

GILBERT MURRAY

# FIVE STAGES OF GREEK RELIGION





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## I. SATURNIA REGNA

Many persons who are quite prepared to admit the importance to the world of Greek poetry, Greek art, and Greek philosophy, may still feel it rather a paradox to be told that Greek religion specially repays our study at the present day. Greek religion, associated with a romantic, trivial, and not very edifying mythology, has generally seemed one of the weakest spots in the armour of those giants of the old world. Yet I will venture to make for Greek religion almost as great a claim as for the thought and the literature, not only because the whole mass of it is shot through by those strange lights of feeling and imagination, and the details of it constantly wrought into beauty by that instinctive sense of artistic form, which we specially associate with Classical Greece, but also for two definite historical reasons. In the first place, the student of that dark and fascinating department of the human mind which we may call Religious Origins, will find in Greece an extraordinary mass of material belonging to a very early date. For detail and variety the primitive Greek evidence has no equal. And, secondly, in this department as in others, ancient Greece has the triumphant if tragic distinction of beginning at the very bottom and struggling, however precariously, to the very summits. There is hardly any horror of primitive superstition of which we cannot find some distant traces in our Greek record. There is hardly any height of spiritual thought attained in the world that has not its archetype or its



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plored; we understand the causes at work; and we are not bewildered by the problems. That is the domain of positive knowledge. But all round us on every side there is an uncharted region, just fragments of the fringe of it explored, and those imperfectly; it is with this that religion deals. And secondly we may note that religion deals with its own province not tentatively, by the normal methods of patient intellectual research, but directly, and by methods of emotion or sub-conscious apprehension. Agriculture, for instance, used to be entirely a question of religion; now it is almost entirely a question of science. In antiquity, if a field was barren, the owner of it would probably assume that the barrenness was due to "pollution," or offence somewhere. He would run through all his own possible offences, or at any rate those of his neighbours and ancestors, and when he eventually decided the cause of the trouble, the steps that he would take would all be of a kind calculated not to affect the chemical constitution of the soil, but to satisfy his own emotions of guilt and terror, or the imaginary emotions of the imaginary being he had offended. A modern man in the same predicament would probably not think of religion at all, at any rate in the earlier stages; he would say it was a case for deeper ploughing or for basic slag. Later on, if disaster followed disaster till he began to feel himself a marked man, even the average modern would, I think, begin instinctively to reflect upon his sins. A third characteristic flows from the first. The uncharted region surrounds us on every side and is apparently infinite; consequently, when once the things of the uncharted region are admitted as factors in our ordinary conduct of life they are apt to be infinite factors, overruling and swamping all others. The thing that religion forbids is a thing never to be



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The things that have misled us moderns in our efforts towards understanding the primitive stage in Greek religion have been first the widespread and almost ineradicable error of treating Homer as primitive, and more generally our unconscious insistence on starting with the notion of "Gods." Mr. Hartland, in his address as president of one of the sections of the International Congress of Religions at Oxford,<sup>3</sup> dwelt on the significant fact about savage religions that wherever the word "God" is used our trustiest witnesses tend to contradict one another. Among the best observers of the Arunta tribes, for instance, some hold that they have no conception of God, others that they are constantly thinking about God. The truth is that this idea of a god far away in the sky—I do not say merely a First Cause who is "without body parts or passions," but almost any being that we should naturally call a "god"—is an idea not easy for primitive man to grasp. It is a subtle and rarefied idea, saturated with ages of philosophy and speculation. And we must always remember that one of the chief religions of the world, Buddhism, has risen to great moral and intellectual heights without using the conception of God at all; in his stead it has Dharma, the Eternal Law.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from some few philosophers, both Christian and Moslem, the gods of the ordinary man have as a rule been as a matter of course anthropomorphic. Men did not take the trouble to try to conceive them otherwise. In many cases they have had the actual bodily shape of man; in almost all they have possessed—of course in their highest development—his mind

<sup>3</sup>*Transactions of the Third International Congress of Religions*, Oxford, 1908, pp. 26-7.

<sup>4</sup>*The Buddhist Dharma*, by Mrs. Rhys Davids.





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our eyes; we were not able to see the half-lit regions behind them, the dark primeval tangle of desires and fears and dreams from which they drew their vitality. The surest test to apply in this question is the evidence of actual cult. Miss Harrison has here shown us the right method, and following her we will begin with the three great festivals of Athens, the Diasia, the Thesmophoria, and the Anthesteria.<sup>11</sup>

The Diasia was said to be the chief festival of Zeus, the central figure of the Olympians, though our authorities generally add an epithet to him, and call him Zeus Meilichios, Zeus of Placation. A god with an "epithet" is always suspicious, like a human being with an "alias." Miss Harrison's examination (*Prolegomena*, pp. 28ff.) shows that in the rites Zeus has no place at all. Meilichios from the beginning has a fairly secure one. On some of the reliefs Meilichios appears not as a god, but as an enormous bearded snake, a well-known representation of underworld powers or dead ancestors. Sometimes the great snake is alone; sometimes he rises gigantic above the small human worshippers approaching him. And then, in certain reliefs, his old barbaric presence vanishes, and we have instead a benevolent and human father of gods and men, trying, as Miss Harrison somewhere expresses it, to look as if he had been there all the time.

There was a sacrifice at the Diasia, but it was not a sacrifice given to Zeus. To Zeus and all the heavenly gods men gave sacrifice in the form of a feast, in which the god had his portion and the worshippers theirs. The two parties cemented their friendship and feasted happily together. But the sacrifice at the Diasia was

<sup>11</sup>See J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena*, i, ii, iv; Mommsen, *Feste der Stadt Athen*, 1898, pp. 308-22 (Thesmophoria), 384-404 (Anthesteria), 421-6 (Diasia). See also Pauly Wissowa, s.v.



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Sacred King, and the imaginary god.<sup>18</sup> Whatever reality there ever was in the ceremony has apparently by classical times faded away. But the place where the god received his bride is curious. It was called the Boukolion, or Bull's Shed. It was not originally the home of an anthropomorphic god, but of a divine animal.

Thus in each of these great festivals we find that the Olympian gods vanish away, and we are left with three things only: first, with an atmosphere of religious dread; second, with a whole sequence of magical ceremonies which, in two at least of the three cases,<sup>19</sup> produce a kind of strange personal emanation of themselves, the Appeasements producing Meilichios, the Charm-bearings Thesmophoros; and thirdly, with a divine or sacred animal. In the Diasia we find the

<sup>18</sup>Dr. Frazer, *The Magic Art*, ii. 137, thinks it not certain that the γάμος took place during the Anthesteria, at the same time as the oath of the γεραιαί. Without the γάμος, however, it is hard to see what the βασίλιννα and γεραιαί had to do in the festival; and this is the view of Mommsen, *Feste der Stadt Athen*, pp. 391-3; Gruppe in Iwan Müller, *Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte*, i. 33; Farnell, *Cults*, v. 217.

<sup>19</sup>One might perhaps say, in all three. Ἀνθίστηρος τοῦ Πυθοχρηστοῦ κοινόν is the name of a society of worshippers in the island of Thera, *I. G. I.* iii. 329. This gives a god Anthister, who is clearly identified with Dionysus, and seems to be a projection of a feast Anthisteria = Anthesteria. The inscription is of the second century B.C. and it seems likely that Anthister-Anthisteria, with their clear derivation from ἀνθίζειν, are corruptions of the earlier and difficult forms Ἀνθέστηρ-Ἀνθεστήρια. It is noteworthy that Thera, an island lying rather outside the main channels of civilization, kept up throughout its history a tendency to treat the "epithet" as a full person. Hikesios and Koures come very early; also Polieus and Stoichaios without the name Zeus; Delphinios, Karneios, Aiglatas, and Aguius without Apollo.

See Hiller von Gaertringen in the *Festschrift für O. Bendorff*, p. 228. Also Nilsson, *Griechische Feste*, 1906, p. 267, n. 5.



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out of which gods are made. You devoured the holy animal to get its *mana*, its swiftness, its strength, its great endurance, just as the savage now will eat his enemy's brain or heart or hands to get some particular quality residing there. The imagination of the pre-Hellenic tribes was evidently dominated above all things by the bull, though there were other sacramental feasts too, combined with sundry horrible rendings and drinkings of raw blood. It is strange to think that even small things like kids and fawns and hares should have struck primitive man as having some uncanny vitality which he longed for, or at least some uncanny power over the weather or the crops. Yet to him it no doubt appeared obvious. Frogs, for instance, could always bring rain by croaking for it, and who can limit the powers and the knowledge of birds?<sup>27</sup>

Here comes a difficulty. If the Olympian god was not there to start with, how did he originate? We can understand—at least after a course of anthropology—this desire of primitive man to acquire for himself the superhuman forces of the bull; but how does he make the transition from the real animal to the imaginary human god? First let us remember the innate tendency of primitive man everywhere, and not especially in Greece, to imagine a personal cause, like himself in all points not otherwise specified, for every striking phenomenon. If the wind blows it is because some being more or less human, though of course superhuman, is blowing with his cheeks. If a tree is struck by lightning it is because some one has thrown his battle-axe at it. In some Australian tribes there is no

<sup>27</sup>See Aristophanes' *Birds*, e. g. 685–736: cf. the practice of augury from birds, and the art-types of Winged Kêres, Victories and Angels.



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possesses the god's sacred instruments, his *ιερὰ* or *ὄρπυια*; he knows the rules for approaching him and making prayers to him.

There is therefore a path open from the divine beast to the anthropomorphic god. From beings like Thesmophoros and Meilichios the road is of course much easier. They are already more than half anthropomorphic; they only lack the concreteness, the lucid shape and the detailed personal history of the Olympians. In this connexion we must not forget the power of hallucination, still fairly strong, as the history of religious revivals in America will bear witness,<sup>35</sup> but far stronger, of course, among the impressionable hordes of early men. "The God," says M. Doutté in his profound study of Algerian magic, "c'est le désir collectif personnifié," the collective desire projected, as it were, or personified.<sup>36</sup> Think of the gods who have appeared in great crises of battle, created sometimes by the desperate desire of men who have for years prayed to them, and who are now at the last extremity for lack of their aid, sometimes by the confused and excited remembrances of the survivors after the victory. The gods who led the Roman charge at Lake Regillus,<sup>37</sup> the gigantic figures that were seen fighting before the Greeks at Marathon,<sup>38</sup> even the celestial signs that promised Constantine victory for the cross:<sup>39</sup>—these are the effects of great emotion: we

<sup>35</sup>See *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals*, by F. M. Davenport. New York, 1906.

<sup>36</sup>E. Doutté, *Magie et religion dans l'Afrique du Nord*, 1909, p. 601.

<sup>37</sup>Cicero, *de Nat. Deorum*, ii. 2; iii. 5, 6; Florus, ii. 12.

<sup>38</sup>Plut. *Theseus*, 35; Paus. i. 32. 5. Herodotus only mentions a bearded and gigantic figure who struck Epizelos blind (vi. 117).

<sup>39</sup>Eusebius, *Vit. Constant.*, l. i, cc, 28, 29, 30; *Nazarius inter Panegy. Vet.* x. 14, 15.



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agriculture. He is not called Kourotrophos, but the Young Sun returning after winter is himself a Kouros,<sup>44</sup> and all the Kouroi have some touch of the Sun in them. The Cretan Spring-song of the Kouretes prays for νέοι πολῖται, young citizens, quite simply among the other gifts of the spring.<sup>45</sup>

This is best shown by the rites of tribal initiation, which seem normally to have formed part of the spring Drômena or sacred performances. The Kouroi, as we have said, are the initiated young men. They pass through their initiation; they become no longer παῖδες, boys, but ἄνδρες, men. The actual name Kouros is possibly connected with κείρειν, to shave,<sup>46</sup> and may mean that after this ceremony they first cut their long hair. Till then the κοῦρος is ἀκερσεκόμης—with hair unshorn. They have now open to them the two roads that belong to ἄνδρες alone: they have the work of begetting children for the tribe, and the work of killing the tribe's enemies in battle.

The classification of people according to their age is apt to be sharp and vivid in primitive communities. We, for example, think of an old man as a kind of man, and an old woman as a kind of woman; but in primitive peoples as soon as a man and woman cease to be

<sup>44</sup>*Hymn Orph.* 8, 10 ὠροτρόφε κοῦρε.

<sup>45</sup>For the order in which men generally proceed in worship, turning their attention to (1) the momentary incidents of weather, rain, sunshine, thunder, &c.; (2) the Moon; (3) the Sun and stars, see Payne, *History of the New World called America*, vol. i, p. 474, cited by Miss Harrison, *Themis*, p. 390.

<sup>46</sup>On the subject of Initiations see Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies*, New York, 1908; Schurtz, *Altersklassen und Männerbunde*, Berlin, 1902; Van Gennep, *Rites de Passage*, Paris, 1909; Nilsson, *Grundlage des Spartanischen Lebens* in *Klio* xii (1912), pp. 308–40; *Themis*, p. 337, n. 1. Since the above, Rivers, *Social Organization*, 1924.



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poet, "that there is not one empty chink into which you could push the spike of a blade of corn."<sup>54</sup>

The extraordinary security of our modern life in times of peace makes it hard for us to realize, except by a definite effort of the imagination, the constant precariousness, the frightful proximity of death, that was usual in these weak ancient communities. They were in fear of wild beasts; they were helpless against floods, helpless against pestilences. Their food depended on the crops of one tiny plot of ground; and if the Saviour was not reborn with the spring, they slowly and miserably died. And all the while they knew almost nothing of the real causes that made crops succeed or fail. They only felt sure it was somehow a matter of pollution, of unexpiated defilement. It is this state of things that explains the curious cruelty of early agricultural doings, the human sacrifices, the scapegoats, the tearing in pieces of living animals, and perhaps of living men, the steeping of the fields in blood. Like most cruelty it has its roots in terror, terror of the breach of *Tabu*—the Forbidden Thing. I will not dwell on this side of the picture: it is well enough known. But we have to remember that, like so many morbid growths of the human mind, it has its sublime side. We must not forget that the human victims were often volunteers. The records of Carthage and Jerusalem, the long list in Greek legend of princes and princesses who died for their country, tell the same story. In most human societies, savage as well as civilized, it is not hard to find men who are ready to endure death for their fellow-citizens. We need not suppose that the martyrs were always the

<sup>54</sup>Frg. Ap. Plut. *Consol. ad Apoll.* xxvi . . . ὅτι "πλείη μὲν γαῖα κακῶν πλείη δὲ θάλασσα" καὶ "τοιᾶδε θνητοῖσι κακὰ κακῶν ἀμφί τε κῆρες εἰλεῦνται, κενεὴ δ' εἰσδυσις οὐδ' ἀθέρι" (MS. αἰθέρι).





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servances without being haunted by the judgement of the Roman poet:

Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum,

and feeling with him that the lightening of this cloud, the taming of this blind dragon, must rank among the very greatest services that Hellenism wrought for mankind.



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case by the time of the Persian Wars (say 500 B.C.) all these tribes together considered themselves Hellenized, bore the name of "Hellenes," and formed a kind of unity against hordes of "barbaroi" surrounding them on every side and threatening them especially from the east.

Let us consider for a moment the dates. In political history this self-realization of the Greek tribes as Hellenes against barbarians seems to have been first felt in the Ionian settlements on the coast of Asia Minor, where the "sons of Javan" (Yawan = Ἰάων) clashed as invaders against the native Hittite and Semite. It was emphasized by a similar clash in the further colonies in Pontus and in the West. If we wish for a central moment as representing this self-realization of Greece, I should be inclined to find it in the reign of Pisistratus (560-527 B.C.) when that monarch made, as it were, the first sketch of an Athenian empire based on alliances and took over to Athens the leadership of the Ionian race.

In literature the decisive moment is clear. It came when, in Mr. Mackail's phrase, "Homer came to Hellas."<sup>7</sup> The date is apparently the same, and the influences at work are the same. It seems to have been under Pisistratus that the Homeric Poems, in some form or other, came from Ionia to be recited in a fixed order at the Panathenaic Festival, and to find a canonical form and a central home in Athens till the end of the classical period. Athens is the centre from which Homeric influence radiates over the mainland of

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intentional on the part of the later reciters, but may well come from the original sources. The compound βαρβαρόφωνοι occurs in B 867, but who knows the date of that particular line in that particular wording?

<sup>7</sup>Paper read to the Classical Association at Birmingham in 1908.



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the mountain gods of the old invading Northmen, the chieftains and princes, each with his *comitatus* or loose following of retainers and minor chieftains, who broke in upon the ordered splendours of the Aegean palaces and, still more important, on the ordered simplicity of tribal life in the pre-Hellenic villages of the mainland. Now, it is a canon of religious study that all gods reflect the social state, past or present, of their worshippers. From this point of view what appearance do the Olympians of Homer make? What are they there for? What do they do, and what are their relations one to another?

The gods of most nations claim to have created the world. The Olympians make no such claim. The most they ever did was to conquer it. Zeus and his *comitatus* conquered Cronos and his; conquered and expelled them—sent them migrating beyond the horizon, Heaven knows where. Zeus took the chief dominion and remained a permanent overlord, but he apportioned large kingdoms to his brothers Hades and Poseidon, and confirmed various of his children and followers in lesser fiefs. Apollo went off on his own adventure and conquered Delphi. Athena conquered the Giants. She gained Athens by a conquest over Poseidon, a point of which we will speak later.

And when they have conquered their kingdoms, what do they do? Do they attend to the government? Do they promote agriculture? Do they practise trades and industries? Not a bit of it. Why should they do any honest work? They find it easier to live on the revenues and blast with thunderbolts the people who do not pay. They are conquering chieftains, royal buccaneers. They fight, and feast, and play, and make music; they drink deep, and roar with laughter at the lame smith who waits on them. They are never afraid, except of



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perboreans.<sup>16</sup> He has a "sacred road" leading far into the North, along which offerings are sent back from shrine to shrine beyond the bounds of Greek knowledge. Such "sacred roads" are normally the roads by which the God himself has travelled; the offerings are sent back from the new sanctuary to the old. On the other side Apollo reaches back to an Aegean matriarchal Kouros. His home is Delos, where he has a mother, Leto, but no very visible father. He leads the ships of his islanders, sometimes in the form of a dolphin. He is no "Hellene." In the fighting at Troy he is against the Achaei: he destroys the Greek host, he champions Hector, he even slays Achilles. In the Homeric hymn to Apollo we read that when the great archer draws near to Olympus all the gods tremble and start from their seats; Leto alone, and of course Zeus, hold their ground.<sup>17</sup> What this god's original name was at Delos we cannot be sure: he has very many names and "epithets." But he early became identified with a similar god at Delphi and adopted his name, "Apollôn," or, in the Delphic and Dorian form, "Apellôn"—presumably the Kouros projected from the Dorian gatherings called "*apellae*."<sup>18</sup> As Phoibos he is a sun-god, and from classical times onward we often find him definitely identified with the Sun, a distinction which came easily to a Kouros.

In any case, and this is the important point, he is at Delos the chief god of the Ionians. The Ionians are defined by Herodotus as those tribes and cities who were sprung from Athens and kept the Apaturia. They

<sup>16</sup>Farnell, *Cults*, iv. 100-4. See, however, Gruppe, p. 107f.

<sup>17</sup>*Hymn. Ap. init.* Cf. Wilamowitz's Oxford Lecture on "Apollo" (Oxford, 1907).

<sup>18</sup>*Themis*, p. 439f. Cf. δ' Ἀγροπαῖος. Other explanations of the name in Gruppe, p. 1224f., notes.



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Panionia, and second only to Delos as a religious centre of the Ionian tribes. He has intimate relations with Attica too. Besides the ancient contest with Athena for the possession of the land, he appears as the father of Theseus, the chief Athenian hero. He is merged in other Attic heroes, like Aigeus and Erechtheus. He is the special patron of the Athenian knights. Thus his prominence in Homer is very natural.

What of Hermes? His history deserves a long monograph to itself; it is so exceptionally instructive. Originally, outside Homer, Hermes was simply an old upright stone, a pillar furnished with the regular Pelasgian sex-symbol of procreation. Set up over a tomb he is the power that generates new lives, or, in the ancient conception, brings the souls back to be born again. He is the Guide of the Dead, the Psychopompos, the divine Herald between the two worlds. If you have a message for the dead, you speak it to the Herm at the grave. This notion of Hermes as herald may have been helped by his use as a boundary-stone—the Latin *Terminus*. Your boundary-stone is your representative, the deliverer of your message, to the hostile neighbour or alien. If you wish to parley with him, you advance up to your boundary-stone. If you go, as a Herald, peacefully, into his territory, you place yourself under the protection of the same sacred stone, the last sign that remains of your own safe country. If you are killed or wronged, it is he, the immovable Watcher, who will avenge you.

Now this phallic stone post was quite unsuitable to Homer. It was not decent; it was not quite human; and every personage in Homer has to be both. In the *Iliad* Hermes is simply removed, and a beautiful creation or tradition, Iris, the rainbow-goddess, takes his place as the messenger from heaven to earth. In the



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fame and beauty and prestige. They were ready to be made "Poliouchoi," "City-holders," of any particular city, still more ready to be "Hellânioi," patrons of all Hellas.

In the working out of these three aims the Olympian religion achieved much: in all three it failed. The moral expurgation failed owing to the mere force of inertia possessed by old religious traditions and local cults. We must remember how weak any central government was in ancient civilization. The power and influence of a highly civilized society were apt to end a few miles outside its city wall. All through the backward parts of Greece obscene and cruel rites lingered on, the darker and worse the further they were removed from the full light of Hellenism.

But in this respect the Olympian Religion did not merely fail: it did worse. To make the elements of a nature-religion human is inevitably to make them vicious. There is no great moral harm in worshipping a thunder-storm, even though the lightning strikes the good and evil quite recklessly. There is no need to pretend that the Lightning is exercising a wise and righteous choice. But when once you worship an imaginary quasi-human being who throws the lightning, you are in a dilemma. Either you have to admit that you are worshipping and flattering a being with no moral sense, because he happens to be dangerous, or else you have to invent reasons for his wrath against the people who happen to be struck. And they are pretty sure to be bad reasons. The god, if personal, becomes capricious and cruel.

When the Ark of Israel was being brought back from the Philistines, the cattle slipped by the threshing floor of Nachon, and the holy object was in danger

of falling. A certain Uzzah, as we all know, sprang forward to save it and was struck dead for his pains. Now, if he was struck dead by the sheer holiness of the tabu object, the holiness stored inside it like so much electricity, his death was a misfortune, an interesting accident, and no more.<sup>41</sup> But when it is made into the deliberate act of an anthropomorphic god, who strikes a well-intentioned man dead in explosive rage for a very pardonable mistake, a dangerous element has been introduced into the ethics of that religion. A being who is the moral equal of man must not behave like a charge of dynamite.

Again, to worship emblems of fertility and generation, as was done in agricultural rites all through the Aegean area, is in itself an intelligible and not necessarily a degrading practice. But when those emblems are somehow humanized, and the result is an anthropomorphic god of enormous procreative power and innumerable amours, a religion so modified has received a death-blow. The step that was meant to soften its grossness has resulted in its moral degradation. This result was intensified by another well-meant effort at elevation. The leading tribes of central Greece were, as we have mentioned, apt to count their descent from some heroine-ancestress. Her consort was sometimes unknown and, in a matrilinear society, unimportant. Sometimes he was a local god or river. When the Olympians came to introduce some order and unity among these innumerable local gods, the original tribal ancestor tended, naturally enough, to be identified with Zeus, Apollo, or Poseidon. The unfortunate Olympians, whose system really aimed at purer morals and condemned polygamy and polyandry, are left with

<sup>41</sup>Sam. vi. 6. See S. Reinach, *Orpheus*, p. 5 (English Translation, p. 4).



a crowd of consorts that would put Solomon to shame.

Thus a failure in the moral expurgation was deepened by a failure in the attempt to bring intellectual order into the welter of primitive gods. The only satisfactory end of that effort would have been monotheism. If Zeus had only gone further and become completely, once and for all, the father of all life, the scandalous stories would have lost their point and meaning. It is curious how near to monotheism, and to monotheism of a very profound and impersonal type, the real religion of Greece came in the sixth and fifth centuries. Many of the philosophers, Xenophanes, Parmenides, and others, asserted it clearly or assumed it without hesitation. Aeschylus, Euripides, Plato, in their deeper moments point the same road. Indeed a metaphysician might hold that their theology is far deeper than that to which we are accustomed, since they seem not to make any particular difference between *οἱ θεοί* and *ὁ θεός* or *τὸ θεῖον*. They do not instinctively suppose that the human distinctions between "he" and "it," or between "one" and "many," apply to the divine. Certainly Greek monotheism, had it really carried the day, would have been a far more philosophic thing than the tribal and personal monotheism of the Hebrews. But unfortunately too many hard-caked superstitions, too many tender and sensitive associations, were linked with particular figures in the pantheon or particular rites which had brought the worshippers religious peace. If there had been some Hebrew prophets about, and a tyrant or two, progressive and bloody-minded, to agree with them, polytheism might perhaps actually have been stamped out in Greece at one time. But Greek thought, always sincere and daring, was seldom brutal, seldom ruthless or cruel. The thinkers of the great period felt their

own way gently to the Holy of Holies, and did not try to compel others to take the same way. Greek theology, whether popular or philosophical, seldom denied any god, seldom forbade any worship. What it tried to do was to identify every new god with some aspect of one of the old ones, and the result was naturally confusion. Apart from the Epicurean school, which though powerful was always unpopular, the religious thought of later antiquity for the most part took refuge in a sort of apotheosis of good taste, in which the great care was not to hurt other people's feelings, or else it collapsed into helpless mysticism.

The attempt to make Olympianism a religion of the Polis failed also. The Olympians did not belong to any particular city: they were too universal; and no particular city had a very positive faith in them. The actual Polis was real and tangible, the Homeric gods a little alien and literary. The City herself was a most real power; and the true gods of the City, who had grown out of the soil and the wall, were simply the City herself in her eternal and personal aspect, as mother and guide and lawgiver, the worshipped and beloved being whom each citizen must defend even to the death. As the Kouros of his day emerged from the social group of Kouroi, or the Aphiktor from the band of suppliants, in like fashion ἡ Πολιάς or ὁ Πολιεύς emerged as a personification or projection of the city. ἡ Πολιάς in Athens was of course Athena; ὁ Πολιεύς might as well be called Zeus as anything else. In reality such beings fall into the same class as the hero Argos or "Korinthos son of Zeus." The City worship was narrow; yet to broaden it was, except in some rare minds, to sap its life. The ordinary man finds it impossible to love his next-door neighbours except by siding with them against the next-door-but-one.



It proved difficult even in a city like Athens to have gods that would appeal to the loyalty of all Attica. On the Acropolis at Athens there seem originally to have been Athena and some Kouros corresponding with her, some Waterer of the earth, like Erechtheus. Then as Attica was united and brought under the lead of its central city, the gods of the outlying districts began to claim places on the Acropolis. Pallas, the thunder-maid of Pallene in the south, came to form a joint personality with Athena. Oinoë, a town in the north-east, on the way from Delos to Delphi, had for its special god a "Pythian Apollo"; when Oinoë became Attic a place for the Pythian Apollo had to be found on the Acropolis. Dionysus came from Eleutherae, Demeter and Korê from Eleusis, Theseus himself perhaps from Marathon or even from Trozên. They were all given official residences on Athena's rock, and Athens in return sent out Athena to new temples built for her in Prasiae and Sunion and various colonies.<sup>42</sup> This development came step by step and grew out of real worships. It was quite different from the wholesale adoption of a body of non-national, poetical gods: yet even this development was too artificial, too much stamped with the marks of expediency and courtesy and compromise. It could not live. The personalities of such gods vanish away; their prayers become prayers to "all gods and goddesses of the City"—θεοῖς καὶ θεῇσι πᾶσι καὶ πάσῃσι; those who remain, chiefly Athena and Theseus, only mean Athens.

What then, amid all this failure, did the Olympian religion really achieve? First, it debarbarized the worship of the leading states of Greece—not of all Greece, since antiquity had no means of spreading knowledge comparable to ours. It reduced the horrors

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Sam Wide in Gercke and Norden's *Handbuch*, ii. 217–19.

of the "Urdummheit," for the most part, to a romantic memory, and made religion no longer a mortal danger to humanity. Unlike many religious systems, it generally permitted progress; it encouraged not only the obedient virtues but the daring virtues as well. It had in it the spirit that saves from disaster, that knows itself fallible and thinks twice before it hates and curses and persecutes. It wrapped religion in Sophrosynê.

Again, it worked for concord and fellow-feeling throughout the Greek communities. It is, after all, a good deal to say, that in Greek history we find almost no warring of sects, no mutual tortures or even blasphemies. With many ragged edges, with many weaknesses, it built up something like a united Hellenic religion to stand against the "beastly devices of the heathen." And after all, if we are inclined on the purely religious side to judge the Olympian system harshly, we must not forget its sheer beauty. Truth, no doubt, is greater than beauty. But in many matters beauty can be attained and truth cannot. All we know is that when the best minds seek for the truth the result is apt to be beautiful. It was a great thing that men should envisage the world as governed, not by Giants and Gorgons and dealers in eternal torture, but by some human and more than human Understanding (*Ξύνεσις*),<sup>43</sup> by beings of quiet splendour like many a classical Zeus and Hermes and Demeter. If Olympianism was not a religious faith, it was at least a vital force in the shaping of cities and societies which re-

<sup>43</sup>The *Ξύνεσις* in which the Chorus finds it hard to believe, *Hippolytus*, 1105. Cf. *Iph. Aul.* 394, 1189; *Herc.* 655; also the ideas in *Suppl.* 203, *Eur. Fr.* 52, 9, where *Ξύνεσις* is implanted in man by a special grace of God. The gods are *ξυνοί*, but of course Euripides goes too far in actually praying to *Ξύνεσις*, *Ar. Frogs*, 893.



main after two thousand years a type to the world of beauty and freedom and high endeavour. Even the stirring of its ashes, when they seemed long cold, had power to produce something of the same result; for the classicism of the Italian Renaissance is a child, however fallen, of the Olympian spirit.

Of course, I recognize that beauty is not the same as faith. There is, in one sense, far more faith in some hideous miracle-working icon which sends out starving peasants to massacre Jews than in the Athena of Phidias. Yet, once we have rid our minds of trivial mythology, there is religion in Athena also. Athena is an ideal, an ideal and a mystery; the ideal of wisdom, of incessant labour, of almost terrifying purity, seen through the light of some mystic and spiritual devotion like, but transcending, the love of man for woman. Or, if the way of Athena is too hard for us common men, it is not hard to find a true religious ideal in such a figure as Persephone. In Persephone there is more of pathos and of mystery. She has more recently entered the calm ranks of Olympus; the old liturgy of the dying and re-risen Year-bride still clings to her. If Religion is that which brings us into relation with the great world-forces, there is the very heart of life in this home-coming Bride of the underworld, life with its broken hopes, its disaster, its new-found spiritual joy: life seen as Mother and Daughter, not a thing continuous and unchanging but shot through with parting and death, life as a great love or desire ever torn asunder and ever renewed.

"But stay," a reader may object: "is not this the Persephone, the Athena, of modern sentiment? Are these figures really the goddesses of the *Iliad* and of Sophocles?" The truth is, I think, that they are neither the one nor the other. They are the goddesses of

ancient reflection and allegory; the goddesses, that is, of the best and most characteristic worship that these idealized creations awakened. What we have treated hitherto as the mortal weakness of the Olympians, the fact that they have no roots in any particular soil, little hold on any definite primeval cult, has turned out to be their peculiar strength. We must not think of allegory as a late post-classical phenomenon in Greece. It begins at least as early as Pythagoras and Heraclitus, perhaps as early as Hesiod; for Hesiod seems sometimes to be turning allegory back into myth. The Olympians, cut loose from the soil, enthroned only in men's free imagination, have two special regions which they have made their own: mythology and allegory. The mythology drops for the most part very early out of practical religion. Even in Homer we find it expurgated; in Pindar, Aeschylus, and Xenophanes it is expurgated, denied and allegorized. The myths survive chiefly as material for literature, the shapes of the gods themselves chiefly as material for art. They are both of them objects not of belief but of imagination. Yet when the religious imagination of Greece deepens it twines itself still round these gracious and ever-moving shapes; the Zeus of Aeschylus moves on into the Zeus of Plato or of Cleanthes or of Marcus Aurelius. Hermes, Athena, Apollo, all have their long spiritual history. They are but little impeded by the echoes of the old frivolous mythology; still less by any local roots or sectional prejudices or compulsory details of ritual. As the more highly educated mind of Greece emerged from a particular, local, tribal, conception of religion, the old denationalized Olympians were ready to receive her.

The real religion of the fifth century was, as we have said, a devotion to the City itself. It is expressed



often in Aeschylus and Sophocles, again and again with more discord and more criticism in Euripides and Plato; for the indignant blasphemies of the Gorgias and the Troades bear the same message as the ideal patriotism of the Republic. It is expressed best perhaps, and that without mention of the name of a single god, in the great Funeral Speech of Pericles. It is higher than most modern patriotism because it is set upon higher ideals. It is more fervid because the men practising it lived habitually nearer to the danger-point, and, when they spoke of dying for the City, spoke of a thing they had faced last week and might face again to-morrow. It was more religious because of the unconscious mysticism in which it is clothed even by such hard heads as Pericles and Thucydides, the mysticism of men in the presence of some fact for which they have no words great enough. Yet for all its intensity it was condemned by its mere narrowness. By the fourth century the average Athenian must have recognized what philosophers had recognized long before, that a religion, to be true, must be universal and not the privilege of a particular people. As soon as the Stoics had proclaimed the world to be "one great City of gods and men," the only Gods with which Greece could satisfactorily people that City were the idealized band of the old Olympians.

They are artists' dreams, ideals, allegories; they are symbols of something beyond themselves. They are Gods of half-rejected tradition, of unconscious make-believe, of aspiration. They are gods to whom doubtful philosophers can pray, with all a philosopher's due caution, as to so many radiant and heart-searching hypotheses. They are not gods in whom any one believes as a hard fact. Does this condemn them? Or is it just the other way? Is it perhaps that one

difference between Religion and Superstition lies exactly in this, that Superstition degrades its worship by turning its beliefs into so many statements of brute fact, on which it must needs act without question, without striving, without any respect for others or any desire for higher or fuller truth? It is only an accident—though perhaps an invariable accident—that all the supposed facts are false. In Religion, however precious you may consider the truth you draw from it, you know that it is a truth seen dimly, and possibly seen by others better than by you. You know that all your creeds and definitions are merely metaphors, attempts to use human language for a purpose for which it was never made. Your concepts are, by the nature of things, inadequate; the truth is not in you but beyond you, a thing not conquered but still to be pursued. Something like this, I take it, was the character of the Olympian Religion in the higher minds of later Greece. Its gods could awaken man's worship and strengthen his higher aspirations; but at heart they knew themselves to be only metaphors. As the most beautiful image carved by man was not the god, but only a symbol, to help towards conceiving the god;<sup>44</sup>

"Cf. the beautiful defence of idols by Maximus of Tyre, *Or. viii* (in Wilamowitz's *Lesebuch*, ii. 338ff.). I quote the last paragraph:

"God Himself, the father and fashioner of all that is, older than the Sun or the Sky, greater than time and eternity and all the flow of being, is unnameable by any lawgiver, unutterable by any voice, not to be seen by any eye. But we, being unable to apprehend His essence, use the help of sounds and names and pictures, of beaten gold and ivory and silver, of plants and rivers, mountain-peaks and torrents, yearning for the knowledge of Him, and in our weakness naming all that is beautiful in this world after His nature—just as happens to earthly lovers. To them the most beautiful sight will be the actual lineaments of the beloved, but for remembrance' sake they will be happy in the sight of a lyre, a little spear, a chair, perhaps, or a running-

so the god himself, when conceived, was not the reality but only a symbol to help towards conceiving the reality. That was the work set before them. Meantime they issued no creeds that contradicted knowledge, no commands that made man sin against his own inner light.

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ground, or anything in the world that wakens the memory of the beloved. Why should I further examine and pass judgement about Images? Let men know what is divine (*τὸ θεῖον γένος*), let them know: that is all. If a Greek is stirred to the remembrance of God by the art of Pheidias, an Egyptian by paying worship to animals, another man by a river, another by fire—I have no anger for their divergences; only let them know, let them love, let them remember.”



### III. THE GREAT SCHOOLS OF THE FOURTH CENTURY, B.C.

There is a passage in Xenophon describing how, one summer night, in 405 B.C., people in Athens heard a cry of wailing, an *oimôgê*, making its way up between the long walls from the Piraeus, and coming nearer and nearer as they listened. It was the news of the final disaster of Kynoskephalai, brought at midnight to the Piraeus by the galley Paralos. "And that night no one slept. They wept for the dead, but far more bitterly for themselves, when they reflected what things they had done to the people of Mêlos, when taken by siege, to the people of Histiaea, and Skîonê and Torônê and Aegîna, and many more of the Hellenes."<sup>1</sup>

The echo of that lamentation seems to ring behind most of the literature of the fourth century, and not the Athenian literature alone. Defeat can on occasion leave men their self-respect or even their pride; as it did after Chaeronea in 338 and after the Chremonidean War in 262, not to speak of Thermopylae. But the defeat of 404 not only left Athens at the mercy of her enemies. It stripped her of those things of which she had been inwardly most proud; her "wisdom," her high civilization, her leadership of all that was most Hellenic in Hellas. The "Beloved City" of Pericles had become a tyrant, her nature poisoned by war, her government a by-word in Greece for brutality. And Greece as a whole felt the tragedy of it. It is curious how this defeat of Athens by Sparta seems to have been felt abroad as a defeat for Greece itself and for

<sup>1</sup>*Hellen.* ii. 2, 3.

the hopes of the Greek city state. The fall of Athens mattered more than the victory of Lysander. Neither Sparta nor any other city ever attempted to take her place. And no writer after the year 400 speaks of any other city as Pericles used to speak of fifth-century Athens, not even Polybius 250 years later, when he stands amazed before the solidity and the "fortune" of Rome.

The city state, the Polis, had concentrated upon itself almost all the loyalty and the aspirations of the Greek mind. It gave security to life. It gave meaning to religion. And in the fall of Athens it had failed. In the third century, when things begin to recover, we find on the one hand the great military monarchies of Alexander's successors, and on the other, a number of federations of tribes, which were generally strongest in the backward regions where the city state had been least developed. Τὸ κοινὸν τῶν Αἰτωλῶν or τῶν Ἀχαιῶν had become more important than Athens or Corinth, and Sparta was only strong by means of a League.<sup>2</sup> By that time the Polis was recognized as a comparatively weak social organism, capable of very high culture but not quite able, as the Covenant of the League of Nations expresses it, "to hold its own under the strenuous conditions of modern life." Besides, it was not now ruled by the best citizens. The best had turned away from politics.

This great discouragement did not take place at a blow. Among the practical statesmen probably most did not form any theory about the cause of the failure but went on, as practical statesmen must, doing as best they could from difficulty to difficulty. But many saw that the fatal danger to Greece was dis-

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Tarn, *Antigonus Gonatas*, p. 52, and authorities there quoted.



union, as many see it in Europe now. When Macedon proved indisputably stronger than Athens Isocrates urged Philip to accept the leadership of Greece against the barbarian and against barbarism. He might thus both unite the Greek cities and also evangelize the world. Lysias, the democratic and anti-Spartan orator, had been groping for a similar solution as early as 384 B.C., and was prepared to make an even sharper sacrifice for it. He appealed at Olympia for a crusade of all the free Greek cities against Dionysius of Syracuse, and begged Sparta herself to lead it. The Spartans are "of right the leaders of Hellas by their natural nobleness and their skill in war. They alone live still in a city unsacked, unwallled, unconquered, uncorrupted by faction, and have followed always the same modes of life. They have been the saviours of Hellas in the past, and one may hope that their freedom will be everlasting."<sup>3</sup> A great and generous change in one who had "learned by suffering" in the Peloponnesian War. Others no doubt merely gave their submission to the stronger powers that were now rising. There were openings for counsellors, for mercenary soldiers, for court savants and philosophers and poets, and, of course, for agents in every free city who were prepared for one motive or another not to kick against the pricks. And there were always also those who had neither learned nor forgotten, the unrepentant idealists; too passionate or too heroic, or, as some will say, too blind, to abandon their life-long devotion to "Athens" or to "Freedom" because the world considered such ideals out of date. They could look the ruined Athenians in the face, after the lost battle, and say with Demosthenes, "Οὐκ ἔστιν, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅπως

<sup>3</sup>Lysias, xxxiii.



ἡμάρτετε. It cannot be that you did wrong, it cannot be!"<sup>4</sup>

But in practical politics the currents of thought are inevitably limited. It is in philosophy and speculation that we find the richest and most varied reaction to the Great Failure. It takes different shapes in those writers, like Plato and Xenophon, who were educated in the fifth century and had once believed in the Great City, and those whose whole thinking life belonged to the time of disillusion.

Plato was disgusted with democracy and with Athens, but he retained his faith in the city, if only the city could be set on the right road. There can be little doubt that he attributes to the bad government of the Demos many evils which were really due to extraneous causes or to the mere fallibility of human nature. Still his analysis of democracy is one of the most brilliant things in the history of political theory. It is so acute, so humorous, so affectionate; and at many different ages of the world has seemed like a portrait of the actual contemporary society. Like a modern popular newspaper, Plato's democracy makes it its business to satisfy existing desires and give people a "good time." It does not distinguish between higher and lower. Any one man is as good as another, and so is any impulse or any idea. Consequently the commoner have the pull. Even the great democratic statesmen of the past, he now sees, have been ministers to mob desires; they have "filled the city with harbours and docks and walls and revenues and such-like trash, without Sophrosynê and righteousness." The sage or saint has no place in practical politics. He would be like a man in a den of wild beasts. Let him and his like seek shelter as best they can, standing up behind some wall while the

<sup>4</sup>*Dem. Crown*, 208.



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other hand, when he sold his barbarian prisoners he sent them to market naked, regardless of their modesty, because it cheered his own soldiers to see how white and fat they were. He wept when he won a victory over Greeks; "for he loved all Greeks and only hated barbarians." When he returned home after his successful campaigns, he obeyed the orders of the ephors without question; his house and furniture were as simple as those of a common man, and his daughter the princess, when she went to and fro to Amyclae, went simply in the public omnibus. He reared chargers and hunting dogs; the rearing of chariot horses he thought effeminate. But he advised his sister Cynisca about hers, and she won the chariot race at Olympia. "Have a king like that," says Xenophon, "and all will be well. He will govern right; he will beat your enemies; and he will set an example of good life. If you want Virtue in the state look for it in a good man, not in a speculative tangle of laws. The Spartan constitution, as it stands, is good enough for any one."

But it was another of the great Socratics who uttered first the characteristic message of the fourth century, and met the blows of Fortune with a direct challenge. Antisthenes was a man twenty years older than Plato. He had fought at Tanagra in 426 B.C. He had been friends with Gorgias and Prodicus, the great Sophists of the Periclean age. He seems to have been, at any rate till younger and more brilliant men cut him out, the recognized philosophic heir of Socrates.<sup>8</sup> And late in life, after the fall of Athens and the condemnation and death of his master, the man underwent a curious change of heart. He is taunted more

<sup>8</sup>This is the impression left by Xenophon, especially in the *Symposium*. Cf. Dümmler, *Antisthenica* (1882); *Akademika* (1889). Cf. the *Life of Antisthenes* in Diog. Laert.



than once with the lateness of his discovery of truth,<sup>9</sup> and with his childish subservience to the old *jeux d'esprit* of the Sceptics which professed to prove the impossibility of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> It seems that he had lost faith in speculation and dialectic and the elaborate superstructures which Plato and others had built upon them; and he felt, like many moralists after him, a sort of hostility to all knowledge that was not immediately convertible into conduct.

But this scepticism was only part of a general disbelief in the world. Greek philosophy had from the first been concerned with a fundamental question which we moderns seldom put clearly to ourselves. It asked "What is the Good?" meaning thereby "What is the element of value in life?" or "What should be our chief aim in living?" A medieval Christian would have answered without hesitation "To go to Heaven and not be damned," and would have been prepared with the necessary prescriptions for attaining that end. But the modern world is not intensely enough convinced of the reality of Sin and Judgement, Hell and Heaven, to accept this answer as an authoritative guide in life, and has not clearly thought out any other. The ancient Greek spent a great part of his philosophical activity in trying, without propounding

<sup>9</sup>Γέρων ὀψιμαθής, Plato, *Soph.* 251 B, Isocr. *Helena*, i. 2.

<sup>10</sup>e. g. no combination of subject and predicate can be true because one is different from the other. "Man" is "man" and "good" is "good"; but "man" is not "good." Nor can "a horse" possibly be "running"; they are totally different conceptions. See Plutarch, *adv. Co.* 22, 1 (p. 1119); Plato, *Soph.* 251 B; Arist. *Metaph.* 1024<sup>b</sup> 33; *Top.* 104<sup>b</sup> 20; Plato, *Euthyd.* 285 E. For similar reasons no statement can ever contradict another; the statements are either the same or not the same; and if not the same they do not touch. Every object has one λόγος or thing to be said about it; if you say a different λόγος you are speaking of something else. See especially *Scholia Arist.*, p. 732<sup>a</sup> 30ff. on the passage in the *Metaphysics*, 1024<sup>b</sup> 33.

supernatural rewards and punishments, or at least without laying stress on them, to think out what the Good of man really was.

The answers given by mankind to this question seem to fall under two main heads. Before a battle if both parties were asked what aim they were pursuing, both would say without hesitation "Victory." After the battle, the conqueror would probably say that his purpose was in some way to consolidate or extend his victory; but the beaten party, as soon as he had time to think, would perhaps explain that, after all, victory was not everything. It was better to have fought for the right, to have done your best and to have failed, than to revel in the prosperity of the unjust. And, since it is difficult to maintain, in the midst of the triumph of the enemy and your own obvious misery and humiliation, that all is well and you yourself thoroughly contented, this second answer easily develops a third: "Wait a little, till God's judgement asserts itself; and see who has the best of it then!" There will be a rich reward hereafter for the suffering virtuous.

The typical Athenian of the Periclean age would have been in the first state of mind. His "good" would be in the nature of success: to spread Justice and Freedom, to make Athens happy and strong and her laws wise and equal for rich and poor. Antisthenes had fallen violently into the second. He was defeated together with all that he most cared for, and he comforted himself with the thought that nothing matters except to have done your best. As he phrased it *Aretê is the good*, *Aretê* meaning "virtue" or "goodness," the quality of a good citizen, a good father, a good dog, a good sword.

The things of the world are vanity, and philosophy



as vain as the rest. Nothing but goodness is good; and the first step towards attaining it is to repent.

There was in Athens a gymnasium built for those who were base-born and could not attend the gymnasium of true citizens. It was called Kynosarges and was dedicated to the great bastard, Heracles. Antisthenes, though he had moved hitherto in the somewhat patrician circle of the Socratics, remembered how that his mother was a Thracian slave, and set up his school in Kynosarges among the disinherited of the earth. He made friends with the "bad," who needed befriending. He dressed like the poorest workman. He would accept no disciples except those who could bear hardship, and was apt to drive new-comers away with his stick. Yet he also preached in the streets, both in Athens and Corinth. He preached rhetorically, with parables and vivid emotional phrases, compelling the attention of the crowd. His eloquence was held to be bad style, and it started the form of literature known to the Cynics as *χρεία*, "a help," or *διατριβή*, "a study," and by the Christians as *ὁμιλία*, a "homily" or sermon.

This passionate and ascetic old man would have attracted the interest of the world even more, had it not been for one of his disciples. This was a young man from Sinope, on the Euxine, whom he did not take to at first sight; the son of a disreputable money-changer who had been sent to prison for defacing the coinage. Antisthenes ordered the lad away, but he paid no attention; he beat him with his stick, but he never moved. He wanted "wisdom," and saw that Antisthenes had it to give. His aim in life was to do as his father had done, to "deface the coinage," but on a much larger scale. He would deface all the coinage current in the world. Every conventional stamp was false. The men stamped as generals and kings; the



things stamped as honour and wisdom and happiness and riches; all were base metal with lying superscriptions. All must have the stamp defaced.<sup>11</sup>

This young man was Diogenes, afterwards the most famous of all the Cynics. He started by rejecting all stamps and superscriptions and holding that nothing but *Aretê*, "worth" or "goodness," was good. He rejected tradition. He rejected the current religion and the rules and customs of temple worship. True religion was a thing of the spirit, and needed no forms. He despised divination. He rejected civil life and marriage. He mocked at the general interest in the public games and the respect paid to birth, wealth, or reputation. Let man put aside these delusions and know himself. And for his defences let him arm himself "against Fortune with courage, against Convention with Nature, against passion with Reason." For Reason is "the god within us."

The salvation for man was to return to Nature, and Diogenes interpreted this return in the simplest and crudest way. He should live like the beasts, like primeval men, like barbarians. Were not the beasts blessed, *ρεῖα ζῶντες* like the Gods in Homer? And so, though in less perfection, were primitive men, not vexing their hearts with imaginary sins and conventions. Travellers told of savages who married their sisters, or ate human flesh, or left their dead unburied. Why should they not, if they wished to? No wonder Zeus punished Prometheus the Fire-Bringer, who had brought all this progress upon us and left man civilized and more unhappy than any beast! He deserved his crag and his vulture!

Diogenes took his mission with great earnestness.

<sup>11</sup>Τὸ νόμισμα παραχαράττειν: see *Life* in Diorg. Laert., fragments in Mullach, vol. ii, and the article in Pauly-Wissowa.

He was leader in a "great battle against Pleasures and Desires." He was "the servant, the message-bearer, sent by Zeus," "the Setter-Free of mankind" and the "Healer of passions."

The life that he personally meant to live, and which he recommended to the wise, was what he called τὸν κυνικὸν βίον, "a dog's life," and he himself wished to be "cynic" or "canine." A dog was brave and faithful; it had no bodily shame, no false theories, and few wants. A dog needed no clothes, no house, no city, no possessions, no titles; what he did need was "virtue," Aretê, to catch his prey, to fight wild beasts, and to defend his master; and that he could provide for himself. Diogenes found, of course, that he needed a little more than an ordinary dog; a blanket, a wallet or bowl to hold his food, and a staff "to beat off dogs and bad men." It was the regular uniform of a beggar. He asked for no house. There was a huge earthen pitcher—not a tub—outside the Temple of the Great Mother; the sort of vessel that was used for burial in primitive Greece and which still had about it the associations of a coffin. Diogenes slept there when he wanted shelter, and it became the nearest approach to a home that he had. Like a dog he performed any bodily act without shame, when and where he chose. He obeyed no human laws because he recognized no city. He was *Cosmopolîtes*, Citizen of the Universe; all men, and all beasts too, were his brothers. He lived preaching in the streets and begging his bread; except that he did not "beg," he "commanded." Other folk obeyed his commands because they were still slaves, while he "had never been a slave again since Antisthenes set him free." He had no fear, because there was nothing to take from him. Only slaves are afraid.

Greece rang with stories of his mordant wit, and



every bitter saying became fathered on Diogenes. Every one knew how Alexander the Great had come to see the famous beggar and, standing before him where he sat in the open air, had asked if there was any boon he could confer on him. "Yes, move from between me and the sun." They knew the king's saying, "If I were not Alexander I would be Diogenes," and the polite answer "If I were not Diogenes I would be Alexander." The Master of the World and the Rejector of the World met on an equality. People told too how the Cynic walked about with a lamp in the daytime searching, so he said, "for a man." They knew his scorn of the Mysteries with their doctrine of exclusive salvation; was a thief to be in bliss because he was initiated, while Agesilaus and Epaminondas were in outer darkness? A few of the stories are more whimsical. A workman carrying a pole accidentally hit Diogenes and cried "Look out!" "Why," said he, "are you going to hit me again?"

He had rejected patriotism as he rejected culture. Yet he suffered as he saw Greece under the Macedonians and Greek liberties disappearing. When his death was approaching some disciple asked his wishes about his burial; "Let the dogs and wolves have me," he said; "I should like to be of some use to my brothers when I die." When this request was refused his thoughts turned again to the Macedonian Wars; "Bury me face downwards; everything is soon going to be turned the other way up."

He remains the permanent and unsurpassed type of one way of grappling with the horror of life. Fear nothing, desire nothing, possess nothing; and then Life with all its ingenuity of malice cannot disappoint you. If man cannot enter into life nor yet depart from it save through agony and filth, let him learn

to endure the one and be indifferent to the other. The watchdog of Zeus on earth has to fulfil his special duty, to warn mankind of the truth and to set slaves free. Nothing else matters.

The criticism of this solution is not that it is selfish. It is not. The Cynic lives for the salvation of his fellow creatures. And it is worth remembering that before the Roman gladiatorial games were eventually stopped by the self-immolation of the monk Telemachus, two Cynic philosophers had thrown themselves into the arena in the same spirit. Its weakness lies in a false psychology, common to all the world at that time, which imagined that salvation or freedom consists in living utterly without desire or fear, that such a life is biologically possible, and that Diogenes lived it. To a subtler critic it is obvious that Diogenes was a man of very strong and successful ambitions, though his ambitions were different from those of most men. He solved the problem of his own life by following with all the force and courage of his genius a line of conduct which made him, next to Alexander, the most famous man in Greece. To be really without fear or desire would mean death, and to die is not to solve the riddle of living.

The difference between the Cynic view of life and that of Plato's *Republic* is interesting. Plato also rejected the most fundamental conventions of existing society, the accepted methods of government, the laws of property and of marriage, the traditional religion and even the poetry which was a second religion to the Greeks. But he rejected the existing culture only because he wanted it to be better. He condemned the concrete existing city in order to build a more perfect city, to proceed in infinite searching and longing towards the Idea of Good, the Sun of the spiritual



universe. Diogenes rejected the civilization which he saw, and admitted the reality of no other. His crude realistic attitude of mind had no use for Plato's "Ideas." "I can see a table," he said; "I cannot see Tabularity" (τραπεζιότης). "I know Athens and Corinth and other cities, and can see that they are all bad. As for the Ideal Society, show it me and I will say what I think."

In spite of its false psychology the Cynic conception of life had a great effect in Greece. It came almost as a revelation to both men and women<sup>12</sup> and profoundly influenced all the Schools. Here indeed, it seemed, was a way to baffle Fortune and to make one's own soul unafraid. What men wanted was τὸ θαρρεῖν "to be of good cheer"; as we say now, to regain their *morale* after bewildering defeats. The Cynic answer, afterwards corrected and humanized by the Stoics, was to look at life as a long and arduous campaign. The loyal soldier does not trouble about his comfort or his rewards or his pleasures. He obeys his commander's orders without fear or failing, whether they lead to easy victories or merely to wounds, captivity or death. Only Goodness is good, and for the soldier Goodness (ἀρετή) is the doing of Duty. That is his true prize, which no external power can take away from him.

<sup>12</sup>There were women among the Cynics. "The doctrine also captured Metrocles' sister, Hipparchia. She loved Crates, his words, and his way of life, and paid no attention to any of her suitors, however rich or highborn or handsome. Crates was everything to her. She threatened her parents that she would commit suicide unless she were given to him. They asked Crates to try to change the girl's mind, and he did all he could to no effect, till at last he put all his possessions on the floor and stood up in front of her. "Here is your bridegroom; there is his fortune; now think!" The girl made her choice, put on the beggar's garb, and went her ways with Crates. She lived with him openly and went like him to beg food at dinners." Diog. Laert. vi. 96ff.

But after all, what is Duty? Diogenes preached "virtue" and assumed that his way of life was "virtue." But was it really so? And, if so, on what evidence? To live like a beast, to be indifferent to art, beauty, letters, science, philosophy, to the amenities of civic life, to all that raised Hellenic Man above the beast or the savage? How could this be the true end of man? The Stoic School, whose founder, Zeno, was a disciple of old Antisthenes, gradually built up a theory of moral life which has on the whole weathered the storms of time with great success. It largely dominated later antiquity by its imaginative and emotional power. It gave form to the aspirations of early Christianity. It lasts now as the nearest approach to an acceptable system of conduct for those who do not accept revelation, but still keep some faith in the Purpose of Things.

The problem is to combine the absolute value of that Goodness which, as we say, "saves the soul" with the relative values of the various good things that soothe or beautify life. For, if there is any value at all—I will not say in health and happiness, but in art, poetry, knowledge, refinement, public esteem, or human affection, and if their claims do clash, as in common opinion they sometimes do, with the demands of absolute sanctity, how is the balance to be struck? Are we to be content with the principle of accepting a little moral wrong for the sake of much material or artistic or intellectual advantage? That is the rule which the practical world follows, though without talking about it; but the Stoics would have none of any such compromise.

Zeno first, like Antisthenes, denied any value whatever to these earthly things that are not virtue—to health or sickness, riches or poverty, beauty or ugly-



ness, pain or pleasure; who would ever mention them when the soul stood naked before God? All that would then matter, and consequently all that can ever matter, is the goodness of the man's self, that is, of his free and living will. The Stoics improved on the military metaphor; or to the soldier, after all, it does matter whether in his part of the field he wins or loses. Life is not like a battle but like a play, in which God has handed each man his part unread, and the good man proceeds to act it to the best of his power, not knowing what may happen in the last scene. He may become a crowned king, he may be a slave dying in torment. What matters it? The good actor can play either part. All that matters is that he shall act his best, accept the order of the Cosmos and obey the Purpose of the great Dramaturge.

The answer seems absolute and unyielding, with no concession to the weakness of the flesh. Yet, in truth, it contains in itself the germ of a sublime practical compromise which makes Stoicism human. It accepts the Cosmos and it obeys the Purpose; therefore there is a Cosmos, and there is a purpose in the world. Stoicism, like much of ancient thought at this period, was permeated by the new discoveries of astronomy and their formation into a coherent scientific system, which remained unshaken till the days of Copernicus. The stars, which had always moved men's wonder and even worship, were now seen and proved to be no wandering fires but parts of an immense and apparently eternal order. One star might differ from another star in glory, but they were all alike in their obedience to law. They had their fixed courses, divine though they were, which had been laid down for them by a Being greater than they. The Order, or Cosmos, was a proven fact; therefore, the Purpose

was a proven fact; and, though in its completeness inscrutable, it could at least in part be divined from the fact that all these varied and eternal splendours had for their centre our Earth and its ephemeral master. The Purpose, though it is not our Purpose, is especially concerned with us and circles round us. It is the purpose of a God who loves Man.

Let us forget that this system of astronomy has been overthrown, and that we now know that Man is not the centre of the universe. Let us forget that the majestic order which reigns, or seems to reign, among the stars, is matched by a brutal conflict and a chaos of jarring purposes in the realms of those sciences which deal with life.<sup>13</sup> If we can recover the imaginative outlook of the generations which stretched from, say, Meton in the fifth century before Christ to Copernicus in the sixteenth after, we shall be able to understand the spiritual exaltation with which men like Zeno or Poseidonius regarded the world.

We are part of an Order, a Cosmos, which we see to be infinitely above our comprehension but which we know to be an expression of love for Man; what can we do but accept it, not with resignation but with enthusiasm, and offer to it with pride any sacrifice which it may demand of us. It is a glory to suffer for such an end.

And there is more. For the Stars show only what may be called a stationary purpose, an Order which is and remains for ever. But in the rest of the world, we

<sup>13</sup>e. g. the struggle for existence among animals and plants; the ἀλληλοφασία, or "mutual devouring," of animals; and such points as the various advances in evolution which seem self-destructive. Thus, Man has learnt to stand on two feet and use his hands; a great advantage but one which has led to numerous diseases. Again, physiologists say that the increasing size of the human head, especially when combined with the diminishing size of the pelvis, tends to make normal birth impossible.



can see a moving Purpose. It is *Phusis*, the word which the Romans unfortunately translated "*Natura*," but which means "Growing" or "the way things grow"—almost what we call Evolution. But to the Stoic it is a living and conscious evolution, a forethought or *Πρόνοια* in the mind of God, what the Romans called *providentia*, guiding all things that grow in a direction which accords with the divine will. And the direction, the Stoic pointed out, was not towards mere happiness but towards *Aretê*, or the perfection of each thing or each species after its kind. *Phusis* shapes the acorn to grow into the perfect oak, the blind puppy into the good hound; it makes the deer grow in swiftness to perform the function of a deer, and man grow in power and wisdom to perform the function of a man. If a man is an artist it is his function to produce beauty; is he a governor, it is his function to produce a flourishing and virtuous city. True, the things that he produces are but shadows and in themselves utterly valueless; it matters not one straw whether the deer goes at ten miles an hour or twenty, whether the population of a city die this year of famine and sickness or twenty years hence of old age. But it belongs to the good governor to avert famine and to produce healthy conditions, as it belongs to the deer to run its best. So it is the part of a friend, if need arise, to give his comfort or his life for a friend; of a mother to love and defend her children; though it is true that in the light of eternity these "creaturely" affections shrivel into their native worthlessness. If the will of God is done, and done willingly, all is well. You may, if it brings you great suffering, feel the pain. You may even, through human weakness, weep or groan; that can be forgiven. Ἐσωθεν μέντοι μὴ στενάξῃς, "But in the centre of your being groan not!" Accept the Cosmos.

Will joyously that which God wills and make the eternal Purpose your own.

I will say no more of this great body of teaching, as I have dealt with it in a separate publication.<sup>14</sup> But I would point out two special advantages of a psychological kind which distinguish Stoicism from many systems of philosophy. First, though it never consciously faced the psychological problem of instinct, it did see clearly that man does not necessarily pursue what pleases him most, or what is most profitable to him, or even his "good." It saw that man can determine his end, and may well choose pain in preference to pleasure. This saved the school from a great deal of that false schematization which besets most forms of rationalistic psychology. Secondly, it did build up a system of thought on which, both in good days and evil, a life can be lived which is not only saintly, but practically wise and human and beneficent. It did for practical purposes solve the problem of living, without despair and without grave, or at least without gross, illusion.

The other great school of the fourth century, a school which, in the matter of ethics, may be called the only true rival of Stoicism, was also rooted in defeat. But it met defeat in a different spirit.<sup>15</sup> Epicurus, son of Neocles, of the old Athenian clan of the Philaïdae, was born on a colony in Samos in 341 B.C. His father was evidently poor; else he would hardly have left Athens to live on a colonial farm, nor have had to

<sup>14</sup>*The Stoic Philosophy* (1915). See also Arnold's *Roman Stoicism* (1911); Bevan's *Stoics and Sceptics* (1913); and especially *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* by von Arnim (1903-5).

<sup>15</sup>The chief authorities on Epicurus are Usener's *Epicurea*, containing the *Life* from Diog. Laert., fragments and introduction: the papyrus fragments of Philodemus in *Volumina Herculanensia*; Diogenes of Oenoanda (text by William, Teubner, 1907); the commentaries on Lucretius (Munro, Giussani, &c.).



eke out his farming by teaching an elementary school. We do not know how much the small boy learned from his father. But for older students there was a famous school on the neighbouring island of Teos, where a certain Nausiphanes taught the Ionian tradition of Mathematics and Physics as well as rhetoric and literary subjects. Epicurus went to this school when he was fourteen, and seems, among other things, to have imbibed the Atomic Theory of Democritus without realizing that it was anything peculiar. He felt afterwards as if his school-days had been merely a waste of time. At the age of eighteen he went to Athens, the centre of the philosophic world, but he only went, as Athenian citizens were in duty bound, to perform his year of military service as *ephêbus*. Study was to come later. The next year, however, 322, Perdiccas of Thrace made an attack on Samos and drove out the Athenian colonists. Neocles had by then lived on his bit of land for thirty years, and was old to begin life again. The ruined family took refuge in Colophon, and there Epicurus joined them. They were now too poor for the boy to go abroad to study philosophy. He could only make the best of a hard time and puzzle alone over the problems of life.

Recent years have taught us that there are few forms of misery harder than that endured by a family of refugees, and it is not likely to have been easier in ancient conditions. Epicurus built up his philosophy, it would seem, while helping his parents and brothers through this bad time. The problem was how to make the life of their little colony tolerable, and he somehow solved it. It was not the kind of problem which Stoicism and the great religions specially set themselves; it was at once too unpretending and too practical. One can easily imagine the condition for which he had to

prescribe. For one thing, the unfortunate refugees all about him would torment themselves with unnecessary terrors. The Thracians were pursuing them. The Gods hated them; they must obviously have committed some offence or impiety. (It is always easy for disheartened men to discover in themselves some sin that deserves punishment.) It would surely be better to die at once; except that, with that sin upon them, they would only suffer more dreadfully beyond the grave! In their distress they jarred, doubtless, on one another's nerves; and mutual bitterness doubled their miseries.

Epicurus is said to have had poor health, and the situation was one where even the best health would be sorely tried. But he had superhuman courage, and—what does not always go with such courage—a very affectionate and gentle nature. In later life all his three brothers were his devoted disciples—a testimonial accorded to few prophets or founders of religions. And he is the first man in the record of European history whose mother was an important element in his life. Some of his letters to her have been preserved, and show a touch of intimate affection which of course must have existed between human beings from the remotest times, but of which we possess no earlier record. And fragments of his letters to his friends strike the same note.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Epicurus is the one philosopher who protests with real indignation against that inhuman superiority to natural sorrows which is so much prized by most of the ancient schools. To him such "apathy" argues either a hard heart or a morbid vanity (Fr. 120). His letters are full of affectionate expressions which rather shock the stern reserve of antique philosophy. He waits for one friend's "heavenly presence" (Fr. 165). He "melts with a peculiar joy mingled with tears in remembering the last words" of one who is dead (Fr. 186; cf. 213). He is enthusiastic about an act of kindness performed by another, who walked some five miles to help a barbarian prisoner (Fr. 194).



His first discovery was that men torture themselves with unnecessary fears. He must teach them courage, *θαρρεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν, θαρρεῖν ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπων*, to fear no evil from either man or God. God is a blessed being; and no blessed being either suffers evil or inflicts evil on others. And as for men, most of the evils you fear from them can be avoided by Justice; and if they do come, they can be borne. Death is like sleep, an unconscious state, nowise to be feared. Pain when it comes can be endured; it is the anticipation that makes men miserable and saps their courage. The refugees were forgotten by the world, and had no hope of any great change in their condition. Well, he argued, so much the better! Let them till the earth and love one another, and they would find that they had already in them that Natural Happiness which is man's possession until he throws it away. And of all things that contribute to happiness the greatest is Affection, *φιλία*.

Like the Cynics and Stoics, he rejected the world and all its conventions and prizes, its desires and passions and futility. But where the Stoic and Cynic proclaimed that in spite of all the pain and suffering of a wicked world, man can by the force of his own will be virtuous, Epicurus brought the more surprising good news that man can after all be happy.

But to make this good news credible he had to construct a system of thought. He had to answer the temple authorities and their adherents among the vulgar, who threatened his followers with the torments of Hades for their impiety. He had to answer the Stoics and Cynics, preaching that all is worthless except Aretê; and the Sceptics, who dwelt on the fallibility of the senses, and the logical impossibility of knowledge.

He met the last of these by the traditional Ionian doctrine of sense-impressions, ingeniously developed.



We can, he argued, know the outer world, because our sense impressions are literally "impressions" or stamps made by external objects upon our organs. To see, for instance, is to be struck by an infinitely tenuous stream of images, flowing from the object and directly impinging upon the retina. Such streams are flowing from all objects in every direction—an idea which seemed incredible until the modern discoveries about light, sound, and radiation. Thus there is direct contact with reality, and consequently knowledge. Besides direct vision, however, we have "anticipations," or *προλήψεις*, sometimes called "common conceptions," e. g. the general conception which we have of a horse when we are not seeing one. These are merely the result of repeated acts of vision. A curious result of this doctrine was that all our "anticipations" or "common ideas" are true; mistakes occur through some interpretation of our own which we add to the simple sensation.

We can know the world. How then are we to understand it? Here again Epicurus found refuge in the old Ionian theory of Atoms and the Void, which is supposed to have originated with Democritus and Leucippus, a century before. But Epicurus seems to have worked out the Atomic Theory more in detail, as we have it expounded in Lucretius' magnificent poem. In particular it was possibly he who first combined the Atomic Theory with hylozoism; i.e. he conceived of the Atoms as possessing some rudimentary power of movement and therefore able to swerve slightly in their regular downward course. That explains how they have become infinitely tangled and mingled, how plants and animals are alive, and how men have Free Will. It also enables Epicurus to build up a world without the assistance of a god. He set man free, as Lucretius says, from the "burden of Religion," though

his doctrine of the "blessed Being" which neither has pain nor gives pain, enables him to elude the dangerous accusation of atheism. He can leave people believing in all their traditional gods, including even, if so they wish, "the bearded Zeus and the helmed Athena" which they see in dreams and in their "common ideas," while at the same time having no fear of them.

There remains the foolish fancy of the Cynics and Stoics that "Aretê" is the only good. Of course, he answers, Aretê is good; but that is because it produces happy life, or blessedness or pleasure or whatever you call it. He used normally the word *ἡδονή* "sweetness," and counted the Good as that which makes life sweet. He seems never to have entered into small disputes as to the difference between "sweetness," or "pleasure," and "happiness" and "well-being" (*ἡδονή, εὐδαιμονία, εὖεστώ, κτλ.*), though sometimes, instead of "sweetness" he spoke of "blessedness" (*μακαριότης*). Ultimately the dispute between him and the Stoics seems to resolve itself into a question whether the Good lies in *πάσχειν* or *ποιεῖν*, in Experience or in Action; and average human beings seem generally to think that the Good for a conscious being must be something of which he is conscious.

Thus the great system is built, simple, intelligible, dogmatic, and—as such systems go—remarkably watertight. It enables man to be unafraid, and it helps him to be happy. The strange thing is that, although on more than one point it seems to anticipate most surprisingly the discoveries of modern science, it was accepted in a spirit more religious than scientific. As we can see from Lucretius it was taken almost as a revelation, from one who had saved mankind; whose intellect had pierced beyond the "flaming walls of



Heaven" and brought back to man the gospel of an intelligible universe.<sup>17</sup>

In 310 B.C., when Epicurus was thirty-two, things had so far improved that he left Colophon and set up a school of philosophy in Mytilene, but soon moved to Lampsacus, on the Sea of Marmora, where he had friends. Disciples gathered about him. Among them were some of the leading men of the city, like Leonteus and Idomeneus. The doctrine thrilled them and seemed to bring freedom with it. They felt that such a teacher must be set up in Athens, the home of the great philosophers. They bought by subscription a house and garden in Athens for 80 minae (about £320)<sup>18</sup> and presented it to the Master. He crossed to Athens in 306 and, though he four times revisited

<sup>17</sup>Lucretius, i. 62-79, actually speaks of the great atheist in language taken from the Saviour Religions (see below, p. 155):  
 When Man's life upon earth in base dismay,  
 Crushed by the burthen of Religion, lay,  
 Whose face, from all the regions of the sky,  
 Hung, glaring hate upon mortality,  
 First one Greek man against her dared to raise  
 His eyes, against her strive through all his days;  
 Him noise of Gods nor lightnings nor the roar  
 Of raging heaven subdued, but pricked the more  
 His spirit's valiance, till he longed the Gate  
 To burst of this low prison of man's fate.  
 And thus the living ardour of his mind  
 Conquered, and clove its way; he passed behind  
 The world's last flaming wall, and through the whole  
 Of space uncharted ranged his mind and soul.  
 Whence, conquering, he returned to make Man see  
 At last what can, what cannot, come to be;  
 By what law to each Thing its power hath been  
 Assigned, and what deep boundary set between;  
 Till underfoot is tamed Religion trod,  
 And, by His victory, Man ascends to God.

<sup>18</sup>That is, 8,000 drachmae. Rents had risen violently in 314 and so presumably had land prices. Else one would say the Garden was about the value of a good farm. See Tarn in *The Hellenistic Age* (1923), p. 116.

Lampsacus and has left letters addressed *To Friends in Lampsacus*, he lived in the famous Garden for the rest of his life.

Friends from Lampsacus and elsewhere came and lived with him or near him. The Garden was not only a philosophical school; it was also a sort of retreat or religious community. There lived there not only philosophers like Mêtrodôrus, Colôtes, Hermarchus, and others; there were slaves, like Mys, and free women, like Themista, the wife of Leonteus, to both of whom the Master, as the extant fragments testify, wrote letters of intimate friendship. And not only free women, but women with names that show that they were slaves, Leontion, Nikidion, Mammарion. They were *hetairae*; perhaps victims of war, like many of the unfortunate heroines in the New Comedy; free women from conquered cities, who had been sold in the slave market or reduced to misery as refugees, and to whom now the Garden afforded a true and spiritual refuge. For, almost as much as Diogenes, Epicurus had obliterated the stamp on the conventional currency. The values of the world no longer held good after you had passed the wicket gate of the Garden, and spoken with the Deliverer.

The Epicureans lived simply. They took neither flesh nor wine, and there is a letter extant, asking some one to send them a present of "potted cheese"<sup>19</sup> as a special luxury. Their enemies, who were numerous and lively, make the obvious accusations about the *hetairae*, and cite an alleged letter of the Master to Leontion. "Lord Paeon, my dear little Leontion, your note fills me with such a bubble of excitement!"<sup>20</sup> The problem of this

<sup>19</sup> τυρὸν κυθρίδιον, Fr. 182.

<sup>20</sup>Fr. 143. Παιᾶν ἄναξ, φίλον Λεοντάριον, οἷου κροτοθορύβου ἡμᾶς ἀνέπλησας, ἀναγνοντας σου τό ἐπιστόλιον. Fr. 121 (from an





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seldom so." Is that common-sense comfort not enough? The doctrine becomes more intense both in its promises and its demands. If intense suffering comes, he enjoins, turn away your mind and conquer the pain by the "sweetness" of memory. There are in every wise man's life moments of intense beauty and delight; if he has strength of mind he will call them back to him at will and live in the blessedness of the past, not in the mere dull agony of the moment. Nay, can he not actually enjoy the intellectual interest of this or that pang? Has he not that within him which can make the quality of its own life? On hearing of the death of a friend he will call back the sweetness of that friend's converse; in the burning Bull of Phalaris he will think his thoughts and be glad. Illusion, the old Siren with whom man cannot live in peace, nor yet without her, has crept back unseen to the centre of the citadel. It was Epicurus, and not a Stoic or Cynic, who asserts that a Wise Man will be happy on the rack.<sup>25</sup>

Strangely obliging, ironic Fortune gave to him also a chance of testing of his own doctrine. There is extant a letter written on his death-bed. "I write to you on this blissful day which is the last of my life. The obstruction of my bladder and internal pains have reached the extreme point, but there is marshalled against them the delight of my mind in thinking over our talks together. Take care of the children of Metrodorus in a way worthy of your life-long devotion to me and to philosophy."<sup>26</sup> At least his courage, and his kindness, did not fail.

Epicureanism had certainly its sublime side; and from this very sublimity perhaps arose the greatest flaw in the system, regarded as a rational philosophy.

<sup>25</sup>Fr. 601; cf. 598ff.

<sup>26</sup>Fr. 138; cf. 177.



It was accepted too much as a Revelation, too little as a mere step in the search for truth. It was based no doubt on careful and even profound scientific studies, and was expounded by the master in a vast array of volumes. But the result so attained was considered sufficient. Further research was not encouraged. Heterodoxy was condemned as something almost approaching "parricide."<sup>27</sup> The pursuit of "needless knowledge" was deliberately frowned upon.<sup>28</sup> When other philosophers were working out calculations about the size of the Sun and the commensurability of the sun-cycle and the moon-cycle, Epicurus contemptuously remarked that the Sun was probably about as big as it looked, or perhaps smaller; since fires at a distance generally look bigger than they are. The various theories of learned men were all possible but none certain. And as for the cycles, how did any one know that there was not a new sun shot off and extinguished every day?<sup>29</sup> It is not surprising to find that none of the great discoveries of the Hellenistic Age were due to the Epicurean school. Lucretius, writing 250 years later, appears to vary hardly in any detail from the doctrines of the Master, and Diogenes of Oenoanda, 500 years later, actually repeats his letters and sayings word for word.

<sup>27</sup>"οἱ τούτοις ἀντιγράφοντες οὐ πάνυ τι μακρὰν τῆς τῶν πατραλοιῶν καταδίκης ἀφεστήκασιν," Fr. 49. Usener, from Philodemus, *De Rhet.* This may be only a playful reference to Plato's phrase about being a πατραλοίας of his father, Parmenides, *Soph.*, p. 241. D.

<sup>28</sup>Epicurus congratulated himself (erroneously) that he came to Philosophy καθαρὸς πάσης παιδείας, "undefiled by education." Cf. Fr. 163 to Pythocles, παιδείαν δὲ πασαν, μακάριε, φεύγε τὸ κᾶάτιον ἀράμενος, "From education in every shape, my son, spread sail and fly!"

<sup>29</sup>Fr. 343-6.



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