

Plutarch on the Pythian Priestess



Περί των Εκλελοιποτων Χρηστηριων
De Defectu Oraculorum
About the Obsolescence of Oracles

Why the Pythian Priestess ceased to deliver her oracles in verse

Published under the title “Wherefore the Pythian Priestess now ceases to deliver her oracles in verse” In: *Plutarch’s Morals*. Translated from the Greek by John Philips. Corrected and revised edition by William W. Goodwin with an Introduction by Ralph Waldo Emerson. (1st ed. 1684-94, London, 5 Vols.) This article is from the 1878 ed. (based on the 5th ed. of 1718), Boston: Little, Brown, & Co.; Vol. III, pp. 69-103.

I. Basilocles, Philinus

II. Philinus, Diogenianus, Theo, Serapio, Boethus, Interpreters.

1. Basilocles. You have spun out the time, Philinus, till it is late in the evening, in giving the strangers a full sight of all the consecrated rarities; so that I am quite tired with waiting longer for your society.

Philinus. Therefore we walked slowly along, talking and discoursing, O Basilocles, sowing and reaping by the way such sharp and hot disputes as offered themselves, which sprung up anew and grew about us as we walked, like the armed men from the Dragon’s teeth of Cadmus.

Basilocles. Shall we then call some of those that were present; or wilt thou be so kind as to tell us what were the discourses and who were the disputants?

Philinus. That, Basilocles, it must be my business to do. For thou wilt hardly meet with anyone else in the city able to serve thee; for we saw most of the rest ascending with the stranger up to the Corycian cave and to Lycorea.

Basilocles. This same stranger is not only covetous of seeing what may be seen, but wonderfully civil and genteel.

Philinus. He is besides a great lover of science, and studious to learn. But these are not the only exercises which are to be admired in him. He is a person modest, yet facetious, smart and prudent in dispute, void of all passion and contumacies in his answers; in short, you will say of him at first sight that he is the son of a virtuous father. [70] For dost thou not know Diogenianus, a most excellent person?

Basilocles. I have not seen him, Philinus, but many report several things of the young gentleman, much like what you say. But, pray now, what was the beginning of these discourses? Upon what occasion did they arise?

2. Philinus. The interpreters of the sacred mysteries acted without any regard to us, who desired them to contract their relation into as few words as might be, and to pass by the most part of the inscriptions. But the stranger was but indifferently taken with the form and workmanship of the statues, being one, as it appeared, who had already been a spectator of many rare pieces of curiosity. He admired the beautiful colour of the brass, not foul and rusty, but shining with a tincture of blue. What, said he, was it any certain mixture and composition of the ancient artists in brass, like the famous art of giving a keen edge to swords, without which brass could not be used in war? For Corinthian brass received its lustre not from art, but by chance, when a fire had devoured some house wherein there was both gold and silver, but of brass the greater plenty; which, being intermixed and melted into one mass, derives its name from the brass, of which there was the greater quantity. Then Theo interposing said: But we have heard another more remarkable reason than this; how an artist in brass at Corinth, happening upon a chest full of gold, and fearing to have it divulged, cut the gold into small pieces, and mixed it by degrees with the brass, till he found the more noble metal gave a more than usual lustre to the baser, and so transformed it that he sold at a great rate the unknown mixture, that was highly admired for its beauty and colour. But I believe both the one and the other to be fabulous; for by all likelihood this Corinthian brass was a certain mixture and temperature of metals, prepared by art; just as at this day artisans temper [71] gold and silver together, and make a peculiar and wonderful pale yellow metal; howbeit, in my eye it is of a sickly colour and a corrupt hue, without any beauty in the world.

3. What then, said Diogenianus, do you believe to be the cause of this extraordinary colour in the brass? And Theo replied: Seeing that of those first and most natural elements, which are and ever will be — that is to say, fire, air, earth, and water — there is none that approaches so near to brass or that so closely environs it as air alone, we have most reason to believe that the air occasions it, and that from thence proceeds the difference which brass displays from other metals. Or did you know this even “before Theognis was born,”¹ as the comic poet intimates; but would you know by what natural quality or by what virtual power this same air thus colours the brass, being touched and surrounded by it? Yes, said Diogenianus; and so would I, dear son, replied the worthy Theo. First then let us endeavour, altogether with submission to your good pleasure, said the first propounder, to find out the reason wherefore of all moistures oil covers brass with rust. For it cannot be imagined that oil of itself causes that defilement, if when first laid on it is clean and pure. By no means, said the young gentleman, in regard the effect seems to proceed from another cause; for the rust appears through the oil, which is thin, pure, and transparent, whereas it is clouded by other more thick and muddy liquors, and so is not able to show itself. It is well said, son, replied the other, and truly; but hear, however, and then consider the reason which Aristotle produces. I am ready, returned the young gentleman. He says then, answered the other, that the rust insensibly penetrates

¹ [Said of any transaction that occurred so early that its origin could not easily be traced.]

and dilates itself through other liquids, as being of parts unequal, and of a thin substance; but that it grows to a consistency, and is, as it were, incorporated by the more dense substance of the oil. Now if [72] we could but suppose how this might be done, we should not want a charm to lull this doubt asleep.

4. When we had made our acknowledgment that he had spoken truth, and besought him to proceed, he told us that the air of the city of Delphi is heavy, compacted, thick, and forcible, by reason of the reflection and resistency of the adjacent mountains, and besides that, is sharp and cutting (as appears by the eager stomachs and swift digestion of the inhabitants); and that this air, entering and penetrating the brass by its keenness, fetches forth from the body of the brass much rust and earthy matter, which afterwards it stops and coagulates by its own density, ere it can get forth; by which means the rust abounding in quantity gives that peculiar grain and lustre to the superficies. When we approved this argument, the stranger declared his opinion, that it needed no more than one of those suppositions to clear the doubt; for, said he, that tenuity or subtilty seems to be in some measure contrary to that thickness supposed to be in the air, and therefore there is no reason to suppose it; for the brass, as it grows old, of itself exhales and sends forth that rust, which afterwards, being stopped and fixed by the thickness of the air, becomes apparent by reason of its quantity. Then Theo replied: and what hinders but that the same thing may be thick and thin both together, like the woofs of silk or fine linen? — of which Homer says:

Thin was the stuff,
Yet liquid oil ran o'er the tissued woof,¹

intimating the extreme fineness of the texture, yet so close woven that it could not suffer oil to pass through it. In like manner may we make use of the subtilty of the air, not only to scour the brass and fetch the rust out of it, but also to render the colour more pleasing and more azure-like, by intermixing light and splendour amidst the blue. [73]

5. This said, after short silence, the guides began again to cite certain words of an ancient oracle in verse, which, as it seemed to me, pointed at the sovereignty of Aegon king of Argos. I have often wondered, said Diogenianus, at the meanness and ill-contrived hobbling of the verses which conveyed the ancient oracles into the world. And yet Apollo is called the chief of the Muses; whom it therefore behooved to take no less care of elegancy and beauty in style and language, than of the voice and manner of singing. Besides, he must needs be thought to surpass in a high degree either Homer or Hesiod in poetic skill. Nevertheless we find several of the oracles lame and erroneous, as well in reference to the measure as to the words. Upon which the poet Serapio, newly come from Athens, being then in company, said: If we believe that those verses were composed by Apollo, can we acknowledge what you allege, that they come short of the beauty and elegancy which adorn the writings of Homer and Hesiod; and shall we not make use of them as examples of neatness and curiosity, correcting our judgment anticipated and forestalled by evil custom? To whom Boethus the geometer (the person who you know has lately gone over to the camp of Epi-

¹ *Odyssey* VII, 107

curus) said: Have you not heard the story of Pauson the painter? Not I, replied Serapio. It is worth your attention, answered Boethus. He, having contracted to paint a horse wallowing upon his back, drew the horse galloping at full speed; at which when the person that had agreed with him seemed to be not a little displeased, Pauson fell a laughing, and turned the picture upside downward; by which means the posture was quite altered, and the horse that seemed to run before lay tumbling now upon the ground. This (as Bion says) frequently happens to propositions, when they are once inverted; for some will deny the oracles to be elegant, because they come from Apollo; others will deny Apollo [74] to be the author, because of their rude and shapeless composure. For the one is dubious and uncertain; but this is manifest, that the verses wherein the oracles are generally delivered are no way laboriously studied. Nor can I appeal to a better judge than yourself, whose compositions and poems are not only written so gravely and philosophically, but, for invention and elegance, more like to those of Homer and Hesiod than the homely Pythian raptures.

6. To whom Serapio: We labour, Boethus, said he, under the distempered senses both of sight and hearing, being accustomed through niceness and delicacy to esteem and call that elegant which most delights; and perhaps we may find fault with the Pythian priestess because she does not warble so charmingly as the fair lyric songstress Glauca, or else because she does not perfume herself with precious doors or appear in rich and gaudy habit. And some may mislike her because she burns for incense rather barley-meal and laurel than frankincense, ladanon, and cinnamon. Do you not see, someone will say, what a grace there is in Sappho's measures, and how they delight and tickle the ears and fancies of the hearers? Whereas the Sibyl with her frantic grimaces, as Heraclitus says, uttering sentences altogether thoughtful and serious, neither bespiced nor perfumed, continues her voice a thousand years by the favour of the Deity that speaks within her. Pindar therefore tells us that Cadmus heard from heaven a sort of music that was neither lofty nor soft, nor shattered into trills and divisions; for severe holiness will not admit the allurements of pleasure, that was for the most part thrown into the world and flowed (as it appears) into the ears of men at the same time with the Goddess of mischief.

7. Serapio thus concluding, Theo with a smile proceeded. Serapio, said he, has not forgot his wonted custom of taking an opportunity to discourse of pleasure. But we, [75] Boethus, believe not these prophetic verses to be the compositions of Apollo, if they are worse than Homer's; but we believe that he supplied the principle of motion, and that every one of the prophetesses was disposed to receive his inspiration. For if the oracles were to be set down in writing, not verbally to be pronounced, surely we should not find fault with the hand, taking it to be Apollo's, because the letters were not so fairly written as in the epistles of kings. For neither the voice, nor the sound, nor the word, nor the metre proceeds from the God, but from the woman. God only presents the visions, and kindles in the soul a light to discover future events; which is called divine inspiration. But in short, I find it is a hard matter to escape the hands of Epicurus's priests (of which number I perceive you are), since you reprove the ancient priestesses for making bad verses, and the modern prophetesses for delivering the oracles in prose and vulgar language, which they do that they may escape being by you called to an account for their lame and mistaken verses. But then, Diogenianus, I beseech you, said he, in the name of all the Gods, be serious with us;

unriddle this question, and explain this mystery unto us, which is now grown almost epidemical. For indeed there is hardly any person that does not with an extreme curiosity search after the reason wherefore the Pythian oracle has ceased to make use of numbers and verse. Hold, son, said Theo, we shall disoblige our historical directors by taking their province out of their hands. First suffer them to make an end, and then at leisure we will go on with what you please.

8. Thus walking along, we were by this time got as far as the statue of Hiero the tyrant, while the stranger, although a most learned historian, yet out of his complaisant and affable disposition, attentively leaned to the present relations. But then, among other things, hearing how that one of the brazen pillars that supported the said statue [76] of Hiero fell of itself the same day that the tyrant died at Syracuse, he began to admire the accident. Thereupon at the same time I called to mind several other examples of the like nature: as that of Hiero the Spartan, the eyes of whose statue fell out of its head just before he was slain at the battle of Leuctra; — how the two stars vanished which Lysander offered and consecrated to the Gods after the naval engagement near Aegos Potami, and how there sprung of a sudden from his statue of stone such a multitude of thorny bushes and weeds as covered all his face; — how, when those calamities and misfortunes befell the Athenians in Sicily, the golden dates dropped from the palm-tree, and the ravens with their beaks pecked holes in the shield of Pallas; — how the crown of the Cnidians which Philomelus, the tyrant of the Phocians, gave Pharsalia, a female dancer, was the occasion of her death; for, passing out of Greece into Italy, one day as she was playing and dancing in the temple of Apollo in the city of Metapontum, having that crown upon her head, the young men of the place falling upon her, and fighting one among another for lucre of the gold, tore the damsel in pieces. Now, though Aristotle was wont to say that only Homer composed names and terms that had motion, by reason of the vigour and vivacity of his expressions, for my part I am apt to believe that the offerings made in this city of statues and consecrated presents sympathize with Divine Providence, and move themselves jointly therewith to foretell and signify future events; and that no part of all those sacred donatives is void of sense, but that every part is full of the Deity.

It is very probable, answered Boethus; for, to tell you truth, we do not think it sufficient to enclose the Divinity every month in a mortal body, unless we incorporate him with every stone and lump of brass; as if Fortune and Chance were not sufficient artists to bring about such accidents [77] and events. Say ye so then? said I. Seems it to you that these things happen accidentally and by hap-hazard; and is it likely that your atoms never separate, never move or incline this or that way either before or after, but just in that nick of time when some one of those who have made these offerings is to fare either better or worse? Shall Epicurus avail thee by his writings and his sayings, which he wrote and uttered above three hundred years ago, and shall the Deity, unless he crowd himself into all substances and blend himself with all things, not be allowed to be a competent author of the principles of motion and affection?

9. This was the reply I made Boethus, and the same answer I gave him touching the Sibyl's verses; for when we drew near that part of the rock which joins to the senate-

house, which by common fame was the seat of the first Sibyl that came to Delphi from Helicon, where she was bred by the Muses (though others affirm that she fixed herself at Maleo, and that she was the daughter of Lamia, the daughter of Neptune), Serapio made mention of certain verses of hers, wherein she had extolled herself as one that should never cease to prophesy even after her death; for that after her decease she should make her abode in the orb of the moon, being metamorphosed into the face of that planet; that her voice and prognostications should be always heard in the air, intermixed with the winds and by them driven about from place to place; and that from her body should spring various plants, herbs, and fruits to feed the sacred victims, which should have sundry forms and qualities in their entrails, whereby men would be able to foretell all manner of events to come. At this Boethus laughed outright; but the stranger replied that, though the Sibyl's vain-glory seemed altogether fabulous, yet the subversions of several Grecian cities, transmigrations of the inhabitants, several invasions of barbarian armies, the destructions of kingdoms and principalities, [78] testified the truth of ancient prophecies and predictions. And were not those accidents that fell out not many years ago in our memories at Cumae and Puteoli, said he, long before that time the predictions and promises of the Sibyl, which Time, as a debtor, afterwards discharged and paid? Such were the breaking forth of kindled fire from the sulphuric wombs of mountains, boiling of the sea, cities so swallowed up as not to leave behind the least footsteps of the ruins where they stood; things hard to be believed, much harder to be foretold, unless by Divine foresight.

10. Then Boethus said: I would fain know what accidents fall out which time does not owe at length to Nature. What so prodigious or unlooked for, either by land or sea, either in respect of cities or men, which, if it be foretold, may not naturally come to pass at one season or other, in process of time? So that such a prophecy, to speak properly, cannot be called a prediction, but a bare speech or report, or rather a scattering or sowing of words in boundless infinity that have no probability or foundation; which, as they rove and wander in the air, Fortune accidentally meets, and musters together by chance, to correspond and agree with some event. For, in my opinion, there is a great difference between the coming to pass of what has been said and the saying of what shall happen. For the discourse of things that are not, being already in itself erroneous and faulty, cannot, in justice, claim the honour of after-credit from a fortuitous accident. Nor is it a true sign that the prophet foretells of his certain knowledge, because what he spoke happened to come to pass; in regard there are an infinite number of accidents, that fall in the course of nature, suitable to all events. He therefore that conjectures best, and whom the common proverb avers to be the exactest diviner, is he who finds out what shall happen hereafter, by tracing the footsteps of future probabilities. [79] Whereas these Sibyls and enthusiastic wizards have only thrown into the capacious abyss of time, as into a vast and boundless ocean, whole heaps of words and sentences, comprehending all sorts of accidents and events, which, though some perchance may come to pass, were yet false when uttered, though afterwards by chance they may happen to be true.

11. Boethus having thus discoursed, Serapio replied, that Boethus had rightly and judiciously argued in reference to cursory predictions uttered not determinately and without good ground. One fairly guessed that such a captain should get the victory,

and he won the field; another cried that such things portended the subversion of such a city, and it was laid in ashes. But when the person does not only foretell the event, but how and when, by what means, and by whom it shall come to pass, this is no hazardous conjecture, but an absolute demonstration, and pre-inspired discovery of what shall come to pass hereafter, and that too by the determined decree of fate, long before it comes to pass. For example, to instance the halting of Agesilaus,

Sparta, beware, though thou art fierce and proud,
Lest a lame king thy ancient glories cloud;
For then 'twill be thy fate to undergo
Tedious turmoils of war, and sudden woe;

together with what was prophesied concerning the island which the sea threw up right against Thera and Therasia; as also the prediction of the war between King Philip and the Romans,

When Trojan race shall tame Phoenicians bold,
Prodigious wonders shall the world behold;
From burning seas shall flames immense ascend;
Lightning and whirlwinds hideous rocks shall rend
From their foundations, and an island rear,
Dreadful to sight and terrible to hear.
In vain shall greater strength and valour then
Withstand the contemned force of weaker men. [80]

Soon after this island shot up out of the ocean, surrounded with flames and boiling surges; and then it was that Hannibal was overthrown, and the Carthaginians were subdued by the distressed and almost ruined Romans, and that the Aetolians, assisted by the Romans, vanquished Philip King of Macedon. So that it is never to be imagined that these things were the effects of negligent and careless chance; besides, the series and train of events ensuing the prodigy clearly demonstrate the foreknowledge of a prophetic spirit. The same may be said of the prophecy made five hundred years beforehand to the Romans of the time when they should be engaged in war with all the world at once; which happened when their own slaves made war upon their masters. In all this there was nothing of conjecture, nothing of blind uncertainty, nor is there any occasion to grope into the vast obscurity of chance for the reason of these events; but we have many pledges of experience, that plainly demonstrate the beaten path by which destiny proceeds. For certainly there is no man who will believe that ever those events answered accidentally the several circumstances of the prediction; otherwise we may as well say that Epicurus himself never wrote his book of dogmatic precepts, but that the work was perfected by the accidental meeting and interchange of the letters, one among another.

12. Thus discoursing, we kept on our walk; but when we came into the Corinthian Hall and observed the brazen palm-tree, the only remainder left of all the consecrated donatives, Diogenianus wondered to observe several figures of frogs and water-snakes, all in cast work about the root of the tree. Nor were we less at a stand, well knowing the palm to be no tree that grows by the water or delights in moist or fenny places; neither do frogs at all concern or belong to the Corinthians, either by way of

emblem or religious ceremony, or as the city arms; as the [81] Selinuntines formerly offered to their Gods parsley or smallage (*selinon*) of goldsmith's work and of the choicest yellow metal; and the inhabitants of Tenedos always kept in their temple a consecrated axe, a fancy taken from their esteem of the crab-fish that breed in that island near the promontory of Asterium, they being the only crabs that carry the figure of an axe upon the upper part of their shells. For as for Apollo, we were of opinion that crows, swans, wolves, sparrow-hawks, or any other sort of creature, would be more acceptable to him than despicable animals. To this Serapio replied, that sure the workman thereby designed to show that the Sun was nourished by moisture and exhalations; whether it was that he thought at that time of that verse in Homer,

The rising Sun then causing day to break,
Quits the cool pleasure of the oozy lake,¹

or whether he had seen how the Egyptians, to represent sunrise, paint a little boy sitting upon a lotus. Thereupon, not able to refrain laughing, What, said I, are you going about to obtrude your stoicisms again upon us; or do you think to slide insensibly into our discourse your exhalations and fiery prodigies? What is this but, like the Thessalian women, to call down the Sun and Moon by enchantments from the skies, while you derive their original from the earth and water?

Therefore Plato will have a man to be a heavenly tree, growing with his root, which is his head, upward. But you deride Empedocles for affirming that the Sun, being illumined by the reflection of the celestial light, with an intrepid countenance casts a radiant lustre back upon the convex of heaven; while you yourselves make the Sun to be a mere terrestrial animal or water plant, confining him to ponds, lakes, and such like regions of frogs. But let us refer these things to the tragical monstrosity of Stoical [82] opinions, and now make some particular reflections touching the extravagant pieces of certain artificers, who, as they are ingenious and elegant in some things, so are no less weakly curious and ambitious in others of their inventions; like him who, designing to signify the dawn of day-light or the hours of sunrise, painted a cock upon the hand of Apollo. And thus may these frogs be thought to have been designed by the artist to denote the spring, when the Sun begins to exercise his power in the air and to dissolve the winter congealments; at least, if we may believe, as you yourselves affirm, that Apollo and the Sun are both one God, and not two distinct Deities. Why, said Serapio, do you think the Sun and Apollo differ the one from the other? Yes, said I, as the Moon differs from the Sun. Nay, the difference is somewhat greater. For the Moon neither very often nor from all the world conceals the Sun; but the Sun is the cause that all men are ignorant of Apollo, by sense withdrawing the rational intellect from that which is to that which appears.

13. After this, Serapio put the question to the Historical Directors, why that same hall did not bear the name of Cypselus, who was both the founder and the consecrator, but was called the Corinthians' Hall? When all the rest were silent, because perhaps they knew not what to say; How can we imagine, said I with a smile, that these people should either know or remember the reason, having been so amused and thunderstruck by your high-flown discourses of prodigies altogether supernatural?

¹ *Odyssey* III, 1

However we have heard it reported, when the monarchical government of Corinth was dissolved by the ruin of Cypselus, the Corinthians claimed the honour to own both the golden statue at Pisa, and the treasure that lay in that place; which was also by the Delphians decreed to be their just right. This glory being envied them by the Eleans, they were by a decree of the Corinthians utterly [83] excluded from the solemnities of the Isthmian games. This is the true reason, that never since any person of the country of Elis was admitted to any trial of skill at those festivals. For as for that murder of the Molionidae, slain by Hercules near Cleonae, that was not the reason wherefore Eleans were excluded, as some have vainly alleged; for on the contrary it had been more proper for the Eleans themselves to have excluded the Corinthians from the Olympic games, had they any animosity against them on this account. And this is all that I have to say in reference to this matter.

14. But when we came into the treasury of the Acanthians and Brasidas, the director showed us the place where formerly stood the obelisks dedicated to the memory of the courtesan Rhodopis. Then Diogenianus in a kind of passion said: It was no less ignominy for this city to allow Rhodopis a place wherein to deposit the tenth of her gains got by the prostitution of her body, than to put Aesop her fellow-servant to death. But why should you be offended at this, said Serapio, when you have but to cast up your eye, and you may yonder behold the golden statue of Mnesarete standing between kings and emperors, which Crates averred to be a trophy of the Grecian intemperance? The young man observed the statue, and said: But it was Phryne of whom Crates uttered that expression. That is very true, replied Serapio; for her proper name was Mnesarete; but Phryne was a nickname, given her by reason of the yellowness of her complexion, like the colour of a toad that lies among moist and overgrown bushes, called in Greek *φρύνη*. For many times it happens that nicknames eclipse and drown the proper names both of men and women. Thus the mother of Alexander, whose true name was Polyxena, was afterwards called Myrtale, then Olympias, and Stratonice; Eumetis the Corinthian was afterwards called from her father's name [84] Cleobule; and Herophyle of the city of Erythraea, skilful in divination, was called Sibylla. And the grammarians will tell you that Leda herself was first called Mnesionoe, and Orestes Achaeus. But how, said he, looking upon Theo, can you answer this complaint concerning Phryne, for being placed in so much state above her quality?

15. In the same manner, and as easily, replied Serapio, as I may charge and accuse yourself for reproaching the slightest faults among the Greeks. For as Socrates reprehended Callias for being always at enmity with perfumes and precious doors, while yet he could endure to see boys and girls dance and tumble together, and to be a spectator of the lascivious gestures of wanton mummers and merryandrews; so, in my opinion, it is with you that envy the standing of a woman's statue in the temple, because she made ill use of her beauty. Yet, though you see Apollo surrounded with the first-fruits and tenths of murders, wars, and plunder, and all the temple full of spoils and pillage taken from the Greeks, these things never move your indignation; you never commiserate your countrymen, when you read engraved upon these gaudy donatives such doleful inscriptions as these — Brasidas and the Acanthians dedicate these spoils taken from Athenians — the Athenians these from the Corinthians — the Phocians these from the Thessalians — the Orneatae these from the Sicyonians

— the Amphictyons these from the Phocians. Now if it is true that Praxiteles offended Crates by erecting a statue in honour of his mistress, in my opinion Crates rather ought to have commended him for placing among the golden monuments of kings and princes the statue of a courtesan, thereby showing a contempt and scorn of riches, to which there is nothing of grandeur or veneration due; for it becomes princes and kings to consecrate to the God the lasting monuments of justice, temperance, magnanimity, not of golden and superfluous opulency, [85] which are as frequently erected to the most flagitious of men.

16. But you forgot, said one of the directors, that Croesus honoured the woman that baked his bread with a golden statue, which he caused to be set up in this place, not to make a show of royal superfluity, but upon a just and honest occasion of gratitude, which happened thus. It is reported that Alyattes, the father of Croesus, married a second wife, by whom he had other children. This same step-dame, therefore, designing to remove Croesus out of the way, gave the woman-baker a dose of poison, with a strict charge to put it in the bread which she made for the young prince. Of this the woman privately informed Croesus, and gave the poisoned bread to the queen's children. By which means Croesus quietly succeeded his father; when he did no less than acknowledge the fidelity of the woman by making even the God himself a testimony of his gratitude, wherein he did like a worthy and virtuous prince. And therefore it is but fitting that we should extol, admire, and honour the magnificent presents and offerings consecrated by several cities upon such occasions, like that of the Opuntines. For when the tyrants of Phocis had broken to pieces, melted down, and coined into money the most precious of their sacred donatives, which they spent as profusely in the neighbouring parts, the Opuntines made it their business to buy up all the plundered metal, wherever they could meet with it; and putting it up into a vessel made on purpose, they sent it as an offering to Apollo. And, for my part, I cannot but highly applaud the inhabitants of Myrina and Apollonia, who sent hither the first-fruits of their harvests in sheaves of gold; but much more the Eretrians and Magnesians, who dedicated to our God the first-fruits of their men, not only acknowledging that from him all the fruits of the earth proceeded, but that he was also the giver of children, as being the [86] author of generation and a lover of mankind. But I blame the Megarians, for that they alone erected here a statue of our God holding a spear in his hand, in memory of the battle which they won from the Athenians, whom they vanquished after the defeat of the Medes, and expelled their city, of which they were masters before. However, afterwards they presented a golden plectrum to Apollo, remembering perhaps those verses of Scythinus, who thus wrote of the harp:

This was the harp which Jove's most beauteous son
Framed by celestial skill to play upon;
And for his plectrum the Sun's beams he used,
To strike those cords that mortal ears amused.

17. Now as Serapio was about to have added something of the same nature, the stranger, taking the words out of his mouth, said: I am wonderfully pleased to hear discourses upon such subjects as these; but I am constrained to claim your first promise, to tell me the reason wherefore now the Pythian prophetess no longer delivers her oracles in poetic numbers and measures. And therefore, if you please, we will

surcease the remaining sight of these curiosities, choosing rather to sit a while and discourse the matter among ourselves. For it seems to be an assertion strangely repugnant to the belief and credit of the oracle, in regard that of necessity one of these two things must be true, either that the Pythian prophetess does not approach the place where the deity makes his abode, or that the sacred vapour that inspired her is utterly extinct, and its efficacy lost. Walking therefore to the south side of the temple, we took our seats within the portico, over against the temple of Tellus, having from thence a prospect of the Castalian fountain; insomuch that Boethus presently told us that the very place itself favoured the stranger's question. For formerly there stood a temple dedicated to the Muses, close by the source of the rivulet, [87] whence they drew their water for the sacrifices, according to that of Simonides:

There flows the spring, whose limpid stream supplies
The fair-haired Muses water for their hands,
Before they touch the hallowed sacrifice.

And the said Simonides a little lower calls Clio somewhat more curiously

The chaste inspectress of those sacred wells,
Whose fragrant water all her cisterns fills;
Water, through dark ambrosial nooks conveyed,
By which Castalian rivulets are fed.

And therefore Eudoxus erroneously gave credit to those that gave the epithet of Stygian to this water, near which the wiser sort placed the temple of the Muses, as guardians of the springs and assistants to prophecy; as also the temple of Tellus, to which the oracle appertained, and where the answers were delivered in verses and songs. And here it was, as some report, that first a certain heroic verse was heard to this effect:

Ye birds, bring hither all your plumes;
Ye bees, bring all your wax;

which related to the time that the oracle, forsaken by the Deity, lost its veneration.

18. These things, then said Serapio, seem to belong of right to the Muses, as being their particular province; for it becomes us not to fight against the gods, nor with divination to abolish providence and divinity, but to search for convincement to refute¹ repugnant arguments; and, in the meantime, not to abandon that religious belief and persuasion which has been so long propagated among us, from father to son, for so many generations.

You say very right, said I, Serapio; for we do not as yet despair of philosophy or give it over for lost, because, although formerly the ancient philosophers published their precepts and sentences in verse — as did Orpheus, Hesiod, Parmenides, Xenophanes, Empedocles, and Thales — yet [88] that custom has been lately laid aside by all others except yourself. For you indeed once more have arrayed philosophy in poetic numbers, on purpose to render it more sprightly, more charming, and delightful to youth. Nor is astrology as yet become more ignoble or less valued, because Aristar-

¹ [refute]

chus, Timochares, Aristillus, and Hipparchus have written in prose, though formerly Eudoxus, Hesiod, and Thales wrote of that science in verse; at least if that astrology was the legitimate offspring of Thales which goes under his name. Pindar also acknowledges his dissatisfaction touching the manner of melody neglected in this time, and wonders why it should be so despised. Neither is it a thing that looks like hurtful or absurd, to enquire into the causes of these alterations. But to destroy the arts and faculties themselves because they have undergone some certain mutations, is neither just nor rational.

19. Upon which Theo interposing said: It cannot be denied but that there have been great changes and innovations in reference to poetry and the sciences; yet is it as certain, that from all antiquity oracles have been delivered in prose. For we find in Thucydides, that the Lacedaemonians, desirous to know the issue of the war then entered into against the Athenians, were answered in prose, that they should become potent and victorious, and that the Deity would assist them, whether invoked or not invoked; and again, that unless they recalled Pausanias, they would plough with a silver ploughshare.¹ To the Athenians consulting the oracle concerning their expedition into Sicily, he gave order to send for the priestess of Minerva from the city of Erythrae; which priestess went by the name of Hesychia, or repose. And when Dinomenes the Sicilian enquired what should become of his children, the oracle returned for answer, that they should all three [89] be lords and princes. And when Dinomenes replied, But then, most powerful Apollo, let it be to their confusion; the God made answer, That also I both grant and promise. The consequence of which was, that Gelo was troubled with the dropsy during his reign, Hiero was afflicted with the stone, and the third, Thrasybulus, surrounded with war and sedition, was in a short time expelled his dominions. Procles also, the tyrant of Epidaurus, after he had cruelly and tyrannically murdered several others, put Timarchus likewise to death, who fled to him for protection from Athens with a great sum of money — after he had pledged him his faith and received him at his first arrival with large demonstrations of kindness and affection — and then threw his carcass into the sea, enclosed in a pannier. All this he did by the persuasion of one Cleander of Aegina, no other of his courtiers being privy to it. After which, meeting with no small trouble and misfortune in all his affairs, he sent to the oracle his brother Cleotimus, with orders to enquire whether he should provide for his safety by flight, or retire to some other place. Apollo made answer, that he advised Procles to fly where he had directed his Aeginetan guest to dispose of the pannier, or where the hart had cast his horns. Upon which the tyrant, understanding that the oracle commanded him either to throw himself into the sea or to bury himself in the earth (in regard that a stag, when he sheds his antlers, scrapes a hole in the ground and hides his ignominy), demurred a while; but at length, seeing the condition of his affairs grew every day worse and worse, he resolved to save himself by flight; at which time the friends of Timarchus, having seized upon his person, slew him and threw his body into the sea. But what is more than all this, the oracular answers according to which Lycurgus composed the form of the Lacedaemonian commonwealth were given in prose. Besides, Alyrius, Herodotus, [90] Philochorus and Ister, than whom no men have been more diligent to collect the an-

¹ See Thucydides I, 118; V, 16.

swers of the oracles, among the many which they cite in verse, quote several also in prose. And Theopompus, the most diligent that ever made scrutiny into oracular history, sharply reprehends those who believed the Pythian oracles were not delivered in verse at that time; and yet, when he labours to prove his assertion, he is able to produce but very few, because doubtless the rest even then were uttered in prose.

20. Yet there are some that now at this day run in verse; one of which has become notorious above the rest. There is in Phocis a temple consecrated to Hercules the woman-hater, the chief priest of which is forbid by the law and custom of the place to have private familiarity with his wife during the year that he officiates; for which reason they most commonly make choice of old men to perform that function. Nevertheless, some time since a young man, no way vicious and covetous of honour, yet dotting upon a new married wife, took upon him the dignity. At first he was very chaste and temperate, and abstained from the woman; but soon after, the young lady coming to give him a visit as he was laid down to rest himself after a brisk dancing and drinking bout, he could not resist the charming temptation. But then, coming to himself and remembering what he had done, perplexed and terrified, he fled to the oracle to consult Apollo upon the crime which he had committed; who returned him this answer,

All things necessary God permitteth.

But should we grant that in our age no oracles are delivered in verse, we should be still doubtful about the ancient times, when the oracles were delivered sometime in verse sometime in prose. Though, whether it be in prose or verse, the oracle is never a whit the falser or the more miraculous, so that we have but a true and religious opinion [91] of the Deity; not irreverently conceiting that formerly he composed a stock of verses to be now repeated by the prophetess, as if he spoke through masks and visors.

21. But these things require a more prolix discourse and a stricter examination, to be deferred till another time. For the present, therefore, let us only call to mind thus much, that the body makes use of several instruments, and the soul employs the body and its members; the soul being the organ of God. Now the perfection of the organ is to imitate the thing that makes use of it, so far as it is capable, and to exhibit the operation of its thought, according to the best of its own power; since it cannot show it as it is in the divine operator himself — neat, without any affection, fault, or error whatsoever — but imperfect and mixed. For of itself, the thing is to us altogether unknown, till it is infused by another and appears to us as fully partaking of the nature of that other. I forbear to mention gold or silver, brass or wax, or whatever other substances are capable to receive the form of an imprinted resemblance. For true it is, they all admit the impression; but still one adds one distinction, another another, to the imitation arising from their presentation itself; as we may readily perceive in mirrors, both plane, concave, and convex, infinite varieties of representations and faces from one and the same original; there being no end of that diversity.

But there is no mirror that more exactly represents any shape or form, nor any instrument that yields more obsequiously to the use of Nature, than the Moon herself. And yet she, receiving from the Sun his masculine splendour and fiery light, does not

transmit the same to us; but when it intermixes with her pellucid substance, it changes colour and loses its power. For warmth and heat abandon the pale planet, and her light grows dim before it can reach our sight. And this is that which, in my opinion, Heraclitus seems to have meant, when he said that the prince [92] who rules the oracle of Delphi neither speaks out nor conceals, but signifies. Add then to these things thus rightly spoken this farther consideration, that the Deity makes use of the Pythian prophetess, so far as concerns her sight and hearing, as the Sun makes use of the Moon; for he makes use of a mortal body and an immortal soul as the organs of prediction. Now the body lies dull and immovable of itself; but the soul being restless, when once the soul begins to be in motion, the body likewise stirs, not able to resist the violent agitation of the nimbler spirit, while it is shaken and tossed as in a stormy sea by the tempestuous passions that ruffle within it. For as the whirling of bodies that merely move circularly is nothing violent, but when they move round by force and tend downward by nature, there results from both a confused and irregular circumrotation; thus that divine rapture which is called enthusiasm is a commixture of two motions, wherewith the soul is agitated, the one extrinsic, as by inspiration, the other by nature. For, seeing that as to inanimate bodies, which always remain in the same condition, it is impossible by preternatural violence to offer a force which is contrary to their nature and intended use, as to move a cylinder spherically or cubically, or to make a lyre sound like a flute, or a trumpet like a harp; how is it possible to manage an animate body, that moves of itself, that is indued with reason, will, and inclination, otherwise than according to its pre-existent reason, power, or nature; as (for example) to incline to music a person altogether ignorant and an utter enemy to music, or to make a grammarian of one that never knew his letters, or to make him speak like a learned man that never understood the least tittle of any science in the world?

22. For proof of this I may call Homer for my witness, who affirms that there is nothing done or brought to perfection of which God is not the cause, supposing that God [93] makes use not of all men for all things alike, but of every man according to his ability either of art or nature. Thus, dost thou not find it to be true, friend Diogenianus, that when Minerva would persuade the Greeks to undertake any enterprise, she brings Ulysses upon the stage? — when she designs to break the truce, she finds out Pandarus? — when she designs a rout of the Trojans, she addresses herself to Diomedes? For the one was stout of body and valiant; the other was a good archer, but without brains; the other a shrewd politician and eloquent. For Homer was not of the same opinion with Pindar, at least if it was Pindar that made the following verses:

Were it the will of Heaven, an ozier bough
Were vessel safe enough the seas to plough.¹

For he well knew that there were different abilities and natures designed for different effects, every one of which is qualified with different motions, though there be but one moving cause that gives motion to all. So that the same virtual power which moves the creature that goes upon all four cannot cause it to fly, no more than he that stammers can speak fluently and eloquently, or he that has a feeble squeaking

¹ Θεοῦ θέλοντος, καν ἐπὶ ριπὸς πλῆσις.

voice can give a loud hollow. Therefore in my opinion it was that Battus, when he consulted the oracle, was sent into Africa, there to build a new city, as being a person who, although he lisped and stammered, had nevertheless endowments truly royal, which rendered him fit for sovereign government. In like manner it is impossible the Pythian priestess should learn to speak learnedly and elegantly; for, though it cannot be denied but that her parentage was virtuous and honest, and that she always lived a sober and a chaste life, yet her education was among poor labouring people; so that she was advanced to the oracular seat rude and unpolished, void of all the advantages of art or experience. For as it is the opinion of Xenophon, that [94] a virgin ready to be espoused ought to be carried to the bridegroom's house when she has seen and heard as little as possible; so the Pythian priestess ought to converse with Apollo, illiterate and ignorant almost of everything, still approaching his presence with a truly and pure virgin soul.

But it is a strange fancy of men; they believe that the God makes use of herons, wrens, and crows to signify future events, expressing himself according to their vulgar notes, but do not expect of these birds, although they are the messengers and ambassadors of the God, to deliver their predictions in words clear and intelligible; but they will not allow the Pythian priestess to pronounce her answers in plain, sincere, and natural expressions, but they demand that she shall speak in the poetical magnificence of high and stately verses, like those of a tragic chorus, with metaphors and figurative phrases, accompanied with the delightful sounds of flutes and hautboys.

23. What then shall we say of the ancients? Not one, but many things. First then, as hath been said already, that the ancient Pythian priestesses pronounced most of their oracles in prose. Secondly, that those ages produced complexions and tempers of body much more prone and inclined to poetry, with which immediately were associated those other ardent desires, affections, and preparations of the mind, which wanted only something of a beginning and a diversion of the fancy from more serious studies, not only to draw to their purpose (according to the saying of Philinus) astrologers and philosophers, but also in the heat of wine and pathetic affections, either of sudden compassion or surprising joy, to slide insensibly into voices melodiously tuned, and to fill banquets with charming odes or love songs, and whole volumes with amorous canzonets and mirthful inventions. Therefore, though Euripides tells us,

Love makes men poets who before no music knew, [95]

he does not mean that love infuses music and poetry into men that were not already inclined to those accomplishments, but that it warms and awakens that disposition which lay unactive and drowsy before. Otherwise we might say that now there were no lovers in the world, but that Cupid himself was vanished and gone, because that now-a-days there is not one

Who now, true archer-like,
Lets his poetic raptures fly
To praise his mistress's lip or eye,

as Pindar said. But this were absurd to affirm. For amorous impatiencies torment and agitate the minds of many men not addicted either to music or poetry, that know not how to handle a flute or touch a harp, and yet are no less talkative and inflamed with desire than the ancients. And I believe there is no person who would be so unkind to himself as to say that the Academy or the quires of Socrates and Plato were void of love, with whose discourses and conferences touching that passion we frequently meet, though they have not left any of their poems behind. And would it not be the same thing to say, there never was any woman that studied courtship but Sappho, nor ever any that were endued with the gift of prophecy but Sibylla and Aristonica and those that delivered their oracles and sacred raptures in verse? For wine, as saith Chaeremon, soaks and infuses itself into the manners and customs of them that drink it. Now poetic rapture, like the raptures of love, makes use of the ability of its subject, and moves every one that receives it, according to its proper qualification.

24. Nevertheless, if we do but make a right reflection upon God and his Providence, we shall find the alteration to be much for the better. For the use of speech seems to be like the exchange of money; that which is good and lawful is commonly current and known, and goes [96] sometimes at a higher, sometimes at a lower value. Thus there was once a time when the stamp and coin of language was approved and passed current in verses, songs, and sonnets; for then all histories, all philosophical learning, all affections and subjects that required grave and solid discussion, were written in poetry and fitted for musical composition. For what now but a few will scarce vouchsafe to hear, then all men listened to,

The shepherd, ploughman, and bird-catcher too,¹

as it is in Pindar; all delighted in songs and verses. For such was the inclination of that age and their readiness to versify, that they fitted their very precepts and admonitions to vocal and instrumental music. If they were to teach, they did it in songs fitted to the harp. If they were to exhort, reprove, or persuade, they made use of fables and allegories. And then for their praises of the Gods, their vows, and paeans after victory, they were all composed in verse; by some, as being naturally airy and flowing in their invention; by others, as habituated by custom. And therefore it is not that Apollo envies this ornament and elegancy to the science of divination; nor was it his design to banish from the Tripos his beloved Muse, but rather to introduce her when rejected by others, being rather a lover and kindler of poetic rapture in others, and choosing rather to furnish labouring fancies with imaginations, and to assist them to bring forth the lofty and learned kind of language, as most becoming and most to be admired.

But afterwards, when the conversation of men and custom of living altered with the change of their fortunes and dispositions, consuetude expelling and discarding all manner of superfluity rejected also golden top-knots, and silken vestments loosely flowing in careless folds, clipped their long dishevelled locks, and, laying aside their embroidered [97] buskin, taught men to glory in sobriety and frugality in opposition to wantonness and superfluity, and to place true honour in simplicity and modesty, not

¹ Pindar, *Isthmian* 1, 67

in pomp and vain curiosity. And then it was that, the manner of writing being quite altered, history alighted from versifying, as it were from riding in chariots, and on foot distinguished truth from fable; and philosophy, in a clear and plain style, familiar and proper to instruct rather than to astonish the world with metaphors and figures, began to dispute and enquire after truth in common and vulgar terms. And then it was, that Apollo caused the Pythian priestess to surcease calling her fellow-citizens fire-inflaming, the Spartans serpent-devourers, men by the name of Oreanes, and rivers by the name of mountain-drainers; and discarding verses, uncouth words, circumlocutions, and obscurity, taught the oracles to speak as the laws discourse to cities, and as princes speak to their people and their subjects, or as masters teach their scholars, appropriating their manner of speech to good sense and persuasive grace.

25. For, as Sophocles tells us, we are to believe the Deity to be

Easy to wise men, who can truth discern;
The fool's bad teacher, who will never learn.

And ever since belief and perspicuity thus associated together, it came to pass by alteration of circumstances that, whereas formerly the vulgar looked with a high veneration upon whatever was extraordinary and extravagant, and conceived a more than common sanctity to lie concealed under the veil of obscurity, afterwards men desirous to understand things clearly and easily, without flowers of circumlocutions and disguisements of dark words, not only began to find fault with oracles enveloped with poetry, as repugnant to the easy understanding of the real meaning, and overshadowing the sentence with mist and darkness, but also suspected the truth of the very prophecy itself [98] which was muffled up in so many metaphors, riddles, and ambiguities, which seemed no better than holes to creep out at and evasions of censure, should the event prove contrary to what had been foretold. And some there were who reported that there were several extempore poets entertained about the Tripod, who were to receive the words as they dropped roughly from the oracle, and presently by virtue of their extempore fancy to model them into verses and measures, that served (as it were) instead of hampers and baskets to convey the answers from place to place. I forbear to tell how far those treacherous deceivers like Onomacritus, Herodotus (?), and Cyneso, have contributed to dishonour the sacred oracles, by their interlarding of bombast expressions and high-flown phrases, where there was no necessity of any such alteration. It is also as certain, that those mountebanks, jugglers, impostors, gipsies, and all that altar-licking tribe of vagabonds that set up their throats at the festivals and sacrifices to Cybele and Serapis, have highly undervalued poesy; some of them extempore, and others by lottery from certain little books, composing vain predictions, which they may sell to servants and silly women, that easily suffer themselves to be deluded by the overawing charms of serious ambiguity couched in strained and uncouth balladry. Whence it comes to pass, that poetry, seeming to prostitute itself among cheats and deluders of the people, among mercenary gipsies and mumping charlatans, has lost its ancient credit, and is therefore thought unworthy the honour of the Tripod.

26. And therefore I do not wonder that the ancients stood in need of double meaning, of circumlocution, and obscurity. For certainly never any private person consulted

the oracle when he went to buy a slave or hire workmen; but potent cities, kings and princes, whose undertakings and concernments were of vast and high [99] concernment, and whom it was not expedient for those that had the charge of the oracle to disoblige or incense by the return of answers ungrateful to their ears. For the deity is not bound to observe that law of Euripides, where he says,

Phoebus alone, and none but he,
Should unto men the prophet be.

Therefore, when he makes use of mortal prophets and agents, of whom it behooves him to take a more especial care that they be not destroyed in his service, he does not altogether go about to suppress the truth, but only eclipses the manifestation of it, like a light divided into sundry reflections, rendering it by the means of poetic umbrage less severe and ungrateful in the delivery. For it is not convenient that princes or their enemies should presently know what is by Fate decreed to their disadvantage. Therefore he so envelops his answers with doubts and ambiguities as to conceal from others the true understanding of what was answered; though to them that came to the oracle themselves, and gave due attention to the deliverer, the meaning of the answer is transparently obvious. Most impertinent therefore are they who, considering the present alteration of things, accuse and exclaim against the Deity for not assisting in the same manner as before.

27. And this may be farther said, that poetry brings no other advantage to the answer than this, that the sentence being comprised and confined within a certain number of words and syllables bounded by poetic measure is more easily carried away and retained in memory. Therefore it behooved those that formerly lived to have extraordinary memories, to retain the marks of places, the times of such and such transactions, the ceremonies of deities beyond the sea, the hidden monuments of heroes, hard to be found in countries far from Greece. For in those expeditions of Phalanthus and several other admirals of [100] great navies, how many signs were they forced to observe, how many conjectures to make, ere they could find the seat of rest allotted by the oracle! In the observance of which there were some nevertheless that failed, as Battus among others. For he said that he failed because he had not landed in the right place to which he was sent; and therefore returning back he complained to the oracle. But Apollo answered:

As well as I thou knowest, who ne'er hast been
In Libya covered o'er with sheep and kine;
If this is true, thy wisdom I admire:

and so sent him back again. Lysander also, ignorant of the hillock Archelides, also called Alopecus, and the river Hoplites, nor apprehensive of what was meant by

The earth-born dragon, treacherous foe behind,

being overthrown in battle, was there slain by Neochorus the Haliartian, who bare for his device a dragon painted upon his shield. But it is needless to recite any more of these ancient examples of oracles, difficult to be retained in memory, especially to you that are so well read.

28. And now, God be praised, there is an end of all those questions which were the grounds of consulting the oracle. For now we repose altogether in the soft slumbers of peace; all our wars are at an end. There are now no tumults, no civil seditions, no tyrannies, no pestilences nor calamities depopulating Greece, no epidemic diseases needing powerful and choice drugs and medicines. Now, when there is nothing of variety, nothing of mystery, nothing dangerous, but only bare and ordinary questions about small trifles and vulgar things, as whether a man may marry, whether take a voyage by sea, or lend his money safely at interest — and when the most important enquiries of cities are concerning the next harvest, the increase of their cattle, or the health of the inhabitants — there to make use of verses, ambiguous words, and confounding obscurities, [101] where the questions require short and easy answers, causes us to suspect that the sacred minister studies only cramp expressions, like some ambitious sophister, to wrest admiration from the ignorant. But the Pythian priestess is naturally of a more generous disposition; and therefore, when she is busy with the Deity, she has more need of truth than of satisfying her vain-glory, or of minding either the commendations or the dispraise of men.

29. And well it were, that we ourselves should be so affected. But on the contrary, being in a quandary and jealousy lest the oracle should lose the reputation it has had for these three thousand years, and lest people should forsake it and forbear going to it, we frame excuses to ourselves, and feign causes and reasons of things which we do not know, and which it is not convenient for us to know; out of a fond design to persuade the persons thus oddly dissatisfied, whom it became us rather to let alone. For certainly the mistake must redound to ourselves,¹ when we shall have such an opinion of our Deity as to approve and esteem those ancient and pithy proverbs of wise men, written at the entrance into the temple,

Know thyself

Nothing to excess

as containing in few words a full and close compacted sentence, and yet find fault with the modern oracle for delivering answers concise and plain. Whereas those apophthegms are like waters crowded and pent up in a narrow room or running between contracted banks, where we can no more discern the bottom of the water than we can the depth and meaning of the sentence. And yet, if we consider what has been written and said concerning those sentences by such as have dived into their signification with an intent to clear their abstruseness, we shall hardly find disputes more prolix than those are. But the language of the Pythian priestess is such as the mathematicians define a right line to be, that is to say, the [102] shortest that may be drawn betwixt two points. So likewise doth she avoid all winding and circles, all double meanings and abstruse ambiguities, and proceed directly to the truth. And though she has been obnoxious to strict examination, yet is she not to be misconstrued without danger, nor could ever any person to this very day convict her of falsehood; but on the other side, she has filled the temple with presents, gifts, and offerings, not only of the Greeks but barbarians, and adorned the seat of the oracle with the magnificent structures and fabrics of the Amphictyons. And we find many

¹ *Odyssey* II, 190

additions of new buildings, many reparations of the old ones that were fallen down or decayed by time. And as we see from trees overgrown with shade and verdant boughs other lesser shoots sprout up; thus has the Delphian concourse afforded growth and grandeur to the assembly of the Amphictyons, which is fed and maintained by the abundance and affluence arising from thence, and has the form and show of magnificent temples, stately meetings, and sacred waters; which, but for the ceremonies of the altar, would not have been brought to perfection in a thousand years. And to what other cause can we attribute the fertility of the Galaxian Plains in Boeotia but to their vicinity to this oracle, and to their being blessed with the neighbouring influences of the Deity, where from the well-nourished udders of the bleating ewes milk flows in copious streams, like water from so many fountain-heads?

Their pails run o'er, and larger vessels still
With rich abundance all their dairies fill.

To us appear yet more clear and remarkable signs of the Deity's liberality, while we behold the glory of far-famed store and plenty overflowing former penury and barrenness. And I cannot but think much the better of myself for having in some measure contributed to these things with Polycrates and Petraeus. Nor can I less admire the [103] first author and promoter of this good order and management. And yet it is not to be thought that such and so great change should come to pass in so small a time by human industry, without the favour of the Deity assisting and blessing his oracle.

30. But although there were some formerly who blamed the ambiguity and obscurity of the oracle, and others who at this day find fault with its modern plainness and perspicuity, yet are they both alike unjust and foolish in their passion; for, like children better pleased with the sight of rainbows, comets, and those halos that encircle the sun and moon, than to see the sun and moon themselves in their splendour, they are taken with riddles, abstruse words, and figurative speeches, which are but the reflections of oracular divination to the apprehension of our mortal understanding. And because they are not able to make a satisfactory judgment of this change, they find fault with the God himself, not considering that neither we nor they are able by discourse of reason to reach unto the hidden counsels and designs of the Deity.

Why the oracles ceased to give answers

Published under the title "Why the Oracles cease to give answers" In: *Plutarch's Morals*. Translated from the Greek by Robert Midgley, M.D. Corrected and revised edition by William W. Goodwin with an Introduction by Ralph Waldo Emerson. (1st ed. 1684-94, London, 5 Vols.) This article is from the 1878 ed. (based on the 5th ed. of 1718), Boston: Little, Brown, & Co.; Vol. III, pp. 3-64.

Lamprias, Cleombrotus, Didymus, Philippus, Demetrius, Ammonius, Heracleon

1. There is an old story, friend Terentius Priscus, that heretofore eagles or swans, flying from the opposite bounds of the earth, met together where now stands the temple of Apollo Pythius, in the place now called the Navel; and that some while after, Epimenides the Phaestian, willing to satisfy his curiosity, enquired of the oracle of Apollo with regard to this story, but received such an answer as made him never a jot the wiser; upon which he said:

No navel is there of the earth or sea:

'Tis known to Gods alone, if one there be.

Thus fitly did the God chastise this bold enquirer into ancient traditions.

2. But in our time, not long before the celebration of the Pythian games during the magistracy of Callistratus, there were two holy men who, coming as it were from the two opposite ends of the world, met together at the city of Delphi. The one was Demetrius the grammarian, who came from England to return to Tarsus in Cilicia, where he was born; the other, Cleombrotus the Lacedaemonian, who had been long conversant in Egypt and the Troglodytic country, and had made several voyages, as well on the Red Sea as other parts — not as a merchant, to get [4] money, but to improve his knowledge and enrich his mind; for he had enough to live upon, and cared for no more. And he was collecting history, as the material for philosophy, the end whereof (as he called it) is theology. He, having been lately at the temple and oracle of Jupiter Ammon, seemed not much to marvel at anything he there saw; yet he mentioned to us one particular (which he said was told him by the priest of the temple) touching the lamp that is never extinguished¹ and spendeth less every year than the former. Whence they conjectured an inequality of years, whereby each year was shorter than the preceding.

3. This discourse was much wondered at by the company, and Demetrius amongst the rest affirmed it unreasonable to ground the knowledge of such great matters on such slight and trivial conjectures; for this was not (as Alcaeus said) to paint the lion from the measure of his claw,² but to change and disorder the motions of celestial bodies for the sake of a lamp or the snuff of a candle, and to overthrow at one stroke all the mathematical sciences. These men, replied Cleombrotus, will not be moved by what you say; for first, they will not yield to mathematicians in point of certainty, seeing they may be more easily mistaken in their comprehension of time, it being so slippery in its motions and with such distant periods, than these men in the measures of their oil, about which they are so exact and careful because of the strangeness of the thing. Moreover, Demetrius, by denying that small things are oft

¹ [See "The quenchless Lamps of Alchemy" in our Blavatsky Speaks Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² Εξ ὀνυχοῦ τοῦ λέοντα, *ex ungue leonem*.

the signs and indications of great, must prejudice several arts and sciences, and deprive them of the proofs of several conclusions and predictions. And yet you grammarians will needs vouch that the Demi-gods and princes at the Trojan war shaved with razors, because you find in Homer the mention of such an instrument; that [5] also usury was then in fashion, because he says in one place,

A debt is due me neither new nor small,¹

where you interpret *ὀφέλλεται* to mean *increases*. And again, when he calls the night quick and sharp, you will needs have him to mean by this word, that the shadow of the earth being round groweth sharp at the end like the body of a cone. Again, who is he that, denying small things to be the signs and proofs of great, will allow what physicians tell us, namely, that we may prognosticate a pestilent summer when great numbers of spiders are seen, and also when the fig leaves in the spring resemble crows' feet? And who will permit us to measure the greatness of the sun's body by a pint or gallon of water, or will grant that a small table like a tile, making a sharp angle leaning on a plane superficies, can show the just measure of the elevation of the pole from the horizon which is ever to be seen in our hemisphere? And this is what the priests may allege in favour of what they affirm; so that we must offer other arguments against them, if we will maintain the course of the sun to be fixed and unchangeable, as we here hold it to be.

4. Not only of the sun, cried out aloud the philosopher Ammonius, who was there present, but also of the whole heaven; for, if the years really decrease, the passage which the sun makes from one tropic to another must of necessity be shortened, so that it shall not take up so great a part of the horizon as the mathematicians do imagine, but become less and shorter as the southern part approaches the northern. Whence consequently the summer will fall out to be shorter and the temperature of the air colder, by reason of the sun's turning more inwardly, and describing greater parallels within the signs of the tropics than it now does in [6] the longest day in summer and the shortest in winter. It would moreover also follow, that the pins of the dials in the city of Syene will no longer appear shadowless at the summer solstice, and some fixed stars will run under the horizon, and others against one another, for want of room. And should it be alleged that all the other celestial bodies keep their courses and ordinary motions without any change, they will never be able to cite any cause which shall hasten his motion alone above all the rest; but they will be forced to confound and disorder all evident appearances which do clearly show themselves to our eyes, and especially those of the moon. So that there will be no need of observing these measures of oil to know the difference of the years; because the eclipses will do this, if there be any, seeing the sun does oft meet with the moon, and the moon as oft falls within the shadow of the earth; so that we need not any longer hold arguing on this matter.

But, says Cleombrotus, I myself have seen the measure of the oil, for they have shown it several years; but that of the present is far less than that of ancient times. Unto which Ammonius answered: How comes it to pass then that other people who

¹ Ἐνθα χρειος μοι οφέλλεται, ου τιν νέον γε ουδ' ολίγον. *Odyssey* III, 867. The same interpretation is found in the Scholia on the *Odyssey*. (G.)

have an inextinguishable fire in veneration, and have preserved it even time out of mind, could never remark this? And granting what you say concerning this measure of oil, is it not better to attribute the cause of this to some coldness or dampness of air; or, on the contrary, to some heat or dryness, by which the fire in the lamp being weakened needs not so much nourishment, and could not consume the same quantity? For it is well known that fire burns better in winter than in summer, its heat being drawn in and enclosed by the cold; whereas in great heats and dry weather it is weakened, lying dead and languishing without any strength; and if it be kindled in the sunshine, its efficacy is small, for it hardly catches hold of the wood, and slowly consumes the fuel. [7] But we may with greater probability attribute the circumstance of the oil to the oil itself; for oil formerly was of less nutriment, as squeezed out of olives which grew upon young trees; but being since better ordered, as coming of plants more fully grown, it must needs be more effectual to the nourishing and keeping of the fire. And this is the best way of saving the credit of the Ammonian priests in their supposition, which will not endure the test of reason.

5. Ammonius having finished his discourse, I pray, said I, Cleombrotus, give us some account of the oracle; for it ever has been in great esteem in those parts till these times, wherein its divinity and reputation seem to be decayed. Unto which Cleombrotus making no answer, but looking down to the ground, Demetrius took up the discourse, saying: You need not busy yourself in enquiries after the oracles in those parts, seeing we find the oracles in these parts to fail or (to speak better) to be totally silenced, except two or three; so that it would be more to the purpose to search into the cause of this silence. But we are more concerned in Boeotia, which, although formerly famous throughout all the world for oracles, is now like a fountain dried up, so that at present we find them dumb. For at this day there is no place in all Boeotia, unless in the town of Lebadea, where one can draw out any divination, all other parts being become silent and forsaken. Yet in the time of the war against the Persians, the oracle of Apollo Ptoüs was in request, as also that of Amphiaraus; for both of them were tried. The priest of Apollo Ptoüs, who was always wont to return the oracle's answers in Aeolic Greek, spake to him that was sent from the barbarians in their own barbarous language, so that none of the assistants understood a word; whereby they were given to understand, that it was not lawful for the barbarians to have the use of the Greek tongue to serve their pleasure. And as to that of Amphiaraus, the [8] person that was sent thither, having fallen asleep in the sanctuary, dreamed that he heard the minister of that God bidding him be gone out of the temple and saying that the God forbade him to remain, and that he presently shoved him out thence with both his hands; and seeing he still stopped by the way, he took up a great stone and struck him with it on the head. And what was this but a prediction and denunciation of what was to come to pass? For Mardonius was not long after defeated by Pausanias, who was no king, but only the king of Lacedaemonia's guardian and minister, and the then lieutenant of the Grecians' army, and was with a stone flung out of a sling felled to the ground, just as the Lydian servant thought he was struck in his dream. In the same manner also flourished the oracle near Tegeyra, where it is said Apollo himself was born; and in effect, there are two streams that glide near the place, one of which is still called the Palm-tree, and the other the Olive-tree. And at this oracle, in the time of the Medes' war, Echeocrates being then

the prophet, the God Apollo answered by his mouth, that the honour and profit of this war would fall to the Greeks' share. And during the Peloponnesian war, the Delians having been driven out of their island, they had word brought them from the oracle of Delphi, that they should search for the place where Apollo was born, and there make some certain sacrifice. At which they marvelling, and demanding whether Apollo was born elsewhere than in their parts, the prophetess Pythia moreover told them that a crow would show them the place. These deputies from the Delians, in their return home, passed by chance through the city of Chaeronea, where they heard their hostess at the inn talking to some travellers about the oracle of Tegyra, to which they were going, and at their parting they heard them say to her Adieu, Dame Corone.¹ By [9] this they comprehended the meaning of Pythia's answer; and having offered their sacrifices at Tegyra, they were soon after restored and established in their own country. Yet there have been given later answers from these oracles than those you have mentioned; but now they have wholly ceased, so that it will not be besides the matter, seeing we are nearby Apollo Pythius, to enquire after the cause of this change.

6. Thus discoursing together, we left the temple, and were come as far as the Cnidian Hall, where entering in, we found our friends which we looked for, being set down in expectation of our coming. All the rest were at leisure, by reason of the time of the day, and did nothing but anoint their bodies, or gaze on the wrestlers who were exercising themselves. Whereupon Demetrius laughing said to them: It seems to me that you are not discoursing of any matter of great consequence, for I see you labour not under deep thoughts. It is true, replied Heracleon the Megarean, we are not a disputing, whether the verb *βάλλω* in his future tense loses one of his *λλ*, nor from what positive or primitive are formed or derived these two comparatives, *χειρόρον* and *βέλτιον*, and these two superlatives, *χειρόριστον* and *βέλτιστον*; for such questions as these make people knit their brows. A man may discourse of all other matters, especially of philosophy, without these frowning angry looks that put the by-standers into a fright. Receive us then, said Demetrius, into your company, and, if you please, the question too which has been now agitated amongst us, which does well agree with the place where we are, and, relating to the God Apollo, concerns therefore all that are here; but, however, let us have no knitting of the brows or frowning looks.

7. Being then all set down close together, and Demetrius having proposed the question we were upon, Didymus the Cynic philosopher, surnamed Planetiades, getting upon [10] his feet and striking the ground two or three times with his stick, cried out: O Jupiter! what a hard question do you offer! What a difficult matter do you propose! For is it any wonder, the whole world wallowing in wickedness, and Shame and Retributive Justice having departed from men (as Hesiod long ago predicted), that the Gods should no longer suffer their oracles to be among them, as heretofore? For my part, I wonder there is so much as one left, and that Hercules or some other of the Gods has not long since plucked up and carried away the tripod whereon are offered such base and villainous questions to Apollo; some coming to him as a mere paltry astrologer, to try his skill and impose on him by subtle questions, others asking him about treasures buried under ground, others about incestuous marriages. So that

¹ *Κοσώνη*, that is, *Crow*.

Pythagoras is here soon convinced of his mistake, when he affirmed that the time when men are honestest is when they present themselves before the Gods; for those filthy passions, which they dare not discover before a grave mortal man, they scruple not to utter to Apollo. He had gone further, if Heracleon had not pulled him by the sleeve; and myself, who was better acquainted than any in the company besides, thus spake to him: Cease, friend Planetiades, from angering Apollo against thee, seeing he is sharp and choleric and not easily reconciled; although, as Pindar says,

Mortals to favour, Heaven has him enjoined.

And whether he be the sun, or the master of the sun and father of it, being above all visible natures, it is not to be supposed he disdains to hold any further intercourse with men at this time, seeing he gives them their birth, nourishment, subsistence, and reason. Neither is it credible that the Divine Providence (who, like a kind and indulgent mother, produces and conserves all things for our use) should show herself malevolent only in the matter of divination, [11] or deprive us of it having once given it us; as if, when there were more oracles than there are now in the world, men were not then as wicked. But let us make a Pythian truce (as they say) with vice, which you are always sharply reprehending, and sit down here together to try whether we can find out any other cause of the ceasing of oracles; and let me only advise you, by the way, to remember that you keep this God propitious and move him not to wrath. Planetiades was so moved with these speeches, that he went away immediately, without speaking a word.

8. The company remaining a while in silence, Ammonius, addressing himself to me, said: Prithee, Lamprias, let us take care of what we say, and not be rash in our assertions; for we do not well when we make the God to be little or no cause of these oracles ceasing; for he that attributes the failing of them to any other cause than the will and decree of the God gives occasion to suspect him of believing that they never were nor are now by his disposition, but by some other means. For there is no other more excellent and noble cause and power which can destroy and abolish divination, if it be the work of a God. And as for Plantiades' discourse, it does not at all please me, as well for the inequality and inconstancy which he attributes to the God, as for other reasons. For he makes him sometimes rejecting and detesting vice, and sometimes admitting and receiving it, just as a king, or rather a tyrant, who drives wicked people out of one gate, and receives them through another, and negotiates with them. But the greatest and most perfect work, that will admit of no additions, is that which agrees best with the dignity of the Gods. By supposing this, we may in my judgment affirm that in this common scarcity of men, occasioned by the former wars and seditions over all the world, Greece has most suffered; so that she can with much difficulty [12] raise three thousand men, which number the single city of Megara sent heretofore to Plataea. Wherefore if the God now forsakes several oracles which anciently were frequented, what is this but a sign that Greece is at this time very much dispeopled, in comparison of what it was heretofore; and he that will affirm this shall not want for arguments. For of what use would the oracle be now, which was heretofore at Tegyra or at Ptoum? For scarcely shall you meet, in a whole day's time, with so much as a herdsman or shepherd in those parts. We find also in writing, that this place of divination where we now are, and which is as ancient as

any, and as famous and renowned as any in all Greece, was for a considerable time deserted and inaccessible, by means of a dangerous creature that resorted hither, namely a dragon. Yet those that have written this did not well comprehend the occasion of the oracle's ceasing; for the dragon did not make the place solitary, but rather the solitude of the place occasioned the dragon to repair hither. Since that time, when Greece became populous and full of towns, they had two women prophetesses, who went down one after another into the cave. Moreover, there was a third chosen, if need were; whereas now there is but one, and yet we do not complain of it, because she is sufficient. And therefore we do not well to repine at Providence, seeing there is no want of divinations, where all that come are satisfied in whatever they desire to know. Homer tells us, Agamemnon had nine heralds, and yet with these could he hardly keep in order the Greeks, they being so many in number; but you will find here that the voice of one man is sufficient to be heard all over the theatre. The oracles then spake by more organs or voices, because there were then a greater number of men. So that we should think it strange, if the God should suffer the prophetic divination to be spilt and run to waste like water, or everywhere [13] to resound, as in solitary fields we hear the rocks echoing the voices of shepherds and bleating cattle.

9. Ammonius having said these words, and I returning no answer, Cleombrotus took up the discourse, and addressed himself to me. Hast thou then, said he, confessed that it is the God who makes and unmakes oracles? Not I, said I; for I maintain that God was never the cause of taking away or abolishing any oracle or divination; but, on the contrary, whereas he produces and prepares several things for our use, so Nature leads them into corruption, and not seldom into a privation of their whole being. Or, to speak better, matter, which is itself privation or negation, often flies away, and dissolves what a more excellent being than herself had wrought. So that I am of opinion, there are other causes which obscure and extinguish these prophetic spirits. For though God does give to men several good and excellent things, yet he gives to none of them the power to exist eternally; for, though the Gods never die, yet their gifts do, as Sophocles speaks. It were then well becoming philosophers who exercise themselves in the study of Nature and the first matter, to enquire into the existence, property, and tendency of those things, but to leave the origin and first cause to God, as is most reasonable. For it is a very childish and silly thing, to suppose that the God himself does, like the spirits speaking in the bowels of ventriloquists (which were anciently called Euryclees, and now Pythons), enter into the bodies of the prophets, and speak by their mouths and voices, as fit instruments for that purpose. For he that thus mixes God in human affairs has not that respect and reverence which is due to so great a majesty, as being ignorant of his power and virtue.

10. Cleombrotus then answered: You say very well; but it is a hard matter to comprehend and define how far this providence does extend itself. They seem both alike [14] faulty to me, who will have him simply the cause of nothing at all in the world, and who will have him to be concerned in all things; for both of these are run into extremes. But as those say well who hold that Plato, having invented the element on which spring up the qualities — which we sometimes call the first matter, and sometimes Nature — has thereby delivered the philosophers from several great difficulties; so it seems to me, that those who have ranked the genus of Daemons between that of Gods and men have solved greater doubts and difficulties, as having found the knot

which does, as it were, join and hold together our society and communication with them. It is uncertain whence this opinion arose, whether from the ancient Magi by Zoroaster, or from Thrace by Orpheus, or from Egypt, or Phrygia; as may be conjectured from the sight of the sacrifices which are made in both countries, where amongst their holy and divine ceremonies there is seen a mixture of mortality and mourning. And as to the Greeks, Homer has indifferently used these two names, terming sometimes the Gods Daemons, and other whiles Daemons Gods. But Hesiod was the first that did best and most distinctly lay down four reasonable natures, the Gods, the Daemons (being many in number, and good in their kind), heroes, and men; for the Demi-gods are reckoned amongst heroes. Others say, there is a transmutation of bodies as well as of souls; and that, just as we see of the earth is engendered water, of the water the air, and of the air fire, the nature of the substance still ascending higher, so good spirits always change for the best, being transformed from men into heroes, and from heroes into Daemons; and from Daemons, by degrees and in a long space of time, a few souls being refined and purified come to partake of the nature of the Divinity. But there are some that cannot contain themselves, but rove about till they be entangled into mortal bodies, where they live meanly and obscurely, like smoke. [15]

11. And moreover, Hesiod imagines that the Daemons themselves, after certain revolutions of time, do at length die. For, introducing a Nymph speaking, he marks the time wherein they expire:

Nine ages of men in their flower doth live
The railing crow; four times the stags surmount
The life of crows; to ravens doth Nature give
A threefold age of stags, by true account;
One phoenix lives as long as ravens nine.
But you, fair Nymphs, as the daughters verily
Of mighty Jove and of Nature divine,
The phoenix's years tenfold do multiply.

Now those which do not well understand what the poet means by this word *γενεά* (age) do cause this computation of time to amount to a great number of years. For the word means a year; so that the total sum makes but 9720 years, which is the space of the age of Daemons. And there are several mathematicians who make it shorter than this. Pindar himself does not make it longer when he says, Destiny has given Nymphs an equal life with trees; and therefore they are called Hamadryades, because they spring up and die with oaks. He was going on, when Demetrius interrupting him thus said: How is it possible, Cleombrotus, that you should maintain that a year was called by this poet the age of a man, seeing it is not the space of his flower and youth, nor of his old age? For there are divers readings of this place, some reading *ἡβώντων*, others *γηρόντων* — one signifying *flourishing*, the other *aged*. Now those that understand hereby “flourishing” reckon thirty years for the age of man's life, according to the opinion of Heraclitus; this being the space of time in which a father has begotten a son who then is apt and able to beget another. And those that read “aged” allow to the age of man a hundred and eight years, saying that fifty-four years are just the half part of a man's life, which number consists of unity, the first

two plane numbers, two squares, and two cubes (*i.e.*, $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 9 + 8 + 27$); which numbers Plato [16] himself has appropriated to the procreation of the soul. And it seems also that Hesiod by these words intimated the consummation of the world by fire; at which time it is likely the Nymphs, with the rivers, marshes, and woods where they inhabit, shall be consumed,

Such as in woods, or grotto's shady cell,
Near sacred springs and verdant meadows dwell.¹

12. I have heard, says Cleombrotus, this alleged by several, and find that the Stoical conflagration hath intruded itself not only upon the works of Heraclitus and Orpheus, but also upon Hesiod's, imposing such meanings on their words as they never thought of. But I cannot approve of the consummation of the world which they maintain, nor of the other impossible matters; and especially what they say about the crow and the stag would force us to believe in the most excessive numbers. Moreover, the year, containing in itself the beginning and end of all things which the seasons bring and the earth produces, may, in my opinion, be not impertinently called the age of man. For you yourselves confess that Hesiod does somewhere call the life of man *γενεά* (*age*). What say you, does he not? Which Demetrius confessing, he proceeded in this manner: It is also certain that we call the vessels whereby we measure things by the names of the things measured in them; as a pint, a quart, or a bushel. As we then call a unit a number, though it be but the least part and measure and the beginning of a number; so has he called a year the age of man, because it is the measure wherewith it is measured. As for those numbers which those others describe, they be not of such singularity and importance. But the sum of 9920 is thus composed. The four numbers arising in order from one, being added together and multiplied by four, amount to forty; this forty being tripled five times makes up the total of the forecited number. But as to that it is [17] not necessary to enter into a debate with Demetrius; for whether it be a short or a long time, certain or uncertain, wherewith Hesiod limits the soul of a Daemon and the life of a Demi-god, either of those will prove, by ancient and evident testimonies, that there are natures neuter and mean, and as it were in the confines of the Gods and men, subject to mortal passions and necessary changes; which natures, according to the tradition and example of our predecessors, it is fitting we should call Daemons, giving them all due honour.

13. To which purpose Xenocrates, one of the familiar friends of Plato, was wont to allege the example of triangles, which agree very well with the subject; for that triangle which has equal sides and equal angles he compared unto the divine and immortal nature; and that which has all three unequal, to the human and mortal nature; and that which has two equal and one unequal, to the nature of Daemons, which is endued with the passions and perturbations of the mortal nature, and the force and power of the divine. Even Nature has set before us sensible figures and resemblance of this; of the Gods, the sun and the stars; of mortal men, the comets, flashings in the night, and shooting-stars. And this similitude is taken up by Euripides, when he saith:

¹ *Iliad* XX, 8

He that but now was fleshy, plump, and gay,
As a fall'n star his glories melt away;
Like that extinguished on the ground he lies,
Breathing his soul into the ambient skies.

And for a mixed body representing the nature of Daemons, we have the moon; which some, observing it to be subject to increase and decrease and wholly to disappear, have thought very agreeable to the mutable condition of Daemons; and for this reason they have termed her a terrestrial star, others Olympic earth, and others the inheritance and possession of Hecate, both heavenly and earthly. As one [18] then that should take from the world the air, and remove it from between the moon and the earth, would dissolve the continuation and composition of the universe, by leaving an empty place in the midst, without any contexture to hold the two parts together; so those that do not allow Daemons oppose all communication and conference of the Gods with men, seeing they destroy that nature (as Plato says) which serves as an interpreter and messenger between them both; or else they constrain us to perplex and confound all things together, by mixing the divine nature with human passions, and plucking it down from heaven, as the women of Thessaly are said to do the moon. Even this fiction has met with belief in some women, because Aglaonice, the daughter of Hegetor, being skilful in astrology, made the vulgar believe, whenever the moon was eclipsed, that by means of some charms and enchantments she brought it down from heaven. But as to us, let us not think there are any oracles or divinations without some divinity, or that the Gods are not pleased with sacrifices, and our services, and other ceremonies. And, on the other hand, let us not think that God is present in them, or employs himself personally about them; but rather believe that he does commit them to his officers, the Daemons, who are the spies and scouts of the Gods, wandering and circuiting about at their commands — some beholding and ordering the sacred ceremonies and oblations offered to the Gods, others being employed to revenge and punish the high misdemeanours and enormous injustices of men. There are, moreover, others, to whom Hesiod gives a very venerable name, calling them the distributors of riches and donors of largesses among mortals; for the Gods have allowed them the privilege, and granted them a royal commission to see them duly distributed. He informs us here, by the way, that to be beneficent and liberal of favours is the proper office of a king. For there is a difference of [19] virtue between these Daemons, as much as between men. For there are some of them in whom still there are some small remains (though weak and scarcely discernible) of the sensitive and irrational soul, which, like a small quantity of excrements and superfluities, stay still behind. Others there are, in whom there abideth a greater measure of these gross humours, the marks and traces of which are to be seen in many places, in the odd and singular ceremonies and sacrifices and the strange fables which prevail.

14. As to the mysteries and secret ceremonies, by which we may more clearly than by any other means understand the nature of Daemons, let me keep a religious silence, as Herodotus says. But as to the certain feasts and direful sacrifices which are held as unfortunate and mournful days, and are celebrated by eating raw flesh and tearing the skin with the nails, or days wherein they fast and smite their breasts, and in several places utter filthy and dishonest words during the sacrifices,

Wagging their heads in frantic wise,
With strange alarms and hideous cries,

— I will never think these done on any of the Gods' account, but rather to avert, mollify, and appease the wrath and fury of some bad Daemons. For it is not likely there ever was a God that expected or required men to be sacrificed to him, as has been anciently done, or who received such kind of sacrifices with approbation. Neither must we imagine it was for nothing, that kings and great men have delivered their own children to be sacrificed, or that they sacrificed them themselves with their own hands; but they intended hereby to avert and appease the malice and rancour of some evil spirits, or to satisfy the violent and raging lusts of some, who either could not or would not enjoy them with their bodies or by their bodies. Even as Hercules besieged the city of Oechalia for a wench that [20] was therein, so these powerful and tyrannical Daemons, requiring some human soul which is still compassed with a body, and yet not being able to satisfy their lust by the body, do therefore bring the plague and famine into towns, raise wars and seditions, till such time as they obtain and enjoy that which they love. Others, on the contrary (as I remember I observed in Crete, for I was some considerable time there) celebrate a feast in which they show the figure of a man without a head, calling it Molus, the father of Meriones, who, having violently laid hands on the Nymph, was afterwards found without a head.

15. The rapes committed on boys or girls, the long voyages, flights, banishments, and voluntary services of the Gods, which are sung by the poets, are passions fitting to be attributed not to Gods, but to Daemons, whose fortunes were recorded in memorial of their virtue and power. Neither is Aeschylus in the right, when he says,

Divine Apollo banished from the sky;
nor Admetus in Sophocles, saying of a God,
My cock by crowing led him to the mill.

The divines of Delphi were far from the truth when they asserted that there was a combat between Apollo and a Dragon about the possession of this oracle. No less are they to blame who suffer the poets or orators in the open theatres to act or speak of such matters; whereby they seem to condemn those things which themselves perform in their sacred solemnities. Philippus (for this man was an historian, and then present in the company), wondering at what was last said, enquired what divine solemnities they contradicted and condemned who contended one against another in the theatres. Even those, quoth Cleombrotus, which concern the oracle of Delphi, by which this city has lately admitted into these ceremonies and sacrifices all the Greeks without Thermopylae, including those [21] that dwell as far as the vale of Tempe. For the tabernacle or hut, which is set up every ninth year within the courtyard of this temple, is not a representation of the Dragon's den, but of some king or tyrant; as likewise the assaulting of it in great silence, by the way termed Dolonia, in which they lead hither a youth whose father and mother are still living, with torches burning; and having set this tabernacle on fire and overthrown the table, they run away as fast as they are able through the doors of the temple, never looking behind them. In fine, this boy's wanderings, together with his servile offices, and all the expiatory sacrifices about Tempe, seem to declare the commission of some horrid crime

in this place. For it looks silly to affirm that Apollo, for having killed the Dragon, was forced to fly to the farthest parts of Greece to be cleansed and purified; and that he there made certain offerings and libations, as men do when they design the appeasing those vindictive spirits whom we call Alastores and Palamnaei, which is to say, the revengers of such crimes as cannot be forgotten but must have punishment. It is true, indeed, that the relation which I have heard touching this flight is very strange and wonderful; but if there be any truth in it, we must not suppose it was an ordinary and common matter which happened then about this oracle. Yet lest I should be thought, as Empedocles says,

Starting new heads, to wander from the text,
And make the theme we have in hand perplex,

I entreat you to let me put a fit conclusion to my discourse (for now the time requires it), and to say what several have said before me, that when the Daemons who are appointed for the government and superintendency of oracles do fail, the oracles must of necessity fail too; and when they depart elsewhere, the divining powers must likewise cease in those places; but when they return again, after a long [22] time, the places will begin again to speak, like musical instruments handled by those that know how to use them.

16. Cleombrotus having said thus much, Heracleon took up the discourse, saying: We have never an infidel among us, but are all agreed in our opinions touching the Gods; yet let us have a care, Philippus, lest in the heat and multiplicity of our words we unawares broach some false doctrine that may tend to impiety. Well! but, saith Philippus, I hope Cleombrotus has not said anything which may occasion this caution. His asserting (says Heracleon) that they be not the Gods who preside over the oracles (because we are to suppose them free from all worldly care), but Daemons, or the Gods' officers or messengers, does not scandalize me; but to attribute to these Daemons all the calamities, vexations, and plagues which happen to mortal men — snatching these violently (we may almost say) from the verses of Empedocles — and in the end to make them to die like them, this, in my mind, savours of bold presumption. Cleombrotus, having asked Philippus who this young man was, and being informed of his name and country, proceeded in this manner: I know very well, Heracleon, that the discourse I used may bear an absurd construction; but there is no speaking of great matters without laying first great foundations for the proof of one's opinion. But, as for your part, you are not sensible how you contradict even that which you allow; for granting, as you do, that there be Daemons, but not allowing them to be vicious and mortal, you cannot prove there are any at all. For wherein do they differ from Gods, supposing they be incorruptible and impassible and not liable to error?

17. Whilst Heracleon was musing, and studying how to answer this, Cleombrotus went on, saying: It is not only Empedocles who affirms there are bad Daemons, but even Plato, Xenocrates, and Chrysippus; yea, and Democritus, [23] when he prayed he might meet with good spirits, which shows that he thought there were bad as well as good Daemons. And as to their mortality, I have heard it reported from a person that was neither fool nor knave, being Epitherses, the father of Aemilianus the orator, whom some of you have heard declaim. This Epitherses was my townsman and a

school-master, who told me that, designing a voyage to Italy, he embarked himself on a vessel well laden both with goods and passengers. About the evening the vessel was becalmed about the Isles Echinades, whereupon their ship drove with the tide till it was carried near the Isles of Paxi; when immediately a voice was heard by most of the passengers (who were then awake, and taking a cup after supper) calling unto one Thamus, and that with so loud a voice as made all the company amazed; which Thamus was a mariner of Egypt, whose name was scarcely known in the ship. He returned no answer to the first calls; but at the third he replied, Here! here! I am the man. Then the voice said aloud to him, When you are arrived at Palodes, take care to make it known that the great God Pan is dead. Epitherses told us, this voice did much astonish all that heard it, and caused much arguing whether this voice was to be obeyed or slighted. Thamus, for his part, was resolved, if the wind permitted, to sail by the place without saying a word; but if the wind ceased and there ensued a calm, to speak and cry out as loud as he was able what he was enjoined. Being come to Palodes, there was no wind stirring, and the sea was as smooth as glass. Whereupon Thamus standing on the deck, with his face towards the land, uttered with a loud voice his message, saying, The great Pan is dead. He had no sooner said this, but they heard a dreadful noise, not only of one, but of several, who, to their thinking, groaned and lamented with a kind of astonishment. And there being many persons in the ship, an account of this [24] was soon spread over Rome, which made Tiberius the Emperor send for Thamus; and he seemed to give such heed to what he told him, that he earnestly enquired who this Pan was; and the learned men about him gave in their judgments, that it was the son of Mercury by Penelope. There were some then in the company who declared they had heard old Aemilianus say as much.

18. Demetrius then related, that about Britain there were many small and desolate islands, some of which were called the Isles of Daemons and Demi-gods; and that he himself, at the command of the Emperor, sailed to the nearest of those places for curiosity's sake, where he found few inhabitants; but that they were all esteemed by the Britains as sacred and divine. Not long after he was arrived there, he said, the air and the weather were very foul and tempestuous, and there followed a terrible storm of wind and thunder; which at length ceasing, he says, the inhabitants told him that one of the Daemons or Demi-gods was deceased. For as a lamp, said he, while it is lighted, offends nobody with its scent, but when it is extinguished, it sends out such a scent as is nauseous to everybody; so these great souls, whilst they shine, are mild and gracious, without being troublesome to anybody; but when they draw to an end, they cause great storms and tempests, and not seldom infect the air with contagious distempers. They say farther, that Saturn is detained prisoner in one of those islands, and guarded by Briareus, being in a sound sleep (for that is the device to hold him captive), and that he has several of those Daemons for his valets and attendants.

19. Thus then spake Cleombrotus: I could, says he, relate several such stories as these; but it is sufficient that what has been said as yet does not contradict the opinion of any one here. And we all know, the Stoics believe the same as we do concerning the Daemons, and that amongst [25] the great company of Gods which are commonly believed, there is but one who is eternal and immortal; all the rest, having been born in time, shall end by death. As to the flouts and scoffing of the Epicure-

ans, they are not to be regarded, seeing they have the boldness to treat divine providence with as little reverence, calling it by no better a name than a mere whimsy and old wives' fable. Whereas we, on the contrary, assert that their Infinity is fabulous and ridiculous, seeing among such endless numbers of worlds there is not one governed by reason or divine providence, they having been all made and upheld by chance. If we cannot forbear drolling even in matters of philosophy, they are most to be ridiculed who bring into their disputes of natural questions certain blind, dumb, and lifeless images, which appear they know not where nor when, which, they say, proceed from bodies, some of which are still living, and others long since dead and rotten. Now, such people's opinions as these must needs be exploded and derided by all rational men; yet these very people shall be offended and angry at a man's saying there be Daemons, and that they subsist both by reason and by Nature, and continue a long time.

20. Here Ammonius began to speak, saying: In my opinion, Theophrastus was in the right, and spoke like a philosopher and a divine; for whoever shall deny what he alleges must also reject many things which may happen, though we understand not the reasons why they do so. And granting what he offers to be true, it carries with it many things called impossible and unreal. But as to what I have heard the Epicureans allege against the Daemons which Empedocles brings in — as, that it is impossible they can be happy and long-lived if they be bad and viciously affected, because vice in its own nature is blind and naturally precipitates itself into such mischiefs as destroy life — that, I must tell you, is vain and idle. For if this [26] reasoning be good, it will then follow that Epicurus was a worse man than Gorgias the sophister, and Metrodorus than Alexis the comic actor; for Alexis lived twice as long as Metrodorus, and Gorgias a third longer than Epicurus. For it is in another regard we say virtue is strong and vice weak, not in reference to the continuance or dissolution of the body; for we know there are many animals which are dull, slow, and heavy, and many disorderly and lustful, which live longer than those that are more sagacious and quicker of sense. And therefore they are much in the wrong in saying the divine nature is immortal because it avoideth the things which are ill and mischievous; for they should have supposed the divine nature free from all possibility of falling into corruption and alteration. But perhaps it will be thought not fair to dispute against those that are absent; I would have therefore Cleombrotus to resume his discourse touching the vanishing and transmigration of Daemons from one place to another.

21. With all my heart, answered Cleombrotus; but I shall now say something which will seem more absurd than anything I have heretofore offered, although it seems to be grounded on natural reason; and Plato himself has touched upon it, not positively affirming it, but offering it as a probable opinion, although among other philosophers it has been much cried out against. And seeing that we are fallen into a free discourse, and that a man cannot light into better company and a more favourable auditory to test the story, as if it were foreign coin, I shall therefore tell you a story which I heard from a stranger, whose acquaintance has cost me no small sum of money in searching after him in divers countries, whom at length, after much travel, I found near the Red Sea. He would converse with men but once a year, all the rest of his time (as he told me) he spent among the Nymphs, Nomades, and Daemons. He was very free with me, and extremely obliging. I never [27] saw a more graceful person

in all my life; and that which was very strange in him was, that he was never subject to any disease; once every month he ate the bitter fruit of a certain medicinal herb. He spake several languages perfectly well; his discourse to me was in the Doric dialect; his speech was as charming as the sweetest music, and as soon as ever he opened his mouth to speak, there issued out of it so sweet and fragrant a breath, that all the place was filled with it. Now, as to human learning, such as history, he retained the knowledge thereof all the year; but as to the gift of divination, he was inspired therewith only one day in the year, in which he went down to the sea-side, and there foretold things to come. And thither resorted to him the princes and great men of all the country, or else their secretaries, who there attended his coming at a prefixed day, and then returned. This person attributed divination to the Daemons, and was well pleased to hear what we related concerning Delphi. Whatsoever we told concerning Bacchus and the sacrifices which are offered to him, he knew it all, saying that, as these were great accidents which happened to Daemons, so also was that which was related of the serpent Python. And he affirmed, that he who slew him was not banished for nine years, neither did he fly into the Valley of Tempe, but was driven out of this world into another, from whence, after nine revolutions of the great years, being returned, cleansed, and purified, and become a true Phoebus — that is to say, clear and bright — he had at length recovered the superintendence of the Delphic oracle, which in the meantime had been committed to the charge of Themis. He said as much concerning what is related of Typhon and the Titans. For he affirmed, they were the battles of Daemons against Daemons, and the flights and banishments of those that had been vanquished, or the punishments inflicted by the Gods on those who had committed such [28] acts as Typhon is said to have done against Osiris, and Saturn against Uranus, whose honours are much obscured, or wholly lost, by being translated into another world. For I know that the Solymeans, who are borderers to the Lycians, did greatly honour Saturn; but since he killed their princes, Arsalus, Dryus, and Trosobius, he fled into some other country, they knew not where, and he now is in a manner forgotten. But they called these three — Arsalus, Dryus, and Trosobius — the severe Gods, and the Lycians do at this day curse people in their names, as well in private as in public. Several other such like examples may a man find in the records of the Gods. And if we call any of the Daemons by the usual and common names of the Gods, on whom they do depend, it is no marvel at all, said the stranger; for they like to be called by the Gods on whom they do depend, and from whom they have received their honour and power; even as amongst us men one is named Diius, another Athenae, another Apollonius, another Dionysius, and still another Hermaeus. And there are some who have names imposed on them, as it were, by chance, which yet do well agree with their tempers; whereas some carry the names of the Gods which do not at all suit with their weaknesses.

22. Here Cleombrotus having paused, his discourse seemed strange to all the company, and Heracleon demanded of him, how all this concerned Plato, and how he had given occasion to this discourse. Unto which Cleombrotus answered: You do well to put me in mind of it; for first, Plato ever rejected the infinity of worlds, yet would determine nothing positively touching the precise number of them. And granting the probability of their opinion who affirmed there were five, one for each element, as to his own part, he kept to one, which seems to be his genuine opinion; whereas all

other philosophers have been afraid to receive and admit the multitude of worlds, as if [29] those who did not limit matter to one must needs fall into troublesome and boundless infinity. But was this stranger, said I, of the same opinion with Plato, touching the number of the worlds? Or did you not all the while ask his opinion in that matter? I was far from failing herein, says Cleombrotus, seeing I found him so communicative and affable to me. He told me, that neither was the number of the worlds infinite, neither was there but only one, nor five; but a hundred and eighty-three, which were ranged in a triangular form, every side containing sixty worlds; and of the three remaining, every corner had one. That they were so ordered, that one always touched another in a circle, like those who dance in a ring. That the plain within the triangle is, as it were, the foundation and common altar to all those worlds, which is called the Plain of Truth, in which lie the designs, moulds, ideas, and invariable examples of all things which were, or ever shall be; and about these is Eternity, whence flowed Time, as from a river, into these worlds. Moreover, that the souls of men, if they have lived well in this world, do see these ideas once in ten thousand years; and that the most holy mystical ceremonies which are performed here are no more than a dream of this sacred vision. And further, that all the pains which are taken in the study of philosophy are to attain to a sight of those beauties; otherwise they were all lost labours. I heard him, said he, relate all these things as perfectly, as if they had been some religious rites wherein he would have instructed me; for he brought me no proof or demonstration to confirm what he said.

23. Here, turning myself to Demetrius, I asked him what were the words which the wooers of Penelope spake in Homer, when they saw Ulysses handling his bow. And Demetrius having put me in mind of them, I said: It came into my thoughts to say as much of this wonderful [30] man. He was indeed “an observer and a cunning thief” of opinions and discourses, and a person conversant in all sorts of learning, being a Greek born, and perfectly well skilled in the studies of his country. For this number of worlds shows us that he was neither an Indian nor an Egyptian; but his father was a Dorian Greek of the country of Sicily, named Petron, born in the city of Himerara, who wrote a little book on this subject, which I indeed never saw, nor can tell whether it be extant. But Hippys, a native of Rhegium, mentioned by Phantias the Eresian, tells us, it was the doctrine of Petron that there were a hundred and eighty-three worlds, tacked to one another in their first principle; but he does not explain to us what this phrase means, nor does he offer any reason to prove this. It is certain, says Demetrius, that Plato himself, bringing no argument to evince this point, does hereby overthrow this opinion. Yet, says Heracleon, we have heard you grammarians say that Homer was the first author of this opinion, as having divided the universe into five worlds, heaven, water, air, earth, and that which he calls Olympus; of which he leaveth two to be common — the earth to all beneath, and Olympus to all above — but the three in the midst between them he attributes unto three several Gods. In the like manner Plato, assigning unto the principal parts of the universe the first forms and most excellent figures of the bodies, calls them five worlds — those of the earth, water, air, and fire, and finally, of that which comprehended all the others, which he calls Dodecahedron (which is to say, with twelve bases), which, amply extending, is of easy motion and capacity, its form and figure being very fit and proper for the revolutions and motions of the souls. What need is there then, cried Demetri-

us, of bringing in good old Homer? For we have had fables enough already. But Plato is far from calling the different elements five worlds; for even where [31] he disputes against those who assert an infinite number of worlds, he affirms, there is only one created of God and satisfying him, consisting of the entire corporeal Nature, perfect, endued with self-sufficiency, and wanting nothing; and therefore we may well think it strange that the truth which he spake should occasion the extravagancy of others. For had he not maintained the world's unity, he would in some sort have given a foundation to those who affirm an infinite number of worlds; but that he asserted precisely five, this is marvellously strange and far from all probability, unless you can (says he, turning himself to me) clear this point. How! (said I) are you then resolved to drop here your first dispute about oracles, and to take up another of no less difficulty? Not so, replied Demetrius; yet we must take cognizance of this, which does, as it were, hold out its hand to us, though we shall not remain long upon it, but treat of it by the way, and soon return to our first discourse.

24. First of all then, I say, the reasons which hinder us from asserting an infinite number of worlds do not hinder us from affirming that there are more than one; for as well in many worlds as in one there may be Providence and Divination, while Fortune intervenes only in the smallest things; but most part of the grand and principal things have and take their beginnings and changes by order, which could not be in an infinite number of worlds. And it is more conformable to reason to say that God made more than one world; for, being perfectly good, he wants no virtue, and least of all justice and friendship, for they do chiefly become the nature of the Gods. Now God hath nothing that is superfluous and useless; and therefore there must be other inferior Gods proceeding from him, and other worlds made by him, towards whom he must use these social virtues; for he cannot exercise those virtues of justice and benignity on himself or any part of [32] himself, but on others. So that it is not likely this world should float and wander about, without either friend, neighbour, or any sort of communication, in an infinite vacuum. For we see Nature includes all single things in genera and species, like as in vessels or in husks of seeds; for there is nothing to be found in Nature — and nothing can have a common notion or appellation — which is not qualified both in common and in particular. Now the world is not said to be such in common, but in particular, for its quality is derived from its being an harmonious whole made up of different parts. But yet, there being no such thing in Nature as one man alone, one horse, one star, one God, one Daemon, why may we not believe that there is not in Nature one only world and no more, but several? And if any one shall object against me that this world hath likewise but one earth and one sea, I can answer him, he is much deceived by not understanding the evidence afforded by like parts. For we divide the earth into similar parts of the same denomination; for all the parts of the earth are earth, and so of the sea; but no part of the world is still the world, it being composed of divers and different natures.

25. For as to the inconvenience which some do seem to fear, and in respect of which they confine all the matter within one world, lest, there remaining anything without, it should disturb the composition of this, by the resistances and jars which it would make against it — they have no need to dread this. For, there being many worlds, and each of them in particular having one definite and determinate measure and limit of its substance and matter, no part thereof will be without order and good disposi-

tion, nothing will remain superfluous or be cast out as an excrement. For the reason which belongeth to each world, being able to rule and govern the matter that is allotted thereto, will not suffer that anything shall run out of [33] course and order, and rencounter and jumble another world, nor likewise that anything from another shall justle or disturb it, there being nothing in Nature infinite and inordinate in quantity, nor in motion without reason and order. And if perhaps there be any influence that passes from the one to the other, this is a fraternal communication, whereby they mix themselves together, like the light of the stars and the influence of their temperatures, and whereby they themselves do rejoice in beholding one another with a benign aspect, and give to the Gods (who are good and many in number in every world) an opportunity of knowing and caressing one another. For there is nothing in all this that is impossible, or fabulous, or contrary to reason; though some may think so because of the opinion of Aristotle, who saith that all bodies have their proper and natural places, by which means the earth must on all sides tend to the midst, and the water must rest upon it, serving by its weight for a foundation to the other lighter elements. Were there then many worlds, the earth would be often found above the airy and fiery regions, and as often under them; while air and water would be sometimes in their natural places, and sometimes in others which are their unnatural; which things being impossible, as he thinks, it follows then, there are neither two nor more worlds, but one only, which is this here, consisting of all kinds of elements, disposed according to Nature, agreeably to the diversity of bodies.

26. But in all this there is more probability than truth. For consider, friend Demetrius; when he saith that some bodies tend towards the midst, which is to say, downwards, the others from the midst, that is, upward, and a third sort move round about the midst, what does he mean by the midst? This cannot be understood in respect of a vacuum, there being no such thing in Nature, as he says himself; and, moreover, those that do allow it say that it can have [34] no middle, no more than beginning and end; for beginning and end are extremities, but that which is infinite, everybody knows, is without an end. But supposing we should be necessitated to admit a middle in a vacuum, it is impossible to comprehend and imagine the difference in the motions of bodies towards it, because there is neither in this vacuum any power attractive of the body, nor in the bodies any inclination or affection to tend on all sides to this middle. And it is no less difficult to imagine that bodies can move of themselves towards an incorporeal place, or receive any motion from it. This middle then must be understood not locally, but corporeally. For this world being a mass and union consisting of different bodies joined together, this diversity of them must beget different motions from one another; which appears in that each of these bodies changing its substance does at the same time change its place. For subtilization and rarefaction dissipate the matter which springeth from the midst and ariseth upwards; whereas, on the contrary, condensation and constipation depress and drive it down towards the middle.

27. On these points it is not necessary to discourse any longer in this place. For whatever cause a man supposes shall produce such passions and changes, that very cause will contain each of these worlds in itself; because each of them has its sea and land, each its proper middle, and each its passions and change of bodies, and the nature and power which contain and preserve each in its place and being. For

that which is without, whether it be nothing at all or an infinite vacuum, cannot allow any middle, as we have already said. But there being several worlds, each has its proper middle apart; so that in each of them there will be motions proper to bodies, some tending down to the midst, others mounting aloft from the midst, others moving round about it, according as they [35] themselves do distinguish motions. And he who asserts there are many middles, and that heavy bodies from all sides do tend unto one alone, is like to him who shall affirm that the blood of several men runs from all parts into one vein, or that all their brains should be contained within one and the same membrane; supposing it absurd, that all natural bodies which are solid should not be in one place, and the rare in another. He that thus thinketh is certainly a mean philosopher; and no better is he who will not allow the whole to have all parts in their order, rank, and natural situation. What could be more foolish, than for a man to call that a world which had a moon within it so situated, as if a man should have his brains in his heels, and his heart in his forehead? Whereas there is no absurdity or inconveniency, if, in supposing several distinct worlds separated from one another, a man should distinguish and separate their parts. For in each of them the earth, sea, and sky will be placed and situated in their proper places, and each of these worlds may have its superior, inferior, circular, and middle part, not in respect of another world, nor in reference to what is without, but to what is within itself.

28. And as to the argument which some do draw from a stone supposed to be placed without the world, it neither proves rest nor motion; for how could it remain suspended, seeing it is by nature heavy, or move towards the midst of the world, as other ponderous bodies, seeing it is neither part of it nor like it? And as to that earth which is fixed and environed by another world, we must not wonder, considering its weightiness, if it does not drop down, seeing it is upheld by a certain natural force pertaining to it. For if we shall take high and low not within the world but without, we shall find ourselves involved in the same difficulties as Epicurus was when he made his little indivisible atoms to move and tend to those places [36] which are under foot, as if the vacuum had feet, or its infinite space would permit one to talk of high or low. Indeed, a man would marvel what should cause Chrysippus to say, that the world was placed and situated directly in the midst, and that the matter thereof, from all eternity having possessed itself of the midst, yet is so compacted together that it remains for ever. For he writes this in his *Fourth Book of Possible Things*, vainly imagining there is a middle in that vast emptiness, and still more absurdly attributing unto that middle, which is not, the cause of the world's stability and continuance; he having often said in other writings of his that the substance is upheld and governed, partly by the motions tending to the midst of it, and partly by others parting from the midst of it.

29. As to the other oppositions which the Stoics make, who should fear them? As when they demand, how it is possible to maintain a fatal destiny and a divine providence, and how it can be otherwise but that we must admit of several Jupiters, when we assert the plurality of worlds. Now if there be an inconveniency in admitting many Jupiters, their opinions will appear far more absurd; for they imagine there are suns, and moons, Apollos, Dianas, and Neptunes innumerable, in innumerable changes and revolutions of worlds. But where is the necessity which lies upon us to grant

that there must be many Jupiters if there be many worlds, seeing that each of them may be subject to a sovereign governor of the whole, a God endued with a suitable mind and ability, like to him whom we name the Lord and Father of all things? Or what shall hinder us from asserting that the several worlds must be subject to the providence and destiny of Jupiter, and that he has an eye to all things, directing all, and administering to them the principles, seeds, and causes of all things which are made? For, while we often see here a body composed of several other distinct bodies — for example, [37] the assembly of a town, an army, or a chorus — in each of which bodies there is life, prudence, and understanding; so it cannot be impossible that, in the whole universe, ten or fifty or a hundred worlds which may be in it should all use the same reason, and all correspond with the same principle. For this order and disposition is very suitable to the Gods; for we must not make them kings of a swarm of bees who never stir out of their hives, or keep them fast imprisoned in matter, like those who affirm the Gods to be certain dispositions of the air, and powers of waters and fire, infused and mixed within, which arise and spring up together with the world, and in time are to be burnt and end with it — not affording them the liberty of coachmen and pilots, but nailing them down to their bases like statues and images. For they enclose the Gods within matter, and that in so strict a manner as makes them liable to all the changes, alterations, and decays of it.

30. It is certainly more agreeable to the nature of the Gods to say that they are wholly at liberty, like Castor and Pollux, ready to succour such as are overtaken by bad weather at sea; for when they appear, the winds cease and the waves are calmed. Not that they navigate and are partakers of the same peril; but they only appear in the sky, and the danger is over. Thus do the Gods visit each world, and rule and provide for all things in them. Jupiter in Homer cast not his eyes far from the city of Troy into Thrace, and to the nomad Scythians along the river Ister; but the true Jupiter has several seemly and agreeable passages for his majesty from one world into another, not looking into the infinite vacuum without, nor regarding himself and nothing else, as some have imagined, but weighing the deeds of Gods and men, and the motions and revolutions of the stars. For the Divinity does not hate variety and changes, but takes great pleasure in them, as one may conjecture by the circuits, conversions, and mutations [38] observable in the heavens. And therefore I conclude that the infinite number of worlds is a chimera, which has not the least probability of truth, and which cannot by any means admit of any God, but must be wholly guided by chance and fortune. Whereas the government and providence of a certain definite number of worlds has nothing in it that seems more laborious and unworthy than that which is employed in the direction of one alone, which is transformed, renewed, and reformed an infinite number of times.

31. Having said this, I paused. And Philippus immediately cried out: Whether this be certain or not, I will not be too positive; but if we carry God beyond one world, it would more gratify me to know why we should make him the Creator only of five worlds and no more, and what proportion this number bears to that of the worlds, than to know why the word EI was inscribed upon this temple. For this is neither a triangular, a quadrate, a perfect, nor a cubic number, neither does it yield any elegance to such as are delighted in this kind of sciences. As to what concerns the argument drawn from the number of elements, which Plato seems to have touched up-

on, it is obscure and improbable, and will not afford this consequence — that, as there are formed from matter five sorts of regular bodies, which have equal angles and equal sides, and are environed with equal superficies, so there were from the beginning five worlds, made and formed of these five bodies.

32. Yet Theodorus the Solian, said I, when he reads Plato's mathematics to his scholars, both keeps to the text and clearly expounds it, when he saith, the pyramid, octahedron, dodecahedron, icosahedron (which Plato lays down as the first bodies) are all beautiful both in their proportions and equalities; Nature cannot contrive and make better than these, nor perhaps so good. Yet they have not all the same constitution and origin; for the least [39] and slightest of the five is the pyramid; the greatest, which has most parts, is the dodecahedron; and of the other two, the icosahedron is greater than the octahedron by more than twofold, if you compare their number of triangles. And therefore it is impossible they should be all made at once, of one and the same matter; for the smallest and most subtile have been certainly more pliable to the hand of the workman who moved and fashioned the matter, and consequently were sooner made and shaped, than those which have stronger parts and a greater mass of bodies, and whose composition was more laborious and difficult, like the dodecahedron. Whence it follows that the pyramid was the first body, and not one of the others, which were by nature last produced. Now the way also to avoid this absurdity is to separate and divide matter into five worlds; here the pyramid (for she is the first and most simple), there the octahedron, and there the icosahedron; and out of that which exists first in every one of these the rest draw their original by the concretion of parts, by which everything is changed into everything, as Plato himself shows us by examples throughout. But it will suffice us briefly to learn thus much. Air is engendered by the extinction of fire, and the same being subtilized and rarefied produceth fire. Now by the seeds of these two we may find out the passions and transmutations of all. The seminary or beginning of fire is the pyramid, consisting of twenty-four first triangles; and the octahedron is the seminary of the air, consisting of forty-eight triangles of the same kind. So that the one element of air stands upon two of fire, joined together and condensed. And again, one body or element of air is divided into two of fire, which again, becoming thick and hard, is changed into water; so that, throughout, that which comes first into light gives easily birth unto the rest by transmutation. And so it comes to pass, that there is not merely one first principle [40] of all things; but one thing is so mixed with the origin of another, in the several changes and alterations of nature by motion, that the same name and denomination belong equally to all.

33. But here Ammonius interrupted him, and said: Notwithstanding that those things are so peremptorily and so pompously asserted by Theodorus, yet I shall wonder if he be not forced to make use of such suppositions as are destructive of themselves and one of another. For he will have it, that the five worlds he speaks of were not composed all at one time, but that that which was subtilest, and which gave least trouble in the making, came out first into being. And as if it were a consequent, and not a repugnant thing, he supposes that the matter does not always drive out into existence that which is most subtile and simple, but that sometimes the thickest, grossest, and heaviest parts do anticipate the more subtile in generation. But besides this, supposing that there be five primitive bodies or elements, and conse-

quently that there be as many worlds, there are but four of those orders which he discourses rationally concerning. For as to the cube, he takes it away and removes it, as it were in a game of counters; for it is naturally unfit either to turn into anything besides itself, or to yield that any of those other bodies be converted into it, inasmuch as the triangles of which they consist be not of the same sort. For all the rest consist in common of demi-triangles (or halves of equilateral triangles); but the proper subject of which the cube is particularly composed is the right isosceles triangle, which admits no inclination to a demi-triangle, nor can possibly be united and incorporated with it. If there be then five bodies, and consequently five worlds, and in each of these worlds the principle of generation be that body which is first produced, it must happen that, where the cube is the first in generation, none of the rest can possibly be produced, it being [41] contrary to its nature to change into any of them. Not to insist here, that Theodorus and those of his mind make the element or principle of which the dodecahedron is composed to be different from the rest, it not being that triangle which is termed scalene, with three unequal sides, out of which the pyramid, octahedron, and icosahedron, according to Plato, are produced; so that (said Ammonius laughing) you must solve these objections, or offer something new concerning the matter in debate.¹

34. And I answered him, that, for my part, I knew not at present how to say anything which carried more probability. But perhaps (said I) it is better for a man to give an account of his own opinion than of another's. Therefore I say that, there being supposed from the beginning of things two several natures contrary to each other — the one sensible, mutable, subject to generation, corruption, and change every way, the other spiritual and intelligible, and abiding always in the same state — it would be very strange, my friends, to say that the spiritual nature admitteth of division and hath diversity and difference in it, and to be angry if a man will not allow the passible and corporeal nature to be wholly united in itself, without dividing it into many parts. For it is most suitable to the permanent and divine natures to be tied and linked to each other, and to avoid, as much as is possible, all division and separation; and yet, amongst incorporeal natures the power of diversity works greater differences in regard to essential forms and reason, than those of distance of place in the corporeal world. And therefore Plato, refuting those who hold this proposition, that all is one, asserts these five grounds and principles of all — entity, identity, diversity, motion, and rest; which five immaterial principles being admitted, it is no marvel if Nature have made every one of [42] these to be an imitation, though not exact, yet as perfect and agreeable as could be drawn, of a correspondent principle in the corporeal mystery, partaking, as much as can be, of its power and virtue. For it is very plain that the cube is most proper and agreeable to repose and rest, by reason of the stability and firmness of those plain surfaces of which it consists. And as to the pyramid, everybody soon sees and acknowledges the nature of fire in it, by the slenderness of its decreasing sides, and the sharpness of its angles; and the nature of the dodecahedron, apt to comprehend all the other figures, may seem more properly to be the corporeal image of Ens, or Being in the general, indifferent to this

¹ See Plato's discussion of triangles and regular solids, *Timaeus*, pp. 53c-56c, with the commentaries. See also Grote's *Plato*, Vol. III, p. 260. (G.)

or that particular form or shape. And of the other two which remain, the icosahedron resembleth the principle of diversity, and the octahedron principally partakes of the identical nature. And thus from one of these the air is produced, which partakes of and borders upon every substance, under one and the same outward form and appearance; and the other has afforded us the element of water, which by mixture may put on the greatest diversity of qualities. Therefore if Nature requires a certain uniformity and harmony in all things, it must be then that there are neither more nor fewer worlds in the corporeal nature than there are patterns or samples in the incorporeal, to the end that each pattern or sample in the invisible nature may have its own primary position and power, answering to a secondary or derivative in the different constitution or composition of bodies.

35. And this may serve for an answer to those that wonder at our dividing Nature, subject to generation and alteration, into so many kinds. But I entreat you all further, attentively to consider with yourselves that, of the two first and supreme principles of all things — that is to say, the unity, and the indefinite binary or duality — this latter, being the element and chief origin of all deformity and disorder, [43] is termed infinity, and on the contrary, the nature of unity, determining and limiting the void infinity, which has no proportion nor termination, reduces it into form, and renders it in some manner capable of receiving a denomination which belongs only to sensible and particular things. Now these two general principles appear first in number; for the multitude is indeed no number, unless a certain form of the matter resulting out of indeterminate infinity is cut off, and bounded within respective limits, either shorter or longer. For then each multitude is made number, when once it is determined and limited by unity; whereas, if we take away unity, then the indeterminate duality brings all into confusion, and renders it without harmony, without number or measure. Now, the form not being the destruction of matter, but rather the order and the beauty of it, both these principles therefore must be within number, from whence ariseth the chief disparity and greatest difference. For the infinite and indeterminate principle is the cause of the even number; and the other better principle, which is the unity, is the father (as it were) of the odd number. So that the first even number is two, and the first odd number is three; of which is composed five by conjunction, which is by its composition common to both, but of power or nature not even but odd. For, since sensible and corporeal nature is divided into several parts, on account of its inborn necessity of diversity, it was necessary that the number of these parts should not be either the first even number, nor yet the first uneven or odd, but a third, consisting of both; to the end that it might be procreated out of both principles, viz. of that which causeth the even number, and of that which produceth the odd; for the one cannot be parted from the other, inasmuch as both have the nature, power, and force of a principle. These two principles being then joined together, the better one being mightier prevails over the indeterminate [44] infinity or duality, which divideth the corporeal nature; and thus the matter being divided, the unity interposing itself between has hindered the universe from being divided and parted into two equal portions. But there has been a multitude of worlds caused by the diversity and disagreement of the infinite Nature; but this multitude was brought into an odd number by the virtue and power of identity, or the finite principle; and it was therefore odd, because the better principle would not suffer Na-

ture to stretch itself further than was fitting. For if there had been nothing but pure and simple unity, the matter would have known no separation; but being mixed with the dividing nature of duality, it has by this means suffered separation and division; yet it has stopped here, by the odd numbers being the superior and master to the even.

36. This is the reason why the ancients were used to express numbering or reckoning by *πεμπάσασθαι*, *to count by fives*. And I am of opinion that that word *πάντα*, *all*, is derived from *πέντε*, which is to say *five*, five being compounded of the first numbers. For all the other numbers being afterwards multiplied by others, they produce numbers different from themselves; whereas five, being multiplied by an even number, produceth a perfect ten, and multiplied by an odd number, representeth itself again; not to insist that it is composed of the two first tetragons or quadrate numbers (unity and four), and that, being the first number whose square is equivalent to the two squares before it, it composeth the fairest of right angled triangles, and is the first number which containeth the sesquilateral proportion. Perhaps all these reasons are not very pertinent to the discourse of the present dispute, it being better to allege that in this number there is a natural virtue of dividing, and that nature divideth many things by this number. For in ourselves she has placed five senses, and five parts of the soul, the vital, the sensitive, the concupiscible, [45] the irascible, and the rational; and as many fingers on each hand; and the most fruitful seed disperseth itself but into five, for we read nowhere of a woman that brought forth more than five at a birth. And the Egyptians also tell us that the Goddess Rhea was delivered of five Gods, giving us to understand in covert terms that of the same matter were procreated five worlds. And in the universe, the earth is divided into five zones, the heaven into five circles — two arctics, two tropics, and one equinoctial in the midst. There are five revolutions of planets or wandering stars, inasmuch as the Sun, Venus, and Mercury make but one and the same revolution. And the construction of the world consists of an harmonical measure; even as our musical chords consist of the posture of five tetrachords, ranged orderly one after another, that is to say, those called *ύπάτων*, *μέσων*, *συνημμένων*, *διεζευγμένων*, and *ύπερβολαίων*.¹ The intervals also which are used in singing are five, diesis, semitone, tone, the tone and a half, and the double tone; so that Nature seems to delight more in making all things according to the number five, than she does in producing them in a spherical form, as Aristotle writeth.

37. But it will perhaps be demanded, why Plato refers the number of worlds to the five regular bodies or figures, saying that God made use of the number five in the fabric of the world, as it were transcribing and copying this; and then, having proposed a doubt and question of the number of the worlds, whether there be five, or one only, thereby clearly shows that his conjecture is grounded on this conceit of the five regular bodies. If now we may make a probable conjecture as to his opinion, we may believe that of necessity, with the diversity of these figures and bodies, there must presently ensue a difference and diversity of motions; as he himself teacheth, affirming that whatever is subtilized or condensed does, at the same time [46] with its alteration of substance, alter and change its place. For if from the air there is engen-

¹ See note prefixed to Plutarch's Treatise on Music. (G.)

dered fire, when the octahedron is dissolved and vanished into pyramids, or, on the contrary, if the air be produced from the fire pressed and squeezed up into the form of the octahedron, it is not possible it should remain there where it was before, but it flies and runs to another place, forcing and combating whatever stands in the way to oppose it. And he shows this more clearly and evidently by an example and similitude of fans, and such like things as drive away the chaff from the corn; for thus the elements driving the matter, and being driven by it, do always bring like to like, some taking up this place, others that, before the world was digested as now it is. The matter then being in that condition in which it is likely everything is where God is not present, the five first qualities, or first bodies, having each their proper and peculiar inclinations and motions, went apart, not wholly and altogether, nor thoroughly divided and separated one from another; for when all was huddled in confusion, such as were surmounted went continually against their nature with the mightier. And therefore, some going on one side and others going on the other, hence it has happened that there have been as many portions and distinctions as there are divers kinds of first bodies; one of fire, not wholly pure, but inclining towards the form of fire; another of an ethereal nature, yet not wholly so, but inclining thereto; another of earth, not simple and mere earth, but inclining to the form of earth. But especially there was a communication of water and air; for these, as we have already mentioned, went their ways, replenished with divers other kinds. For God did not separate and distribute the matter, but having found it thus carelessly dissipated in itself, and each part being carried away in such great disorder and confusion, he ranged and ordered it into symmetry and proportion; and setting [47] reason over each as a guardian and governor, he made as many worlds as there were first bodies. However, in respect to Ammonius, let these Platonical notions pass for what they are worth. For my part, I will never be overzealous in this precise number of worlds; but this I will say, that those who hold there are more than one, yet not an infinite number, have as good grounds as others, seeing the matter does naturally spread itself and is diffused into many parts — not resting in one, while yet it is contrary to reason that it should be infinitely extended. In short, let us here especially be mindful of the wise precepts of the Academy, and preserve ourselves upon such slippery ground as the controversy concerning the infinity of worlds, by refusing a too confident assent.

38. And when I had finished this discourse, Demetrius said: Lamprias is very much in the right; for the Gods deceive us with multiplicities, not of shadows and impostures (as Euripides¹ expresseth it), but even of realities and substances themselves, when we presume to be positive, as if we understood them in things of such weight and moment. But we must, as he advises us, return to our first question, which we seem to have forgotten. For what was said concerning the oracles remaining dumb and useless when the Daemons who presided over them were departed, even as we see musical instruments yield no harmony when the musician does not handle them — this, I say, brings a greater question into debate, namely touching the cause and power by which these Daemons use to make their prophets and prophetesses to be ravished with enthusiasm and filled with fantastical imaginations. For to say the or-

¹ See Euripides, Fragment 925.

acles are silent as being forsaken by the Daemons is nothing, unless we be first shown how (when they are present and govern them) they set them at work and make them prophesy. [48]

Ammonius then taking up the discourse, Do you think, said he, that the Daemons are anything else

Than wandering spirits clothed in finest air,¹

as Hesiod says? For as to my part, I think the same difference which there is between one man and another, when they act in a tragedy or comedy, is also to be found in this life in souls that are clothed with bodies. So that there is nothing in this which is strange or contrary to reason, if souls meeting with other souls do imprint on them visions and apprehensions of future things, just as we show several things already done and come to pass, and prognosticate of those which have not yet happened, not only by the help of speech, but also by letters and writings, or by a bare touch, or a single look; — unless you, Lamprias, are of another opinion. For we heard but very lately, that you discoursed at large upon this subject with the strangers that came to Lebadea; but he that gave us this information could give us no particular account of what passed. No wonder, replied I, for several avocations and businesses intervening, occasioned by the oracle and the solemn sacrifice that was then performing, made our discourse very broken and interrupted. But now, says Ammonius, you have auditors at leisure, that are inquisitive and desirous of instruction, so that you may speak freely, and expect all the candour and consideration which you can desire.

39. And the rest of the company making the like exhortations, having paused a while, I began after this manner: It so happened, Ammonius, that you did, without your knowledge, give occasion to the discourse which was then held; for if the Daemons be souls and spirits separated from bodies and having no communication with them, as you affirm, but according to the divine poet Hesiod,

Are our kind guardians, walking here their rounds,²

why do we deprive the spirits and souls which are in bodies of the same power by which Daemons may foresee and foretell things to come? For it is not likely souls do acquire any property and power, when they abandon their bodies, wherewith they were not endowed before; but rather, we should think that they had always the same parts, but in a worse degree, when they were mixed with bodies, some of them being inapparent and hid, and others weak and obscure, like those who see through a thick mist or move in water, heavily and uneasily performing their operations, much desiring to be cured and so to recover what is their own, and to be discharged and purified of that which covers them. For as the sun does not then properly become bright when he has escaped out of the cloud — for he is always so, though to our eyes, being clouded, he seems obscure and dark — so the soul acquires not then the faculty of divining when gotten clear of the body, as from a cloud, but having the same before, is blinded by the commixture and confusion which she has with the mortal body. And this cannot seem strange or incredible, if we consider nothing else

¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 125

² *ibid.*, 123

in the soul but the faculty of remembrance, which is, as it were, the reverse of divination, and if we reflect upon the miraculous power it hath of preserving things past, or, we should rather say, things present, for of what is past nothing remains, and all things do come into being and perish in the same moment, whether they be actions, or words, or passions; they all pass by and vanish as soon as they appear; for time, like the course of a river, passeth on, and carries everything along with it. But this retentive faculty of the soul seizes upon these in some mysterious way, and gives a form and a being to those things which are no longer [50] present. For the oracle which was given to those of Thessaly, touching Arne, enjoined them to declare

The deaf man's hearing, and the blind man's sight.

But memory is to us the hearing of things without voice, and the sight of things invisible; so that, as I now said, no marvel, if retaining the things which are no longer in being, the soul anticipates several of those which are still to come; for these do more concern her, and she does naturally sympathize with them, inclining and tending to things which are future; whereas, as to those which are past and have an end, she leaves them behind her, only retaining the bare remembrance of them.

40. Our souls then, having this inbred power — though weak, obscure, and hardly able to express their apprehensions — yet sometimes spread forth and recover themselves, either in dreams or in the time of sacrifice or religious worship, when the body is well purified and endued with a certain temperature proper to this effect or when the rational and speculative part, being released and freed from the solicitude after present things, joineth with the irrational and imaginative part to think of and represent what is to come. For it is not, as Euripides saith, that he is the best prophet who guesses well; but he is the wisest man, not whose guess succeeds well in the event, but who, whatever the event be, takes reason and probability for his guide. Now the faculty of divining, like blank paper, is void of any reason or determination of itself, but is susceptible of fantasies and presentiments; and without any ratiocination or discourse of reason, it touches on that which is to come, when it has withdrawn itself farthest from the present. And from this it withdraws by means of a certain disposition of body, by which that state is produced which we call inspiration or enthusiasm. Now the body is sometimes endued naturally with this disposition; but [51] most times the earth casts forth to men the sources and causes of several other powers and faculties, some of which carry men beside themselves into ecstasy and phrensy, and produce maladies and mortalities; others again are good, gentle, and profitable, as appears by those who have had the experience of them. But this spring, or wind, or spirit of divination is most holy and divine, whether it comes by itself through the air, or through the water of some spring. For, being infused and mixed with the body, it produceth an odd temperature and strange disposition in the soul, which a man cannot exactly express, though he may resemble or compare it to several things. For by heat and dilatation it seems to open certain pores that make a discovery of future things; like wine, which, causing fumes to ascend up into the head, puts the spirits into many unusual motions, and reveals things that were laid up in secret. For drunkenness and phrensy, if we will believe Euripides, have a near approach to the nature of divination, when the soul, being hot and fiery, banishes

those fears to which prudence and sobriety are subject, and which extinguish and quench the spirit of divination.

41. Furthermore, a man may say that dryness, being mixed with heat, attenuateth and subtilizeth the spirit, and makes it pure and of an ethereal nature and consistence; for the soul itself, according to Heraclitus, is of a dry constitution; whereas moisture does not only dim the sight and dull the hearing, but when mingled with the air and touching the superficies of mirrors, dusketh the brightness of the one and takes away the light of the other. Or perhaps, on the contrary, by some refrigeration and condensation of this spirit, like the tincture and hardening of iron, this part of the soul which does prognosticate may become more intense and get a perfect edge. Just as tin being melted with brass (which of itself is rare and spongy) does drive it nearer and make it more massy and solid, and [52] withal causeth it to look more bright and resplendent; so I cannot see any reason, why this prophetic exhalation, having some congruence and affinity with souls, may not fill up that which is lax and empty, and drive it more close together. For there are many things which have a reference and congruity one with another; as the bean is useful in dyeing purple, and soda in dyeing saffron, if they be mixed therewith; and as Empedocles says,

Linen is dyed with the bright saffron's flower.

And we have learned of you, Demetrius, that only the river Cydnus cleaneth the knife consecrated to Apollo, in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia, and that there is no other water which can scour and cleanse it. So in the town of Olympia, they temper ashes with the water of the river Alpheus, with which they make a mortar wherewith they plaster the altar there; but if this be attempted to be done by the water of any other river, it is all to no purpose.

42. It is no wonder then if, the earth sending up many exhalations, only those of this sort transport the soul with a divine fury, and give it a faculty of foretelling future things. And, without a doubt, what is related touching the oracle of this place does herewith agree; for it is here where this faculty of divining first showed itself, by means of a certain shepherd, who chanced to fall down and began to utter enthusiastic speeches concerning future events; of which at first the neighbours took no notice; but when they saw what he foretold came to pass, they had him in admiration; and the most learned among the Delphians, speaking of this man, are used to call him by the name of Coretas. The soul seems to me to mix and join itself with this prophetic exhalation, just as the eye is affected with the light. For the eye, which has a natural property and faculty of seeing, would be wholly useless without the light; so the soul, having this faculty and property of foreseeing [53] future things, as an eye, has need of a proper object which may enlighten and sharpen it. And therefore the ancients took the sun and Apollo to be the same God; and those who understand the beauty and wisdom of analogy or proportion do tell us, that as the body is to the soul, the sight to the mind, and light to truth, so is the sun with reference to Apollo; affirming the sun to be the offspring proceeding perpetually from Apollo, who is eternal and who continually bringeth him forth. For as the sun enlightens and excites the visive powers of the senses, so Apollo does excite the prophetic virtue in the soul.

43. Those then that imagined that both were one and the same God have with good reason dedicated and consecrated this oracle to Apollo and to the earth, deeming it to be the sun which imprinted this temperature and disposition on the earth, from whence arose this predictive exhalation. For as Hesiod, with far better reason than other philosophers, calls the earth

The well-fixed seat of all things;¹

so do we esteem it eternal, immortal, and incorruptible. But as to the virtues and faculties which are in it, we believe that some fail in one place, and spring up anew in another. It seems also (for so some experiments incline us to conjecture) that these transitions, changes, and revolutions in process of time do circulate and return to the same place, and begin again where they left off. In some countries we see lakes and whole rivers and not a few fountains and springs of hot waters have sometimes failed and been entirely lost, and at others have fled and absconded themselves, being hidden and concealed under the earth; but perhaps some years after do appear again in the same place, or else run hard by. And so of metal mines, some have been quite exhausted, as the silver ones about [54] Attica; and the same has happened to the veins of brass ore in Euboea, of which the best blades were made and hardened in cold water, as the poet Aeschylus tells us,

Taking his sword, a right Euboean blade.

It is not long since the quarry of Carystus has ceased to yield a certain soft stone, which was wont to be drawn into a fine thread; for I suppose some here have seen towels, net-work, and coifs woven of that thread, which could not be burnt; but when they were soiled with using, people flung them into the fire, and took them thence white and clean, the fire only purifying them.² But all this is vanished; and there is nothing but some few fibres or hairy threads, lying up and down scatteringly in the grain of the stones, to be seen now in the quarry.

44. Aristotle and his followers affirm that all this proceeds from an exhalation within the earth, and when this fails or removes to another place, or revives and recovers itself again, the phenomena proceeding from them do so too. The same must we say of the prophetic exhalations which spring from the earth, that their virtue also is not immortal, but may wax old and decay; for it is not unlikely that great floods of rain and showers do extinguish them, and that the claps of thunder do dissipate them; or else (which I look upon to be the principal cause) they are sunk lower into the earth or utterly destroyed by the shock of earthquakes and the confusion that attends them, as here in this place there still remain the tragical monuments of that great earthquake that overthrew the city. And in the town of Orchomenus, they say, when the pestilence carried away such multitudes of people, the oracle of Tiresias of a sudden ceased, and remains mute to this day. And whether the like has not happened to the oracles in Cilicia, as we have heard it hath, no man can better inform us than you, Demetrius.

¹ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 117

² [See "The quenchless Lamps of Alchemy" in our Blavatsky Speaks Series. — ED. PHIL.]

45. I cannot tell, says Demetrius, how things are at present in those parts, for you all know I have been long absent from thence; but when I was there, both that of Mopsus and of Amphilochus flourished and were in great esteem. And as to the oracle of Mopsus, I can from my own knowledge tell you a strange story about it. The Governor of Cicilia was a man inclining to scepticism about the Gods — through the infirmity of his unbelief, I think, for otherwise he was an oppressor and a worthless man — and he had about him several Epicureans, who are wont to mock at the belief of such things as seem contrary to reason, as they themselves say, standing much upon their goodly natural philosophy. He sent a freed servant of his to the oracle, like a spy into an enemy's camp, with a letter sealed, wherein was the question he was to ask the oracle, nobody knowing the contents thereof. This man then, as the custom of the place is, remaining all night in the temple-porch asleep, related the next morning the dream which he had; for he thought he saw a very handsome man stand before him, who said only this word, Black, to him, and nothing else, for he vanished away immediately. This seemed to us very impertinent, though we could not tell what to make of it; but the governor marvelled at it, and was so nettled with it, that he had the oracle in great veneration ever since; for, opening the letter, he showed this question which was therein: Shall I sacrifice to thee a white bull or a black? Which dashed his Epicureans quite out of countenance, and he offered the sacrifice required, and to the day of his death continued a devout admirer of Mopsus.

46. When Demetrius had given us this relation, he held his peace. And I, being desirous to put an end to this conference, cast mine eyes on Philippus and Ammonius, who sat together; and they, I thought, looked as if they had something to say to me, and therefore I kept silent. [56] With that Ammonius: Philippus hath something to offer, Lamprias, touching what hath been debated; for he thinks, as well as other folks, that Apollo and the sun are the same God. But the question which I propose is of greater consequence; for just now in our discourse we have taken away divination from the Gods, and openly attributed it to the Daemons, and now we are for excluding them also, and dispossessing them of the oracle and three-footed stool, referring the cause, or rather the nature and essence, of divination to exhalations, winds, and vapours; for these opinions carry us still farther off from the Gods, introducing such a cause of this event as Euripides makes Polyphemus to allege:

The earth by force, whether she will or no
Does for my cattle make the grass to grow.¹

Yet he says that he sacrificed his herds, not to the Gods, but to himself and his own belly, “the greatest of all Daemons”; whereas we offer them sacrifices and prayers to obtain an answer from their oracles; but to what purpose, if it be true that souls are naturally endued with the faculty of prediction, and that the chief cause that excites this faculty and virtue is a certain temperature of air and winds? And what signifies then the sacred institutions and setting apart these religious prophetesses, for the giving of answers? And why do they return no answer at all, unless the sacrifice tremble all over, even from the very feet, whilst the wine is poured on its head? For it is not enough to wag the head, as other beasts do which are appointed for sacrifices;

¹ Euripides, *Cyclops* 332

but this quaking and shivering must be universal throughout all parts of the body, and that with a trembling noise; for if this be not done, they say that the oracle will give no answer, neither is the priestess even introduced. For it is very proper and suitable for them to do and believe thus who ascribe the impulses of [57] prophetic inspiration either to a God or a Daemon, but by no means for those that are of your opinion. For the exhalation which springeth out of the ground, whether the beast tremble or not, will always, if it be present, cause a ravishment and transport of spirit, and dispose the soul alike, not only of Pythia, but of anyone else that first cometh or is presented. And it must needs seem absurd to set apart one certain woman for the delivery of these oracles, and to oblige her to virginity and chastity all her days, when the thing is referred to such a cause. For as to that Coretas, whom the Delphians will needs have to be the first that happened to fall upon this chink or crevice of the ground, and gave the first proof of the virtue of the place — he, I say, seems to me not at all to differ from other herdsmen or shepherds, supposing what is reported of him to be true, as I believe it is not. And truly, when I call to mind of what benefit this oracle has been unto the Greeks, not only in their wars and building of cities, but also in the stresses of plague and famine, methinks it is very unfit to refer its invention and original unto mere chance, rather than to God and divine providence. But I would willingly have you, Lamprias, says he, to speak on this point, and I pray you, Philippus, to have patience a while. With all my heart, replied Philippus, and I dare undertake the same for all the company.

47. And, as to my part, quoth I, O Philippus! I am not only much moved, but also ashamed, considering my youth, in the presence of so many wise and grave personages, to appear as if I endeavoured by sophistry to impose upon them, and to destroy and evacuate what sage and holy men have determined concerning the divine nature and power. But though I am young, yet Plato was old and wise as you are, and he shall be my example and advocate in this case. He reprehended Anaxagoras for applying himself too much to natural causes, always following [58] and pursuing the necessary and material cause of the passions and affections incident to bodies, and omitting the final and efficient, which are much better and more considerable principles than the other. But Plato either first, or most of all the philosophers, hath joined both of these principles together, attributing to God the causality of all things that are according to reason, and yet not depriving matter of a necessary or passive concurrence; but acknowledging that the adorning and disposing of all this sensible world does not depend on one single and simple cause, but took its being from the conjunction and fellowship of matter with reason. This may be illustrated by the works of art; as, for example, without going any further, the foot of the famous cup which is amongst the treasure of this temple, which Herodotus calls a Hypocrateridion,¹ that has for the material causes fire and iron, and pliability by means of fire, and the tincture in water, without which such a piece of work could not be wrought. But the principal cause, and that which is most properly so called, which wrought by all these, was art and reason. And we see the name of the artist set on all such pieces, according to that,

¹ [Υποκρατηριδίου, the stand of κρατήρ.]

'Twas Thasian Polygnotus, Aglaophon's son,
That drew this draught of conquer'd Ilium.

But yet, without colours mixed and confounded with one another, it had been impossible to have done a piece so pleasing to the eye. Should one come then and enquire into the material cause, searching into and discoursing concerning the alterations and mutations which the vermilion receives mixed with ochre, or the ceruse with black, would he thereby lessen the credit of the painter Polygnotus? And so he that shall discourse how iron is both hardened and mollified, and how, being softened in the fire, it becomes obedient to them who by beating it drive it out in length and breadth; and afterwards, being plunged [59] into fresh water, by the coldness of it becomes hardened and condensed after it was softened and rarefied by the fire, and acquires a firmness and temper which Homer calls the strength of the iron — does he, because of this, e'er the less attribute the cause of the work to the workman? I do not think he does; for those who examine the virtues and properties of medicinal drugs do not thereby condemn the art of physic. Just as when Plato says that we see because the light of the eye is mixed with the clearness of the sun, and that we hear by the percussion of the air, yet this does not hinder but that we have the faculty of seeing and hearing from Divine Providence.

48. In a word, generation, as I have said, proceeding from two causes, the chiefest and most ancient poets and divines have stuck only to the first and most excellent of these, having on all occasions these known words in their mouths,

Jove, the beginning, middle, source of all;¹

but as to the necessary and natural causes, they concern not themselves with them. Whereas their successors, who were for that reason called natural philosophers, took a different course; for they, forsaking this admirable and divine principle, ascribe all matter and the passions of it to the motions, mutations, and mixtures of its parts. So that both of these are defective in their methods, because they omit, through ignorance or design, the one the efficient, the others the material cause. Whereas he that first pointed at both causes, and manifestly joined with the reason, which freely operateth and moveth, the matter, which necessarily is obedient and passive, does defend both himself and us from all calumny and censure. For we do not deprive divination either of God or of reason; seeing we allow it for its subject the soul of man, and for its instrument an enthusiastic exhalation. For first, the earth, [60] out of which exhalations are generated, and then the sun, which in and upon the earth works all the infinite possibilities of mixture and alteration, are, in the divinity of our forefathers, esteemed Gods. And hereunto if we add the Daemons as superintendents and guardians of this temperature, as of a harmony and consort, who in due time slacken or stretch the virtue of this exhalation, sometimes taking from it the too great activity which it has to torment the soul and transport it beyond itself, and mingling with it a virtue of moving, without causing pain to those that are possessed with it; in all this it seems to me that we do nothing that can look strange or impossible or unagreeable to reason.

¹ From the *Orphic Fragments* VI, 10 (Hermann).

49. And when we offer victims before we come to the oracle, and crown them with garlands of flowers and pour wine on their heads, I see we do not anything in all this that is absurd or repugnant to this opinion of ours. For the priests, who offer the sacrifices, and pour out the holy wine thereon, and observe their motions and tremblings, do this for no other reason besides that of learning whether they can receive an answer from the oracle. For the animal which is offered to the Gods must be pure, entire, and sound, both as to soul and body. Now it is not very hard to discover the marks of the body; and as to the soul, they make an experiment of it in setting meal before the bulls and presenting pease to the boars; for if they will not taste them, it is a certain sign they be not sound. As to goats, cold water is a trial for them; for if the beast does not seem to be moved and affected when the water is poured upon her, this is an evident sign that her soul is not right according to Nature. And supposing it should be granted that it is a certain and unquestionable sign that God will give an answer when the sacrifice thus drenched stirs, and that when it is otherwise he vouchsafes none, I do not see herein anything that disagrees with the account [61] of oracles which I have given. For every natural virtue produceth the effect to which it is ordained better or worse, according as its season is more or less proper; and it is likely God gives us signs whereby we may know whether the opportunity be gone or not.

50. As for my part, I believe the exhalation itself which comes out of the ground is not always of the same kind, being at one time slack, and at another strong and vigorous; and the truth of that experiment which I use to prove it is attested by several strangers, and by all those which serve in the temple. For the room where those do wait who come for answers from the oracle is sometimes — though not often and at certain stated times, but as it were by chance — filled with such a fragrant odour and scent, that no perfumes in the world can exceed it, and this arises, as it were, out of a spring, from the sanctuary of the temple. And this proceeds very likely from its heat or some other power or faculty which is in it; and if peradventure this seems to anybody an unlikely thing, such a one will, however, allow that the prophetess Pythia hath that part of the soul unto which this wind and blast of inspiration approacheth moved by variety of passions and affections, sometimes after one sort and sometimes another, and that she is not always in the same mood and temper, like a fixed and immutable harmony which the least alteration or change of such and such proportions destroys. For there are several vexations and passions, which agitate bodies and slide into the soul, that she perceives, but more that she does not, in which case it would be better that she should tarry away and not present herself to this divine inspiration, as not being clean and void of perturbations, like an instrument of music exquisitely made, but at present in disorder and out of tune. For wine does not at all times alike surprise the drunkard, neither does the sound of the flute always affect in the [62] same manner him who dances to it. For the same persons are sometimes more and sometimes less transported beyond themselves, and more or less inebriated, according to the present disposition of their bodies. But especially the imaginative part of the soul is subject to change and sympathize together with the body, as is apparent from dreams; for sometimes we are mightily troubled with many and confused visions in our dreams, and at other times there is a perfect calm, undisturbed by any such images or ideas. We all know Cleon, a native of Daulia, who

used to say to himself that in the many years in which he hath lived he never had any dream. And among the ancients, the same is related of Thrasymedes of Heraea. The cause of this lies in the complexion and constitution of bodies, as is seen by melancholy people, who are much subject to dreams in the night, and their dreams sometimes prove true. Inasmuch as such persons' fancies run sometimes on one thing and at other times on another, they must thereby of necessity now and then light right, as they that shoot often must hit sometimes.

51. When therefore the imaginative part of the soul and the prophetic blast or exhalation have a sort of harmony and proportion with each other, so as the one, as it were in the nature of a medicament, may operate upon the other, then happens that enthusiasm or divine fury which is discernible in prophets and inspired persons. And, on the contrary, when the proportion is lost, there can be no prophetic inspiration, or only such as is as good as none; for then it is a forced fury, not a natural one, but violent and turbulent, such as we have seen to have happened in the prophetess Pythia who is lately deceased. For certain pilgrims being come for an answer from the oracle, it is said the sacrifice endured the first effusion without stirring or moving a jot, which made the priests, out of an excess of zeal, to continue to pour on more, till the beast was [63] almost drowned with cold water; but what happened hereupon to the prophetess Pythia? She went down into the hole against her will; but at the first words which she uttered, she plainly showed by the hoarseness of her voice that she was not able to bear up against so strong an inspiration (like a ship under sail, oppressed with too much wind), but was possessed with a dumb and evil spirit. Finally, being horribly disordered and running with dreadful screeches towards the door to get out, she threw herself violently on the ground, so that not only the pilgrims fled for fear, but also the high priest Nicander and the other priests and religious which were there present; who entering within a while took her up, being out of her senses; and indeed she lived but few days after. For these reasons it is that Pythia is obliged to keep her body pure and clean from the company of men, there being no stranger permitted to converse with her. And before she goes to the oracle, they are used by certain marks to examine whether she be fit or no, believing that the God certainly knows when her body is disposed and fit to receive, without endangering her person, this enthusiastical inspiration. For the force and virtue of this exhalation does not move all sorts of persons, nor the same persons in like manner, nor as much at one time as at another; but it only gives beginning, and, as it were, kindles those spirits which are prepared and fitted to receive its influence. Now this exhalation is certainly divine and celestial, but yet not incorruptible and immortal, nor proof against the eternity of time, which subdues all things below the moon, as our doctrine teaches — and, as some say, all things above it, which, weary and in despair as regards eternity and infinity, are apt to be suddenly renewed and changed.

52. But these things, said I, I must advise you and myself often and seriously to consider of, they being liable [64] to many disputes and objections, which our leisure will not suffer to particularize; and therefore we must remit them, together with the questions which Philippus proposes touching Apollo and the sun, to another opportunity.

