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PHAETHON; LOOSE THOUGHTS FOR LOOSE THINKERS. 1852.

Templeton and I were lounging by the clear limestone stream which crossed his park and wound away round wooded hills toward the distant Severn. A lovelier fishing morning sportsman never saw. A soft gray under-roof of cloud slid on before a soft west wind, and here and there a stray gleam of sunlight shot into the vale across the purple mountain-tops, and awoke into busy life the denizens of the water, already quickened by the mysterious electric influences of the last night's thunder-shower. The long-winged cinnamon-flies spun and fluttered over the pools; the sand-bees hummed merrily round their burrows in the marly bank; and delicate iridescent ephemerae rose by hundreds from the depths, and, dropping their shells, floated away, each a tiny Venus Anadyomene, down the glassy ripples of the reaches. Every moment a heavy splash beneath some overhanging tuft of milfoil or water hemlock proclaimed the death-doom of a hapless beetle who had dropped into the stream beneath; yet still we fished and fished, and caught nothing, and seemed utterly careless about catching anything; till the old keeper who followed us, sighing and shrugging his shoulders, broke forth into open remonstrance:

"Excuse my liberty, gentlemen, but what ever is the matter with you and master, sir? I never did see you miss so many honest rises before."

"It is too true," said Templeton to me with a laugh. "I must confess I have been dreaming instead of fishing the whole morning. But what has happened to you, who are not as apt as I am to do nothing by trying to do two things at once?"

"My hand may well be somewhat unsteady; for to tell the truth, I sat up all last night writing."

"A hopeful preparation for a day's fishing in limestone water! But what can have set you on writing all night after so busy and talkative an evening as the last, ending too, as it did, somewhere about half-past twelve?"

"Perhaps the said talkative evening itself; and I suspect, if you will confess the truth, you will say that your morning's meditations are running very much in the same channel."

"Lewis," said he, after a pause, "go up to the hall, and bring some luncheon for us down to the lower waterfall."

"And a wheelbarrow to carry home the fish, sir?"

"If you wish to warm yourself, certainly. And now, my good fellow," said he, as the old keeper toddled away up the park, "I will open my heart—a process for which I have but few opportunities here—to an old college friend. I am disturbed and saddened by last night's talk and by last night's guest."

"By the American professor? How, in the name of English exclusiveness, did such a rampantly heterodox spiritual guerilla invade the respectabilities and conservatism of Herefordshire?"

"He was returning from a tour through Wales, and had introductions to me from some Manchester friends of mine, to avail himself of which I found he had gone some thirty miles out of his way."

"Complimentary to you, at least."

"To Lady Jane, I suspect, rather than to me; for he told me broadly enough that all the flattering attentions which he had received in Manchester—where, you know, all such prophets are received with open arms, their only credentials being that, whatsoever they believe, they shall not believe the Bible—had not given him the pleasure which he had received from that one introduction to what he called 'the inner hearth-life of the English landed aristocracy.' But what did you think of him?"

"Do you really wish to know?"

"I do."

"Then, honestly, I never heard so much magniloquent unwisdom talked in the same space of time. It was the sense of shame for my race which kept me silent all the evening. I could not trust myself to argue with a gray-haired Saxon man, whose fifty years of life seemed to have left him a child in all but the childlike heart which alone can enter into the kingdom of heaven."

"You are severe," said Templeton, smilingly though, as if his estimate were not very different from mine.

"Can one help being severe when one hears irreverence poured forth from reverend lips? I do not mean merely irreverence for the Catholic Creeds; that to my mind—God forgive me if I misjudge him—seemed to me only one fruit of a deep root of irreverence for all things as they are, even for all things as they seem. Did you not remark the audacious contempt for all ages but 'our glorious nineteenth century,' and the still deeper contempt for all in the said glorious time who dared to believe that there was any ascertained truth independent of the private fancy and opinion of—for I am afraid it came to that—him, Professor Windrush, and his circle of elect souls? 'You may believe nothing if you like, and welcome; but if you do take to that unnecessary act, you are a fool if you believe anything but what I believe—though I do not choose to state what that is.' Is not that, now, a pretty fair formulisation of his doctrine?"

"But, my dear raver," said Templeton, laughing, "the man believed at least in physical science. I am sure we heard enough about its triumphs."

"It may be so. But to me his very 'spiritualism' seemed more materialistic than his physics. His notion seemed to be, though heaven forbid that I should say that he ever put it formally before himself—"

"Or anything else," said Templeton, sotto voce.

"—that it is the spiritual world which is governed by physical laws, and the physical by spiritual ones; that while men and women are merely the puppets of cerebrations and mentations, and attractions and repulsions, it is the trees, and stones, and gases, who have the wills and the energies, and the faiths and the virtues and the personalities."

"You are caricaturing."

"How so? How can I judge otherwise, when I hear a man talking, as he did, of God in terms which, every one of them involved what we call the essential properties of matter—space, time, passibility, motion; setting forth phrenology and mesmerism as the great organs of education, even of the regeneration of mankind; apologising for the earlier ravings of the Poughkeepsie seer, and considering his later eclectic-pantheist farragos as great utterances: while, whenever he talked of Nature, he showed the most credulous craving after everything which we, the countrymen of Bacon, have been taught to consider unscientific—Homœopathy, Electro-biology, Loves of the Plants à la Darwin, Vestiges of Creation, Vegetarianisms, Teetotalisms—never mind what, provided it was unaccredited or condemned by regularly educated men of science?"

"But you don't mean to assert that there is nothing in any of these theories?"

"Of course not. I can no more prove a universal negative about them than I can about the existence of life on the moon. But I do say that this contempt for that which has been already discovered—this carelessness about induction from the normal phenomena, coupled with this hankering after theories built upon exceptional ones—this craving for 'signs and wonders,' which is the sure accompaniment of a dying faith in God, and in nature as God's work—are symptoms which make me tremble for the fate of physical as well as of spiritual science, both in America and in the Americanists here at home. As the Professor talked on, I could not help thinking of the neo-Platonists of Alexandria, and their exactly similar course—downward from a spiritualism of notions and emotions, which in every term confessed its own materialism, to the fearful discovery that consciousness does not reveal God, not even matter, but only its own existence; and then onward, in desperate search after something external wherein to trust, towards theurgic fetish worship, and the secret virtues of gems and flowers and stars; and, last of all, to the lowest depth of bowing statues and winking pictures. The sixth century saw that career, Templeton; the nineteenth may see it re-enacted, with only these differences, that the Nature-worship which seems coming will be all the more crushing and slavish, because we know so much better how vast and glorious Nature is; and that the superstitions will be more clumsy and foolish in proportion as our Saxon brain is less acute and discursive, and our education less severely scientific, than those of the old Greeks."

"Silence, raver!" cried Templeton, throwing himself on the grass in fits of laughter. "So the Professor's grandchildren will have either turned Papists, or be bowing down before rusty locomotives and broken electric telegraphs? But, my good friend, you surely do not take Professor Windrush for a fair sample of the great American people?"

"God forbid that so unpractical a talker should be a sample of the most practical people upon earth. The Americans have their engineers, their geographers, their astronomers, their scientific chemists; few indeed, but such as bid fair to rival those of any nation upon earth. But these, like other true workers, hold their tongues and do their business."

"And they have a few indigenous authors too: you must have read the 'Biglow Papers,' and the 'Fable for Critics,' and last but not least, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'?"

"Yes; and I have had far less fear for Americans since I read that book; for it showed me that there was right healthy power, artistic as well as intellectual, among them, even now—ready, when their present borrowed peacocks' feathers have fallen off, to come forth and prove that the Yankee Eagle is a right gallant bird, if he will but trust to his own natural plumage."

"And they have a few statesmen also."

"But they are curt, plain-spoken, practical—in everything antipodal to the knot of hapless men, who, unable from some defect or morbidity to help on the real movement of their nation, are fain to get their bread with tongue and pen, by retailing to 'silly women,' 'ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth,' second-hand German eclecticism, now exploded even in the country where they arose, and the very froth and scum of the Medea's caldron, in which the disjecta membra of old Calvinism are pitiably seething."

"Ah! It has been always the plan, you know, in England, as well as in America, courteously to avoid taking up a German theory till the Germans had quite done with it, and thrown it away for something new. But what are we to say of those who are trying to introduce into England these very Americanised Germanisms, as the only teaching which can suit the needs of the old world?"

"We will, if we are in a vulgar humour, apply to them a certain old proverb about teaching one's grandmother a certain simple operation on the egg of the domestic fowl; but we will no less take shame to ourselves, as sons of Alma Mater, that such nonsense can get even a day's hearing, either among the daughters of Manchester manufacturers, or among London working men. Had we taught them what we were taught in the schools, Templeton—"

"Alas, my friend, we must ourselves have learnt it first. I have no right to throw stones at the poor Professor, for I could not answer him."

"Do not suppose that I can either. All I say is—mankind has not lived in vain. Least of all has it lived in vain during the last eighteen hundred years. It has gained something of eternal truth in every age, and that which it has gained is as fresh and young now as ever; and I will not throw away the bird in the hand for any number of birds in the bush."

"Especially when you suspect most of them to be only wooden pheasants, set up to delude poachers. Well, you are far more of a Philister and a Conservative than I thought you."

"The New is coming, I doubt not; but it must grow organically out of the Old—not root the old up, and stick itself full-grown into the place thereof, like a French tree of liberty—sure of much the same fate. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid already, in spiritual things or in physical; as the Professor and his school will surely find."

"You recollect to whom the Bible applies that text?"

"I do."

"And yet you say you cannot answer the Professor?"

"I do not care to do so. There are certain root-truths which I know, because they have been discovered and settled for ages; and instead of accepting the challenge of every I-know-not-whom to re-examine them, and begin the world's work all over again, I will test his theories by them; and if they fail to coincide, I will hear no more speech about the details of the branches and flowers, for I shall know the root is rotten."

"But he, too, acknowledged certain of those root-truths," said Templeton, who seemed to have a lingering sympathy with my victim; "he insisted most strongly, and spoke, you will not deny, eloquently and nobly on the Unity of the Deity."

"On the non-Trinity of *it*, rather; for I will not degrade the word 'Him,' by applying it here. But, tell me honestly—*c'est le timbre qui fait la musique*—did his 'Unity of the Deity' sound in your English Bible-bred heart at all like that ancient, human, personal 'Hear, O Israel! the Lord thy God is one Lord'?"

"Much more like 'The Something our Nothing is one Something.'"

"May we not suspect, then, that his notion of the 'Unity of the Deity' does not quite coincide with the foundation already laid, whosoever else may?"

"You are assuming rather hastily."

"Perhaps I may prove also, some day or other. Do you think, moreover, that the theory which he so boldly started, when his nerves and his manners were relieved from the unwonted pressure by Lady Jane and the ladies going upstairs, was part of the same old foundation?"

"Which, then?"

"That, if a man does but believe a thing, he has a right to speak it and act on it, right or wrong. Have you forgotten his vindication of your friend, the radical voter, and his 'spirit of truth'?"

"What, the worthy who, when I canvassed him as the Liberal candidate for ---, and promised to support complete freedom of religious opinion, tested me by breaking out into such blasphemous ribaldry as made me run out of the house, and then went and voted against me as a bigot?"

"I mean him, of course. The Professor really seemed to admire the man, as a more brave and conscientious hero than himself. I am not squeamish, as you know; but I am afraid that I was quite rude to him when he went as far as that."

“What—when you told him that you thought that, after all, the old theory of the Divine Right of Kings was as plausible as the new theory of the Divine Right of Blasphemy? My dear fellow, do not fret yourself on that point. He seemed to take it rather as a compliment to his own audacity, and whispered to me that ‘The Divine Right of Blasphemy’ was an expression of which Theodore Parker himself need not have been ashamed.”

“He was pleased to be complimentary. But, tell me, what was it in his oratory which has so vexed the soul of the country squire?”

“That very argument of his, among many things. I saw, or rather felt, that he was wrong; and yet, as I have said already, I could not answer him; and, had he not been my guest, should have got thoroughly cross with him, as a pissaller.”

“I saw it. But, my friend, used we not to read Plato together, and enjoy him together, in old Cambridge days? Do you not think that Socrates might at all events have driven the Professor into a corner?”

“He might: but I cannot. Is that, then, what you were writing about all last night?”

“It was. I could not help, when I went out on the terrace to smoke my last cigar, fancying to myself how Socrates might have seemed to set you, and the Professor, and that warm-hearted, right-headed, wrong-tongued High-Church Curate, all together by the ears, and made confusion worse confounded for the time being, and yet have left for each of you some hint whereby you might see the darling truth for which you were barking, all the more clearly in the light of the one which you were howling down.”

“And so you sat up, and—I thought the corridor smelt somewhat of smoke.”

“Forgive, and I will confess. I wrote a dialogue;—and here it is, if you choose to hear it. If there are a few passages, or even many, which Plato would not have written, you will consider my age and inexperience, and forgive.”

“My dear fellow, you forget that I, like you, have been ten years away from dear old Alma-Mater, Plato, the boats, and Potton Wood. My authorities now are ‘Morton on Soils’ and ‘Miles on the Horse’s Foot.’ Read on, fearless of my criticisms. Here is the waterfall; we will settle ourselves on Jane’s favourite seat. You shall discourse, and I, till Lewis brings the luncheon, will smoke my cigar; and if I seem to be looking at the mountain, don’t fancy that I am only counting how many young grouse those heath-burning worthies will have left me by the twelfth.”

So we sat down, and I began:

PHAETHON

Alcibiades and I walked into the Pnyx early the other morning, before the people assembled. There we saw Socrates standing, having his face turned toward the rising sun. Approaching him, we perceived that he was praying; and that so ardently, that we touched him on the shoulder before he became aware of our presence.

“You seem like a man filled with the God, Socrates,” said Alcibiades.

“Would that were true,” answered he, “both of me and of all who will counsel here this day. In fact, I was praying for that very thing; namely, that they might have light to see the truth, in whatsoever matter might be discussed here.”

“And for me also?” said Alcibiades; “but I have prepared my speech already.”

“And for you also, if you desire it—even though some of your periods should be spoiled thereby. But why are you both here so early, before any business is stirring?”

“We were discussing,” said I, “that very thing for which we found you praying—namely, truth, and what it might be.”

“Perhaps you went a worse way toward discovering it than I did. But let us hear. Whence did the discussion arise?”

“From something,” said Alcibiades, “which Protagoras said in his lecture yesterday—How truth was what each man troweth, or believeth, to be true. ‘So that,’ he said, ‘one thing is true to me, if I believe it true, and another opposite thing to you, if you believe that opposite. For,’ continued he, ‘there is an objective and a subjective truth; the former, doubtless, one and absolute, and contained in the nature of each thing; but the other manifold and relative, varying with the faculties of each perceiver thereof.’ But as each man’s faculties, he said, were different from his neighbour’s, and all more or less imperfect, it was impossible that the absolute objective truth of anything could be seen by any mortal, but only some partial approximation, and, as it were, sketch of it, according as the object was represented with more or less refraction on the mirror of his subjectivity. And therefore, as the true inquirer deals only with the possible, and lets the impossible go, it was the business of the wise man, shunning the search after absolute truth as an impious attempt of the Titans to scale Olympus, to busy himself humbly and practically with subjective truth, and with those methods—rhetoric, for instance—by which he can make the subjective opinions of others either similar to his own, or, leaving them as they are—for it may be very often unnecessary to change them—useful to his own ends.”

Then Socrates, laughing:

“My fine fellow, you will have made more than one oration in the Pnyx to-day. And indeed, I myself felt quite exalted, and rapt aloft, like Bellerophon on Pegasus, upon the eloquence of Protagoras and you. But yet forgive me this one thing; for my mother bare me, as you know, a man-midwife, after her own trade, and not a sage.”

ALCIBIADES. "What then?"

SOCRATES. "This, my astonishing friend—for really I am altogether astonished and struck dumb, as I always am whensoever I hear a brilliant talker like you discourse concerning objectivities and subjectivities, and such mysterious words; at such moments I am like an old war-horse, who, though he will rush on levelled lances, shudders and sweats with terror at a boy rattling pebbles in a bladder; and I feel altogether dizzy, and dread lest I should suffer some such transformation as Scylla, when I hear awful words, like incantations, pronounced over me, of which I, being no sage, understand nothing. But tell me now, Alcibiades, did the opinion of Protagoras altogether please you?"

A. "Why not? Is it not certain that two equally honest men may differ in their opinions on the same matter?"

S. "Undeniable."

A. "But if each is equally sincere in speaking what he believes, is not each equally moved by the spirit of truth?"

S. "You seem to have been lately initiated, and that not at Eleusis merely, nor in the Cabiria, but rather in some Persian or Babylonian mysteries, when you discourse thus of spirits. But you, Phaethon" (turning to me), "how did you like the periods of Protagoras?"

"Do not ask me, Socrates," said I, "for indeed we have fought a weary battle together ever since sundown last night, and all that I had to say I learnt from you."

S. "From me, good fellow?"

PHAETHON. "Yes, indeed. I seemed to have heard from you that truth is simply 'facts as they are.' But when I urged this on Alcibiades, his arguments seemed superior to mine."

A. "But I have been telling him, drunk and sober, that it is my opinion also as to what truth is. Only I, with Protagoras, distinguish between objective fact and subjective opinion."

S. "Doing rightly, too, fair youth. But how comes it then that you and Phaethon cannot agree?"

"That," said I, "you know better than either of us."

"You seem both of you," said Socrates, "to be, as usual, in the family way. Shall I exercise my profession on you?"

"No, by Zeus!" answered Alcibiades, laughing; "I fear thee, thou juggler, lest I suffer once again the same fate with the woman in the myth, and after I have conceived a fair man-child, and, as I fancy, brought it forth; thou hold up to the people some dead puppy, or log, or what not, and cry: 'Look what Alcibiades has produced!'"

S. "But, beautiful youth, before I can do that, you will have spoken your oration on the bema, and all the people will be ready and able to say 'Absurd! Nothing but what is fair can come from so fair a body.' Come, let us consider the question together."

I assented willingly; and Alcibiades, mincing and pouting, after his fashion, still was loath to refuse.

S. "Let us see, then. Alcibiades distinguishes, he says, between objective fact and subjective opinion?"

A. "Of course I do."

S. "But not, I presume, between objective truth and subjective truth, whereof Protagoras spoke?"

A. "What trap are you laying now? I distinguish between them also, of course."

S. "Tell me, then, dear youth, of your indulgence, what they are; for I am shamefully ignorant on the matter."

A. "Why, do they not call a thing objectively true, when it is true absolutely in itself; but subjectively true, when it is true in the belief of a particular person?"

S. "—Though not necessarily true objectively, that is, absolutely and in itself?"

A. "No."

S. "But possibly true so?"

A. "Of course."

S. "Now, tell me—a thing is objectively true, is it not, when it is a fact as it is?"

A. "Yes."

S. "And when it is a fact as it is not, it is objectively false; for such a fact would not be true absolutely, and in itself, would it?"

A. "Of course not."

S. "Such a fact would be, therefore, no fact, and nothing."

A. "Why so?"

S. "Because, if a thing exists, it can only exist as it is, not as it is not; at least my opinion inclines that way."

"Certainly not," said I; "why do you haggle so, Alcibiades?"

S. "Fair and softly, Phaethon! How do you know that he is not fighting for wife and child, and the altars of his gods? But if he will agree with you and me, he will confess that a thing which is objectively false does not exist at all, and is nothing."

A. "I suppose it is necessary to do so. But I know whither you are struggling."

S. "To this, dear youth, that, therefore, if a thing subjectively true be also objectively false, it does not exist, and is nothing."

"It is so," said I.

S. "Let us, then, let nothing go its own way, while we go on ours with that which is only objectively true, lest coming to a river over which it is subjectively true to us that there is a bridge, and trying to walk over that work of our own mind, but no one's hands, the bridge prove to be objectively false, and we, walking over the bank into the water, be set free from that which is subjectively on the farther bank of Styx."

Then I, laughing: "This hardly coincides, Alcibiades, with Protagoras's opinion, that subjective truth was alone useful."

"But rather proves," said Socrates, "that undiluted draughts of it are of a hurtful and poisonous nature, and require to be tempered with somewhat of objective truth, before it is safe to use them—at least in the case of bridges."

"Did I not tell you," interrupted Alcibiades, "how the old deceiver would try to put me to bed of some dead puppy or log? Or do you not see how, in order, after his custom, to raise a laugh about the whole question by vulgar examples, he is blinking what he knows as well as I?"

S. "What then, fair youth?"

A. "That Protagoras was not speaking about bridges, or any other merely physical things, on which no difference of opinion need occur, because every one can satisfy himself by simply using his senses; but concerning moral and intellectual matters, which are not cognisable by the senses, and therefore permit, without blame, a greater diversity of opinion. Error on such points, he told us—on the subject of religion, for example—was both pardonable and harmless; for no blame could be imputed to the man who acted faithfully up to his own belief, whatsoever that might be."

S. "Bravely spoken of him, and worthily of a free state. But tell me, Alcibiades, with what matters does religion deal?"

A. "With the Gods."

S. "Then it is not hurtful to speak false things of the Gods?"

A. "Not unless you know them to be false."

S. "But answer me this, Alcibiades. If you made a mistake concerning numbers, as that twice two made five, might it not be hurtful to you?"

A. "Certainly; for I might pay away five obols instead of four."

S. "And so be punished, not by any anger of two and two against you, but by those very necessary laws of number, which you had mistaken?"

A. "Yes."

S. "Or if you made a mistake concerning music, as that two consecutive notes could produce harmony, that opinion also, if you acted upon it, would be hurtful to you?"

A. "Certainly; for I should make a discord, and pain my own ears, and my hearers'."

S. "And in this case also, be punished, not by any anger of the lyre against you, but by those very necessary laws of music which you had mistaken?"

A. "Yes."

S. "Or if you mistook concerning a brave man, believing him to be a coward, might not this also be hurtful to you? If, for instance, you attacked him carelessly, expecting him to run away, and he defended himself valiantly, and conquered you; or if you neglected to call for his help in need, expecting him falsely, as in the former case, to run away; would not such a mistake be hurtful to you, and punish you, not by any anger of the man against you, but by your mistake itself?"

A. "It is evident."

S. "We may assume, then, that such mistakes at least are hurtful, and that they are liable to be punished by the very laws of that concerning which we mistake?"

A. "We may so assume."

S. "Suppose, then, we were to say: 'What argument is this of yours, Protagoras?—that concerning lesser things, both intellectual and moral, such as concerning number, music, or the character of a man, mistakes are hurtful, and liable to

bring punishment, in proportion to our need of using those things: but concerning the Gods, the very authors and lawgivers of number, music, human character, and all other things whatsoever, mistakes are of no consequence, nor in any way hurtful to man, who stands in need of their help, not only in stress of battle, once or twice in his life, as he might of the brave man, but always and in all things both outward and inward? Does it not seem strange to you, for it does to me, that to make mistakes concerning such beings should not bring an altogether infinite and daily punishment, not by any resentment of theirs, but, as in the case of music or numbers, by the very fact of our having mistaken the laws of their being, on which the whole universe depends?—What do you suppose Protagoras would be able to answer, if he faced the question boldly?”

A. “I cannot tell.”

S. “Nor I either. Yet one thing more it may be worth our while to examine. If one should mistake concerning God, will his error be one of excess, or defect?”

A. “How can I tell?”

S. “Let us see. Is not Zeus more perfect than all other beings?”

A. “Certainly, if it be true that, as they say, the perfection of each kind of being is derived from him; he must therefore be himself more perfect than any one of those perfections.”

S. “Well argued. Therefore, if he conceived of himself, his conception of himself would be more perfect than that of any man concerning him?”

A. “Assuredly; if he have that faculty, he must needs have it in perfection.”

S. “Suppose, then, that he conceived of one of his own properties, such as his justice; how large would that perfect conception of his be?”

A. “But how can I tell, Socrates?”

S. “My good friend, would it not be exactly commensurate with that justice of his?”

A. “How then?”

S. “Wherein consists the perfection of any conception, save in this, that it be the exact copy of that whereof it is conceived, and neither greater nor less?”

A. “I see now.”

S. “Without the Pythia’s help, I should say. But, tell me—We agree that Zeus’s conception of his own justice will be exactly commensurate with his justice?”

A. “We do.”

S. “But man’s conception thereof, it has been agreed, would be certainly less perfect than Zeus’s?”

A. “It would.”

S. “Man, then, it seems, would always conceive God to be less just than God conceives himself to be?”

A. “He would.”

S. “And therefore to be less just, according to the argument, than he really is?”

A. “True.”

S. “And therefore his error concerning Zeus, would be in this case an error of defect?”

A. “It would.”

S. “And so on of each of his other properties?”

A. “The same argument would likewise, as far as I can see, apply to them.”

S. “So that, on the whole, man, by the unassisted power of his own faculty, will always conceive Zeus to be less just, wise, good, and beautiful than he is?”

A. “It seems probable.”

S. “But does not that seem to you hurtful?”

A. “Why so?”

S. “As if, for instance, a man believing that Zeus loves him less than he really does, should become superstitious and self-tormenting. Or, believing that Zeus will guide him less than he really will, he should go his own way through life without looking for that guidance: or if, believing that Zeus cares about his conquering his passions less than he really does, he should become careless and despairing in the struggle: or if, believing that Zeus is less interested in the welfare of mankind than he really is, he should himself neglect to assist them, and so lose the glory of being called a

benefactor of his country: would not all these mistakes be hurtful ones?"

"Certainly," said I: but Alcibiades was silent.

S. "And would not these mistakes, by the hypothesis, themselves punish him who made them, without any resentment whatsoever, or Nemesis of the Gods being required for his chastisement?"

"It seems so," said I.

S. "But can we say of such mistakes, and of the harm which may accrue from them, anything but that they must both be infinite; seeing that they are mistakes concerning an infinite Being, and his infinite properties, on every one of which, and on all together, our daily existence depends?"

P. "It seems so."

S. "So that, until such a man's error concerning Zeus, the source of all things, is cleared up, either in this life or in some future one, we cannot but fear for him infinite confusion, misery, and harm, in all matters which he may take in hand?"

Then Alcibiades, angrily: "What ugly mask is this you have put on, Socrates? You speak rather like a priest trying to frighten rustics into paying their first-fruits, than a philosopher inquiring after that which is beautiful. But you shall never terrify me into believing that it is not a noble thing to speak out whatsoever a man believes, and to go forward boldly in the spirit of truth."

S. "Feeling first, I hope, with your staff, as would be but reasonable in the case of the bridge, whether your belief was objectively or only subjectively true, lest you should fall through your subjective bridge into objective water. Nevertheless, leaving the bridge and the water, let us examine a little what this said spirit of truth may be. How do you define it?"

A. "I assert that whosoever says honestly what he believes, does so by the spirit of truth."

S. "Then if Lyce, patting those soft cheeks of yours, were to say: 'Alcibiades, thou art the fairest youth in Athens,' she would speak by the spirit of truth?"

A. "They say so."

S. "And they say rightly. But if Lyce, as is her custom, wished, by so saying, to cheat you into believing that she loved you, and thereby to wheedle you out of a new shawl, she would still speak by the spirit of truth?"

A. "I suppose so."

S. "But if, again, she said the same thing to Phaethon, she would still speak by the spirit of truth?"

"By no means, Socrates," said I, laughing.

S. "Be silent, fair boy; you are out of court as an interested party. Alcibiades shall answer. If Lyce, being really mad with love, like Sappho, were to believe Phaethon to be fairer than you, and say so, she would still speak by the spirit of truth?"

A. "I suppose so."

S. "Do not frown; your beauty is in no question. Only she would then be saying what is not true?"

"I must answer for him after all," said I.

S. "Then it seems, from what has been agreed, that it is indifferent to the spirit of truth, whether it speak truth or not. The spirit seems to be of an enviable serenity. But suppose again, that I believed that Alcibiades had an ulcer on his leg, and were to proclaim the same now to the people, when they come into the Pnyx, should I not be speaking by the spirit of truth?"

A. "But that would be a shameful and blackguardly action."

S. "Be it so. It seems, therefore, that it is indifferent to the spirit of truth whether that which it affirms be honourable or blackguardly. Is it not so?"

A. "It seems so, most certainly, in that case at least."

S. "And in others, as I think. But tell me—Is not the man who does what he believes, as much moved by this your spirit of truth as he who says what he believes?"

A. "Certainly he is."

S. "Then if I believed it right to lie or steal, I, in lying or stealing, should lie or steal by the spirit of truth?"

A. "Certainly: but that is impossible."

S. "My fine fellow, and wherefore? I have heard of a nation among the Indians who hold it a sacred duty to murder every one not of their own tribe, whom they can waylay: and when they are taken and punished by the rulers of that country, die joyfully under the greatest torments, believing themselves certain of an entrance into the Elysian fields, in

proportion to the number of murders which they have committed.”

A. “They must be impious wretches.”

S. “Be it so. But believing themselves to be right, they commit murder by the spirit of truth.”

A. “It seems to follow from the argument.”

S. “Then it is indifferent to the spirit of truth whether the action which it prompts be right or wrong?”

A. “It must be confessed.”

S. “It is therefore not a moral faculty, this spirit of truth. Let us see now whether it be an intellectual one. How are intellectual things defined, Phaethon? Tell me, for you are cunning in such matters.”

P. “Those things which have to do with processes of the mind.”

S. “With right processes, or with wrong?”

P. “With right, of course.”

S. “And processes for what purpose?”

P. “For the discovery of facts.”

S. “Of facts as they are, or as they are not?”

P. “As they are.”

S. “And he who discovers facts as they are, discovers truth; while he who discovers facts as they are not, discovers falsehood?”

P. “He discovers nothing, Socrates.”

S. “True; but it has been agreed already that the spirit of truth is indifferent to the question whether facts be true or false, but only concerns itself with the sincere affirmation of them, whatsoever they may be. Much more then must it be indifferent to those processes by which they are discovered.”

P. “How so?”

S. “Because it only concerns itself with affirmation concerning facts; but these processes are anterior to that affirmation.”

P. “I comprehend.”

S. “And much more is it indifferent to whether those are right processes or not.”

P. “Much more so.”

S. “It is therefore not intellectual. It remains, therefore, that it must be some merely physical faculty, like that of fearing, hungering, or enjoying the sexual appetite.”

A. “Absurd, Socrates!”

S. “That is the argument’s concern, not ours: let us follow manfully whithersoever it may lead us.”

A. “Lead on, thou sophist!”

S. “It was agreed, then, that he who does what he thinks right, does so by the spirit of truth—was it not?”

A. “It was.”

S. “Then he who eats when he thinks that he ought to eat, does so by the spirit of truth?”

A. “What next?”

S. “This next, that he who blows his nose when he thinks that it wants blowing, blows his nose by the spirit of truth.”

A. “What next?”

S. “Do not frown, friend. Believe me, in such days as these, I honour even the man who is honest enough to blow his nose because he finds that he ought to do so. But tell me—a horse, when he shies at a beggar, does not he also do so by the spirit of truth? For he believes sincerely the beggar to be something formidable, and honestly acts upon his conviction.”

“Not a doubt of it,” said I, laughing, in spite of myself, at Alcibiades’s countenance.

S. “It is in danger, then, of proving to be something quite brutish and doggish, this spirit of truth. I should not wonder, therefore, if we found it proper to be restrained.”

A. "How so, thou hair-splitter?"

S. "Have we not proved it to be common to man and animals; but are not those passions which we have in common with animals to be restrained?"

P. "Restrain the spirit of truth, Socrates?"

S. "If it be doggishly inclined. As, for instance, if a man knew that his father had committed a shameful act, and were to publish it, he would do so by the spirit of truth. Yet such an act would be blackguardly, and to be restrained."

P. "Of course."

S. "But much more, if he accused his father only on his own private suspicion, not having seen him commit the act; while many others, who had watched his father's character more than he did, assured him that he was mistaken."

P. "Such an act would be to be restrained, not merely as blackguardly, but as impious."

S. "Or if a man believed things derogatory to the character of the Gods, not having seen them do wrong himself, while all those who had given themselves to the study of divine things assured him that he was mistaken, would he not be bound to restrain an inclination to speak such things, even if he believed them?"

P. "Surely, Socrates; and that even if he believed that the Gods did not exist at all. For there would be far more chance that he alone was wrong, and the many right, than that the many were wrong, and he alone right. He would therefore commit an insolent and conceited action, and, moreover, a cruel and shameless one; for he would certainly make miserable, if he were believed, the hearts of many virtuous persons who had never harmed him, for no immediate or demonstrable purpose except that of pleasing his own self-will; and that much more, were he wrong in his assertion."

S. "Here, then, is another case in which it seems proper to restrain the spirit of truth, whatsoever it may be?"

P. "What, then, are we to say of those who speak fearlessly and openly their own opinions on every subject? for, in spite of all this, one cannot but admire them, whether rationally or irrationally."

S. "We will allow them at least the honour which we do to the wild boar, who rushes fiercely through thorns and brambles upon the dogs, not to be turned aside by spears or tree-trunks, and indeed charges forward the more valiantly the more tightly he shuts his eyes. That praise we can bestow on him, but, I fear, no higher one. It is expedient, nevertheless, to have such a temperament as it is to have a good memory, or a loud voice, or a straight nose unlike mine; only, like other animal passions, it must be restrained and regulated by reason and the law of right, so as to employ itself only on such matters and to such a degree as they prescribe."

"It may seem so in the argument," said I. "Yet no argument, even of yours, Socrates, with your pardon, shall convince me that the spirit of truth is not fair and good, ay, the noblest possession of all; throwing away which, a man throws away his shield, and becomes unworthy of the company of gods or men."

S. "Or of beasts either, as it seems to me and the argument. Nevertheless, to this point has the argument, in its cunning and malice, brought us by crooked paths. Can we find no escape?"

P. "I know none."

S. "But may it not be possible that we, not having been initiated, like Alcibiades, into the Babylonian mysteries, have somewhat mistaken the meaning of that expression, 'spirit of truth'? For truth we defined to be 'facts as they are.' The spirit of truth then should mean, should it not, the spirit of facts as they are?"

P. "It should."

S. "But what shall we say that this expression, in its turn, means? The spirit which makes facts as they are?"

A. "Surely not. That would be the supreme Demiurgus himself."

S. "Of whom you were not speaking, when you spoke of the spirit of truth?"

A. "Certainly not. I was speaking of a spirit in man."

S. "And belonging to him?"

A. "Yes."

S. "And doing—what, with regard to facts as they are? for this is just the thing which puzzles me."

A. "Telling facts as they are."

S. "Without seeing them as they are?"

A. "How you bore one! of course not. It sees facts as they are, and therefore tells them."

S. "But perhaps it might see them as they are, and find it expedient, being of the same temperament as I, to hold its tongue about them? Would it then be still the spirit of truth?"

A. "It would, of course."

S. "The man then who possesses the spirit of truth will see facts as they are?"

A. "He will."

S. "And conversely?"

A. "Yes."

S. "But if he sees anything only as it seems to him, and is not in fact, he will not, with regard to that thing, see it by the spirit of truth?"

A. "I suppose not."

S. "Neither then will he be able to speak of it by the spirit of truth."

A. "Why?"

S. "Because, by what we agreed before, it will not be there to speak of, my wondrous friend. For it appeared to us, if I recollect right, that facts can only exist as they are, and not as they are not, and that therefore the spirit of truth had nothing to do with any facts but those which are."

"But," I interrupted, "O dear Socrates, I fear much that if the spirit of truth be such as this, it must be beyond the reach of man."

S. "Why then?"

P. "Because the immortal gods only can see things as they really are, having alone made all things, and ruling them all according to the laws of each. They therefore, I much fear, will be alone able to behold them, how they are really in their inner nature and properties, and not merely from the outside, and by guess, as we do. How then can we obtain such a spirit ourselves?"

S. "Dear boy, you seem to wish that I should, as usual, put you off with a myth, when you begin to ask me about those who know far more about me than I do about them. Nevertheless, shall I tell you a myth?"

P. "If you have nothing better."

S. "They say, then, that Prometheus, when he grew to man's estate, found mankind, though they were like him in form, utterly brutish and ignorant, so that, as Æschylus says:

Seeing they saw in vain,
Hearing they heard not; but were like the shapes
Of dreams, and long time did confuse all things
At random:

being, as I suppose, led, like the animals, only by their private judgments of things as they seemed to each man, and enslaved to that subjective truth, which we found to be utterly careless and ignorant of facts as they are. But Prometheus, taking pity on them, determined in his mind to free them from that slavery and to teach them to rise above the beasts, by seeing things as they are. He therefore made them acquainted with the secrets of nature, and taught them to build houses, to work in wood and metals, to observe the courses of the stars, and all other such arts and sciences, which if any man attempts to follow according to his private opinion, and not according to the rules of that art, which are independent of him and of his opinions, being discovered from the unchangeable laws of things as they are, he will fail. But yet, as the myth relates, they became only a more cunning sort of animals; not being wholly freed from their original slavery to a certain subjective opinion about themselves, that each man should, by means of those arts and sciences, please and help himself only. Fearing, therefore, lest their increased strength and cunning should only enable them to prey upon each other all the more fiercely, he stole fire from heaven, and gave to each man a share thereof for his hearth, and to each community for their common altar. And by the light of this celestial fire they learnt to see those celestial and eternal bonds between man and man, as of husband to wife, of father to child, of citizen to his country, and of master to servant, without which man is but a biped without feathers, and which are in themselves, being independent of the flux of matter and time, most truly facts as they are. And since that time, whatsoever household or nation has allowed these fires to become extinguished, has sunk down again to the level of the brutes: while those who have passed them down to their children burning bright and strong, become partakers of the bliss of the Heroes, in the Happy Islands. It seems to me then, Phaethon and Alcibiades, that if we find ourselves in anywise destitute of this heavenly fire, we should pray for the coming of that day, when Prometheus shall be unbound from Caucasus, if by any means he may take pity on us and on our children, and again bring us down from heaven that fire which is the spirit of truth, that we may see facts as they are. For which, if he were to ask Zeus humbly and filially, I cannot believe that He would refuse it. And indeed, I think that the poets, as is their custom, corrupt the minds of young men by telling them that Zeus chained Prometheus to Caucasus for his theft; seeing that it befits such a ruler, as I take the Father of gods and men to be, to know that his subjects can only do well by means of his bounty, and therefore to bestow it freely, as the kings of Persia do, on all who are willing to use it in the service of their sovereign."

"So then," said Alcibiades, laughing, "till Prometheus be unbound from Caucasus, we who have lost, as you seem to hint, this heavenly fire, must needs go on upon our own subjective opinions, having nothing better to which to trust. Truly, thou sophist, thy conclusion seems to me after all not to differ much from that of Protagoras."

S. "Ah dear boy! know you not that to those who have been initiated, and, as they say in the mysteries, twice born, Prometheus is always unbound, and stands ready to assist them; while to those who are self-willed and conceited of their own opinions, he is removed to an inaccessible distance, and chained in icy fetters on untrodden mountain-peaks, where the vulture ever devours his fair heart, which sympathises continually with the follies and the sorrows of mankind? Of what punishment, then, must not those be worthy, who by their own wilfulness and self-confidence bind again to Caucasus the fair Titan, the friend of men?"

"By Apollo!" said Alcibiades, "this language is more fit for the tripod in Delphos, than for the bema in the Pnyx. So fare-thee-well, thou Pythoness! I must go and con over my oration, at least if thy prophesying has not altogether addled my thoughts."

But I, as soon as Alcibiades was gone, for I was ashamed to speak before, turning to Socrates said to him, all but weeping:

"Oh Socrates, what cruel words are these which you have spoken? Are you not ashamed to talk thus contemptuously to one like me, even though he be younger and less cunning in argument than yourself; knowing as you do, how, when I might have grown rich in my native city of Rhodes, and marrying there, as my father purposed, a wealthy merchant's heiress, so have passed my life delicately, receiving the profits of many ships and warehouses, I yet preferred Truth beyond riches; and leaving my father's house, came to Athens in search of wisdom, dissipating my patrimony upon one sophist after another, listening greedily to Hippias, and Polus, and Gorgias, and Protagoras, and last of all to you, hard-hearted man that you are? For from my youth I loved and longed after nothing so much as Truth, whatsoever it may be; thinking nothing so noble as to know that which is Right, and knowing it, to do it. And that longing, or love of mine, which is what I suppose Protagoras meant by the spirit of truth, I cherished as the fairest and most divine possession, and that for which alone it was worth while to live. For it seemed to me, that even if in my search I never attained to truth, still it were better to die seeking, than not to seek; and that even if acting by what I considered to be the spirit of truth, and doing honestly in every case that which seemed right, I should often, acting on a false conviction, offend in ignorance against the absolute righteousness of the gods, yet that such an offence was deserving, if not of praise for its sincerity, yet at least of pity and forgiveness; but by no means to be classed, as you class it, with the appetites of brutes; much less to be threatened, as you threaten it, with infinite and eternal misery by I know not what necessary laws of Zeus, and to be put off at last with some myth or other about Prometheus. Surely your mother bare you a scoffer and pitiless, Socrates, and not, as you boast, a man-midwife fit for fair youths."

Then, smiling sweetly, "Dear boy," said he, "were I such as you fancy, how should I be here now, discoursing with you concerning truth, instead of conning my speech for the Pnyx, like Alcibiades, that I may become a demagogue, deceiving the mob with flattery, and win for myself houses, and lands, and gold, and slave-girls, and fame, and power, even to a tyranny itself? For in this way I might have made my tongue a profitable member of my body; but now, being hurried up and down in barren places, like one mad of love, from my longing after fair youths, I waste my speech on them; receiving, as is the wont of true lovers, only curses and ingratitude from their arrogance. But tell me, thou proud Adonis—This spirit of truth in thee, which thou thoughtest, and rightly, thy most noble possession—did it desire truth, or not?"

P. "But, Socrates, I told you that very thing, and said that it was a longing after truth, which I could not restrain or disobey."

S. "Tell me now, does one long for that which one possesses, or for that which one does not possess?"

P. "For that which one does not possess."

S. "And is one in love with that which is oneself, or with that which is not?"

P. "With that which is not oneself, thou mocker. We are not all, surely, like Narcissus?"

S. "No, by the dog! not quite all. But see now: it appears that when any one is in love with a thing, and longs for it, as thou didst for truth, it must be something which is not himself, and which he does not possess?"

P. "True."

S. "You, then, while you were loving facts as they are, and longing to see them as they are, yet did not possess that which you longed for?"

P. "True, indeed; else why should I have been driven forth by the anger of the gods, like Bellerophon, to pace the Aleian plain, eating my own soul, if I had possessed that for which I longed?"

S. "Well said, dear boy. But see again. This truth which you loved, and which was not yourself or part of yourself, was certainly also nothing of your own making?—Though they say that Pygmalion was enamoured of the statue which he himself had carved."

P. "But he was miserable, Socrates, till the statue became alive."

S. "They say so; but what has that to do with the argument?"

P. "I know not. But it seems to me horrible, as it did to Pygmalion, to be enamoured of anything which cannot return your love, but is, as it were, your puppet. Should we not think it a shameful thing, if a mistress were to be enamoured of one of her own slaves?"

S. "We should; and that, I suppose, because the slave would have no free choice whether to refuse or to return his mistress's love; but would be compelled, being a slave, to submit to her, even if she were old, or ugly, or hateful to

him?"

P. "Of course."

S. "And should we not say, Phaethon, that there was no true enjoyment in such love, even on the part of the mistress; nay, that it was not worthy of the name of love at all, but was merely something base, such as happens to animals?"

P. "We should say so rightly."

S. "Tell me, then, Phaethon—for a strange doubt has entered my mind on account of your words. This truth of which you were enamoured, seems, from what has been agreed, not to be a part of yourself, nor a creation of your own, like Pygmalion's statue—how then has it not happened to you to be even more miserable than Pygmalion till you were sure that truth loved you in return?—and, moreover, till you were sure that truth had free choice as to whether it should return or refuse your love? For, otherwise, you would be in danger of being found suffering the same base passion as a mistress enamoured of a slave who cannot resist her."

P. "I am puzzled, Socrates."

S. "Shall we rather say, then, that you were enamoured, not of truth itself, but of the spirit of truth? For we have been all along defining truth to be 'facts as they are,' have we not?"

P. "We have."

S. "But there are many facts as they are, whereof to be enamoured would be base, for they cannot return your love. As, for instance, that one and one make two, or that a horse has four legs. With respect to such facts, you would be, would you not, in the same position as a mistress towards her slave?"

P. "Certainly. It seems, then, better to assume the other alternative."

S. "It does. But does it not follow, that when you were enamoured of this spirit, you did not possess it?"

P. "I fear so, by the argument."

S. "And I fear, too, that we agreed that he only who possessed the spirit of truth saw facts as they are; for that was involved in our definition of the spirit of truth."

P. "But, Socrates, I knew, at least, that one and one made two, and that a horse had four legs. I must then have seen some facts as they are."

S. "Doubtless, fair boy; but not all."

P. "I do not pretend to that."

S. "But if you had possessed the spirit of truth, you would have seen all facts whatsoever as they are. For he who possesses a thing can surely employ it freely for all purposes which are not contrary to the nature of that thing; can he not?"

P. "Of course he can. But if I did not possess the spirit of truth, how could I see any truth whatsoever?"

S. "Suppose, dear boy, that instead of your possessing it, it were possible for it to possess you; and possessing you, to show you as much of itself, or as little, as it might choose, and concerning such things only as it might choose: would not that explain the dilemma?"

P. "It would assuredly."

S. "Let us see, then, whether this spirit of truth may not be something which is capable of possessing you, and employing you, rather than of being possessed and employed by you. To me, indeed, this spirit seems likely to be some demon or deity, and that one of the greatest."

P. "Why then?"

S. "Can lifeless and material things see?"

P. "Certainly not; only live ones."

S. "This spirit, then, seems to be living; for it sees things as they are."

P. "Yes."

S. "And it is also intellectual; for intellectual facts can be only seen by an intellectual being."

P. "True."

S. "And also moral; for moral facts can only be seen by a moral being."

P. "True also."

S. "But this spirit is evidently not a man; it remains therefore, that it must be some demon."

P. "But why one of the greatest?"

S. "Tell me, Phaethon, is not God to be numbered among facts as they are?"

P. "Assuredly; for he is before all others and more eternal and absolute than all."

S. "Then this spirit of truth must also be able to see God as he is."

P. "It is probable."

S. "And certain, if, as we agreed, it be the very spirit which sees all facts whatsoever as they are. Now tell me, can the less see the greater as it is?"

P. "I think not; for an animal cannot see a man as he is, but only that part of him in which he is like an animal, namely, his outward figure and his animal passions; but not his moral sense or reason, for of them it has itself no share."

S. "True; and in like wise, a man of less intellect could not see a man of greater intellect than himself as he is, but only a part of his intellect."

P. "Certainly."

S. "And does not the same thing follow from what we said just now, that God's conceptions of himself must be the only perfect conceptions of him? For if any being could see God as he is, the same would be able to conceive of him as he is: which we agreed was impossible."

P. "True."

S. "Then surely this spirit which sees God as he is, must be equal with God."

P. "It seems probable; but none is equal to God except himself."

S. "Most true, Phaethon. But what shall we say now, but that this spirit of truth, whereof thou hast been enamoured, is, according to the argument, none other than Zeus, who alone comprehends all things, and sees them as they are, because he alone has given to each its inward and necessary laws?"

P. "But, Socrates, there seems something impious in the thought."

S. "Impious, truly, if we held that this spirit of truth was a part of your own self. But we agreed that it was not a part of you, but something utterly independent of you."

P. "Noble would the news be, Socrates, were it true; yet it seems to me beyond belief."

S. "Did we not prove just now concerning Zeus, that all mistakes concerning him were certain to be mistakes of defect?"

P. "We did, indeed."

S. "How do you know, then, that you have not fallen into some such error, and have suspected Zeus to be less condescending towards you than he really is?"

P. "Would that it were so! But I fear it is too fair a hope."

S. "Do I seem to thee now, dear boy, more insolent and unfeeling than Protagoras, when he tried to turn thee away from the search after absolute truth, by saying sophistically that it was an attempt of the Titans to scale heaven, and bade thee be content with asserting shamelessly and brutishly thine own subjective opinions? For I do not bid thee scale the throne of Zeus, into whose presence none could arrive, as it seems to me, unless he himself willed it; but to believe that he has given thee from thy childhood a glimpse of his own excellence, that so thy heart, conjecturing, as in the case of a veiled statue, from one part the beauty of the rest, might become enamoured thereof, and long for that sight of him which is the highest and only good, that so his splendour may give thee light to see facts as they are."

P. "Oh Socrates! and how is this blessedness to be attained?"

S. "Even as the myths relate, the nymphs obtained the embraces of the gods; by pleasing him and obeying him in all things, lifting up daily pure hands and a thankful heart, if by any means he may condescend to purge thine eyes, that thou mayest see clearly, and without those motes, and specks, and distortions of thine own organs of vision, which flit before the eyeballs of those who have been drunk over-night, and which are called by sophists subjective truth; watching everywhere anxiously and reverently for those glimpses of his beauty, which he will vouchsafe to thee more and more as thou provest thyself worthy of them, and will reward thy love by making thee more and more partaker of his own spirit of truth; whereby, seeing facts as they are, thou wilt see him who has made them according to his own ideas, that they may be a mirror of his unspeakable splendour. Is not this a fairer hope for thee, oh Phaethon, than that which Protagoras held out to thee—that neither seeing Zeus, nor seeing facts as they are, nor affirming any truth whatsoever, nor depending for thy knowledge on any one but thine own ignorant self, thou mightest nevertheless be so fortunate as to escape punishment: not knowing, as it seems to me, that such a state of ignorance and blindfold rashness, even if Tartarus were a dream of the poets or the priests, is in itself the most fearful of punishments?"

P. "It is, indeed, my dear Socrates. Yet what are we to say of those who, sincerely loving and longing after knowledge, yet arrive at false conclusions, which are proved to be false by contradicting each other?"

S. "We are to say, Phaethon, that they have not loved knowledge enough to desire utterly to see facts as they are, but

only to see them as they would wish them to be; and loving themselves rather than Zeus, have wished to remodel in some things or other his universe, according to their own subjective opinions. By this, or by some other act of self-will, or self-conceit, or self-dependence, they have compelled Zeus, not, as I think, without pity and kindness to them, to withdraw from them in some degree the sight of his own beauty. We must, therefore, I fear, liken them to Acharis, the painter of Lemnos, who, intending to represent Phœbus, painted from a mirror a copy of his own defects and deformities; or perhaps to that Nymph, who finding herself beloved by Phœbus, instead of reverently and silently returning the affection, boasted of it to all her neighbours, as a token of her own beauty, and despised the god; so that he, being angry, changed her into a chattering magpie; or again to Arachne, who having been taught the art of weaving by Athene, pretended to compete with her own instructress, and being metamorphosed by her into a spider, was condemned, like the sophists, to spin out of her own entrails endless ugly webs, which are destroyed, as soon as finished, by every slave-girl's broom."

P. "But shall we despise and hate such, Oh Socrates?"

S. "No, dearest boy, we will rather pity and instruct them lovingly; remembering always that we shall become such as they the moment we begin to fancy that truth is our own possession, and not the very beauty of Zeus himself, which he shows to those whom he will, and in such measure as he finds them worthy to behold. But to me, considering how great must be the condescension of Zeus in unveiling to any man, even the worthiest, the least portion of his own loveliness, there has come at times a sort of dream, that the divine splendour will at last pierce through and illumine all dark souls, even in the house of Hades, showing them, as by a great sunrise, both what they themselves, and what all other things are, really and in the sight of Zeus; which if it happened, even to Ixion, I believe that his wheel would stop, and his fetters drop off of themselves, and that he would return freely to the upper air, for as long as he himself might choose."

Just then the people began to throng into the Pnyx; and we took our places with the rest to hear the business of the day, after Socrates had privately uttered this prayer:

"Oh Zeus, give to me and to all who shall counsel here this day, that spirit of truth by which we may behold that whereof we deliberate, as it is in thy sight!"

"As I expected," said Templeton, with a smile, as I folded up my manuscript. "My friend the parson could not demolish the poor Professor's bad logic without a little professional touch by way of finish."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh—never mind. Only I owe you little thanks for sweeping away any one of my lingering sympathies with Mr. Windrush, if all you can offer me instead is the confounded old nostrum of religion over again."

"Heydey, friend! What next?"

"Really, my dear fellow, I beg your pardon, I forgot that I was speaking to a clergyman."

"Pray don't beg my pardon on that ground. If what you say be right, a clergyman above all others ought to hear it; and if it be wrong, and a symptom of spiritual disease, he ought to hear it all the more. But I cannot tell whether you are right or wrong, till I know what you mean by religion; for there is a great deal of very truly confounded and confounding religion abroad in the world just now, as there has been in all ages; and perhaps you may be alluding to that."

Templeton sat silent for a few minutes, playing with the tackle in his fly-book, and then murmured to himself the well-known lines of Lucretius:

"Humana ante oculos fœde cum vita jaceret
In terris oppressa gravi sub Relligione
Quæ caput a cœli regionibus ostendebat,
Horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans.

There!—blasphemous reprobate fellow, am I not?"

"On the contrary," I said, "I think that in the sense in which Lucretius intended that the lines should be taken, they contain a great deal of truth. He had seen the basest and foulest crimes spring from that which he calls *Relligio*, and he had a full right to state that fact. I am not aware that one blasphemes the Catholic and Apostolic Faith by saying that the devilries of the Spanish Inquisition were the direct offspring of that 'religious sentiment' which Mr. Windrush's school—though they are at all events right in saying that its source is in man himself, and not in the 'regionibus Cœli'—are now glorifying, as something which enables man to save his own soul without the interference of 'The Deity'—indeed, whether 'The Deity' chooses or not."

"Do leave these poor Emersonians alone for a few minutes, and tell me how you can reconcile what you have just said with your own dialogue."

"Why not?"

"Is not Lucretius glorying in the notion that the gods do not trouble themselves with mortals, while you have been asserting that 'The Deity' troubles Himself even with the souls of heathens?"

"Certainly. But that is quite a distinct matter from his dislike of what he calls *Relligio*. In that dislike I can sympathise fully: but on his method of escape Mr. Windrush will probably look with more complaisance than I do, who call it by the ugly name of Atheism."

"Then I fear you would call me an Atheist, if you knew all. So we had better say no more about it."

"A most curious speech, certainly, to make to a parson, or soul-curer by profession!"

"Why, what on earth have you to do but to abhor and flee me?" asked he, with a laugh, though by no means a merry one.

"Would your having a headache be a reason for the medical man's running away from you, or coming to visit you?"

"Ah, but this, you know, is my 'fault,' and my 'crime,' and my 'sin.' Eh?" and he laughed again.

"Would the doctor visit you the less, because it was your own fault that your head ached?"

"Ah, but suppose I professed openly no faith in his powers of curing, and had a great hankering after unaccredited Homœopathies, like Mr. Windrush's; would not that be a fair cause for interdiction from fire and water, sacraments and Christian burial?"

"Come, come, Templeton," I said; "you shall not thus jest away serious thoughts with an old friend. I know you are ill at ease. Why not talk over the matter with me fairly and soberly? How do you know till you have tried, whether I can help you or not?"

"Because I know that your arguments will have no force with me; they will demand of me or assume in me, certain faculties, sentiments, notions, experiences—call them what you like; I am beginning to suspect sometimes with Cabanis that they are 'a product of the small intestines'—which I never have had, and never could make myself have, and now don't care whether I have them or not."

"On my honour, I will address you only as what you are, and know yourself to be. But what are these faculties, so strangely beyond my friend Templeton's reach? He used to be distinguished at college for a very clear head, and a very kind heart, and the nicest sense of honour which I ever saw in living man; and I have not heard that they have failed him since he became Templeton of Templeton. And as for his Churchmanship, were not the county papers ringing last month with the accounts of the beautiful new church which he had built, and the stained glass which he brought from Belgium, and the marble font which he brought from Italy; and how he had even given for an altar-piece his own pet Luini, the gem of Templeton House?"

"Effeminate picture!" he said. "It was part and parcel of the idea—"

Before I could ask him what he meant, he looked up suddenly at me, with deep sadness on his usually nonchalant face.

"Well, my dear fellow, I suppose I must tell you all, as I have told you so much without your shaking the dust off your feet against me, and consulting Bradshaw for the earliest train to Shrewsbury. You knew my dear mother?"

"I did. The best of women."

"The best of women, and the best of mothers. But, if you recollect, she was a great Low-Church saint."

"Why 'but'? How does that derogate in any wise from her excellence?"

"Not from her excellence; God forbid! or from the excellence of the people of her own party, whom she used to have round her, and who were, some of them, I do believe, as really earnest, and pious, and charitable, and all that, as human beings could be. But it did take away very much indeed from her influence on me."

"Surely she did not neglect to teach you."

"It is a strange thing to say, but she rather taught me too much. I don't deny that it may have been my own fault. I don't blame her, or any one. But you know what I was at college—no worse than other men, I dare say; but no better. I had no reason for being better."

"No reason? Surely she gave you reasons."

"There—you have touched the ailing nerve now. The reasons were what you would call paralogisms. They had no more to do with me than with those trout."

"You mistake, friend, you mistake, indeed," said I.

"I don't mistake at all about this; that whether or not the reasons in themselves had to do with me, the way in which she put them made them practically so much Hebrew. She demanded of me, as the only grounds on which I was to consider myself safe from hell, certain fears and hopes which I did not feel, and experiences which I did not experience; and it was my fault, and a sign of my being in a wrong state—to use no harder term—that I did not feel them; and yet it was only God's grace which could make me feel them: and so I grew up with a dark secret notion that I was a very bad boy; but that it was God's fault and not mine that I was so."

"You were ripe indeed then," said I sadly, "like hundreds more, for Professor Windrush's teaching."

"I will come to that presently. But in the meantime—was it my fault? I was never what you call a devout person. My 'organ of veneration,' as the phrenologists would say, was never very large. I was a shrewd dashing boy, enjoying life

to the finger-tips, and enjoying above all, I will say, pleasing my mother in every way, except in the understanding what she told me—and what I felt I could not understand. But as I grew older, and watched her, and the men round her, I began to suspect that religion and effeminacy had a good deal to do with each other. For the women, whatsoever their temperaments, or even their tastes might be, took to this to me incomprehensible religion naturally and instinctively; while the very few men who were in their clique were—I don't deny some of them were good men enough—if they had been men at all: if they had been well-read, or well-bred, or gallant, or clear-headed, or liberal-minded, or, in short, anything but the silky, smooth-tongued hunt-the-slippers nine out of ten of them were. I recollect well asking my mother once, whether there would not be five times more women than men in heaven—and her answering me sadly and seriously, that she feared there would be. And in the meantime she brought me up to pray and hope that I might some day be converted, and become a child of God—And one could not help wishing to enjoy oneself as much as possible before that event happened."

"Before that event happened, my dear fellow? Pardon me, but your tone is somewhat irreverent."

"Very likely. I had no reason put before me for regarding such a change as anything but an unpleasant doom, which would cut me off, or ought to do so, from field sports, from poetry, from art, from science, from politics—for Christians, I was told, had nothing to do with the politics of this world—from man and all man's civilisation, in short; and leave to me, as the only two lawful indulgences, those of living in a good house, and begetting a family of children."

"And did you throw off the old Creeds for the sake of the civilisation which you fancied that they forbid?"

"No. I am a Churchman, you know; principally on political grounds, or from custom, or from—the devil knows what, perhaps—I do not."

"Probably it is God, and not the devil, who knows why, Templeton."

"Be it so—Frightful as it is to have to say it—I do not so much care—I suppose it is all right: if it is not, it will all come right at last. And in the meantime, I compromise, like the rest of the world; and hear Jane making the children every week-day pray that they may become God's children, and then teaching them every Sunday evening the Catechism, which says that they are so already. I don't understand it—I suppose if it was important, one would understand it. One knows right from wrong, you know, and other fundamentals. If that were necessary, one would know that too."

"But can you submit quietly to such a barefaced contradiction?"

"I? I am only a plain country squire. Of course I should call such dealing with an Act of Parliament a lie and a sham—But about these things, I fancy, the women know best. Jane is ten thousand times as good as I am—you don't know half her worth—And I haven't the heart to contradict her—nor the right either; for I have no reasons to give her; no faith to substitute for hers."

"Our friend, the High-Church curate, could have given you a few plain reasons, I should think."

"Of course he could. And I believe in my heart the man is in the right in calling Jane wrong. He has honesty and common sense on his side, just as he has when he calls the present state of Convocation, in the face of that prayer for God's Spirit on its deliberations, a blasphemous lie and sham. Of course it is. Any ensign in a marching regiment could tell us that from his mere sense of soldier's honour. But then—if she is wrong, is he right? How do I know? I want reasons: he gives me historic authorities."

"And very good things too; for they are fair phenomena for induction."

"But how will proving to me that certain people once thought a thing right prove to me that it is right? Good people think differently every day. Good people have thought differently about those very matters in every age. I want some proof which will coincide with the little which I do know about science and philosophy. They must fight out their own battle, if they choose to fight it on mere authority. If one could but have the implicit faith of a child, it would be all very well: but one can't. If one has once been fool enough to think about these things, one must have reasons, or something better than mere ipse dixits, or one can't believe them. I should be glad enough to believe; do you suppose that I don't envy poor dear Jane from morning to night?—but I can't. And so—"

"And so what?" asked I.

"And so, I believe, I am growing to have no religion at all, and no substitute for it either; for I feel I have no ground or reason for admiring or working out any subject. I have tired of philosophy. Perhaps it's all wrong—at least I can't see what it has to do with God, and Christianity, and all which, if it is true, must be more important than anything else. I have tired of art for the same reason. How can I be anything but a wretched dilettante, when I have no principles to ground my criticism on, beyond bosh about 'The Beautiful'? I did pluck up heart and read Mr. Ruskin's books greedily when they came out, because I heard he was a good Christian. But I fell upon a little tract of his, 'Notes on Sheepfolds,' and gave him up again, when I found that he had a leaning to that 'Clapham sect.' I have dropped politics: for I have no reason, no ground, no principle in them, but expediency. When they asked me this summer to represent the interests of the county in Parliament, I asked them how they came to make such a mistake as to fancy that I knew what was their interest, or anyone else's? I am becoming more and more of an animal; fragmentary, inconsistent, seeing to the root of nothing, unable to unite things in my own mind. I just do the duty which lies nearest, and looks simplest. I try to make the boys grow up plucky and knowing—though what's the use of it? They will go to college with even less principles than I had, and will get into proportionably worse scrapes, I expect to be ruined by their debts before I die. And for the rest, I read nothing but "The Edinburgh" and "The Agricultural Gazette." My talk is of bullocks. I just know right from wrong enough to see that the farms are in good order, pay my labourers living wages, keep the old people out of the workhouse, and see that my cottages and schools are all right; for I suppose I was put here for some purpose of that kind—though what it is I can't very clearly define—And there's an end of my long story."

"Not quite an animal yet, it seems?" said I with a smile, half to hide my own sadness at a set of experiences which are, alas! already far too common, and will soon be more common still.

"Nearer it than you fancy. I am getting fonder and fonder of a good dinner and a second bottle of claret—about their meaning there is no mistake. And my principal reason for taking the hounds two years ago was, I do believe, to have something to do in the winter which required no thought, and to have an excuse for falling asleep after dinner, instead of arguing with Jane about her scurrilous religious newspapers—There is a great gulf opening, I see, between me and her—And as I can't bridge it over I may as well forget it. Pah! I am boring you, and over-talking myself. Have a cigar, and let us say no more about it. There is more here, old fellow, than you will cure by doses of Socratic Dialectics."

"I am not so sure of that," I replied. "On the contrary, I should recommend you in your present state of mind to look out your old Plato as quickly as possible, and see if he and his master Socrates cannot give you, if not altogether a solution for your puzzle, at least a method whereby you may solve it yourself. But tell me first—What has all this to do with your evident sympathy for a man so unlike yourself as Professor Windrush?"

"Perhaps I feel for him principally because he has broken loose from it all in desperation, just as I have. But, to tell you the truth, I have been reading more than one book of his school lately; and, as I said, I owe you no thanks for demolishing the little comfort which I seemed to find in them."

"And what was that then?"

"Why—in the first place, you can't deny that however incoherent they may be they do say a great many clever things, and noble things too, about man, and society, and art, and nature."

"No doubt of it."

"And moreover, they seem to connect all they say with—with—I suppose you will laugh at me—with God, and spiritual truths, and eternal Divine laws; in short, to consecrate common matters in that very way, which I could not find in my poor mother's teaching."

"No doubt of that either. And therein is one real value of them, as protests in behalf of something nobler and more unselfish than the mere dollar-getting spirit of their country."

"Well, then, can you not see how pleasant it was to me to find someone who would give me a peep into the unseen world, without requiring as an entrance-fee any religious emotions and experiences? Here I had been for years, shut out; told that I had no business with anything eternal, and pure, and noble, and good; that to all intents and purposes I was nothing better than a very cunning animal who could be damned; because I was still 'carnal,' and had not been through all Jane's mysterious sorrows and joys. And it was really good news to me to hear that they were not required after all, and that all I need do was to be a good man, and leave devotion to those who were inclined to it by temperament."

"Not to be a good man," said I, "but only a good specimen of some sort of man. That, I think, would be the outcome of Emerson's 'Representative Men,' or of those most tragic 'Memoirs of Margaret Puller Ossoli.'"

"How then, hair-splitter? What is the mighty difference?"

"Would you call Dick Turpin a good man, because he was a good highwayman?"

"What now?"

"That he would be an excellent representative man of his class; and therefore, on Mr. Emerson's grounds, a fit subject for a laudatory lecture."

"I hate reductiones ad absurdum. Let Turpin take care of himself. I suppose I do not belong to such a very bad sort of men, but that it may be worth my while to become a good specimen of it?"

"Certainly not; only I think, contrary to Mr. Emerson's opinion, that you will not become even that, unless you first become something better still, namely, a good man."

"There you are too refined for me. But can you not understand, now, the causes of my sympathy even with Windrush and his 'spirit of truth'?"

"I can, and those of many more. It seems that you thought you found in that school a wider creed than the one to which you had been accustomed?"

"There was a more comprehensive view of humanity about them, and that pleased me."

"Doubtless, one can be easily comprehensive if one comprehends good and bad, true and false, under one category, by denying the absolute existence of either goodness or badness, truth or falsehood. But let the view be as comprehensive as it will, I am afraid that the creed founded thereon will not be very comprehensive."

"Why then?"

"Because it will comprehend so few people; fewer even than the sect of those who will believe, with Mr. Emerson, that Harvey and Newton made their discoveries by the 'Aristotelian method.' The sect of those who believe that there is no absolute right and wrong, no absolute truth external to himself, discoverable by man, will, it seems to me, be a very narrow one to the end of time; owing to a certain primeval superstition of our race, who, even in barbarous countries, have always been Platonists enough to have some sort of instinct and hope that there was a right and a wrong, and

truths independent of their own sentiments and faculties. So that, though this school may enable you to fancy that you understand Lady Jane somewhat more, by the simple expedient of putting on her religious experiences an arbitrary interpretation of your own, which she would indignantly and justly deny, it will enable her to understand you all the less, and widen the gulf between you immeasurably."

"You are severe."

"I only wish you to face one result of a theory, which, while it pretends to offer the most comprehensive liberality, will be found to lead in practice to the most narrow and sectarian Epicurism for a cultivated few. But for the many, struggling with the innate consciousness of evil, in them and around them—an instinctive consciousness which no argumentation about 'evil being a lower form of good' will ever explain away to those who 'grind among the iron facts of life, and have no time for self-deception'—what good news for them is there in Mr. Emerson's cosy and tolerant Epicurism? They cry for deliverance from their natures; they know that they are not that which they were intended to be, because they follow their natures; and he answers them with: 'Follow your natures, and be that which you were intended to be.' You began this argument by stipulating that I should argue with you simply as a man. Does Mr. Emerson's argument look like doing that, or only arguing as with an individual of that kind of man, or rather animal, to which some iron Fate has compelled you to belong?"

"But, I say, these books have made me a better man."

"I do not doubt it. An earnest cultivated man, speaking his whole mind to an earnest cultivated man, will hardly fail of telling him something he did not know before. But if you had not been a cultivated man, Templeton, a man with few sorrows, and few trials, and few unsatisfied desires—if you had been the village shopkeeper, with his bad debts, and his temptations to make those who can pay for those who cannot,—if you had been one of your own labourers, environed with the struggle for daily bread, and the alehouse, and hungry children, and a sick wife, and a dull taste, and a duller head—in short, if you had been a man such as nine out of ten are—what would his school have taught you then? You want some truths which are common to men as men, which will help and teach them, let their temperament or their circumstances be what they will—do you not? If you do not, your complaint of Lady Jane's exclusive Creed is a mere selfish competition on your part, between a Creed which will fit her peculiarities, and a Creed which will fit your peculiarities. Do you not see that?"

"I do—go on."

"Then I say you will not find that in Professor Windrush's school. I say you will find it in Lady Jane's Creed."

"What? In the very Creed which excludes me?"

"Whether that Creed excludes you or not is a question of the true meaning of its words. And that again is a question of Dialectics. I say it includes you and all mankind."

"You must mistake her doctrines, then."

"I do not, I assure you. I know what they are; and I know, also, the misreading of them to which your dear mother's school has accustomed her, and which has taught her that these Creeds only belong to the few who have discovered their own share in them. But whether the Creeds really do that or not—whether Lady Jane does not implicitly confess that they do not by her own words and deeds of every day, that, I say, is a question of Dialectics, in the Platonic sense of that word, as the science which discovers the true and false in thought, by discovering the true and false concerning the meanings of words, which represent thought."

"Be it so. I should be glad to hold what Jane holds, for the sake of the marvellous practical effect on her character—sweet creature that she is!—which it has produced in the last seven years."

"And which effect, I presume, was not increased by her denying to you any share in the same?"

"Alas, no! It is only when she falls on that—when she begins denouncing and excluding—that all the old faults, few and light as they are, seem to leap into ugly life again for the moment."

"Few and light, indeed! Ah, my dear Templeton, the gulf between you and happiness looks wide; but only because it is magnified in mist."

"Which you would have me disperse by lightning-flashes of Dialectics, eh? Well, every man has his nostrum."

"I have not. My method is not my own, but Plato's."

"But, my good fellow, the Windrush school admire Plato as much as you do, and yet certainly arrive at somewhat different conclusions."

"They do Plato the honour of patronising him, as a Representative Man; but their real text-book, you will find, is Proclus. That hapless philosophaster's *a priori* method, even his very verbiage, is dear to their souls; for they copy it through wet and dry, through sense and nonsense. But as for Plato—when I find them using Plato's weapons, I shall believe in their understanding and love of him."

"And in the meanwhile claim him as a new verger for the Reformed Church Catholic?"

"Not a new verger, Templeton. Augustine said, fourteen hundred years ago, that Socrates was the philosopher of the Catholic Faith. If he has not seemed so of late years, it is, I suspect, because we do not understand quite the same thing as Augustine did, when we talk of the Catholic Faith and Christianity."

"But you forget, in your hurry of clerical confidence, that the question still remains, whether these Creeds are true."

"That, too, as I take it, is a question of Dialectics, unless you choose to reduce the whole to a balance-of-probabilities argument—rather too narrow a basis for a World-faith to stand upon. Try all 'mythic' theories, Straussite and others, by honest Dialectics. Try your own thoughts and experiences, and the accredited thoughts and experiences of wise men, by the same method. Mesmerism and 'The Development of Species' may wait till they have settled themselves somewhat more into sciences; at present it does not much matter what agrees or disagrees with them. But using this weapon fearlessly and honestly, you will, unless Socrates and Plato were fools, arrive at absolute eternal truths, which are equally true for all men, good or bad, conscious or unconscious; and I tell you—of course you need not believe me till you have made trial—that those truths will coincide with the plain honest meaning of the Catholic Creeds, as determined by the same method—the only one, indeed, by which they or anything else can be determined."

"You forget Baconian induction, of which you are so fond."

"And pray what are Dialectics, but strict Baconian induction applied to words, as the phenomena of mind, instead of to things, the phenomena of—"

"What?"

"I can't tell you; or, rather, I will not. I have my own opinion about what those trees and stones are; but it will require a few years' more verification before I tell."

"Really, you and your Dialectics seem in a hopeful and valiant state of mind."

"Why not? Can truth do anything but conquer?"

"Of course—assuming, as every one does, that the truth is with you."

"My dear fellow, I have seldom met a man who could not be a far better dialectician than I shall ever be, if he would but use his Common Sense."

"Common Sense? That really sounds something like a bathos, after the great big Greek word which you have been propounding to me as the cure for all my doubts."

"What? Are you about to 'gib' after all, just as I was flattering myself that I had broken you in to go quietly in harness?"

"I am very much minded to do so. The truth is, I cannot bring myself to believe that the universal panacea lies in an obscure and ancient scientific method."

"Obscure and ancient? Did I not just say that any man might be a dialectician? Did Socrates ever appeal to any faculty but the Common Sense of man as man, which exists just as much in England now, I presume, as it did in Athens in his day? Does he not, in pursuance of that method of his, draw his arguments and illustrations, to the horror of the big-worded Sophists, from dogs, kettles, fishwives, and what not which is vulgar and commonplace? Or did I, in my clumsy attempt to imitate him, make use of a single argument which does not lie, developed or undeveloped, in the Common Sense of every clown; in that human Reason of his, which is part of God's image in him, and in every man? And has not my complaint against Mr. Windrush's school been, that they will not do this; that they will not accept the ground which is common to men as men, but disregard that part of the 'Vox Populi' which is truly 'Vox Dei,' for that which is 'Vox Diaboli'—for private sentiments, fancies, and aspirations; and so casting away the common sense of mankind, build up each man, on the pin's point of his own private judgment, his own inverted pyramid?"

"But are you not asking me to do just the same, when you propose to me to start as a Scientific Dialectician?"

"Why, what are Dialectics, or any other scientific method, but conscious common sense? And what is common sense, but unconscious scientific method? Every man is a dialectician, be he scholar or boor, in as far as he tries to use no words which he does not understand, and to sift his own thoughts, and his expression of them, by that Reason which is at once common to men, and independent of them."

"As M. Jourdain talked prose all his life without knowing it. Well—I prefer the unconscious method. I have as little faith as Mr. Carlyle would have in saying: 'Go to, let us make'—an induction about words, or anything else. It seems to me no very hopeful method of finding out facts as they are."

"Certainly; provided you mean any particular induction, and not a general inductive and severely-inquiring habit of mind; that very 'Go to' being a fair sign that you have settled beforehand what the induction shall be; in plain English, that you have come to your conclusion already, and are now looking about for facts to prove it. But is it any wiser to say: 'Go to, I will be conscious of being unconscious of being conscious of my own forms of thought'? For that is what you do say, when, having read Plato, and knowing his method, and its coincidence with Common Sense, you determine to ignore it on common-sense questions."

"But why not ignore it, if mother-wit does as well?"

"Because you cannot ignore it. You have learnt it more or less, and cannot forget it, try as you will, and must either follow it, or break it and talk nonsense. And moreover, you ought not to ignore it. For it seems to me, that you were sent to Cambridge by One greater than, your parents, in order that you might learn it, and bring it home hither for the use of the M. Jourdain's round you here, who have no doubt been talking prose all their life, but may have been also talking it very badly."

"You speak riddles."

“My dear fellow, may not a man employ Reason, or any other common human faculty, all his life, and yet employ them very clumsily and defectively?”

“I should say so, from the gross amount of human unwisdom.”

“And that, in the case of uneducated persons, happens because they are not conscious of those faculties, or of their right laws, but use them blindly and capriciously, by fits and starts, talking sense on one point and nonsense on another?”

“Too true, Heaven knows.”

“But the educated man, if education mean anything, is the man who has become conscious of those common human faculties and their laws, and has learnt to use them continuously and accurately, on all matters alike.”

“True, O Socraticule!”

“Then is it not his especial business to teach the right use of them to the less educated?—unless you agree with the old Sophists, that the purpose of education is to enable us to deceive or coerce the uneducated for our own aggrandisement.”

“I am therefore, it seems, to get up Platonic Dialectics simply in order to teach my ploughmen to use their common sense?”

“Exactly so. Teach yourself first, and every one around you afterwards, not the doctrines, nor the formulas—though he had none—but the habit of mind which Socrates tried in vain to teach the Athenian youth. Teach them to face all questions patiently and fearlessly: to begin always by asking every word, great or small, from ‘Predestination’ to ‘Protection,’ what it really means. Teach them that ‘By your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned,’ is no barren pulpit-test, but a tremendous practical law for every day, and for every matter. Teach them to be sure that man can find out truth, because God his Father and Archetype will show it to those who hunger after it. Try to make them see clearly the Divine truths which are implied, not only in their creeds, but in their simplest household words; and—”

“And fail as Socrates failed, or rather worse; for he did teach himself: but I shall not even do that.”

“Do not despair in haste. In the first place, I deny that Socrates taught himself, for I believe that One taught him, who has promised to teach every man who desires wisdom; and in the next place, I have no fear but that the sound practical intellect which that same One has bestowed on the Englishman, will give you a far better auditory in any harvest field, than Socrates could find among the mercurial Athenians of a fallen age.”

“Well, that is, at all events, a comfort for poor me. I will really take to my Plato again, till the hunting begins.”

“And even then, you know, you don’t keep two packs; so you will have three days out of the six wherein to study him.”

“Four, you mean—for I have long given up reading Sunday books on Sunday.”

“Then you read your Bible and Prayer-book; or even borrow some of Lady Jane’s devotional treatises; and try, after you have translated the latter into plain English, to make out what they one and all really do mean, by the light which old Socrates has given you during the week. You will find them wiser than you fancy, and simpler also.”

“So be it, my dear Soul-doctor. Here come Lewis and the luncheon.”

And so ended our conversation.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PHAETHON: LOOSE THOUGHTS FOR LOOSE THINKERS ***

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