

part of this battery, its power to rouse the conscience, its power to startle the moral sense into the noting and abhorring of moral abominations long practised as forms of social expediency and luxury. Both historical and preceptive, the word of God is a warning against sin; many things in it are light-houses on dangerous reefs. Therefore, no greater treachery is possible, nor more malignant treason against mankind, than to creep into one of these light-houses and, under pretence of being its keeper, to put out its light; or, still worse, to put up the signal of its being a safe harbor, when the man or the nation that makes for it will inevitably be dashed in pieces.

ARTICLE VI.

PLUTARCH ON THE DELAY OF PROVIDENCE IN PUNISHING THE WICKED.

By Horatio B. Hackett, Professor in Newton Theological Institution.

THE treatise, of which it is proposed to give an abstract in this Article, is entitled in Greek: *Περὶ τῶν ἐπὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ βραδείας τιμωρουμένων*. The common title in Latin is: *De sera Numinis vindicta*. An edition of the original work, with notes, was published by the writer a number of years ago (in 1844), and is now out of print. The analysis of the argument inserted in that edition has been revised and very considerably enlarged in the form in which it is here placed before the reader. Stillingfleet's outline of the principal ideas, in his *Origines Sacræ* (B. III. c. iii. § 21), is the best, perhaps, that we have in English; but omits so many of the minor thoughts, and is so brief, even on the main topics, that one can obtain from it only an imperfect impression of the spirit and power of the original treatise.

Of the value of such a discussion, from a writer situated as Plutarch was, but one opinion surely can be entertained. It is not easy to think of a question that would be likely to appear so full of perplexity, to a thoughtful heathen, as the one considered in this treatise; namely, the question how the impunity and, not unfrequently, the signal prosperity, of the wicked can be reconciled with the doctrine of a just Providence; or, in other words, how the apparent disregard of men's deserts, in what befalls them in this life, is consistent with the belief of a Deity who observes the right and wrong of human actions, and governs the world according to the principles of a righteous retribution. A subject like this, when viewed from the position of those destitute entirely of the light which the Scriptures shed upon it, cannot fail to present to the mind much that is mysterious, and, to all appearance, incapable of explanation. We see from the treatise under remark, what objections have been urged against the justice of Providence from this point of view, and also what replies can be offered to them, on grounds of mere reason or natural religion.

The work, in the first instance, was directed more particularly against the followers of Epicurus. As a sect, they denied the moral accountability of men; they acknowledged nothing as retributive in the sufferings or allotments of life; they referred everything to an inexorable fate, or mere chance; while, in common with other ancient skeptics, they alleged as one of the main arguments for their opinion, the self-evident absurdity of any other; since nothing, as they affirmed, could be more reproachful to the gods, than to attribute to them any concern in the government of a world, which exhibits such a manifest want of correspondence between the experience and the deserts of men. The considerations which Plutarch has here urged, for the purpose of obviating or diminishing the force of such a statement, are such as evince an elevation of views, a depth and soundness of moral feeling, to which no parallel can be found in any work of pagan antiquity. Plato is the only ancient writer whom any one would think

of comparing with Plutarch in the discussion of such themes.¹ I am not aware, indeed, that even Christian writers, who have attempted to defend the same truth within the same limits of natural religion, have been able to do anything better than to re-affirm the positions of this heathen philosopher, and perhaps amplify and illustrate somewhat his arguments.²

Before proceeding to the proposed abstract, it may be proper to say a word on the general plan and structure of the dialogue.

The subject is represented as discussed in a conversation between Plutarch and several of his relatives or intimate friends, as they happened to be walking, on a certain occasion, for exercise. The scene is laid at Delphi, the seat of the celebrated oracle, where Plutarch resided, to which locality repeated allusion is made in the course of the dialogue. The person whose remarks gave rise to the discussion, a certain Epicurus, one of the "minute philosophers" of the age, has just left the company, at the opening of the piece, as here reported, in a state of great excitement. We learn what it was that had thrown him into such a passion, from the tenor of the conversation which ensues on his departure. Unlike the other speakers, this Epicurus is no doubt a fictitious person, who bears that name as indicating the sect in philosophy whose views he represented. Plutarch sustains the principal part in the dialogue, and may be considered as defending not only his own opinions, but those of the New Platonic school in general, the class of philosophers with whom he agreed in most of his religious opinions. It is interesting to recollect, that Christianity found, in this

¹ De Maistre assigns the superiority on the whole to Plutarch: "Je ne vois pas trop ce qu'on pourrait opposer à cet ouvrage, parmi ceux des anciens philosophes. On trouvera sans doute ça et là, et dans Platon surtout, des traits admirables, de superbes éclaircissements de vérité; mais nulle part, je crois, rien d'aussi suivi, d'aussi sagement raisonné, d'aussi fini dans l'ensemble." See the Preface to his Translation of the Treatise.

² Wyttenbach has expressed the general opinion of critics on this point: "Sive argumentum spectes, nullum majus graviusque est; sive explicandi rationem, adeo subtiliter eleganterque disputavit Plutarchus, ut, summorum virorum judicio, proxime ad christianæ doctrinæ præstantiam accesserit."

form of Platonism (sometimes called Platonic Eclecticism), its point of nearest approximation, on the part of heathenism, and that in this school, as a sort of intermediate position, several of the earlier and more distinguished Christian Fathers received a training which prepared them, on hearing the Gospel, to embrace it the more readily.¹ The other speakers in the dialogue are Patrocleas, Timon, and Olympicus. The first of these was a son-in-law of Plutarch, who is introduced elsewhere in his writings, as sustaining that relation to him. Timon is probably the brother of that name whom Plutarch mentions, in another of his treatises, as having shown to him proofs of an uncommon fraternal affection. Olympicus is otherwise unknown to us, unless he be the individual who appears as one of the colloquists in the author's Symposium. Plutarch himself engrosses so much of the conversation, while the other speakers have so little to say, that we might entitle the performance a monologue, with quite as much propriety as a dialogue. Its interest, however, does not depend on its form. Whether we view it under the one aspect or the other, whether we call it a discussion or a colloquy, we must still regard it as a calm, studied exposition of the highest views on one of the most difficult questions of natural theology which the mind of man seems capable of attaining without the light of revelation.

It may be proper to add, that in drawing off the following summary of this remarkable treatise, I have endeavored to guard carefully against introducing any foreign ideas. The reader may feel assured that not only have the principal topics and reflections been faithfully traced, but the more striking passages have been translated out of the Greek almost as closely as the difference of idiom in the two languages would allow.

¹ It is within the knowledge of the writer that the reading of this very treatise of Plutarch, which we are about to examine, had a salutary effect on the mind of Professor Tholuck, at a time when he was inclined to scepticism, and was among the providential means of leading him to embrace the Gospel of Christ. A similar fact is related of the illustrious Neander, in a biographical sketch which appeared a few years ago in the *Studien und Kritiken*.

Epicurus is represented as going away abruptly, at the beginning of the dialogue, leaving the company in silent astonishment at the passion and absurdity with which he had inveighed against the justice of the Deity in the government of the world.¹ Timon first breaks this silence, and suggests whether, although what they had heard was so weak in itself, they ought not to take occasion from it to discuss freely the topics which had been introduced, and thus preserve themselves from any injurious effect, which even vague representation and mere invective might have upon them, if left unanswered. Brasidas, a Spartan general, having been pierced with a spear in battle, drew it forth from his body and hurled it back against the enemy, whom he slew with the same weapon. How much more important must it be to protect ourselves against attacks on our integrity and our principles, than against those which are aimed merely against our persons! They all assent to the correctness of this view; and Patrocleas, who seems to have been more perplexed than the others by the discourse of Epicurus, proceeds then to restate some of the principal ideas which had been advanced, strengthened by some objections of his own, to the commonly-received doctrine of a retributive Providence. He asserts, that the long-delayed punishment of the guilty argues an unbecoming indifference, on the part of the Deity, to the deserts of crime; that it fails to restrain the commission of it, as a more speedy retribution would do; that it is often entirely useless as a reparation to those who have suffered from injustice, since they are generally dead long before their wrongs are vindicated; and finally, that it emboldens the wicked in their course by leading them to think, that because they are spared for a time, they may therefore trample on the laws of God with permanent impunity.

¹ The reader may be interested to know what terms Plutarch uses to designate the idea of a Supreme Power or Ruler. He employs different expressions for this purpose, but evidently as tantamount to each other in meaning. One of the most common of them is τὸ θεῦμα; another is πρῶτος; another θεός, which occurs indifferently in the singular or plural. He speaks at times, also, of Jupiter, Apollo, Minerva, and other gods, but manifestly as subordinate to a higher destiny or power, and not as sharing a divided empire over the world.

Some of these points the speaker confirms by historical illustrations.

Olympicus here interposes, and adds to these objections still others. He urges especially, that such delay in the punishment of the wicked must have a tendency to destroy the belief of men in the reality of a Divine Providence itself; and, further, that where the act and its consequences follow each other at such a distance, no useful purpose can be accomplished, as far as respects the reformation of the offender himself. Punishment delayed for a long time after the commission of the crime, instead of being referred to its proper source, is liable to be regarded as a calamity or accident. The tardy retribution, standing in no obvious relation to its cause, may annoy and distress the guilty person, but must fail to lead him to profitable reflections on his conduct and the occasion of his suffering. Hence, he says, he could never think with any patience of the maxim so often quoted by the poets: *The mill-stones of the gods grind late, but they grind fine.*

The theme for discussion having been thus presented, Plutarch takes upon himself chiefly the office of replying to the objections which have been stated, whether such objections originate with those who deny the truth, or with those who are simply perplexed on the subject. He begins by reminding his friends of the caution and self-distrust with which it becomes them to pursue inquiries of so intricate a character. They should take their motto from the Academic philosophers, whose reverence for the Deity was proverbial; who viewed it as impious to discourse on such subjects with a confident tone. They should recollect the necessary imperfections of human knowledge, and not be so inconsistent as to demand a full explanation of every difficulty that may be started here by an unrestrained imagination. Let those who are ignorant of the science of music, who are destitute of the power of perceiving the harmony of sounds, talk at random, if they choose, about notes and symphonies; or, let those who have never seen a battle or handled a weapon in their lives, discourse of military tactics. But let not us, who are

mortal, finite, commit such folly as that of presuming to scrutinize the plans of the Deity, and to pronounce them wise or unwise, just or unjust, according to the narrow scale of our own limited knowledge and understanding. Those who have no knowledge of medicine must find it difficult often to discover why the physician performed an operation later, and not sooner; why he ordered the bath to-day, and not yesterday. The cure and purification of the soul is, of all arts, the greatest. Hence it is the dictate alike of modesty and reason that we should leave it to Him who understands best the remedy for moral disease, to determine *when* and *in what manner* and *how much* each one of the wicked should be punished. Even human governments frequently adopt measures that must appear, to those unacquainted with the grounds of them, as not only unreasonnable, but altogether ridiculous and absurd. Thus the Ephori at Sparta signalize their entrance upon office by proclaiming that no one should wear moustaches; the Romans, when they emancipate a slave, strike him on the back with a light rod; and when they make a will, first go through the form of selling their property to a third person, instead of the intended heir. Much more, then, should we be prepared to meet with mysteries in the Divine government, which cannot make known, always, the reasons on which it proceeds; which is planned and carried on by a wisdom too deep for our finite comprehension. But this train of thought, the speaker says, that he would suggest, not as an excuse for declining the argument, or as discouraging a proper freedom of inquiry in such matters, but as intending merely to show with what spirit they should discuss them, and as disclosing a harbor in which they might take refuge, in case the difficulties should prove to be too great for them.

Our author enters, therefore, in the next place, on a direct vindication of Providence against the charge of remissness, in treating or seeming to treat the good and the bad so much alike in the present life. The reasoning assumes that this alleged inequality, in the experience and allotments of men, is true in part, and must be admitted; but, in part, is apparent

only, and is to be denied. To some extent it undoubtedly exists; and here we can conceive of various important moral ends, which such a course is suited to accomplish, that render it not unworthy of the Supreme Disposer to proceed in this manner.

The following considerations are urged here: First, the Governor of the world, by such forbearance towards the wicked, would present to us an example of the manner in which we are to conduct towards those who injure us and provoke our anger. A resemblance to the Divine nature is the highest human virtue; and hence to incite us to this, to unfold to us a clearer conception of what we should strive to be, the Deity has been pleased to make himself known to mankind in his works and operations, in the realms both of nature and of providence. Thus he has given us the eye, as Plato says, to enable us to contemplate the heavenly bodies, to admire the method and precision of their motions, that we may learn to cultivate what is decent and orderly in ourselves, and avoid whatever is disorderly or irregular in our conduct or our passions. A similar lesson he would teach us by his patience towards the wicked. He bears with them, not from a fear lest he should err by an immediate punishment of them, but because he would reprove men for the fury and violence with which they are disposed to revenge their injuries on each other; he would lead them to imitate his own gentleness and forbearance, in dealing with those who have the least possible claim upon his indulgence. Men are too apt to pursue the offender with immediate and unsparing rigor, like hounds baying with open mouth at the heels of their prey. Even the lower examples of this patience, which appear sometimes in eminent men, command our admiration. Thus Plato, having lifted his cane in a fit of passion, over one of his slaves, stood for a long time with up-raised arm, saying that he was punishing his temper; and Archytas, perceiving that he was unduly provoked by some misconduct of his servants, turned from them with the remark, that it was well for them that he was so angry.

Secondly, the wicked who are not incorrigible, have, in

consequence of such delay, an opportunity to repent; and are spared, therefore, not from indifference to their conduct, but a desire for their reformation. It is reasonable to conclude that the Deity, in the case of a diseased soul which may deserve punishment, perceives clearly its passions whether, still flexible, they incline at all to repentance; and hence he may justly allot time at least for reformation to those whose vice has not become unrestrained and incorrigible. The summary justice, on the contrary, to which the passions of men incite them, excludes necessarily all regard for this object, and degenerates too often into the mere gratification of personal malice and revenge. The wisdom of the Divine policy, so different from this, is fully justified by the results. Men are susceptible of change and improvement. The very terms which designate character imply this possibility; as *τροπός*, turn of mind, manner, and *ἥθος*, custom, habit. History records the names of many who have changed from worse to better; who, in early life, were profligate and worthless, but afterward reformed and became eminent for their political services and for their virtues. But if now Miltiades, asks Plutarch, had been arrested at once, in the midst of his tyranny, or Themistocles in his debaucheries, or Cimon in his incest, where would have been the victories of Marathon, Eurymedon, and Artemesium, in which the Greeks vindicated so nobly their liberties and acquired such imperishable renown?

The skilful husbandman sees evidence of the richness of the soil in the thorns and mire, which so deform it in the eyes of the superficial judge; and so "great natures" may indicate their future power and their capacity for excellence, even by their vices. As the good fruit may appear in time, it cannot be unwise to afford an opportunity for that purpose.

Thirdly, the wicked are sometimes permitted to live and prosper, because Providence would use them as instruments of its justice in the punishment of others. It is, on this account especially, that tyrants are allowed so often to succeed in their designs. As physicians use the gall of hyenas and other noxious animals as a cure for certain disorders, so

the Deity employs, often, the rage of tyrannical rulers as a means of reforming states and communities which have fallen into luxury and corruption. Such a medicine was Phalaris to the Agrigentines, and Marius to the Romans; and the oracle announced to the Sicyonians that there was nothing which could save them from ruin but the wholesome discipline of being scourged by a race of tyrants.

Fourthly, the wicked may be spared for a time, because it is foreseen that they are to bless the world with a noble and virtuous posterity. Homer says of one of his heroes, that he "was the better son of a worse father." The progeny of such infamous men as Sisyphus, Autolychus, and Phlegyas, attained the honors of kings as the just rewards of their regal virtues. Pericles belonged to a family "accursed." Pompey the Great was the son of a man whose dead body the Romans trampled under foot, and cast into the Tiber. But though the tree may be thorny and sharp, the wise husbandman does not cut it down, if he can obtain from it flowers, and fruit, and gums. The blessings which the good confer on the world outweigh, a thousand times, the evils which the bad inflict upon it.

Finally, the punishment of crime is sometimes deferred for a season, that it may be inflicted, at length, in a manner which makes the hand of Providence so much the more conspicuous in it. The well-known case of Callippus teaches that moral. The very dagger which, under the mask of friendship, he had used in taking the life of Dion, was used by false friends for the purpose of taking his own life. The story of Bessus, who had murdered his father and for years had escaped detection, is still more remarkable. Being present on a certain occasion, with some friends at a feast, he suddenly lifted his spear and struck down a nest of young swallows, which he immediately killed. On being asked what reason he could possibly have for so barbarous an act, he replied: "Do you not hear how they falsely accuse me, and cry out that I murdered my father?" The suspicion which this answer excited, was confirmed upon investigation; the unnatural son was convicted and condemned to suffer

death for the parricide. Thus has the Divine justice often seemed to slumber for a time; but in reality it was only to furnish, in the end, so much the more striking proof of its eternal vigilance.

But there is another side, on which the subject may be viewed. It is next argued that the objection against an overruling Providence, founded on the prosperity of the wicked, has been urged much too far. There are limits beyond which this alleged impunity of the wicked is apparent rather than real. Guilt has its immediate retributions; it sets the sinner at variance with himself, arms his conscience against him, and renders him the prey of anxieties and fears which can find no admission to the bosoms of the innocent. Many people judge as erroneously here as children do who witness the spectacles of the theatre; they look with admiration upon the poor culprits, who, crowned with garlands and arrayed in robes of purple and gold, dance there for the entertainment of the populace; until at length they see, with horror, the flames bursting forth from their garments (inlaid with combustibles for that purpose) and consigning them to a dreadful death.¹ So many look, with envy, on the wicked who occupy splendid palaces, who enjoy honor and power; and have no idea of any punishment suffered by such men, till they see them strangled by the halter or thrown over the precipice. But such a result they ought to regard, not as the entire retribution, but its end and consummation. The wicked suffer, in reality, not a *late* but a *long* punishment; they are not punished after they have grown old, but they grow old being punished all the while. The conception of time in this case as long, is such only with reference to ourselves, and not the Deity; for the distinctions of time have no place with him. To put the malefactor to the rack or hang him now, instead of having done it thirty years ago, is the same thing, in his sight, as if it were to take place in the evening and not in the morning. In all the interval too, till the period of full retribution arrives, he has the wicked safe in his custody, and in-

¹ Some of the first Christian martyrs were put to death in this manner, in the persecutions under the Roman emperors.

curs no risk of their escape, by any possibility, from his justice. He may, it is true, during this imprisonment, occupy himself with business or pleasure, may give presents and receive them ; just as the culprit in jail may pass his time in sports and games, while the rope is hanging over his head. But who would say that those awaiting death in prison are not punished till their necks are cut off? Who would say that those who have drunk the hemlock but are still walking about till their limbs become weary, are unharmed till they are stiff and cold in death? To deny that those are punished who suffer the anxieties and perturbations of mind inseparable from crime, from the first moment of its commission, would be as absurd as to say that the fish which has already swallowed the hook, is not caught till we see it cut in pieces and roasting on the fire!

The poets and dramatists have borne witness to this trait of human nature. Stesichorus represents the guilty Clytemnestra as having a dream, in which a dragon with a bloody head seemed to approach her, presaging the vengeance which Orestes was to take upon her, for murdering his father. They relate of Apollodorus, a monster of inhumanity, that he dreamed that he was skinned alive by the Scythians, and then seethed in a cauldron, from which his heart cried out to him, ever and anon : " For all this you have to thank me." Ptolemy Ceraunus had his presentiments of what was to be the end of his career of ambition and blood. His attendants reported to him this singular dream : they saw him arraigned for justice by Seleucus (one of his murdered victims) ; vultures and wolves acted as judges, and portions of flesh were dealt out to his friends.¹ Such visions, phantoms, oracles, omens, disturb the guilty and admonish them of their doom. Indeed to such an extent is this true, that if

¹ On the same principle Shakspeare represents the ghosts of Clarence, Hastings, Buckingham, and others, as appearing to King Richard on the night before his fatal battle and threatening him with vengeance. On awaking from his troubled dream, the tyrant exclaims :

" My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain."

the soul have no existence beyond this world, if we might then reverse the objection and say, that greater lenity would be shown to the wicked by cutting them off suddenly in their sins, than by suffering them to live. Even if those who sin escape, during this life, without any signal disaster, how sad and depressing must it be for them to reflect on the unsatisfying result of their misdeeds! Their conduct must appear to them like that of the king who, for the sake of gratifying a momentary thirst, surrendered his army and his empire for a drop of water. The envious, the malignant, the avaricious, may gain a paltry advantage over others; may have the pleasure of indulging a passion which it would require some self-denial to overcome at the moment; but how soon must their exultation give place to a feeling of shame and self-contempt. Regret for the past, a sense of present insecurity, fear of death, a struggle between ignoble and better impulses, vain purposes of reformation, dread of censure, fill up and embitter their lives. They fear even those who praise them for virtues which they are reputed to have but have not; for the very voice which applauds them would condemn them as readily, if their hypocrisy were only unmasked. How often, under such circumstances, must the soul oppressed with a sense of debasement revolve the question, How can I escape from the memory of my sins, and, being made pure, lead another life as from the beginning? Thus it is that the transgressor forges the instruments of his own torture; like the criminal condemned to be crucified, he bears his own cross to the place of execution.¹ For my part, says Plutarch, I think if the remark may be allowed, that the wicked have no need that gods or men should interpose to punish them; their own lives, made so miserable by vice, are sufficient for that purpose.

Timon then leads the conversation to another kindred subject; namely, the question how the rectitude of Providence is to be justified in punishing the children for the sins of their

¹ This passage of Plutarch is a *locus classicus*, in proof of the existence of such a custom, and confirms what the Evangelists assume as true relative to this point in their history of the crucifixion of the Saviour. See Lipsius de Cruce, 2. 5.

parents. He commends Euripides for speaking out so boldly the unuttered thought of many, that such a proceeding is unworthy of the gods. He objects to it as unjust in a two-fold point of view. If the parents themselves have already suffered their deserts, there surely can be no good reason why justice should be exacted twice for the same offence; and if they have not suffered their deserts, there can be still less reason why the innocent should be made to atone for this deficiency. Nor will it be pretended, that such punishment possesses any remedial virtue as regards those who, in such cases, are really the guilty persons. It was a saying of Bion, that to punish the children on account of the parents, with a view to any such result, was as if a physician should give physic to a son or grandson, in order to cure the distemper of a father or grandfather.

How absurd, he goes on to say, are the cases which are supposed to exemplify this mode of retribution! Thus the Delphians, having been guilty of the death of Æsop, suffered untold calamities for three generations; and were freed from them at length only by making reparation to a descendant of the man who had owned him as a slave. Alexander destroyed a city of the Greeks in Asia, because their remote ancestors had given up the treasures of a temple to Xerxes. Apollo, at that very time, was said to be inundating the region of Pheneus because, more than a thousand years before, Hercules had stolen the tripod from Delphi and carried it to that city. The Locrians had but recently abolished the practice of sending virgins to Troy, there to spend their days in the most degrading servitude, as a means of propitiating Minerva, whose temple Ajax profaned during the Trojan war. Who can defend such a punishment! Where is the reason or the justice of it!

Plutarch interposes here, and acts, again, the part of respondent. He denies the truth of many of the popular stories on this subject, but admits fully the reality of the doctrine. He contends, in the first place, that the instinct which leads us to honor and reward the posterity of the good, should lead us also to acquiesce in the punishment of the descendants

of the wicked. Even in some of the Grecian states, honors were conferred, by law, on certain families, out of regard to the merit of their founders ; while disabilities were entailed on others because they had an infamous origin. Secondly, if no explanation of the manner in which the guilt of ancestors affects their posterity could be given, we ought not to deny the reality of the connection ; for the relation of cause and effect is undeniable in many other cases, where it is impossible for us to ascertain how the events depended on each other. Why, for instance, is it more wonderful that a sin committed in one age should transmit its consequences to another, than that the plague which commenced in Ethiopia should spread to Athens and destroy so many of its inhabitants ? Thirdly, the constitution of society itself, the nature of the tie which binds one generation to another, renders this law of retribution just, as well as inevitable. Every family, as well as every State, has a sort of separate existence, a personal identity of its own. It remains one and the same through successive ages, as really as a man remains the same individual, through the different periods of his life. Hence it is but reasonable that the social crime of one age should be left to work out its legitimate social result in another ; since the Deity, in the operation of such a law, is dealing still with the same agent, is merely holding the offender responsible for his own acts. To deny this would be to reason like Heraclitus, who held that a man could not descend twice into the same stream ; or that the individual who owes a debt to-day is released from it to-morrow, because he is no longer the same person. Fourthly, much of the suffering which wicked parents entail upon their descendants, instead of being penal strictly, is preventive in its design. It is inflicted not so much as a punishment for the sins which the fathers have committed, as for the purpose of preventing the commission of them by the children themselves. These latter inherit often the evil qualities of their progenitors ; and unless reclaimed from the sinful bias, would inevitably follow them in the same path of open crime. A man does not show himself to be wicked, and become so

in the same moment; but he has the wickedness in him from the first, and awaits only the fit opportunity to reveal his character as a thief or a tyrant. Hence the Deity, who foresees the future, and understands the disposition of every one, interposes with the necessary discipline for counteracting the inherited tendency to evil. Instead of allowing the latent seeds of vice to germinate, and ripen into actual guilt, he anticipates their development and extinguishes them at the beginning.¹ Fifthly, this visitation of the sins of one upon another answers an important end as a warning against doing evil. Nothing touches the hearts of men sooner than the sight of their own offspring subjected to calamities which they themselves have brought upon them. Providence, therefore, has exhibited to us the spectacle of such suffering in order to infuse into the mind a stronger fear of transgression, and to multiply the inducements to good conduct. The consequences which follow a wicked life hereafter, are unseen and are too apt to be disbelieved; whereas those which come upon children through the agency of their parents, are open to the view of all, and appeal to the strongest sympathies of our nature. Finally, if the children themselves are virtuous, they are not harmed for what their ancestors have done. They have, then, no penalty to bear for the sins of others. They are subject to no abatement of the reward due to them for a single one of their virtues. It is only when they themselves tread in the steps of a criminal race, that the guilt of such an ancestry avenges itself on them. A wicked son is the natural heir of his father's guilt; but if he be innocent himself, he becomes then, so to speak, the adopted child of virtue, and is treated as belonging to another stock.

¹ Plutarch appears to have been deeply impressed with this view of human nature. He repeats it elsewhere in his writings. The following passage occurs in his treatise *de recte audiendo*, c. 2: "The passions of men which impel them to self-indulgence, and which are the sources of innumerable sufferings and disorders, spring up as indigenous products in the soul. They are not introduced from without, or insinuated by the corrupt discourse of others. They are such as to require every mode of counteraction, which the wisest instruction or the most careful discipline can apply; and the man, whose nature is not subdued by these means, is likely to become wilder than an untamed beast."

But some of your remarks, says one of the speakers, imply the continued existence of the soul after death. That is true, Plutarch answers, and we have good reason for assuming that point; for that the souls of men continue to suffer or enjoy, after the present life, is a doctrine which results from the idea itself of an overruling Providence. It is incredible that the Deity would lavish so much care and attention upon us, if we were destined to perish forever with the dissolution of the body. It would be unworthy of Him to take such concern in our affairs if we were like the leaves which fall from the trees in autumn; or like the hot-house plant which has no enduring root, but may wither and die on the slightest exposure or neglect.¹ It proves the soul also to be immortal that the gods direct honors to be paid to the departed, and sacrifices to be offered to them for the purpose of propitiating their favor. If the souls of the dead were like smoke or a vapor, surely the oracles which prescribe these customs, would not so abuse our credulity and confirm us in error. The practice of necromancy affords another proof of the same nature. We have those among us whose acknowledged office it is to evoke the spirits of the dead, consult them, and lead them from place to place.

But if now the soul merely changes the scene of its existence at death, we may conclude that the future state to which it is destined, must be one of rewards or punishments. The soul, so long as it continues in this life, maintains, like a wrestler, a perpetual combat; but when the trial is ended, goes to receive according to her deserts. To clothe this truth with the greatest practical power, Plutarch avails him-

¹ This is the point which Addison has urged with so much beauty and force in one of the numbers of the Spectator: "Would an infinitely wise Being make such glorious creatures for so mean a purpose? Can he delight in the production of such abortive intelligences, such short-lived reasonable beings? Would he give us talents which are not to be exerted, capacities that are never to be gratified? How can we find that wisdom which shines through all his works, in the formation of man, without looking on this world as only a nursery of the next, and believing that the several generations of rational creatures which rise up and disappear in such quick succession, are only to receive their first rudiments of existence here, and afterwards to be transplanted into a more friendly climate, where they may spread and flourish to all eternity."

self, in conclusion, of a singular story respecting a man named Aridæus, a native of Cilicia, but well known to persons with whom they were all acquainted. This man had been born to a large estate, but soon lost it by a course of profligacy, and was plunged, at once, into all the evils of abject poverty. In this condition, stung with self-reproach for his folly, he suddenly resolved that he would be rich again, and, in the pursuit of that object, would employ any means, however despicable, which afforded any prospect of adding to his gains. He was not very successful in heaping up riches, but won for himself, certainly, abundant infamy by his shameful life. The response of an oracle, which he consulted about this time, brought him into still greater disrepute; for, having asked if he should be more fortunate for the time to come, he was answered that he "would do better after he died." This strange prophecy was verified not long after that. Having fallen from a certain height upon his head, he was apparently killed; but, on the third day, just as his friends were putting him into the grave, he came to life again. All of a sudden, from having been so profligate and unprincipled, he reformed and became henceforth a pattern of every virtue. His friends were astonished, and wished to know the cause of this change in his character. He related to them the following account of what befell him during the time of his supposed death.

His spirit was separated from the body, and his sensations as that took place, were such as a person has who is thrown suddenly into the water, and is on the point of being drowned. Recovering from this shock, he seemed to breathe in every part, and to look around him on every side, his soul being opened as if it were all one eye. Instead of the familiar objects of this world, he saw at first nothing but stars of immense size, and remote from each other, shooting forth rays of light upon which his soul was borne gently and rapidly forward, as on the surface of a quiet sea. He passed over, in his narrative, many of the sights which he saw; but spoke especially of the appearance of the souls of men as they entered into that world from this, and of their condition there. On

issuing from the body they assumed, at first, a shape like a globular flame; and that gently and gradually dissolving, they took then a spiritual form, having such a resemblance to the persons in this life as to admit of their being recognized by each other. The conduct of the different souls, as they arrived there, was by no means the same. Some of them, those who were good, mounted up at once, in an easy, gentle manner, into the higher regions of space, where they appeared with a serene aspect, and testified, by abundant tokens, the happiness which they enjoyed. The wicked, on the contrary, were immediately seized with a tumultuous motion, which hurried them hither and thither, and deprived them for a time of all power of self-control.¹

Among the throng of the happy, he saw the spirit of one of his relatives, though he was not entirely certain, as the person had died in childhood. This spirit came to him and attended him as a guide, in order to explain to him the different objects which he saw. He received a new name, that of Thespesius instead of Aridæus, as he had been called on earth; and he was told that he had come thither by a special permission of the gods; for he was still allied to matter, as could be seen from the dark figure which followed him; whereas the others there were transparent, and cast no shadow. But though the souls of the dead were all distinguished by this sign, they were not equally transparent; some of them exhibiting a mild, uniform splendor, like the pure lustre of the full moon; others being disfigured with stains, or slight bruises; and others still, covered with black spots, like adders, and loathsome to the sight.

The process of dealing with transgressors, in that world,

¹ This dissimilarity in the motions of the different souls is intended no doubt to be significant of their moral state and character. Those who disengage themselves most readily from the body, and mount upward so instinctively, are the good who have subdued their passions, and from an affinity of nature, seek at once the higher regions, which are most remote from matter and its contaminations. The confused motion of the others, on the contrary, who are whirled with such fury hither and thither, indicates the moral disorder of their souls. They are the wicked, who have allowed their passions to control them, who are destitute of all power of calm and considerate action. Similar views are expressed by Plato in Tim. 44, A.; de Legg. 2. 672, B, and Tim. 43, A.

was then explained to Thespesius. *Adrastea*, or *Nemesis*, is the great minister of justice, who presides over this department of the divine government. Such is her power, that no one, small or great, can elude her vigilance, or defy her summons. Under her are placed three subordinate ministers or agents. The first of these is termed *Pœna*, or punishment, who executes her office mainly in the present life, and is the author of the pains and penalties which are the more immediate effects of guilt. She is active, overtakes the sinner speedily, but treats him mildly, so that much remains unre-moved, from which he needs to be purified. The second is *Dike*, or justice, whose inflictions are immensely more severe, and experienced by the soul after death. She receives those who have been but partially punished in this world, and scourges them for a longer or shorter time, according to the measure of their guilt and the depth of the stains from which their souls are to be freed. But the most terrible of these ministers is *Erinnys*, or *Fury*, to whom it belongs to punish those who remain still incorrigible after the other appointed means of correction have been employed in vain. It is her task to consummate what the others have begun. Accordingly, she is represented as scourging her victims from place to place, inflicting on them innumerable tortures, allowing them whithersoever they flee no refuge or respite from her insatiable rage, and finally plunging them headlong into an abyss whose horrors no language can describe.

The souls of men being there stripped of every disguise, expose to view their true color and complexion, as derived from the passions which they have been accustomed to entertain and cherish. Observe, said the guide to Thespesius, the different hues which they exhibit. In that dark, sordid appearance, you see the taint of avarice and fraud. That sanguinary, flame-like dye betokens cruelty and vindictiveness. Those livid spots denote, that the souls disfigured by them were the slaves of sensuality and lust. The stain which appears in others, resembling so much the black fluid which the cuttle-fish discharges, is the sign of malignity and envy.

From the situation in which he saw many who had been known to him here, Thespesius was led to reflect on the

false manner in which men are liable to judge of each other. Some who had been accounted very wicked in this world were found, from circumstances of palliation there brought to light for the first time, to be far less deserving of punishment, than others who had passed for very virtuous men, and been honored with the highest human praise. But nothing of this kind filled him with greater surprise and horror than to see his own father, emerging from a deep abyss, all covered with the scars and gashes of the scourging which he had received, and compelled to bear witness to its justice by confessing that he had secretly poisoned several persons, his own guests, for the sake of obtaining their gold. And he observed, in general, that none were doomed to suffer more severely, than those who had played the hypocrite in this life, having assumed the mask of virtue, merely in order to practise the vices to which they were addicted, with so much the greater success, in secret. That their punishment might exhibit a sort of conformity to their character, inasmuch as they had sinned against truth and nature, they were committed to the hands of tormentors, by whom they were compelled to turn themselves inside out, and to twist themselves, with the greatest agony of effort, into every possible variety of unnatural shape and posture. Persons who had harbored feelings of hatred toward each other, were there seen fastened together, gnawing and devouring each other with remorseless fury.

Those who had been avaricious were subjected to a process adjusted in like manner to the nature of their sin. They are seized by demons, armed with hooks for the purpose, and thrown by them, first into a lake of boiling gold, where they are scalded and burnt; next, they are plunged into a lake of lead, exceedingly cold, where they are as suddenly congealed and frozen; and, finally, into a third, of iron, where they are blackened and mutilated by being dragged over its uneven jagged surface.¹ Not less dreadful is the retribution which awaits guilty parents and ancestors. Their descend-

¹ It is worth mentioning that Plutarch speaks elsewhere of an ancient, well-known tradition, which represents it as one of the employments of evil demons (for some of them are good), to tempt men and render the practice of virtue dif-

ants, who had suffered on their account, no sooner saw them than they gathered around them and assailed them with the most hideous outcries and imprecations. If any of them attempted to escape, their children still followed them with the same upbraiding voice; and frequently, when they supposed their sufferings to be almost at an end, their tormentors laid hold of them again, and dragged them back to the ministers of justice for new punishment.

As Thespesius was passing along, he overheard a shrill voice foretelling, as he thought, the day of his own death; which proceeded, as he was told, from the Sybil in the moon, who looks forth thence upon the earth, and sings the fates of its inhabitants, as she revolves around it.

The last spectacle which Thespesius saw, was the place where the souls of those about to enter, by transmigration, on a new existence, were undergoing the changes necessary to fit them for the shapes they were to assume. Here, among others, he saw the soul of Nero, who, in addition to other torments, had been transfixed with red-hot nails. The artificer at work upon him was on the point of making him into a viper, as agreeing best with his disposition; but, in consideration of his merit in restoring to the Greeks their freedom, it was concluded to mitigate his doom and transform him (in allusion, it is supposed, to his musical propensities) into a frog, or possibly a swan.

In the effect which this singular experience is represented as having had in leading Thespesius to reform his life, we may discover Plutarch's opinion in regard to the moral use to which the myth (if that be its name) should be applied. He would hold up to men this doctrine of a coming retribution as a motive to living virtuously here on the earth, since whatever impunity the wicked may enjoy for the present, they are hastening to a scene where the awards of their conduct will be meted out to them with strict justice.

ficult to them. The passage (in his *Life of Dion*) runs thus: "That there are certain wicked and malignant demons which envy good men, and withstand their enterprises, by raising fears and troubles to them, that so they might hinder them in their pursuit of virtue, lest if they continue steadfast and immovable in good, they should be at last partakers of greater felicity than they themselves enjoy."