds. "He that denies the Providence of God has no share in this exceeding joy. For it is not abundance of wine and well-cooked meats that gladden our hearts in a religious festival; it is our good hope and belief that God Himself is graciously present and approving our acts." Without this conviction, he insists, the religious value of the ceremony is utterly lost.<sup>1</sup> To approach the gods with cheerfulness and courage and openness is the soul of Plutarch's religion, and he is faithful to this principle on the most diverse occasions. Fond of Literature as he is, there are many famous passages of classical verse which he will not permit youthful students to carry away into their lives as factors in ethical progress until they have been harmonized with the claims of a rational criticism. Thus he quotes a verse of Sophocles—"God is a cause of fear to prudent men"—and insists that "fear" should be changed to "hope," lest those should be justified who regard "with suspicion and dread as the cause of injury the power that is the principle and origin of all good."<sup>2</sup> And when dealing with the sanctities of domestic life he insists that one important element of conjugal happiness lies in the avoidance of separate worship on the part of the wife, and in a closing of the door on superfluous ministrations and the practices of foreign

<sup>1</sup> 1102 B.

<sup>2</sup> *De Audiendis Poetis* 34 B.

superstition. "For," says he, "there is no god who takes delight in stolen and secret sacrifices on the part of a wife."<sup>1</sup> These passages, selected from various portions

<sup>1</sup> *Conjugalia Præcepta*, 140 D. Champagny sees a reference here to Christianity. But why not also in PLATO'S *Laws*, 674 F, and 661 C?—It is quite in harmony with Plutarch's love of openness in Religion that to the general reticence displayed by the Greeks on the subject of their religious Mysteries, he seems to add a personal reticence peculiarly his own. Considering how anxiously he hovers about the question of the soul's immortality (see above, p. 118, and cf. *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, 120 B, C: "If, as is probable, there is any truth in the sayings of ancient poets and philosophers . . . then must you cherish fair hopes of your dear departed son"—a passage curiously similar in form and thought to TACITUS, *Agric.* 46: "*Si quis piorum manibus locus, si, ut sapientibus placet,*" &c.), it is remarkable that only once—and then under the stress of a bitter domestic bereavement—does he specifically quote the Mysteries (those of Dionysus) as inculcating that doctrine (*Ad Uxorem*, 611 D). His adoption of an unknown writer's beautiful comparison of Sleep to the Lesser Mysteries of Death (*Consol. ad Apoll.*, 107 E), and his repetition of the same idea elsewhere (see above, p. 118), may also be indications how naturally the teaching of the Mysteries suggested the idea of immortality. But he most frequently alludes to the Mysteries as secret sources of information for the identification of nominally different deities (*De Iside et Osiride*, 364 E), or for the assignation of their proper functions to the Demons (*De Defectu*, 417 C), who are regarded as responsible for what Mr. Andrew Lang ("Myth, Ritual, and Religion," *passim*) calls "the barbaric and licentious part of the performances" (*De Iside et Osiride*, 360 E, F). We should perhaps conclude, from the few indications which Plutarch gives of his views on this subject, that he regarded the Mysteries in a twofold light; they were a source of religious instruction, or consolation, respecting the future state of the soul, and they were also a means of explaining and justifying the crude legends which so largely intermingled with the purer elements of Greek religion. Though, as Plutarch hints, many of these barbaric legends were not suited to discussion by the profane, yet the mind, when purified by sacred rites, and educated to the apprehension of sacred meanings, could grasp the high and pure significance of things which were a

of Plutarch's ethical teachings, show how strongly it is his practice to emphasize a note of cheerful and open courage in worship as an essential part of religious belief. But it is in the well-known essay "on Superstition" that he most thoroughly expounds this aspect of his philosophy, and no endeavour to understand Plutarch's mental attitude in face of a problem which always affects humanity would be successful without a careful analysis of that treatise. The "De Iside et Osiride" attempts to safeguard the mind from the attacks of Superstition on the side of the Intellect, as the "De Superstitione" does on the side of the Imagination, and the two tracts have therefore an organic connexion which renders it necessary to treat them together as expounding different aspects of the same question.

stumbling-block to the uninitiated, and could make them an aid to a loftier moral life.

## CHAPTER IX.

*Relation between Superstition and Atheism: Atheism an intellectual error: Superstition an error involving the passions: the DE SUPERSTITIONE—Moral fervour of Plutarch's attack on Superstition—His comparative tolerance of Atheism—The greatest safeguard against both alike consists in an intellectual appreciation of the Truth—The DE ISIDE ET OSIRIDE—The Unity underlying national differences of religious belief.*

“THE profoundest, the most essential and paramount theme of human interest,” says Goethe, “is the eternal conflict between Atheism and Superstition.”<sup>1</sup> Plutarch's tract, “De Superstitione,” is a classical sermon on this text, although in his presentment of the subject the mutual antagonism of the two principles receives less emphasis than the hostility which both alike direct against the interests of true Religion. He has no sympathy with any notion similar to that current since his days, in many religious minds, that Superstition is but a mistaken form of Piety, deserving tenderness rather than reprehension, and he maintains that absolute disbelief in God is less mischievous in its effects upon human conduct and character than its

<sup>1</sup> “*Das eigentlich einzige und tiefste Thema der Welt- und Menschengeschichte, dem alle übrigen untergeordnet sind, bleibt der Conflict des Unglaubens und des Aberglaubens.*” — GOETHE, *Westöstlicher Divan* (quoted by THOLUCK).

opposite extreme of superstitious devotion. With this hint of Plutarch's point of view we proceed to a brief analysis of the tract in which his view is mainly expounded.

At the very commencement he describes the two evils as springing from an identical source. Ignorance of the Divine Nature has a twofold aspect: in people of stern dispositions it appears as Atheism; in minds of more yielding and submissive mould it shows itself as Superstition. Merely intellectual errors, such as the Epicurean Theory of Atoms and the Void, or the Stoic notion that virtue and vice are corporeal substances, are unaccompanied by any passionate mental disturbance: they are silly blunders, but not worth tears. But is a man convinced that wealth is the highest good? or does he regard virtue as a mere empty name?—these are errors that cannot be distinguished from moral disorders. Atheism is an intellectual error: Superstition a moral disorder—an intellectual error “touched with emotion.”<sup>1</sup> The moral disorder of Superstition is depicted in a few paragraphs of striking power, opulent with historical and literary allusion. The effect of the description is to leave a conviction of the utter inability of the superstitious man to free any portion of his life from the influence of his awful fear of the gods. “He does not dread the sea who never sails; nor he a war who never goes to camp; nor he a robber who keeps his home; nor he an informer who has no wealth; nor he envy who lives retired; nor he

<sup>1</sup> 165 C.

an earthquake who dwells in Gaul; nor he a thunderbolt who inhabits Æthiopia. But they who fear the gods fear all things—land, sea, air, sky, darkness, light, sound, silence, dream.<sup>1</sup> By day as well as night they live in prey to dreadful dreams, and fall a ready victim to the first fortune-telling cheat they come upon. They dip themselves in the sea: they pass all day in a sitting posture: they roll themselves on dunghills: cover themselves with mud: keep Sabbaths:<sup>2</sup> cast themselves on their faces: stand in strange attitudes, and adopt strange methods of adoration.—Those who thought it important to maintain the recognized laws of Music, used to instruct their pupils to ‘sing with a just mouth’; and we maintain that those who approach the gods should address them with a just mouth and a righteous, lest, in our anxiety to have the tongue of the victim pure and free from fault, we twist and defile our own with strange barbarian names and expressions, and thus disgrace the dignified piety of our national Faith.”<sup>3</sup> Not only is this life full of torture to the Superstitious, but their terrified imagination leaps the limits of the Afterworld, and adds to death the conception of deathless woes. Hell-gate yawns for them;

<sup>1</sup> 165 D.

<sup>2</sup> BERNARDAKIS adopts Bentley’s emendation βαπτισμούς, which might be an allusion to Christianity, but would more probably refer to such a process as that already described in the words βάπτισον σπαντων εις θαλασσαν. We have previously discussed the general question involved (see p. 45), but may here add the opinion of so unprejudiced a Christian writer as Archbishop Trench, “*strange to say. Christianity is to him (Plutarch) utterly unknown.*”—(See also note, p. 202).

<sup>3</sup> 166 B.

streams of flame and Stygian cataracts threaten them ; the gloom is horrid with spectral shapes, and piteous sights and sounds, with judges and executioners, and chasms crowded with a myriad woes.

The condition of the Atheist is far to be preferred. It was better for Tiresias to be blind than it was for Athamas and Agave to see their children in the shape of lions and stags. The Atheist does not see God at all : the superstitious man sees Him terrible instead of benign, a tyrant instead of a father, harsh instead of tender. The troubles of actual life are assigned by the Atheist to natural causes, to defects in himself or his circumstances ; and he endeavours to mitigate or remove them by greater care. But to the victim of Superstition his bodily ailments, his pecuniary misfortunes, his children's deaths, his public failures, are the strokes of a god or the attacks of a *dæmon*, and cannot therefore be remedied by natural means, which would have the appearance of opposition to the will of God.<sup>1</sup> Hence light misfortunes are often allowed to become fatal disasters.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Midas was frightened to death by his dreams ; Aristodemus of Messene committed suicide because the soothsayers had alarmed him about a trifling omen ;<sup>3</sup> Nicias lost his life and his great army because he was afraid when a shadow crept over the moon. Let us pray to the gods, but let us not neglect reasonable human endeavour. "While the Greeks were

<sup>1</sup> 166 B.

<sup>2</sup> 168 F.

<sup>3</sup> *Bello primo, Aristodemum Messeniorum regem per superstitionem animum ac spes omnes despondisse, seque ipsum interfecisse, narrat etiam Pausanias, iv. 3.*—WYTTENBACH.



praying for Ajax, Ajax was putting on his armour; for God is the hope of bravery, not the pretext for cowardice.”<sup>1</sup> Participation in religious ceremonies, which should be the most cheerful and happy act of life, is an additional cause of dread to the Superstitious, whose case is worse than that of the Atheist who smiles sarcastically at the whole business. The Atheist, true, is guilty of impiety: but is not Superstition more open to this charge? “I, for my part, would greatly prefer that men should say about me that there was not, and never had been, such a man as Plutarch, than that they should say that Plutarch is a fickle, irascible, vindictive fellow, who will pay you out for not inviting him to supper, or for omitting to call upon him, or for passing him in the street without speaking to him, by committing a violent assault upon you, giving one of your children a thorough caning, or turning a beast into your cornfield.”<sup>2</sup> The fact of the matter is, that the Atheist believes there are no gods, while the superstitious man wishes there were none;<sup>3</sup> the former is an Atheist pure and simple, while the latter is an Atheist who professes to believe because he has not the moral courage to utter his secret desires. And, as in the individual mind Superstition involves Atheism, so historically the latter has developed out of the former. The Epicureans were Atheists, not because they did not perceive the splendour and perfection

<sup>1</sup> 169 C. *Iliad*, vii. 193, 194.

<sup>2</sup> 170 A. Trench quotes Seneca *Epist.*, 123—“Quid enim interest utrum deos neges, an infames?”

<sup>3</sup> 170 F.

of the universe, but because they desired to deliver humanity from the thralldom which Superstition had cast about it—from its ridiculous passions and actions, its spells of speech and motion, its magic and witchcraft, its charmed circles and drum-beating, its impure purifications and its filthy cleansings, its barbaric and unlawful penances and its self-torturings at holy shrines. If these practices are pleasant to the gods, mankind is no better off than if the administration of the world were in the hands of the Typhons or the Giants.

But no disease is so difficult to cope with as Superstition. We must fly from it, but we must so fly from it that we do not run into the other extreme. “*Aussi y en a il qui fuyans la Superstition, se vont ruer et precipiter en la rude et pierreuse impieté de l’atheisme, en sautant par dessus la vraye Religion, qui est assise au milieu entre les deux.*”

Such is a brief account of the contents of this famous tract. One thing becomes clear from its perusal, the fact that the advantage is altogether regarded as on the side of Atheism. Amyot, from whose translation we have taken its concluding sentence, sounds a note of serious alarm in a prefatory note to his version: “*Ce traicté est dangereux à lire, et contient une doctrine fausse: Car il est certain que la Superstition est moins mauvaise, et approche plus pres du milieu de la vraye Religion, que ne fuit l’Impieté et Atheisme.*” Others have followed Amyot in his view of this “dangerous” treatise; while Plutarch has not been without his champions against those who have

thus accused him of irreligion.<sup>1</sup> So far as concerns the views expounded in the treatise, it appears to us that the alarm of Amyot is justified. But Amyot, who knew his Plutarch well, should have observed that there is a note of rhetoric in this work which is totally different from the teacher's usually quiet and unimpassioned method of argument. There is an emphasis, an exaggeration, of everything that tells against the victim of Superstition, a restraint, a gentleness in minimizing the faults which could have been made into a serious indictment against Atheism. This, as we know, is not Plutarch's favourite method of discussion. In ordinary circumstances an Epicurean would have attacked Superstition, a Stoic would have inveighed against Atheism, and an Academic friend of Plutarch's would have taken the judicial mean. As a matter of fact, however, Plutarch—and he connects his own name with the argument in the most emphatic manner—assumes a position in this tract scarcely discrepant from the peculiarly Epicurean attitude. From this point of view, Wytttenbach's epithet of *vere Plutarcheus* applied to the tract is incorrect, and even Wytttenbach admits the possibility that Plutarch may have written

<sup>1</sup> To the numerous citations made by Gréard (p. 209), we may add an expression of opinion by Dr. Tholuck, given with special reference to Plutarch's views on Superstition:—"Wir haben in Alterthum einen hohen Geist, Plutarch, welcher dem, was das Alterthum Aberglaube nannte, viele Betrachtungen gewidmet hat, dem Gegenstande zwar nicht auf den Grund gekommen, *aber in der Betrachtung desselben doch so tiefe religiöse Wahrheiten ausgesprochen*, dass wir nicht umhin können, ihn hier ausführlicher dem Leser vorzuführen" (*Ueber Aberglauben und Unglauben*).

another tract, "in which the cause of *Superstition* was defended against Epicurus."<sup>1</sup> How Plutarch could have accomplished a successful defence without going back on all the arguments in the treatise "on *Superstition*" will not be clear to a modern reader. It appears to us that Plutarch, having an acute perception of the gross evils inherent in the many superstitious practices of the day, has been disturbed from his usual philosophic pose, and has been carried, by a feeling of almost personal resentment, to draw a picture which was intended to be one-sided, because it was intended to be alarming. Plutarch's Philosophy, his Religion, here touch the vital interests of life, and come to close combat with a gigantic moral evil. What is lost in philosophic detachment is gained in moral fervour, a change of balance which gives quite other than a theoretical interest to those many short sermons in which Plutarch is *aux prises* with the sins and vices and follies of his day. The main importance of the "De *Superstitione*" is its contact with practical affairs, and its translation of philosophic and religious conceptions into terms of everyday life. Philosophy and Religion have displayed to Plutarch the Purity, the Unity, the Benevolence of God; it is a question of Ethics to expose and destroy practices which are repellent to this conception of the Divine Nature. Plutarch's

<sup>1</sup> WYTENBACH bases this possibility on the 150th entry in the Lamprian catalogue, "*On Superstition, against Epicurus.*" (Entry No. 155 in the catalogue as given in BERNARDAKIS, vol. vii. pp. 473-7.) But the discussion on this point in the *Non posse suaviter* forms so important a part of that tract that the title "*On Superstition, against Epicurus*" would be no inapt title for the whole treatise.

way of solving that question in one direction is expounded in the tract "De Superstitione."<sup>1</sup>

While Plutarch, in his anxiety to safeguard the emotional aspects of Religion from the incursions of Superstition, departs in this tract from his ordinary attitude of intellectual moderation, he reverts very markedly to his usual manner in his treatise on the two Egyptian divinities, Isis and Osiris. Knowledge of the Truth is here depicted as the very heart of devotion, and the pursuit of this is regarded as the only means of holding a middle path between the bog of Superstition and the precipice of Atheism. The main object of this treatise is to show how principles of rational inquiry may be applied to religious myths, so that Reason and Piety may both be satisfied with the result. Wytttenbach explains this purpose in a few words of terse Latinity which might safely be quoted as descriptive of Plutarch's attitude towards Religion in general. "*Consilium scriptoris videtur fuisse, ut amicam de horum Ægyptiorum numinum ortu et cultu saniora, quam quæ vulgo ferrentur, doceret, religionemque fabularum deliriis carimoniarumque ineptiis mirifice deformatam et apud prudentiores homines in contemptum adductam, istis quoad ejus fieri posset sordibus purgaret, omnique literarum et philosophicæ instrumento ad historicæ fidem, nature*

<sup>1</sup> The view taken in the text as to the character of this strenuous and noble sermon on *Superstition* is, of course, quite at variance with the opinion of Prof. Mahaffy, who regards it as "one of those sophistical exercises practised by every one in that age—I mean, the defence of a paradox with subtlety and ingenuity, taking little account of sober truth in comparison with dialectical plausibility."—*Greeks under Roman Sway*, p. 318.

*rationem dignamque divinitate speciem reformaret.*" But while serving as an example of Plutarch's general method of inquiry, a particular motive for the choice of this special myth as subject would doubtless be furnished by the great prevalence and popularity of the worship of Isis during the Græco-Roman Empire of this period. Its passionate excitements were hostile to the calm cultivated by the Roman in matters of Religion, and Isis had undergone a prolonged struggle before her temples were allowed to stand erect in Rome. The patrician indignation of Lucan—*nos in templa tuam Romana accipimus Isin!*<sup>1</sup>—expressed, however, rather the sentiment of the Republic than the conviction of the Empire. Juvenal alludes to the *Isiacæ sacraria lænæ*—the *fanum Isidis*—the temple of the goddess in the Campus Martius, in terms which, however severe from the moral standpoint, leave no historical doubt as to the established character of the cult and its institutions. In the later romance of Apuleius, the hero Lucius owes his re-transformation into human shape to the power of Isis, and makes a pilgrimage of gratitude to the very temple to which Juvenal makes so scathing an allusion.

The detailed description given by Apuleius of the ceremonies connected with the worship of the goddess in so important a place as Cenchrææ, the port of Corinth, bears emphatic witness to the established popularity of her rites.<sup>2</sup> Even in Plutarch's tract the

<sup>1</sup> *Pharsalia*, viii. 831.

<sup>2</sup> APULEIUS, *Meta*: Lib. xi. Lucius (a descendant of Plutarch, by the way), in his pious gratitude, enters the service of the goddess

fact is everywhere indirectly evident. Clea, to whom it is addressed, was officially and intimately associated with the worship of Dionysus at Delphi, but she had also been instructed from her childhood in the rites appertaining to the worship of Isis and Osiris.<sup>1</sup> It is only in accordance with Plutarch's well-known character that he should be anxious to explain anything in the Isiac ceremonies and traditions, the misunderstanding of which was likely to generate superstitious and licentious practices and lead indirectly to Atheism. And if, by explaining absurdities, excising crudities, refuting false interpretations, he could at the same time demonstrate the unity of God, the identity of religious basis lying beneath these various beliefs of other peoples, we can recognize in the task one eminently suited to the character and aims of Plutarch. In the "Isis and Osiris" Plutarch has, therefore, a two-fold object. He endeavours to explain, from a rationalistic point of view, the meaning of Isiac and Osirian ceremonies and legends; and he develops his theories on these matters into an exposition of his attitude towards Myth in general, showing that the various beliefs of other nations are not, when rightly understood, mutually destructive and opposite, but simply different ways of envisaging the same essential and eternal truth. We proceed to explain these assertions by an examination of the treatise.

who had *uncharmed* him.—Rursus denique, quam raso capillo, collegii vetustissimi et sub illis Sullæ temporibus conditi munia, non obumbrato vel oblecto calvitio, sed quoquo versus obvio, gaudens obibam.

<sup>1</sup> 364 E.

Plutarch gives early indication of his point of view. "The philosophy of the Egyptian priests was generally concealed in myths and narratives containing dim hints and suggestions of truth." It was to indicate this "enigmatic" character of their theological wisdom that they erected Sphinxes before their temples; that, too, is the meaning of their inscription on the shrine of Athene-Isis at Sais, "*I am all that was, and all that is, and all that shall be, and my veil hath yet no mortal raised.*"<sup>1</sup> It follows from this that we must on no account attach a literal significance to their narratives.<sup>2</sup> Thus they represent the sun as a newborn child sitting on a lotus flower, but this is an enigma teaching the derivation of the solar heat from moisture.<sup>3</sup> "It is in this way," says he, clearly indicating the twofold object he has in view throughout this work, "it is in this way that you are to hear and accept traditions of the gods, taking their meaning from such as interpret them *in a spirit at once pious and philosophic*. This spirit of reverent inquiry must be accompanied by a constant observance of the recognized forms of worship, and by a conviction that no religious or other action is more grateful to the gods than the acceptance of true opinions concerning them. This harmonious co-operation of Piety and Philosophy saves equally from Atheism and its cognate evil, Superstition."<sup>4</sup>

It is in this spirit—the spirit in which every Religion justly claims that it should be approached—that Plutarch gives an account of the Egyptian myth

<sup>1</sup> 354 C.

<sup>2</sup> 355 B.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *De Pyth. Orac.*, 400 A.

<sup>4</sup> 355 D.



“in the briefest possible terms, denuded of such particulars as are quite useless and superfluous”; denuded also, as we are told later, “of its most blasphemous features,”<sup>1</sup> “such as the dismemberment of Horus and the decapitation of Isis.” Piety absolutely rejects these tales concerning beings who participate “in that blessed and eternal nature which marks our conception of the Divine”; although Philosophy will not be equally severe on these legends, regarding them not solely as unsubstantial tales and empty fictions spun, like spiders’ webs, by poets and romancers out of their own imagination, but also as indirectly reflecting the pure light of some ancient narrative whose meaning has now been utterly broken up as are the sun’s rays when reproduced in the multitudinous hues of the rainbow.<sup>2</sup> Plutarch clearly

<sup>1</sup> 358 E. Mr. Andrew Lang justly remarks, “Why these myths should be considered ‘more blasphemous’ than the rest does not appear” (*Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, vol. ii. pp. 116, 117).

<sup>2</sup> 358 F. This is a difficult passage. It seems necessary to read ἀνακλάσει for ἀναχωρήσει (cf. ἀνάκλασις δὴ που περὶ τὴν Ἴριον, *Amatorius*, 765 E), but even then the meaning is difficult to elicit, and it is not confidently claimed that the rendering in the text has elicited it. Three translations are appended: “For as mathematicians assure us that the rainbow is nothing else but a variegated image of the sun, thrown upon the sight by the reflexion of his beams from the clouds, so ought we to look upon the present story as the representation, or reflexion rather, of something real as its true cause” (Plutarchi *De Iside et Osiride* Liber: Græce et Anglice, by SAMUEL SQUIRE, A.M., Cambridge, 1744).—“Und so wie die Naturforscher den Regenbogen für ein Gegenbild der Sonne erklären, das durch das Zurücktreten der Erscheinung an die Wolke bunt wird, so ist hier die Sage das Gegenbild einer Wahrheit, welche ihre Bedeutung auf etwas anderes hin abspiegelt” (Plutarch über Isis und Osiris herausgegeben von G. PARTHEY, Berlin, 1850).—*Legendum ἀναχώρει vel ἀνακλάσει, ut Rieisk.* “Et

regards it as a pious duty to accept the Osirian legend as containing a substratum of truth, embodying the religious lore of the Egyptian priesthood, but he reserves to himself the right of interpreting the expression of this truth in the light of his own philosophy. His attitude is identical with that assumed by the authors of the various explanations of the myth which he reports as current in antiquity. "These interpretations," in the lively expression of Mr. Andrew Lang, "are the interpretations of civilized men, whose method is to ask themselves: 'Now, if I had told such a tale as this, or invented such a mystery play of divine misadventures, what meaning could I have intended to convey in what is apparently blasphemous nonsense?'"<sup>1</sup> It will be seen that Plutarch does not himself finally adopt any special interpretation, although he emphatically rejects those which are not pious as well as philosophic. He is desirous rather of showing in what way the investigation of such questions should be approached, than of imposing any definite conclusion on the understanding; of cultivating an aptitude for rational and reverent inquiry, than of establishing a final and inflexible dogma.

He deals first with the Euhemerists, or "Exanthropizers." Euhemerus of Tegea, or, as Plutarch here calls him, Euhemerus<sup>2</sup> of Messene, first treated with

*quemadmodum mathematici arcum caelestem Solis tradunt esse imaginem variatam visus ad umbem reflexu: Sic fabula hoc loco iudicium est orationis alio reflectentis intellectum.*—WYTTENBACH.

<sup>1</sup> *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, vol. ii. p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> In our spelling of this name we use the freedom of choice so graciously accorded by Xylander—*Si Euhemerus maris, non repugno.*

scientific precision that tendency to regard the gods as kings and rulers whose surpassing greatness and merit had been rewarded by an imaginary apotheosis. He had embodied the result of his researches, which he claims to have made during an expedition sent by Cassander to the Red Sea, in a work called the "Sacred Record." He asserted, according to Lactantius, that he had seen in the Island of Panchaia (Plutarch calls it *Panchon*) a column of gold with an inscription indicating its erection by Zeus himself, *in qua columna gesta sua perscripsit ut monimentum esset posteris rerum suarum*. This "humanizing" of Zeus was extended to other deities; and Plutarch, who sarcastically denies that these inscriptions had ever been seen by anybody else, whether Greek or Barbarian, asserts that the principles of Euhemerus had been applied to the explanation of the tombs and other monuments commemorating in Egypt the events embodied in the Osirian myth. Although it has been asserted that Euhemerus admitted the existence of the elemental deities, such as the sun and the heavens, the atheistical tendency of his theory is evident, and the author of the tract "De Placitis Philosophorum," whose bias is distinctly Epicurean and atheistic, says that Euhemerus absolutely denied the existence of the gods, associating him in this connexion with Diagoras the Melian, and Theodorus of Cyrene.<sup>1</sup> Plutarch himself has no doubts as to the

<sup>1</sup> *De Placitis Philosophorum*, 880 D. Cf. CICERO, *De Natura Deorum*, i. 42. "Ab Euhemero autem et mortes et sepulturæ demonstrantur deorum. Utrum igitur hic confirmasse videtur religionem,

tendency of Euhemerism. Those who have recourse to these theories, "transferring great names from heaven to earth, almost entirely uproot and destroy the reverence and faith implanted in all of us at our birth, and open wide the temple doors to the profane and atheistical mob."<sup>1</sup>—"They bring divinity to the level of humanity, and fair occasion of unfettered speech to the impostures of Euhemerus, who scattered Atheism the wide world over, degrading all the recognized deities alike to the names of generals, admirals, kings of a pretended eld." Good and great kings are rewarded with the gratitude of posterity, while disgrace and obloquy have been the portion of those whose insolence has led them to assume the titles and temples of gods.<sup>2</sup>

The hypothesis of Dæmonic natures, next applied by Plutarch to the explanation of the legend, we have already examined. Naturally he expresses a preference for this theory over that of the Euhemerists, but will still proceed to discuss with philosophic detachment the hypotheses of other schools, taking, as he says, the

an penitus totam sustulisse?" See MAYOR'S note on this passage. The references to Lactantius and Eusebius and many others bearing on the question are collected by Corsini in his first dissertation on the *De Placitis*. Zimmerman is very indignant with Plutarch on account of the charge here brought against Euhemerus and Diagoras, and has defended them against our author with great energy and spirit. (*Epistola ad Nicolaum Nonnen qua Euhemerus Messenius et Diagoras Melius ab Atheismo contra Plutarchum aliosque defenduntur.*)

<sup>1</sup> 360 A.

<sup>2</sup> The language here seems curiously outspoken in view of the now established apotheosis of the Emperors.

simplest first.<sup>1</sup> These are the Physical Allegorists. "Just as the Greeks assert that Cronus is an allegorical symbol for Time, Hera for Air, the birth of Hephaistos for the transformation of Air into Fire, so also among the Egyptians there are those who maintain that Osiris symbolizes the Nile, Isis the Earth, fecundated in his embrace, Typhon the Sea, into which the Nile falls to disappear and be scattered, except such part of him as has been abstracted by the Earth to make her fruitful."<sup>2</sup> He shows how this identification of Typhon with the sea explains certain sayings, beliefs, and practices of the Egyptians, but he regards it as rather crude and superficial,<sup>3</sup> and passes on to an explanation given by the more learned priests, who, with a more philosophic application of the principles of allegorical interpretation, identify Osiris with the *Moist* Principle of the Universe, and Typhon with the *Dry* Principle, the former being the cause of Generation, the latter being hostile to it.<sup>4</sup> The similarity of these views to early Greek speculation is pointed out by a statement that the Egyptians held that Homer, like Thales, had learnt from them that Water is the generative principle of all things, Homer's Ocean being Osiris, and his Tethys, Isis. This ancient theory is fully discussed by Plutarch, showing how the Egyptians applied it to the myth, but also indicating similarities of detail and identities of principle between the Egyptian and Greek mythologies.<sup>5</sup> "Those who combine with these physical explanations certain points borrowed from astronomical speculation," are next dealt

<sup>1</sup> 360 D.<sup>3</sup> 364 A.<sup>2</sup> 356, 357. Cf. *De Dædalis Platænsibus*.<sup>4</sup> 366 C.<sup>5</sup> 364 D.

with. These Astronomical Allegorists maintained that Osiris is the Lunar World and Typhon the Solar: the Moon's light being regarded as favourable to the reproductiveness of plants and animals, from its greater moistening tendency, while the light of the Sun is parching, and so hostile to life and vegetation that "a considerable portion of the earth is rendered by his heat totally uninhabitable."<sup>1</sup> After a brief description of another class of astronomical Allegorists who regard the myth as an enigmatical description of Eclipses,<sup>2</sup> he puts the whole of these particular explanations of the Physical and Astronomical Allegorists in their proper place as merely partial and distorted expressions of the ancient and universal belief in the existence of two opposing principles, two mutually hostile influences which operate throughout the universe, giving Nature its mixed and uncertain and fluctuating character.<sup>3</sup> One of the most conspicuous features in Plutarch's Theology, as already examined in these pages, is his anxiety to avoid any kind of Dualism in his conception of Deity; and it is a necessary corollary of his religious and philosophical conviction on this point that there should be no place in the constitution of the world for a Being regarded as a coequal rival to the One Supreme Omnipotence. As Plutarch, however, himself points out, if nothing can be conceived as originating without a cause, and Good cannot be regarded as

<sup>1</sup> 367 D.

<sup>2</sup> 368 D.

<sup>3</sup> 369 C. It is clear from a careful examination of the text that Plutarch gives only a critical examination of this theory: he does not adopt it as his own, as has frequently been asserted.

furnishing the cause of Evil, it follows that Evil as well as Good must have an originating principle of its own.<sup>1</sup> But neither on the religious nor on the purely philosophic side does he carry this admission to the extent of accepting an Evil personality or principle equivalent in power to the Deity. On the one hand, he accepts the doctrine of subordinate Dæmons, whose evil propensities are ultimately under the control of the Omnipotent Author of Good, inasmuch as they are liable to pains and penances for their infraction of the laws He has imposed upon them; and on the other, he has learned from Greek philosophy the conception of τὸ ἄπειρον, that infinite, formless "Matter," out of which the Demiurgus, making it the nurse and receptacle of the ideas, had created the Universe. He insists, indeed, that the two conceptions are familiar to Greek philosophers: Empedocles opposed φιλότῃτα καὶ φιλίαν to νεῖκος οὐλόμενον; the Pythagoreans had two well-known lists of contrary expressions.<sup>2</sup> Anaxagoras expressed the antithesis by νοῦς and ἄπειρον; Aristotle by εἶδος and στέρησις. In all these philosophical distinctions the inferiority of the second term is implied, and Plutarch asserts this inferiority in unmistakable terms. "The creation and formation of this world arose out of opposing, but not

<sup>1</sup> 369 D. "It is impossible," argued these ancient thinkers, "that moral life and death, that good and evil, can flow from a single source. It is impossible that a Holy God can have been the author of evil. Evil, then, must be referred to some other origin: it must have had an author of its own."—"Some Elements of Religion," by Canon LIDDON (Lecture iv. sect. i.).

<sup>2</sup> 370 E.

equal, Principles, the supreme sway being the portion of the Better.”<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from these considerations that Plutarch's own mind is made up on the subject; but he cannot refrain from giving sympathetic consideration to so ancient, widespread, and respectable a belief as that involved in the myth of Osiris and Typhon, of Ormuzd and Ahriman; and he devotes considerable space, and displays considerable ingenuity, in connecting the Egyptian and Zoroastrian beliefs with the legends of Greek Mythology and the principles of Greek Philosophy.<sup>2</sup> But his object, even when he makes

<sup>1</sup> 371 A.

<sup>2</sup> See especially the quotations from Plato in 370 F, and the application of Platonic terms in the interpretation of the Isiac and Osirian myth in 372 E, F, 373 and 374. Hesiod, too, is made to agree with this Platonic explanation of the Egyptian legend (374 C), and the Platonic notion of matter is strained to allow of its being identified with Isis (372 E, 374 F). In 367 C, a parallelism is pointed out between Stoic theology and an interpretation of the myth; and in 367 E the death of Osiris on the 17th of the month is used to illustrate, if not to explain, the Pythagorean ἀφοσίωσις of that number.

As regards the identification of particular deities in this tract, reference may be made to 364 E, F and 365 A, B, where Dionysus is identified with Osiris; and to 365 F, where Mnaseas of Patara is mentioned with approval as associating with Epaphus, not only Dionysus, but Serapis and Osiris also. Anticleides is also referred to as asserting that Isis was the daughter of Prometheus and the wife of Dionysus. In 372 D, Osiris is identified with the Sun under the name of Sirius, and Isis with the Moon. In 375, a fanciful philology is called in to aid a further identification of Greek and Egyptian deities; but not much importance is attached to similarities derived in this way. In the next sentence Isis is stated to have been identified with Athene by the Egyptians; and the general principle of identity is boldly stated in 377 C:—“*It is quite legitimate to regard these gods as common possessions and not the exclusive property of the Egyptians*



indulgent concessions to an opposite view, is never lost sight of, and towards the conclusion of his search for parallelisms and similarities, he expresses his aim in unmistakable and peculiarly Plutarchean language. After passing severe criticism on the impiety of those who give the names of gods to the productions of Nature, asserting that Dionysus is *Wine*, and Hephaistos *Flame* (which, says he, is like identifying sail and cable and anchor with the pilot, the thread with the weaver, or the draught with the physician), he adds, "God is not lifeless, unintelligent, subject to man, as these things are. But it is from these blessings that we conclude that those who bestow them upon us for our use, and give us a constant and never-failing supply thereof, are gods, *not different gods among different peoples, not Barbarian gods, nor Greek gods, not gods of the south nor gods of the north; but just as the sun, the moon, the earth, the sky, and the sea are common to all, but receive different names among different peoples, so likewise are different honours assigned and different invocations addressed to the gods in different places according to the customs there established. Yet is it one Reason which admonishes, and one Providence which directs, while subordinate powers have been appointed over all things. Certain peoples make use of sacred symbols which, with greater or less clearness, direct the understanding to divine knowledge, and yet*

—*Isis and the deities that go in her train are universally known and worshipped. The names, indeed, of certain of them have been borrowed from the Egyptians, not so long ago; but their divinity has been known and recognized for ages.*"

not without danger, since some in their desire to shun the swamp of Superstition have unconsciously slipped over the precipice of Atheism.”<sup>1</sup> Here we have, combined in one sentence, Plutarch’s belief in the Unity of God, his acceptance of the theory of Dæmons, his recognition of the truth of foreign creeds, his desire, so frequently expressed, and so consistently acted upon, to follow the guidance of a reverent yet inquiring philosophy on a path which is equally distant from the two great moral evils which loom so large in his mental vision. Hence this tract is organically connected with the treatise on Superstition; the former aims at securing by purely intellectual and rational processes what the latter attempts by appealing to the Intellect through the medium of the Imagination.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 378 A.

<sup>2</sup> There is a strain of mysticism in the *De Osiride* which is alien from the cheerful common sense which usually marks Plutarch; a remark which also applies to the *De Facie quæ apparet in Orbe Lunæ*. But the same strain appears in others of his authentic tracts, though mostly operating through the medium of Platonic dreams and myths, e.g. the story of Thespesius in the *Sera Num. Vindic.*, and that of Timarchus in the *De Dæmonio Socratis*. Besides, one would not *ceteris paribus* deny the authenticity of Browning’s “*Childe Roland*” because he had written “*The Guardian Angel*,” or that of “*The Antiquary*” because Scott was also the author of “*The Monastery*.” The tract was probably composed after that return from Alexandria to which Plutarch so charmingly alludes in *Sympos.*, 678 C. Moreover, the very nature of the subject, and the priestly character of the lady to whom it was addressed, as well as the mysterious nature of the goddess whose ministrant she was, are all parts of a natural inducement to mysticism. We must admit that Plutarch here participates in that spirit of mysticism which, always inherent in Platonism, was kept in check by his acutely practical bent, to be revived and exaggerated to the destruction of practical ethics in the dreams and abstractions of the Neo-Platonists.

## CHAPTER X.

*Conclusions respecting the general character of Plutarch's Religion—Monotheism and Dæmonology both essential parts of his Theodicy—His strong belief in the personality of God—Metaphysical weakness but Moral strength of his Teaching—Close connexion between his Religion and his Ethics—Plutarch not an "Eclectic," nor a Neo-Platonist—Contrast between Plutarch's Religion and Philosophy and the Religion and Philosophy of the Neo-Platonists—Christianity and Neo-Platonism—The struggle between them and its probable effect on later religious history—Conclusion.*

WE have endeavoured in the preceding pages to ascertain, from Plutarch's own account of his views, the principles, the method and the character of his Religion; to learn in what manner he conceives the supernatural world and its relation to the human mind and to human interests; to discover and illustrate the processes by which these results are attained; to note their philosophic bearing and tendency; and to exemplify their application in the sphere of practical ethics. We have seen how clearly he recognizes the existence, and demonstrates the attributes, of a Supreme Being, and have observed how he raises the humility of mankind nearer to the Majesty of the Highest by admitting the activities of an intermediate and mediatory race of supernatural beings, whose mingled nature allies

them equally to God and Man, and forms a channel of communication between human wants and divine benevolence. These are the two fundamental truths of the religion of Plutarch. The whole of his exegesis, in whatsoever direction operating, whether examining the doctrines of Philosophy, the legends of popular Myth, or the traditions embodied in ceremonial observances, is involved with a recognition of this twofold conception as the essential characteristic of a religious attitude of mind. Those, indeed, who have emphasized too exclusively that element in Plutarch's Religion which he owes to Philosophy, have concluded that his religious beliefs were purely Monotheistic: just as a misunderstanding of his Dæmonology has resulted in the assertion that he was trammelled in the meshes of a superstitious Polytheism.<sup>1</sup> It could, if necessary, be

<sup>1</sup> A very slight acquaintance with Plutarch's writings will serve to dispose of the charge of Atheism brought against him by Zimmerman, the professor of Theology in the Gymnasium of Zurich:—Credo equidem Plutarchum inter eos fuisse qui cum Cicerone crediderint eos qui dant philosophiæ operam non arbitrari Deos esse.—It is true that Zimmerman supports his case by quoting the pseudo-Plutarehean *De Placitis* (*Idem de providentia non minus male loquitur quam ipsi Epicurei*), and seems himself afraid to accept the conclusion of his own demonstrations:—Atheum eum fuisse non credo, sed quomodo asserere potuerit Superstitione Atheismum tolerabiliorem esse, simul tamen eos, quos atheos fuisse minime probare potuit, Superstitioni autem inimicissimos, omnem malorum mundum intulisse, consociare nequeo.—But the learned author is too intent on exculpating *Noster Euhemerus* from Plutarch's "injustice" to have justice to spare for Plutarch himself.—(J. J. ZIMMERMAN, *Epistola ad Nonnen*). Gréard quotes other authors of this charge against Plutarch (p. 269).—We cannot allow this opportunity to pass of protesting against the attitude of those who assumed, even in the Nineteenth Century, that it was a sign either of moral depravity, or mental incapacity, in Plutarch not

plausibly argued, against those who have maintained this latter view, that the elaboration of the belief in Dæmons, and the multiplication of the functions of these lesser divine beings, are factors which tend to emphasize the unity and purity of the Supreme God; and that Plutarch's Monotheism is no more destroyed by the recognition of a Dæmonic Race than is the Catholic Trinity overthrown by the Church's acceptance

to have been a believer in the Christian faith. Even Archbishop Trench, who admits, concerning such writers as our author, that "many were by them enabled to live their lives after a far higher and nobler fashion than else they would have attained," cannot rid himself of the notion that had Plutarch actively opposed Christianity he would have committed an offence which our generosity might have pardoned, though our justice must recognize that it *needed* pardon. "Plutarch himself may be entirely acquitted of any *conscious* attempt to fight against that truth which was higher than any which he had" (p. 13).—"I have already mentioned that, *through no fault of his own*, he stood removed from all the immediate influences of the Christian Church" (p. 89). But suppose the facts to have been just the opposite of those indicated in the words we have italicized, it would involve the loss of all sense of historical perspective to draw the conclusion which would clearly have been drawn by Trench himself. The use of similar language by Prof. Mahaffy has already been noted. (Pref. p. xii.) The position assumed by writers who maintain this view, is one quite inappropriate for historical discussion, and its natural expression, if it must be expressed at all, is through the medium of such poetical aspirations as that breathed in the epigram of John, the Metropolitan of Euchaita:—

"If any Pagans, Lord, Thy grace shall save  
 From wrath divine, this boon I humbly crave,  
 Plato and Plutarch save: Thine was the cause  
 Their speech supported: Thine, too, were the laws  
 Their hearts obeyed; and if their eyes were blind  
 To recognize Thee Lord of human kind,  
 Needs only that Thy gift of grace be shown  
 To bring them, and bring all men, to the Throne."

of the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius "the Areopagite," with its thrice-repeated triplets of Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim; Powers, Dominions, Might; Angels, Archangels, Principalities. But, in the first place, Plutarch does not keep his Religion and his Philosophy in separate mental compartments: they are fused into one operation in his thought; and we should adopt a false method of interpretation were we to separate the result as expounded in his writings. Further, we should obtain a totally misleading view of Plutarch's teaching were we to insist that he was fully conscious of all the conclusions that by a strict use of logic could conceivably be deduced from his tenets. An examination of the opinions and beliefs which he states that he actually maintained leads inevitably to the conviction that his Dæmonology was as sincere as his Theology. There can, we think, be no doubt that his reverence for the national tradition gave him as real a belief in the polytheistic activities of the Dæmons as his love of Philosophy gave him in the Unity, Perfection and Eternity of the Deity. The strength of this belief was increased by his recognition of the important part it might play, in one direction by solving perplexities and removing stumbling-blocks from the national tradition, in another by responding to that eternal craving of humanity for a god-man, a mediator, which had already begun to receive a purer, a simpler, and a more perfect satisfaction. The conscious expression, therefore, which Plutarch gives in his writings to the belief in Dæmons, we are bound to accept as corresponding with a conviction actually existing in his mind, quite as much as

we admit the sincerity of his reiterated belief in a Supreme and Universal Deity.

But it is one of the most interesting aspects of Plutarch's Theology—not the less interesting, perhaps, because it has a certain inconsistency with other parts of his Religion—that, even were we to confine our investigations to the philosophic elements of his idea of the Divine Nature: even if we could totally exclude from consideration all the functions which he ascribes to the Dæmonic character: we should still find ourselves face to face with a God different, in one of the qualities now regarded as essential to a complete conception of Deity, from any of the theological representations current in the schools of Greek Philosophy. The essential basis of all these representations is the God of Plato, partly regarded as the creative Demiurgus of the “Timæus;” partly as the World-Soul, that “blessed god” produced by the operation of the Creator's “Intelligence”; and partly as that ultimate ideal Unity, the final abstraction reached by a supreme effort of dialectic subtlety. The last of these three conceptions is essentially and truly that of Plato; it is the native and unalloyed product of Dialectic, owing naught of its existence to the illustrative or ironical use of Myth, out of which the other two conceptions spring. The element of personality is totally absent from this conception,<sup>1</sup> nor did the Stoics introduce this element into

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Martineau (*Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. i. p. 91) thinks that “we must go a little further than Zeller, who decides that Plato usually conceived of God as if personal, yet was restrained by a doctrine inconsistent with such conception from approaching it closely or setting it deliberately on any scientific ground,” and devotes several

their adoption of the Soul of the Universe as Deity.<sup>1</sup> But Plutarch's God is a personal God. The God of the "De Sera Numinis Vindicta" approaches nearer to the Christian conception of God as a Father than the Deity as conceived by any Faith which has not been permeated by Christian feeling, and the God of the "De Superstitione" presents the same characteristics as the God of the "De Sera Numinis Vindicta." Plutarch's

closely-reasoned pages to show that, although there was no room for a personal god in Plato's philosophy, Plato himself was in distinct opposition to his own views as systematically expounded in his writings. "We may regard him as fully aware of the conditions of the problem, and, though unable to solve it without lesion of his dialectic, yet deliberately pronouncing judgment on the side of his religious feeling." But *pace tantorum virorum* it will be admitted that the personality of God is not very evident in Plato when those who understand him best can only maintain that it is not essentially interwoven with his philosophy, having only an indirect and accidental existence which is not possible "without lesion of his dialectic."

<sup>1</sup> "Abstractedly, the theology of the Stoics appears as a materialistic pantheism; God is represented as a fire, and the world as a mode of God." (GRANT, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, vol. i. p. 265.) In the famous "hymn of Cleanthes," preserved, like so many other of the great wonders of classical literature, by Stobæus, Grant sees an emphatic recognition of the personality of God, but it is equally natural to regard the hymn as a more detailed expression of that necessity of submitting to Destiny—of living in accordance with nature—which Cleanthes enounces in that other famous fragment which Epictetus would have us hold ready to hand in all the circumstances of life:—

"Lead me, O Zeus, and thou O Destiny,  
The way that I am bid by you to go:  
To follow I am ready. If I choose not,  
I make myself a wretch, and still must follow."

—EPICETUS, *Encheir.* lii. (Long's translation.) Epictetus, indeed, and Seneca, late comers in the history of Stoicism, have undoubtedly attained to a clear recognition of the personality of God.



feeling of the intimate relation existing between the Divine Knowledge and the secret weaknesses and sins, and the feeble strivings after virtue in the human heart, does not require an elaborate and contentious process of ratiocination before we can discern its presence. It is the basis of his finest arguments, and the inspiration of his most earnest and fruitful teachings. This weakness of Plutarch on the side of Metaphysics, this revolt of his nature against the coldness and distance of the Deity of the Platonic Dialectic, constitutes his strength as a religious and moral teacher. This inconsistency makes him the type of certain modern theologians who will expound to a formal Congregation the Eternity, Self-Existence, Necessity, and Unity of God the First Cause, while in their private devotions their hearts and their lips turn naturally to the simple and touching petitions of "Our Father, which art in Heaven;" or, while composing a sermon in which the particular attributes of the Persons of the Trinity and their mutual relationships are defined and enumerated with more than scholastic precision, will turn and teach their children to pray to God as the "gentle Jesus." In a similar manner, there is the Plutarch of the "De E apud Delphos," the Plutarch of the "De Sera Numinis Vindicta," and the Plutarch of the Dæmonology. He contributes his share to the discussions of philosophic theologians; he depicts God in direct spiritual relationship with his human children; and he describes the Dæmons as aiding mankind in their internal struggles towards perfection of moral character. He will allow neither

Reason nor Emotion to run away with him; he is as far removed from the dialectic severities of Plato, as he is from the superstitious beliefs and practices of the later Platonists. He has no special and peculiar message either to the theologian in the pulpit, or to the child at its mother's knee. He appeals to humanity at large; to the people who have work to do, and who want to get it done with honesty and dignity; to students, teachers, politicians, members of a busy society; to people who are liable to all the temptations, and capable of all the virtues, which naturally arise in the ordinary life of highly civilized communities. He analyses and illustrates such common vices as anger, avarice, envy, hate, flattery;<sup>1</sup> he penetrates and exposes such ordinary failings as garrulity, *gaucherie*, personal extravagance, and interfering curiosity.<sup>2</sup> His sympathetic pen, as of one who knows the value of such things, depicts with rare charm the loveliness of friendship, and of affection for brother, child, and wife; while he applies a more religious consolation to those who are suffering under the bitterness of exile, the sadness of bereavement by death.<sup>3</sup> To connect Plutarch's Religion with his Ethics at all these points of contact

<sup>1</sup> See the "*De cohibenda ira*," "*de cupiditate divitiarum*," "*de invidia et odio*," "*de adulate et amico*."

<sup>2</sup> "*De garrulitate*," "*de vitioso pudore*," "*de vitando aere alieno*," "*de curiositate*."

<sup>3</sup> "*De amicorum multitudine*," and "*de adulate et amico*"; "*de fraterno amore*," "*de amore prolis*"; "*conjugalia præcepta*," "*de exilio*," "*consolatio ad uxorem*," "*consolatio ad Apollonium*." ("I can easily believe," says Emerson, "that an anxious soul may find in Plutarch's 'Letter to his Wife Timoxena,' a more sweet and reassuring argument on the immortality than in the Phædo of Plato.")

would carry us beyond the natural limits of our present aim.<sup>1</sup> As an illustration of his method as operating in this direction, we may recall how intimately Plutarch's conception of the Divine Nature is interwoven with his ethical aim in face of so serious a moral evil as Superstition. We may also add that he is consistent with himself in constructing no scientifically accurate system of Ethics any more than he maintains a dialectically impeccable scheme of Theology. He criticizes the ethical results attained by various Schools of Philosophy, and selects from this one and that one such elements as promise to give greater clearness and strength to his own convictions.<sup>2</sup> He quotes Plato and Aristotle to show that Reason and Passion are both necessary elements in the production of practical virtue. Superior power as Reason is in the constitution of man, she cannot act by herself towards the accomplishment of her own virtuous aims. Although he refuses to agree with Aristotle that all Virtue is a mean between two extremes, since the virtue of Intelligence as employed, for example, in the contemplation of a mathematical problem, being an activity of the pure and dispassionate part of the soul, needs no admixture of the unreasoning element to make it effective; he yet insists that the virtues of practical life demand for their realization the instrumental agency of the passions, and are thus, in effect, a mean, correcting excess or

<sup>1</sup> Zeller says that "the most characteristic mark of the Plutarchian Ethics is their connexion with religion."—(*Greek Philosophy*, translated by Alleyne and Abbott.)

<sup>2</sup> *De Virtute Morali*, 440 E.

defect of either of the co-operating agencies.<sup>1</sup> Referring to a favourite illustration, he maintains that the passions are not to be uprooted and destroyed as Lycurgus uprooted and destroyed the vineyards of Thracia, but are to be treated with the fostering gentleness of a god who would prune the wild, trim the rank, and carefully cultivate the healthy and productive portions of the plant.<sup>2</sup> If we wish to avoid drunkenness we need not throw our wine away; we must temper it with water. In like manner, Reason will not act "by harsh and obstinate methods, but by gentle means, which convey persuasion and secure submission more effectively than any sort of compulsion."<sup>3</sup> It is quite in harmony with this essentially practical view of life that he holds that Virtue can be taught, and that it is through the persuasion, and by the guidance, of Reason and Philosophy that a happy life can be secured, inasmuch as their efforts are directed at counterbalancing the exaggerated picture which passion draws of all the circumstances of life, whether they are fortunate or the reverse.<sup>4</sup> It is this principle which he applies to the discussion of topics of practical morality, as he applies it to the discussion of questions of Religion. The practice of the virtues based upon this principle is most vividly exhibited in his "Symposiacs," a work which is of considerable value for the light it throws upon the family and private

<sup>1</sup> 444 C, D. (Cf. 451.)

<sup>2</sup> 444 D. Cf. *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat*, 15 E.

<sup>3</sup> 445 C.

<sup>4</sup> "An virtus doceri possit," "de virtute et vitio," 101, C, D.

habits of the Græco-Roman empire of that age, but which is chiefly interesting because it shows to what an extent the simple and humane moralities of Epicureanism had permeated Society, and brought a calm and gentle happiness in their train.

It may be admitted that the positive additions made by Plutarch to the intellectual and moral wealth of his age were small and unimportant. He made no great discoveries in any of the great branches of philosophical activity which had so long been the special pride and prerogative of the Hellenic Race. There was not a tendency of Greek Philosophy with whose history and results he was not familiarly acquainted; there was not a School from which he did not borrow something for introduction into the texture of his own thought. It is in this sense that he is, as he has been called, an Eclectic; but his teaching surrounds his appropriated thoughts with none of the weakness so often attaching to great and original utterances when torn out of the systems in which they were originally embodied. Nor was his Eclecticism that spurious Eclecticism of the later Platonists, which imagined it had harmonized discordant systems when it had tied them together with the withes of an artificial classification. Plutarch's Eclecticism was unified by the Ethical aim which constantly inspired his choice, and gave to old sayings of philosophers, old lines of verse, old notions of the people, a new and richer significance in his application of them to the uses of practical life. Thus, if Plutarch did not add to the gathered wealth of Hellas, he taught his countrymen new ways of passing their ancient acquisitions into the

currency. There are periods in the intellectual and moral progress of humanity when the world is exhausted with the accumulation of its riches; when its appetite for acquisition is satiated; when it needs to find what its possessions are, and how best they can be put to their legitimate uses. At these periods the cultivation of a mental attitude is of greater service to humanity than the accumulation of mental stores. Plutarch came at such a period in the history of the Hellenic race; and we, who are once again beginning to recognize that the end of education should not be the mere accumulation of facts, but rather the strengthening of the intellect and the formation of the character, can properly estimate the value of the work accomplished by one who, on the side of intellect, inculcated the necessity of sympathetically watching for signs of a rational basis in beliefs however *primâ facie* strange and abhorrent, and on the side of character, that a man could become virtuous by learning what his faults were, and endeavouring to check them by practice and habit. In him Religion and Philosophy went hand in hand, operating on the same body of truth, and directing their energies to the realization of the same end. That rational influence which we saw working in the sphere of early Roman Religion: which subsequently gave Roman Morality a source of inspiration in Greek Philosophy: which associated Greek Religion and Greek Philosophy as factors in Ethics, until the latter became the predominating power: this influence had its final classical expression in Plutarch and in the other thinkers and workers of his epoch and that immediately succeeding, in Seneca, in Dion, in Marcus

Aurelius. These men avoided extravagance in Religion, as they avoided it in their philosophical studies and in the practical affairs of life. They are the last legitimate outcome of the Greek spirit in Pagan times. Plutarch collected the wisdom, and fixed the emotions, of Antiquity, in a manner which the best men of many Christian ages have found efficacious for goodness. In his own more immediate age his spirit predominated for a century, and was then absorbed to form a thin vein of common sense in that mingled mass of Oriental mystery and Hellenic metaphysics which was known as Neo-Platonism.<sup>1</sup>

Neo-Platonism, which claimed to represent the perfect harmony of Religion and Philosophy, substantiated its claim by annihilating the historic foundations of both, and by thus compelling Christianity to dispense with the accumulated wisdom of ages in its

<sup>1</sup> Trench follows Zeller in regarding Plutarch as a forerunner of the Neo-Platonists:—"Plutarch was a Platonist, with an oriental tinge, and thus a forerunner of the new Platonists, who ever regarded him with the highest honour. Their proper founder, indeed, he, more than any other man, deserves to be called, though clear of many of the unhealthy excesses into which, at a later date, many of them ran" (Trench, p. 90). We hope our pages have done something towards putting Plutarch in a different light from that which surrounds him here. As a matter of fact, did the "new Platonists regard him ever with the highest honour?" The testimony of Eunapius we have already quoted (p. 67, note). Himerius is equally laudatory. "Plutarch, who is the source of all the instruction you convey."—*Eclogæ*, vii. 4. "I weep for one who, I fondly hoped, would be gifted with speech excelling Minucianus in force, Nicagoras in stateliness, Plutarch in sweetness" (*Orat.* xliii. 21—Monody on his son's death). But this is rather late in the history of Neo-Platonism. What about Plotinus, and Porphyry, and Proclus? Trench gives no references in proof of his statement, and we have been unable to find any.

reorganization of human relationships with the eternal. In Plutarch's teaching, each element of the combination was at once assisted and restrained by the other, and the fusion was natural and effective. In Neo-Platonism, Reason, the principle of Philosophy, and Emotion, the inspiration of Religion, were each carried to an impossible extent of extravagance; and it was only the existence of the two elements in the minds of a few strenuous and original characters, who were assisted in their attempts at unity by the refinements of an ultra-Platonic Dialectic, which secured even the appearance of harmony between the discrepant conceptions which they borrowed from various differing and even mutually hostile schools. Even in Plato the conspicuousness of the Ethical element compensates to some extent for the abstractness of his conception of the Deity. But Neo-Platonism forced the idealism of Plato to a more extravagant metaphysic; and, although upon Dialectics the rational part of their doctrine was nominally based, the abstractness of its processes lent itself to mysticism as effectively as the purely religious element which lost itself in the vagaries of Oriental rapture, and debased itself by its miraculous methods of intercourse with the spiritual world. Reason, in the pursuit of the One, was attenuated to Mathematics. Mathematics, having arrived at the conception of the One, and finding it without any qualities, gave way to the raptures of the "perfect vision."

How far this twofold extravagance was due to the personality of the founders of the new System, and how far to its express object of rivalling Christianity, is a



doubtful problem. Maximus was a Tyrian; Numenius came from Apamea in Syria; Ammonius Saccas, the first great Neo-Platonist, was of Alexandria. Plotinus came from Lycopolis in Egypt, and was perhaps a Copt; Porphyry and Iamblichus were Syrians. Plutarch, as Bishop Theodoret said, was a Hellene of the Hellenes.<sup>1</sup> But the necessity of competing with the rising Faith doubtless operated very strongly in developing the mystical tendencies always tacitly inherent in Platonism, and proclaimed by the Neo-Platonists at the very commencement. This rivalry emphasized that out-Platonizing of Plato which culminated in the Alexandrian Trinity, and that competition with the Christian miracles which issued in the triple folly of Magic, Theurgy, and Theosophy. Plutarch, knowing that the necessity of confuting an adversary is liable to cause exaggeration and distortion, removed his Epicurean from the scene when he wished to discuss the providential dispensation of human affairs. The circumstances of his time, and the bent of his own character, which inclined him to seek points of agreement rather than to emphasize points of difference, saved him from

<sup>1</sup> Theodoretus: *De Oraculis*, 951.—“*Plutarch of Chæronea, a man who was not Hebrew, but Greek—Greek by birth and in language, and enslaved to Greek ideas.*” Cf. MOMMSEN: *The Provinces, from Cæsar to Diocletian*, Lib. viii. cap. vii.—“*In this Chæroneau the contrast between the Hellenes and the Hellenized found expression; such a type of Greek life was not possible in Smyrna or in Antioch; it belonged to the soil like the honey of Hymettus. There were men enough of more powerful talents and of deeper natures, but hardly any second author has known how, in so happy a measure, to reconcile himself serenely to necessity, and how to impress upon his writings the stamp of his tranquillity of spirit, and of his blessedness of life.*”

the prejudices of the *odium theologicum*. But in the third century Christianity could not be disposed of by contemptuous phrases, or equally contemptuous silence. The Neo-Platonists came into direct contact with the new Religion, both in its literature and in its practice. Ammonius Saccas, the teacher who satisfied all the yearning aspirations of Plotinus, had been a Christian in the days when he was young and carried a porter's knot on the quays.<sup>1</sup> Porphyry informs us that he had met Origen, and Socrates, the Church historian, asserts that Porphyry had himself been a Christian. The evidence of Bishop Theodoret, which cannot be accepted as regards Plutarch, may easily be admitted as regards Plotinus.<sup>2</sup> Porphyry wrote fifteen books against the Christians, which were publicly burned by Theodosius 200 years later. He demonstrated that the prophecies of Daniel were composed after the event, and in the Third Book of his *Collection of Oracles*, he devotes a chapter to "the foolishness of the Christians," and finds a place for Christ in his lowest rank of supernatural beings. Plutarch's thoughts were not disturbed either by anti-Christian polemic, or by the necessity of finding a place for Christ in his spiritual world.

The modifications which these influences wrought

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bigg calls him a renegade, as the Church has called Julian an apostate. A comment of M. Martha's on this uncharitable practice is worthy of frequent repetition:—"Ainsi donc, que l'on donne à Julien tous les noms qu'il plaira, qu'on l'appelle insensé, fanatique, mais qu'on cesse de lui infliger durement ce nom d'apostat, de peur qu'un historien, trop touché de ses malheurs, ne s'avise un jour de prouver que l'apostasie était excusable." ("Un chrétien devenu païen"—*Etudes Morales*.)

<sup>2</sup> See note, p. 45.

in that body of Hellenic wisdom which had been the material of Plutarch's work were most conspicuous in the Theology and Dæmonology of the Neo-Platonists. Plutarch had been content to state the Unity, Eternity, Absoluteness of God. He needed such a conception to make the world intelligible; but he defined his conception with a rare simplicity which satisfies the practical mind as well as meets the essential requirements of Philosophy. But the Neo-Platonist theology refines and subdivides and abstracts to an extent which puzzles and bewilders its most earnest students, and removes God infinitely further from mankind than even the Ideas of Plato are removed. "According to Plotinus, God is Goodness without Love. Man may love God, but God cannot love man." Even the "Divine Soul," the third Hypostasis of the Neo-Platonist Trinity, that which lies nearest the comprehension of the common intellect, "is of little intellectual or religious significance in the mind of Plotinus." Dogmatism would be unbecoming on a subject where Kirchner and Zeller are at variance, and where the French lucidity of Vacherot and Saisset casts little more light than the close and careful analysis of Dr. Bigg.<sup>1</sup> But it is necessary to a full

<sup>1</sup> Though having also carefully studied both Zeller and Vacherot (ZELLER: *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, vol. iii.; VACHEROT: *Histoire critique de l'École d'Alexandrie*), we have specially used for the purposes of the text the close analysis of the various aspects of Neo-Platonism presented by Dr. Bigg in his "Neo-Platonism," and the interesting account given by M. Saisset in his article "De l'École d'Alexandrie," written for the "Revue des Deux Mondes," of September, 1844, as a review of Jules Simon's work on the Alexandrian School.—For the Neo-Platonist Dæmonology we have largely consulted Wolff.

understanding of Plutarch's position to consider his relation to his successors as well as to his predecessors, and we are therefore compelled to a brief analysis of the Neo-Platonic Theology and Dæmonology, putting ourselves under more competent guidance than we can ourselves hope to supply. "The Supreme Cause," says Dr. Bigg, "God, in the proper sense of the word, . . . embraces in Himself a unity of Three Hypostases. . . . Hypostasis signifies the underlying cause of the phenomenal manifestation. Hence it can be applied to all three Persons of the Platonic Trinity, while Being could only be used of the second and third.—Each Hypostasis is a person, but a purely intellectual person. All three are one, like three mutually enfolding thoughts, and where one is there is the All in the fullness of its power. All are eternal, but the second is inferior to the first, because 'begotten,' and the third to the second, for the same reason." "God," says M. Saisset, "is three-fold, and yet a whole. The divine nature, conceived as absolutely simple, admits of division; at the pinnacle of the scale soars Unity; beneath it Intelligence, identical with Being, or the Logos; in the third rank, the Universal Soul, or the Spirit. We have not here three gods, but three hypostases of the same God. An Hypostasis is not a substance, it is not an attribute, it is not a mode, it is not a relation. Unity is above Intelligence and Being, it is above Reason; it is incomprehensible and ineffable; without Intelligence itself, it generates Intelligence; it gives birth to Being, and is not itself Being. Intelligence, in its turn, without motion or activity as it is, produces the Soul, which is

the principle of activity and motion. God conceived as a perfect type of which the human soul is a copy, the infinite and universal Soul, is the third hypostasis. God conceived as absolute, eternal, simple, motionless Thought, superior to space and time, is the second hypostasis." But soul and thought and being are terms relative to the human mind. "God is above thought, above Being: He is, therefore, indivisible and inconceivable. He is the One, the Good, grasped by Ecstasy. This is the third hypostasis." M. Saisset continues: "Such are the three terms which compose this obscure and profound Trinity. Human reason, reason still imperfectly free from the meshes of sense, stops with the conception of the Universal Soul, the active principle of motion; the reason of the Philosophers rises higher, to the Motionless Intelligence, the depository of the essences and types of all things; it is love and ecstasy alone that can carry us to the conception of Absolute Unity."

Almost the only thing that is easy to understand in the Neo-Platonic theology is its adoption of the conceptions of various schools of Greek Philosophy. This Eclecticism has a superficial resemblance to that of Plutarch: but it is Eclecticism formally enumerating and classifying its results, not harmonizing and unifying them. The third hypostasis is the λόγος ὁ ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ of the Stoics; the second hypostasis is the Intelligence, the eternal, absolute, and motionless Νοῦς of Aristotle, while the first has striking affinities with the Pythagorean One. But, by a forced process of interpretation, all the three Hypostases are found in Plato. In

the "Laws" and the "Phædrus" Plato stopped with the conception of the Third Hypostasis, the World Soul, the origin and cause of movement in the created world, which in the "Timæus" is represented as a creation of the Demiurgus. In the God of the "Banquet" and the "Republic," who is the source of Being and Intelligence, Plato was anticipating the Second Hypostasis; while in the "Parmenides" he describes the First Hypostasis, that absolute Unity which has no relation with either Being or Reason, or with anything else either actual or conceivable. The placing of these three different conceptions of God in three different compartments of thought, in three different Scales of Existence, is not to unify them: nor is that process made any the more feasible by the invention of the term Emanation, by which the Second Hypostasis proceeds from the First, and the Third from the Second.<sup>1</sup> Plutarch's Eclecticism is based upon the needs of the moral life: that of Neo-Platonism was actuated by a desire for formal harmony, and was steeped in a mysticism which operated in drawing the soul away from action to a divine contemplation. The Perfect Vision, the revelation of the First Hypostasis, is the culmination of the soul's progress. The Second and Third Hypostases,

<sup>1</sup> "In so far as the Deity is the original force, it must create everything. But as it is raised above everything in its nature, and needs nothing external, it cannot communicate itself substantially to another, nor make the creation of another its object. Creation cannot, as with the Stoics, be regarded as the communication of the Divine Nature, as a partial transference of it into the derivative creature; nor can it be conceived as an act of will. But Plotinus cannot succeed in uniting these determinations in a clear and consistent conception. He has recourse, therefore, to metaphors."—ZELLER.

being subject to relations and conditions, are susceptible of approach through the Reason; but the First Hypostasis, being unconditioned, cannot be grasped by Reason, which moves in the sphere of conditions and relations. Hence, the Perfect Vision repudiates that Reason of which it is the culmination: "for thought is a kind of movement, but in the Vision is no movement." In the Revelation of the Perfect Vision, as well as in the formal development of the Trinity, we see the influence of a desire to compete with Christianity.

This ecstatic contemplation of the highest conception of their Theology exhibited a mysticism which had a more degrading side, one which is specially conspicuous in the Neo-Platonist Dæmonology. There also the Mysticism is in combination with refinements of logical definition. Plotinus takes the floating conceptions of Dæmonology and makes them submit to a rigid classification in formal harmony with the tripartite character of the Divine Nature. Divine Powers he divides into three classes. The first Power is that which dwells in the world of Ideas, apart from the perception of man and in close touch with the Divine Intelligence. The next is the race of visible Gods, the Stars, Nature, Earth: the third is that of the Dæmons. The Dæmons are again subdivided into three ranks: Gods, Loves, and Dæmons. Porphyry insists on a similar classification. In one of the oracles collected by him and preserved by Eusebius, the beings of the Dæmonic hierarchy are classified with equal strictness, but with greater simplicity than that shown by

Plotinus. His highest rank corresponds with that of his Master. The second rank corresponds with Plotinus' third class, but does not here undergo a tripartite subdivision. His third class, unlike the first, which moves in the presence of God, is far away from communion with Him, and corresponds with the created and visible gods in the second class of Plotinus. He is not always faithful to this simplicity. In the third book of his "De Philosophia ex Oraculis" he admits another class of Dæmons called Heroes, admitting Christ to their number. Elsewhere he divides the Dæmons into archangels, angels, and dæmons. Proclus will have six ranks: and Dionysius the Areopagite, who classified this Dæmonlore for the Christian Church, will have nine. We can equally discern here the operation of that spurious Eclecticism which fits its thefts into the clamps of a preconceived system. The simple notion of Beings intermediate between God and Man, breaking the distance between the two by participating in the Divine and Human nature, is rendered absurd and impossible by its compulsory harmonizing with the demand of the Alexandrine Trinity. Plotinus thought he had made Aristotle agree with Plato, but the harmony was of the same character as that secured between Christianity and Neo-Platonism by making the Christian God-man a Neo-Platonist Dæmon. The Ideas of Plato, the *νόησις τῆς νοήσεως* of Aristotle, and the World Soul of the Stoics: how easy to reconcile these different conceptions of the Deity, if they are placed in different spheres of thought, and connected by the mysterious process of Emanation! The Neo-



Platonist school was damned by its fatal proclivity for trinities. There were three kinds of gods, three kinds of dæmons, and three methods of approach to the supernatural world. These three methods were of course systematic, almost scientific, constructions. Before Porphyry there were Magic (*γοητεία*) and Theosophy (*θεοσοφία*). That philosopher introduced a third and middle term Theurgy (*θειουργία*). Theosophy was the process by which the philosopher attained the Perfect Vision, arrived at the consummation of *ἔνωσις*. Magic was the process by which the evil Dæmons, whom Porphyry puts under the dominion of Serapis and Hecate, were approached. The object of Theurgy was communion with the good Dæmons. Aided by Oriental fervour, we know the absurdities which these systems developed in the world of practice. But the development of these sciences on the theoretical side was enough to drag them down with their own weight. In Proclus the practical and the theoretic sides of Neo-Platonism are both driven to a culmination which passes the intelligence of humanity. "From the Incommunicable One spring—one knows not how—a host of Henads. Each has the character of absolute being, yet each has distinctive qualities. The Henads run down in long lines; the Intelligible are followed by the Intellectual, these by the Overworldly, these again by the Inworldly. From the Intelligible springs the family of Being, from the Intellectual that of Intelligence, from the Overworldly that of Soul, from the Inworldly that of Nature. These principal 'chains' are mainly like brooks falling into one river; that which has a body may also have a soul and an

intelligence ; but they subdivide as they go down, there are different kinds of intelligences and different kinds of souls dependent on them, so that the river is perpetually branching off into other rivers. Yet, further, the principal chains have to be multiplied by the number of Henads, for each chain is a family depending on a God, and exhibiting throughout the characteristic of that God. It includes not only Angels, Heroes, Demons, and human beings, but stones, plants, animals, which bear the signature of the deity, and have sacramental virtues with respect to him."

If Proclus believed all this, we can understand his being a victim to the grossest superstition, both in belief and in practice. In the life of Proclus, second Aristotle as he was, we see the natural culmination of that excess of Reason and that exaggeration of Emotion which had marked the Neo-Platonic attitude from the beginning. When Justinian closed the School of Athens in the Sixth Century its professors, the last representatives of Neo-Platonism, were being hunted down as practitioners of magic of the meanest description. The "De Superstitione" of Plutarch marked a stage in the history of the human mind which the Neo-Platonists left behind, and which the European world has only just attained again after centuries of horrible crimes born of a sincere belief in witchcraft.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "In the year 1722, a Sheriff-depute of Sutherland, Captain David Ross, of Littledean, took it upon him to pronounce the last sentence of death for witchcraft which was ever passed in Scotland. The victim was an insane old woman who had so little idea of her situation as to rejoice at the sight of the fire which was destined to consume her."—Sir W. Scott : "*Demonology and Witchcraft*," cap. 9.

It is a natural subject of speculation to those who are interested in the history of this period, how far the character of modern civilization would have been modified, had not the free and tolerant traditions of Greece been clamped into the systematized absurdities of Neo-Platonism. The struggle for social and political ascendancy reacted also upon the liberal and gentle spirit of the Man of Nazareth, whose teachings were thus embedded in a theological formalism which robbed them of half their meaning and all their inspiration. Christianity fought the enemy with its own weapons, and the scientific terminology of the Neo-Platonists gave definiteness to the Christian conception of the Trinity and the celestial hierarchy, while the whole system of Dæmonology, which has played so sinister a part in modern civilization, was to be found entire in the works of Porphyry and Proclus. It has even been asserted that the chief merit of the Neo-Platonist school lay in the fact that it prepared the educated circles of Pagan Society for the acceptance of the Gospel, and laid the foundations for the construction of Christian Theology.<sup>1</sup> But it is conceivable that had Christianity come face to face with the calm rationalism and gentle piety of Pagan Religion and Philosophy as they appear in Plutarch, more of the spirit, if less of the form, of the old tradition might have passed into the teachings of the new Faith. We should, perhaps, then have been spared the martyrdom of Christians at the hands of Christians, the Inquisition, and the whole terrible consequences of the *Odium Theologicum*.

<sup>1</sup> See Volkmann, vol. i. cap. i.

Plutarch suggested a frame of mind rather than inculcated a body of dogma, and in that he resembled the founder of Christianity a great deal more than the most honoured theologians of the Church have done. But Paganism girt on its armour in direct hostility to the new Creed, and from these clenched antagonisms sprang that accentuation of points of difference which broke the continuity of civilization, and separated the modern from the classical world by a chasm which the efforts of four centuries have not succeeded in bridging over.<sup>1</sup> Is it not possible that Paganism, which out of the multitude of separate gods had evolved the idea of the One Pure and Perfect Deity, might also, out of the many-sided activities of the half-human, half-divine Dæmons, have arrived at the belief in a single mediatory power, and, with a perception unblinded by polemic bitterness, have been prepared to merge this conception in the Divine Man of the Catholic Church?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. MARTHA, "Un chrétien devenu païen," in his *Études Morales*: "La philosophie prit tout à coup des allures mystiques et inspirées, elle entourait de savantes ténèbres la claire mythologie compromise par sa clarté; à ses explications symboliques elle mêla les pratiques mystérieuses des cultes orientaux, à sa théologie subtile et confuse les redoutables secrets de la magie: elle eut ses initiations clandestines et terribles, ses enthousiasmes extatiques, ses vertus nouvelles souvent empruntées au christianisme, ses bonnes œuvres, ses miracles même. En un mot, elle devint la théurgie, cet art sublime et suspect qui prétend pouvoir évoquer Dieu sur la terre et dans les âmes. Le christianisme rencontra donc non plus un culte suranné, facile à renverser, mais une religion vivante, puisant son énergie dans sa défaite, défendu par des fanatiques savants dont le sombre ferveur et l'éloquence illuminée étaient capables d'entraîner aussi une armée de prosélytes.

<sup>2</sup> As it was, the later Neo-Platonists had to content themselves

But though the spirit of Plutarch was not destined in this way to pass directly on to the believer in Christianity, the time was to come when, among the best and purest adherents of that faith, his teachings would be regarded as efficacious for the sincerest goodness. "The works of Jeremy Taylor," says Archbishop Trench, "contain no less than two hundred and fifty-six allusions or direct references made by him to the writings of Plutarch." But direct indebtedness of this kind does not necessarily imply similarity of spirit, and fortunately the mental attitude of Plutarch is one which appears essential to human progress, and does not depend upon the continuity of a tradition. "Plutarch," wrote Emerson, "will be perpetually rediscovered from time to time as long as books last."<sup>1</sup> He will be perpetually rediscovered because there will be a perpetually recurring necessity to look at life from his point of view. But he will be perpetually rediscovered because he is perpetually allowed to disappear. There will always be those among the disciples of Religion and the followers of Science who maintain that there can be no truce, no toleration between the two, and the history of the human race will be formulated into an indictment against the Superstition of the one, and the most terrible anathemas of the Church will be fulminated against the Atheism of the other. Meanwhile those who take a middle course with Apollonius of Tyana, instead of Jesus Christ.—"Apollonius of Tyana, who was no longer a mere philosopher, but a being half-human, half-divine" (ERNAPIUS, *op. cit.*).

<sup>1</sup> See Emerson's "Introduction" to Goodwin's translation of the "Morals."

and recognize the "immortal vitality of Philosophy and the eternal necessity of Religion,"<sup>1</sup> and would leave the individual mind to select its appropriate support from the dogmas of the one or the discoveries of the other, without dressing Philosophy in the fantastic garb of Religion, as the Neo-Platonists did, or turning Religion into a matter of rules and regulations as the Clerical Rationalists of the Eighteenth Century did, will be regarded by the extremists as traitors at once to the cause of progress and the cause of morality, and will be placed among the—

"Anime triste di coloro  
 Che visser senza infamia, e senza lodo.  
 Mischiate sono a quel cattivo coro  
 Degli Angeli, che non furon ribelli  
 Nè fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sè foro." <sup>2</sup>

But so long as human nature is composite: so long as it is compelled to feel an interest in the home joys of earth, and is endowed with an imagination which soars beyond the actual realities of life to the possibilities that lie beyond its limits: so long will the spirit which dominated Plutarch operate in inducing men "to borrow Reason from Philosophy, making it their Mystagogue to Religion:" so long will it be recognized that the most subtle Dialectic and the most spiritualized rapture are dangerous at once to Reason and Religion unless they are brought into contact with the necessities of daily life, and made to subserve the ends of practical goodness in the sphere of man's natural and immediate interests. This recognition of Ethics as the dominating

<sup>1</sup> Saissset, *op. cit.*

DANTE: *Inferno*, Canto iii.

end of all Thought and Emotion will lead men on that firm path of reasonable happiness which, in Plutarch's own favourite expression, lies midway between the headlong precipice of Atheism and the engulfing quagmire of Superstition.

FINIS.









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