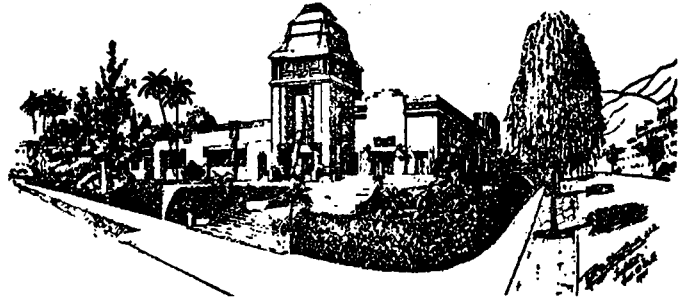


A



MONTHLY LETTER

Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall

Seattle, Wash., Sept. 15, 1936

PLATO, THE DIVINE MAN

Dear Friend:

Plato, one of the noblest men who ever lived upon this earth, was born on the day of the Feast of Apollo on the island of Ægina, of an illustrious family. There is some confusion as to the exact date. According to one account, he was born on the 26th or 27th of May, B. C. 427, and according to another, the 5th or 6th of June B. C. 428. He died at Athens B. C. 347, and the earlier date of his birth is most probably correct for it is explicitly stated that he died in his 81st year.

Apuleius reports that Plato was born of a "sublime race," possibly concurring with Aristander who, with a number of the earlier Platonists, believed the great philosopher to be the son of no mortal man but of the Holy Spirit which manifested itself in the luminous shape of Apollo. Clearchus, in his EULOGY OF PLATO, and Anaxilides, in his SECOND BOOK OF PHILOSOPHERS, Plutarch, Suidas, and others affirm it to have been commonly reported at Athens that Plato was the son of Apollo who appeared in a vision to Perictione, Plato's mother. Plato's father, or foster-father, Aristo, named the babe Aristocles after the paternal grandfather, but as the child grew up he so increased in size that the

name of Plato was conferred upon him in allusion to the largeness of his person, some say the width of his shoulders. Neathes relates the term to the breadth of his forehead, Plato meaning breadth as in the word plateau.

According to Hesychius, Plato was also called Serapis from the majesty and dignity of his person. The gods bestowed upon Plato most of the blessings which can be derived from nature. It was said of him that there was not any imperfection throughout his person. He had "large eloquence," comeliness of body and majesty of intellect. He was a lover of the fine arts, as he learned to paint and addicted himself to poetry. The beauty of his words caused it to be reported of him that while as a child he lay sleeping the bees made a honeycomb in his mouth. In writing he was fluent, in discourse and argument he demonstrated the greatest ability, and in all forms of learning he possessed what the Greeks called an "intensive genius."

Stanley, in his HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY, says of Plato that "he added much to learning and languages by many inventions, as well of things as of words." He excelled in grammar and rhetoric, creat-

ing many terms now used in these sciences. He had strength of body, love of argument and courage of conviction. He was most proficient in wrestling and even competed in the Pythian games, distinguishing himself in contests of skill and strength. He defended his ideas with great brilliancy and in discourse and debate fearlessly pressed his opinions to their legitimate ends.

Plato became a disciple of Socrates when he was twenty years of age and remained with him for about eight years. At the trial of Socrates Plato attempted to defend his master but was cried down by the Senate. He later offered to secure the necessary funds to purchase the liberty of Socrates but this the old Athenian sage would not permit. After the death of his master Plato fled to Megara to escape the animosity of those Athenians who had brought about the death of Socrates and were bent upon the destruction of his school.

The night before Plato presented himself to Socrates as a disciple, Socrates dreamed that a young swan had flown from Cupid's altar in the Academy and had settled to rest in his lap, and after remaining for a short time had taken wing again and flown upward to the heavens where it was received with the greatest delight by the gods and heroes. When Aristo came to Athens and presented his son Plato, Socrates turned to his followers exclaiming "Friends, this is the swan from Cupid's altar!"

Plato was not fully satisfied with the knowledge which he secured from Socrates and determined to perfect himself in a diviner form of wisdom. To achieve this end he attached himself to Cratylus, a follower of the sect of Heraclitus, into which sect he seems to have been initiated. Later he studied with Hermogenes. Having dedicated his life to the discovery of truth, Plato was resolved to travel into any country where wisdom might be found, even if it be to the furthestmost parts of the earth, therefore it was natural that he should go to Italy where he could attach himself to the disciplines of the Pythagoreans. There is evidence that from the Pythagoreans Plato gained much of natural and divine philosophy. Having discovered that the Pythago-

reans in turn had gained much from other nations, he next travelled to Cyrene where he studied geometry with Theodorus. Next he went to Egypt to study astrology from the priests there, for, says Cicero, "he learned from the barbarians (Egyptians) arithmetic and celestial speculations." Having surveyed the whole of Egypt, he settled finally in the province of Sais where he studied with the wise men concerning the origin of the universe, the immortality of the soul, and the transmigrations of the soul through earthly bodies. Having accomplished this he returned to his own nation, regretting that the Eastern wars had prevented his journeying to India.

It may therefore be said of the Platonic philosophy that it is derived from several ancient and mysterious origins. In addition to the illumination which proceeded from his own soul, Plato received knowledge from the Hermetic Rites of the Egyptians into which he was initiated, from the Mosaic traditions of the Jews, from the Pythagorean fragments of Philolaus, as well as from the numerous instituted Mysteries of the Greeks.

Having returned to Athens, Plato established his school in the Academy, a wooded place of exercise in the suburbs of the city. It was from this Academy that his school secured its name. The wooded grove was not a healthy place and Plato on at least one occasion came near death, being ill for eighteen months because of the unwholesomeness of the air. His physician advised him to move his school but Plato refused, declaring it to be more philosophic to lift himself to a state of physical and mental well-being by which he could be immune to the evils of the place. In this he succeeded and suffered no more. Over the entrance to his school he placed the words: "Let none ignorant of geometry enter here." By geometry was inferred the whole science of universal mechanics.

In addition to the journeys already mentioned, Plato made three voyages to Sicily, the first when he was about forty years old. This was to study the eruption of Mt. Ætna and to perfect his knowledge of astrology. It was on this journey that Plato was sold into slavery through the machinations of Dio-

nysius, Prince of Syracuse. On this occasion one Anniceris of Cyrene purchased his freedom. Later when Plato's friends sought to repay this debt Anniceris would not accept the money. The funds were therefore used to buy the garden of the Academy. Plato's Academy is sometimes called the first university in history.



PLATO

Plato continued quietly in the Academy, and although writing frequently on political subjects, in no way taking part in public affairs. His fame greatly spread and disciples came to him not only from nearby cities but from distant countries. He never married and bequeathed his estate to a son of his second brother. He died in the 13th year of the reign of King Philip of Macedon, in his 81st

year, on the same day whereon he was born. It was said of him that he died at the most venerable of all ages "having completed the most perfect number of years, namely 9 multiplied by itself." He died of no disease but simply of old age which Seneca declares was the reward of his temperate and diligent existence. He was found dead with the books of Sophron lying under his head.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PLATO

Plato derived his philosophical inspiration from a variety of sources. Knowledge came to him not as a revelation but through an unfoldment of the reasoning powers within himself. The remote source of his knowledge was the Orphic Mysteries which were brought to Greece from Asia nearly 1000 years before the birth of Plato. The Orphic Mysteries were an elaborate metaphysical system and the deep truths which Orpheus had taught at the dawn of Grecian civilization exerted a powerful influence on nearly all the schools of philosophy and religious thought which developed and flourished in the Hellenic states. Without a knowledge of the Orphic Mysteries it is impossible to interpret the more profound aspects of Plato's thought. His gods were the Orphic divinities, and the whole framework of his metaphysical system was derived from the sublimity of the Orphic conception.

Plato was also deeply indebted to the disciplines of Pythagoras, the sage of Samos. Pythagoras, the first philosopher, had been dead over one hundred years, but fragments of his philosophy were rescued from the ruin of his school. These fragments Plato studied assiduously. He made the Pythagorean lore his own. It has therefore been said that although the two men never met, Plato was a legitimate disciple of Pythagoras. Plato drew particularly upon the mathematical and numerological philosophy of Pythagoras, attributing numbers to the divine principles, and recognizing deity as the Supreme Geometrician.

From Socrates Plato gained immeasurably, especially in logic and ethics. The great Athenian

Commoner was a man of practical and utilitarian mind and did much to preserve the balance of Plato's intellect. In this late day it is difficult to tell how much of Plato and his philosophy is present in the Socratic Dialogues, for we have no record of the teachings of Socrates except those recorded in the words of Plato.

Not satisfied until he had made all knowledge his province, Plato travelled extensively, associating himself with several of the most eminent scholars of his time. His travels were not as extensive as those of Pythagoras, but his mind was less obscure in its workings and no man has done more towards the cultural enlightenment of the race. The Platonic philosophy may be regarded as a summary of the best and noblest in Greek thought, but it should not be accepted as a mere compilation. Everywhere throughout his writings is evidence of a master intellect digesting, assimilating and arranging, so that all ideas become part of One Idea, and all knowledge becomes part of one magnificent summary. Plato was an inclusive thinker, the finest type of mind the race has yet produced. He synthesized the arts, sciences, philosophies and religions, uniting them all and forming from their compound the enlightened man's philosophy of life.

Those who followed after him in the Academy never equalled his vision or his strength. After his death the school broke apart, a considerable number of disciples moving to the Lyceum where they remained under the guidance of Plato's greatest disciple Aristotle. Whereas Plato was of large heart and great body, Aristotle was in every way the opposite, an excellent mind but of critical disposition, angular, thin, and of melancholy body. Plato always referred to Aristotle as the "mind" of his school. On one occasion when Aristotle was absent from a class, Plato looked around remarking, "What? the intellect is not here!" Plato greatly admired Aristotle and was himself too noble to be annoyed by the younger man's constant argument.

For the first twelve centuries of the Christian Era Plato dominated the philosophy of Christian nations, being generally accepted among even the

most bigoted religious communities. In the 13th century Aristotle came to the fore and for over 300 years usurped the place formerly held by his master. The dawn of modern science still showed the influence of Aristotelian thought but as the mind of man grows richer with experience, arguments give place to understanding, and Plato will in time be restored to his high place in the admiration of mankind.

After the death of Plato and the increasing power of Aristotle, the Platonic doctrines decreased in influence and finally ceased in Greece, to be restored in the 3rd century of the Christian Era by the Neo-Platonists of Alexandria. For 200 years Platonism flourished again. Such great men as Proclus and Plotinus revealed the lustre and grace of Plato's philosophy. The increasing power of Christianity destroyed the Alexandrian culture, depriving Platonism of its religious influence, so that it became a way of thinking rather than a doctrine or system of belief. It has remained so until this day, its political and social inferences taught, and to a great measure appreciated, but its spiritual and metaphysical part ignored and rejected. Platonism is not only a philosophy, it is a religion. It is a way of thinking, a way of living, and a complete spiritual institution.

Plato's philosophy surrounds the principle of Unity. To him the concept of Unity was all-pervading, everywhere present and evident. Division was illusion. To accept a philosophy of division was ignorance. Unity was reality and the doctrine of Unity was truth. Ignorance sees many separate things in the world; wisdom sees only the many parts of one thing. God, man and the universe are related fragments of a common unity. This concept is true monotheism, for monotheism is more than admitting the existence of one God—it is the realization of the existence of one life of which all living things are part. All learning, then, is the study of relationships. It is not the analysis of isolated natures but rather it is the coming to understand the part that each plays in the drama of the Whole.

Plato's concept of God is moral rather than

physical. To him God is Truth, the fact or the reality which sustains the universe. Unity or oneness is the evidence of truth, even as law is the evidence of intelligence. Whatever truth does must be unity or one-ness, for truth cannot be the parent of diversity. What we call diversity is merely an infinite process in unity which we do not understand. Plato acknowledged no principle of evil. What appears to be evil is only a form of truth that we cannot understand—a single circumstance which we have not been able to fit into the general plan because of the inadequacy of our own understanding. Truth, being not merely mechanical fact but rather living fact, is the spiritual principle that animates all living creatures. Thus there is truth in everything. To discover the truth in the universe and the truth in self—these are the duties of such as desire to be wise.

The universe is a manifestation of truth. Truth, unfolding, causes to emerge from its own being relative truths in distinction to their source—Absolute Truth. Relative truths are the gods, the sustainers of the world. From them issues the formal universe, sustained by relative truth. Men are the progeny of the gods, inwardly composed of Absolute Truth (spirit) and outwardly composed of relative truth in varying degrees (soul, intellect, body). The inward nature of man, being in itself of greater virtue than the body, is referred to as the superior part and abides in the heart. The intellect, being the next in the scale of values, dwells in the brain which the Platonists call the Acropolis of the body. The emotional and animal propensities, the least permanent parts of man, are again in a lower place, and man becomes thus an empire composed of parts. These parts, however, are all conditions of one divine Principle. As the body is united in action, so it is united in source. The ignorant man is in servitude to his animal nature; the partly informed man is in servitude to his intellectual nature; and the divinely enlightened man is united with his spiritual principle which is the sustaining power in the midst of his being.

The ancients generally used the term "world" to

signify what we call the universe, that is, creation, or the whole out-pouring of subjective energy into objective form. He does not conceive however that the "world" is eternal, therefore he does not apply to it the term "being," inasmuch as "being" cannot be qualified by a concept of beginning and end. On the other hand, the world is not an illusion. He cannot say of it that it is "not-being." Therefore, asks the Platonist, what is it? And Plato replies that it is suspended between being and not-being and is therefore properly termed "becoming." This is the concept of eternal growth. All progress is part of the process of becoming. This is the concept of eternal growth. Plato was an evolutionist. Things are never born, they never die, but they always change. This changing is on an ascending scale. Things are never less than they are—all change is growth. What is growth? Growth is the unfoldment of inner truth, a process as eternal as truth itself. Plato therefore visions vast cycles of time, inconceivable to human reason, but necessary to the hypothesis of eternal growth. Of course it is not forms that grow. It is life growing through forms. In the universe this is evolution, in man it is reincarnation. Plato believed in Reincarnation, and taught it as the only reasonable solution to the mystery of human life.

In the last few years there has been considerable discussion of Plato's political theories. During his lifetime Plato remained entirely aloof from politics but he could not fail to consider the political corruption that weighed heavily upon society even in his own time. Plato sensed that education alone could bring an end to the social evils of the race. He believed that this education must have its beginning in earliest childhood. He knew only too well that inadequacy of viewpoint led to those shortsighted evils which corrupt the state and destroy nations. He realized that all men are not fitted for a high degree of spiritual realization, but he reasoned that the state is not ruled by all men but by a small group of men who lead and direct the destiny of the rest. He knew that the men who lead must know and understand. If these men lack

vision then all the nation must perish. From these realizations Plato evolved his system of GOVERNMENT BY THE PHILOSOPHIC ELECT. His ideal state was that in which wise men protected and instructed the uninformed, recognizing leadership as a responsibility and an opportunity for exploitation. How clearly the centuries have shown the rightness of his viewpoint. We have tried in a thousand ways to avoid the adoption of Plato's government. So-called substitute after substitute has failed for the reason that there can be no substitute for truth. We must say that Plato's plan is social rather than political. It would transform states or nations into social orders, removing the political interference, and establishing government as community service and community cooperation.

Plato's theory of education differs widely from our present concepts. He envisioned the state as the teacher of its own people. Religion, science, art, literature, and all the cultural parts of knowledge together constituted the state. Spiritual as well as physical education was the natural birth-right of the citizenry, and the state itself was these things. The temple was the city hall, and around this central axis of philosophical enlightenment the community rotated, all the life and industry of the people being geared to this central motif. Instead of political creeds men should have philosophical creeds. Allegiance should be to principles and not to parties. The good of the whole should be the end to which each individual labors.

This concept was the natural outcome of Plato's doctrine of unity. Men should not work under the illusion that their lives and purposes are separate one from the other, but with the realization that the accomplishments of each are part of the accomplishments of all. Civilization is community existence and community inter-dependence, and civilization requires a standard of mental unfoldment by which each citizen perceives the common good and cooperates towards its accomplishment.

From Socrates Plato derived his understanding of the three-fold nature of truth, that this sovereign reality manifests through three conceivable attributes

which Socrates termed: the One, the Beautiful, and the Good. By the One Plato interpreted Unity, the principle which sustains the world. By the Beautiful Plato interpreted Harmony, the mingling of persons or principles to a common good. By the Good Plato interpreted the intrinsic nobility, the rightness and integrity which is the only sufficient and appropriate standard of community action. These also became the criteria of conduct. Whenever a man performed an action he examined it for its intrinsic value by asking himself, "Is it in harmony with unity, beauty and virtue?" If it cannot pass this test, it is unworthy of a philosopher.

THE PLATONIC DISCIPLINES

As an initiate of the Eleusinian and Dionysian Rites, Plato was not permitted to disclose the secrets of human regeneration communicated to neophytes in the Adita of the temples. Even in his own time he was accused of veiling too thinly the divine Arcana. Throughout Plato's writings are hints of secret knowledge and allusions to mysteries concealed from the profane. Plato taught that truth and life are intrinsic to spiritual natures but not to the lower elementary parts of man and nature. Lower forms participate in the virtue of truth but do not possess truth in themselves. For this reason forms are not in themselves conscious or aware but rather have consciousness and awareness bestowed upon them by the proximity of higher natures. To the degree that man addicts himself to the illusions and intemperances of form, to this degree he departs from participation in the virtues of divine natures.

The Platonic disciplines may be summed up in the teaching that man shall first realize the reality of truth, and, having accomplished this realization shall then strive with every part of his being to become one with this truth so that every thought and action shall bear witness to integrity and virtue.

The Platonists recognize three orders of beings dwelling together in the ample nature of truth, and participating in various degrees in its effulgency. The first order is the gods, in whom truth is most

perfectly manifested. The second order is the heroes, enlightened men who, having lifted themselves above ordinary human estate, have become a race of demigods less than divine but more than mortal. The third order embraces mankind and the rest of the diversified material creation, forms in which the divine principle is latent or so slightly awakened as to be incapable of dominating courses of action. "The body," says Plato "is the sepulchre of the soul." All creatures in whom the higher nature is in servitude to the bodily impulses are properly termed dead, inasmuch as truth is dead within them, having no way of manifesting itself.

The purpose of philosophical education is to release the indwelling integrity so that it may practice dominion over the inferior and unenlightened instincts. Plato writes that learning is remembering. By this he not only means that education rescues from the subconscious mind of the individual the wisdom and experience of previous lives, he also means that through education the memory of Self is released, the divine origin is once more discovered by the intellect, and man comes to know the origin, purpose and destiny of himself. The Platonic approach to philosophy is educational and cultural. Through the sciences man perfects the reason, and through the arts he refines the passions. Socrates was by profession a sculptor and his art influenced his philosophy. He taught Plato that the wise man carves out his destiny, perfecting himself as a stone-cutter perfects a statue. By education man chips off the rough parts of himself, and by an enlightened process of elimination reveals finally the perfect image concealed within the irregular and imperfect mass of uncultivated instincts and emotions.

It was Plato's idea that the more we know of everything the more we know about ourselves. Increased knowledge brings increased perspective, bestows greater appreciation, and we honor the universe by understanding it. An ignorant man cannot pay tribute to the gods because he does not understand the gods. Only the wise can know and appreciate wisdom and only the perfect are worthy to participate in the glory of truth.

Plato taught most often seated under a tree, his disciples gathered about him on marble benches. He seldom spoke within doors. He accepted only such as came to him with a certain standard of accomplishment. Disciples had to be recommended by reputable persons, and he would accept none who had disgraced themselves in their communities. He demanded of each a knowledge of geometry and was pleased if astronomy and music were included among the accomplishments of prospective students. He usually spoke for a certain length of time and then invited discussion. His patience and tolerance were great and he was painstaking in his effort to make sure that his meanings were clear. He usually followed the Socratic method of making the students answer their own questions by drawing knowledge from them by means of an adroit system of interrogation. His disciples frequently took notes but this was not demanded of them. Abundant opportunity was given for the students to express their own convictions and opinions. Plato is said to have used a system called "persuasion." The truth in each man is likened to a timid creature, hidden and afraid. Plato coaxed this truth out from its deep hiding place so that each disciple should discover this sacred power locked within himself.

Plato demanded a high development of logic, urging his disciples to accept nothing that was contrary to common reason. He abhorred idle speculation and refused to discuss matters which could not lead to some practical product. He was little given to the discussion of fragmentary forms of knowledge and insisted that his disciples should fit small matters into general orders before they were discussed. To the modern student a practical example of the Platonic method would be to say that in matters of thinking Plato took his disciples into high mountain places where, standing aloof, they could look down upon the world. Below them stretched the plains, dotted with cities, towns and villages. From an elevated and detached position it was possible to gain that peculiar perspective which is termed philosophic insight. Having seen the world in perspective the disciple could then go down into the vil-

lages without making the mistake of believing that his own small town was the whole of the world. Narrow-mindedness cannot follow upon broad viewpoints.

Plato reasoned from generals to particulars. His generality was TRUTH and his particulars were the innumerable manifestations of INTELLIGENCE present everywhere in nature. Plato reasoned downward from divine concerns. He discovered the world by discovering God. He estimated all material matters from the standpoint of their divine origins. In this attitude he was a true metaphysician. Life was the foundation and form the temporary structure raised upon it. He saw nature as the shadow of the gods. His principal discipline was to instruct others in this PERSPECTIVE that they might also perceive the one divine principle which sustains and nourishes the infinite diversity of temporal forms.

QUOTATIONS

"Rhetoric is the art of ruling the minds of men."

"Through obedience learn to command."

"Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god."

"Poets utter great and divine things which they themselves do not understand."

"It is better to be unborn than untaught; for ignorance is the root of misfortune."

"God is Truth, and light his shadow."

"Self-conquest is the greatest of the victories."

Those having torches will pass them on to others."

"Let no man speak evil of anyone."

"God geometrizes, and His government of the world is no less mathematically exact than His creation of it."

"Nothing in the affairs of men is worthy of anxiety."

"Wisdom alone is a science of other sciences and of itself."

"When men speak ill of thee, live so as nobody may believe them."

"The most important part of education is right training in the nursery. The soul of the child in his play should be trained to that sort of excellence in which, when he grows to manhood, he will have to be perfected."

"As the government is, such will be the man."

"Love is the eldest and noblest and mightiest of the gods and the chiefest author and giver of virtue in life and of happiness after death."

"Of all the things which a man has, next to the gods, his soul is the most divine and most truly his own."

Sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall