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THE CELESTIAL HIERARCHIES

BY DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

INTRODUCTION

The *Celestial Hierarchies* of Dionysius the Areopagite is based on passages from the Old and New Testaments, but like the other writings of this great mystic it embodies the essential principles of the Neoplatonic teachings.

In this work Dionysius reveals the manner in which, through the ministry of the Angelic Hosts, the Divine Providential Life is transmitted from Its ultimate Source to all things, even to the remotest bounds of transiency, in accordance with the Divine Plan which is a perfect and harmonious unity whereby all beings and things, from the innermost to the outermost, participate in the Providential Stream in the measure of their capacity.

"Every particular thing," says Proclus, "even the most minute as well as the universal, depends for ever upon the beneficent Providence of Divinity." And Plotinus writes: "From first to last Providence descends from on high, communicating Its gifts, not according to a numerical law of equality, but by all-wise Prescience varying Its operations according to the needs and conditions of participants."

The Celestial Intelligences are constituted in three Triads, forming nine Orders, whose names represent the Divine Attributes which they manifest to all below them.

They have also an inner relation with every human soul, for through their ministrations the aspiring soul becomes liberated from material bondage, receives a knowledge of its own purpose, and is enabled to live its true life and ultimately to attain to the full its Divine Likeness.

The first Triad, the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones, are nearest to the Godhead, "ever dwelling in the vestibule of Divinity."

From the Seraphim, the "Burning" or "Fiery" Ones, flows the Stream of Supercelestial Grace. Like fire they consume all that separates man from God, enabling him to rise to the highest fulfilment of his destiny through the perfection and unification of all the activities of the soul, and its union with the Divine.

The name Cherubim means "Fullness of Knowledge." Through them the Providential Energy streams forth as a Transcendental Light perfectly illuminating the soul, uniting it with the Divine Wisdom, and imparting a full and lucid understanding of the Divine Immanence in all things.

The Thrones, "Divine Seats," make manifest the purifying Power of Providence which wholly penetrates the consciousness. Through them the soul is uplifted to the Divine and becomes established in the constancy of Divine Service.

The second Triad, the Dominions, Virtues, and Powers, are given the middle place as indicating the ordered governance of Providence. Through them the soul is liberated from all that is below and assimilated to that which is above.

The Dominions impart Order and Justice through which true liberty is gained. The Virtues are the bestowers of Grace and Valour. The Powers or Authorities give the Providential Aid which with irresistible power overcomes and re-directs the forces which fetter the mind of man to the things of earth.

To the third Triad of Principalities, Archangels, and Angels belongs the final execution of the work of Providence.

The Principalities or Princes exhibit Divine Lordship and true Service. Through them the soul may turn from its attachment to worldly pursuits to the service of the Divine, and ultimately become a co-worker with His Ministers. The Archangels imprint on all things the Divine Seal whereby the universe is the written Word of God; they impart to the soul the spiritual light through which it may learn to read this Divine Book, and also to know and use rightly its own faculties. The Angels minister to all men and to the things of Nature, purifying and uplifting them.

The down-flowing Life of Providence has a threefold operation: It is perfective, illuminating, and purifying. These qualities characterize the activities of each Triad, though the work of the

highest is said to be essentially perfective, that of the middle more definitely illuminative, and that of the lowest Triad purgative.

Thus, while the Celestial Hierarchies are the Transmitters of Providential Life to all below them, they constitute for the aspiring soul which unites itself to them, a spiritual Ladder of Ascent from Earth to Heaven which is seen to correspond with the threefold Way traversed by all great mystics—the Active Life through the Way of Purification, whereby men may become true servants of God; the Inner Life, the Way of Illumination and of real sonship with God; and the Contemplative Life, which is the unitive Way whereby men may attain to true friendship with God.

The Purificatory Way leads to the Immutable GOOD; through the Illuminative Way is revealed the Sacred Majesty of TRUTH; and in the Perfective Way union is attained with the Supreme BEAUTY.

“And He summoneth all the Hosts of Heaven, and all the Holy Ones above—the Seraphim, the Kerubim, the Ophanim, all the Spirits of Power, the Blessed Ones, and all the Spirits of Principalities, the Angels, and the Powers on earth and over the water: with one voice shall they bless and glorify and exalt the Lord, in the virtue of faith, and in the virtue of wisdom, in the virtue of patience, and in the virtue of mercy, in the virtue of justice, and in the virtue of peace, in the virtue of goodness, and shall sing with one voice: ‘Blessed is He: may the Holy Name of the Lord of Hosts be blessed for ever.’”

BOOK OF ENOCH.

THE CELESTIAL HIERARCHIES*

CHAPTER I

TO MY FELLOW-PRESBYTER TIMOTHY. DIONYSIUS THE PRESBYTER

That every Divine illumination, whilst going forth with love in various ways to the objects of its forethought, remains one. Nor is this all: it also unifies the things illuminated.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of Lights.”

Moreover, every Divine procession of radiance from the Father, whilst constantly and bounteously flowing unto us, fills

* Translated from the Greek by the Editors of *The Shrine of Wisdom*.

us anew, as though with a unifying power, by recalling us to things above, and leads us again to the unity of the Shepherding Father and to the Divine ONE. For from Him and into Him are all things, as saith the holy Word.

Calling, then, upon Jesus, the Light of the Father, the Real, the True, "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, by whom we have access to the Father," the Origin of Light, let us raise our thought, according to our power, to the illuminations of the most sacred doctrines handed down by the Fathers, and also, as far as we may, let us contemplate the Hierarchies of the Celestial Intelligences revealed to us by them in symbols for our upliftment: and admitting through the spiritual and unwavering eyes of the mind the original and super-original Gift of Light of the Father Who is the Source of Divinity, which shows to us in images the all-blessed Hierarchies of the Angels in figurative symbols, let us through them again strive upwards towards Its Primal Ray. For this Light can never be deprived of Its own intrinsic unity, and although in goodness, as is fitting, It becomes a manyness and proceeds into manifestation for the upliftment and unification of those creatures which are governed by Its Providence, yet It abides eternally within Itself in changeless sameness, firmly established in Its own unity, and elevates to Itself, according to their capacity, those who turn towards It, as is meet, uniting them in accordance with Its own unity. For by that First Divine Ray we can be enlightened only in so far as It is hidden by all-various holy veils for our upliftment, and fittingly tempered to our natures by the Providence of the Father.

Wherefore that first institution of the sacred Rites, judging it worthy of a supermundane copy of the Celestial Hierarchies, gave us our most holy hierarchy, and described that Spiritual Hierarchy in material terms and in various compositions of forms so that we might be led, each according to his capacity, from the most holy imagery to formless, unific, elevative principles and assimilations. For the mind can by no means be directed to the spiritual presentation and contemplation of the Celestial Hierarchies unless it use the material guidance suited to it, accounting those beauties which are seen to be images of the hidden Beauty, the sweet incense a symbol of spiritual dispensations, and the earthly lights a figure of the immaterial enlightenment. Similarly the details of the sacred teaching correspond to

the feast of contemplation in the soul, while the ranks of order on earth reflect the Divine Concord and the disposition of the Heavenly Orders. The receiving of the most holy Eucharist symbolizes our participation of Jesus; and everything else delivered in a supermundane manner to Celestial Natures is given to us in symbols.

To further, then, the attainment of our due measure of deification, the loving Source of all mysteries, in showing to us the Celestial Hierarchies, and consecrating our hierarchy as fellow-ministers, according to our capacity, in the likeness of their divine ministry, depicted those Super-Celestial Intelligences in material images in the inspired writings of the sacred Word so that we might be guided through the sensible to the Intelligible, and from sacred symbols to the Primal Source of the Celestial Hierarchies.

CHAPTER II

That Divine and Celestial matters are fittingly revealed even through unlike symbols.

I consider, then, that in the first place we must explain our conception of the purpose of each Hierarchy and the good conferred by each upon its followers; secondly we must celebrate the Celestial Hierarchies as they are revealed in the Scriptures; and finally we must say under what holy figures the descriptions in the sacred writings portray those Celestial Orders, and to what kind of purity we ought to be guided through those forms lest we, like the many, should impiously suppose that those Celestial and Divine Intelligences are many-footed or many-faced beings, or formed with the brutishness of oxen, or the savageness of lions, or the curved beaks of eagles, or the feathers of birds, or should imagine that they are some kind of fiery wheels above the heavens, or material thrones upon which the Supreme Deity may recline, or many-coloured horses, or commanders of armies, or whatever else of symbolic description has been given to us in the various sacred images of the Scriptures.

Theology, in its sacred utterances regarding the formless Intelligencies, does indeed use poetic symbolism, having regard to our intelligence, as has been said, and providing a means of ascent fitting and natural to it by framing the sacred Scriptures in a manner designed for our upliftment.

But someone may prefer to regard the Divine Orders as pure and ineffable in their own natures, and beyond our power of vision, and may consider that the imagery of the Celestial Intelligences in the Scriptures does not really represent them, and is like a crude dramatization of the Celestial Names : and he may say that the theologians, in depicting wholly incorporeal natures under bodily forms should, as far as possible, make use of fitting and related images, and represent them by the most exalted, incorporeal, and spiritual substances amongst ourselves, and should not endue the Celestial and God-like Principles with a multitude of low and earthly forms. For the one would contribute in a higher degree to our ascent by dissociating incongruous images from the descriptions of Supermundane Natures, while the other impiously outrages the Divine Powers, and leads our minds into error when we dwell upon such unholy compositions. For we might even think that the Super-celestial Regions are filled with herds of lions and horses, and re-echo with roaring songs of praise, and contain flocks of birds and other creatures, and the lower forms of matter, and whatever other absurd, spurious, passion-arousing, and unlike forms the Scriptures use in describing their resemblances.

Nevertheless, I think that the investigation of the truth shows the most holy wisdom of the Scriptures in the representations of the Celestial Intelligences which makes the most perfect provision in each case, so that neither is dishonour done to the Divine Powers (as they may be called), nor are we bound more passionately to earth by the meanness and baseness of the images. For it might be said that the reason for attributing shapes to that which is above shape, and forms to that which is beyond form, is not only the feebleness of our intellectual power which is unable to rise at once to spiritual contemplation, and which needs to be encouraged by the natural and suitable support and upliftment which offers us forms perceptible to us of formless and supernatural contemplations, but it is also because it is most fitting that the secret doctrines, through ineffable and holy enigmas, should veil and render difficult of access for the multitude the sublime and profound truth of the Supernatural Intelligences. For, as the Scripture declares, not everyone is holy, nor have all men knowledge.

Again, if anyone condemns these representations as incon-

gruous, suggesting that it is disgraceful to fashion such base images of the Divine and most holy Orders, it is sufficient to answer that the most holy Mysteries are set forth in two modes: one, by means of similar and sacred representations akin to their nature, and the other through unlike forms designed with every possible discordance and difference. For example, the mystical traditions of the enlightening Word sometimes celebrate the Sublime Blessedness of the Superessential ONE as Word, and Wisdom, and Essence; proclaiming the Intellect and Wisdom of God both essentially, as the Source of Being, and also as the true Cause of existence; and they make it equivalent to Light, and call It Life.

Now although such sacred forms are more venerable, and seem in one sense to surpass the material presentation, even so, they fail to express truly the Divine Likeness which verily transcends all Essence and Life, and which no Light can fully represent; for all other word and wisdom is incomparably below It. But at other times It is extolled in a supermundane manner in the same writings, where It is named Invisible, Infinite, and Unbounded, in such terms as indicate not what It is, but what It is not: for this, in my judgment, is more in accord with Its Nature, since, as the Mysteries and the priestly tradition suggested, we are right in saying that It is not in the likeness of any created thing, and we cannot comprehend Its superessential, invisible, and ineffable Infinity. If, therefore, the negations in the descriptions of the Divine are true, and the affirmations are inconsistent with It, the exposition of the hidden Mysteries by the use of unlike symbols accords more closely with That Which is ineffable.

Accordingly this mode of description in the holy writings honours, rather than dishonours, the Holy and Celestial Orders by revealing them in unlike images, manifesting through these their supernal excellence, far beyond all mundane things. Nor, I suppose, will any reasonable man deny that discordant figures uplift the mind more than do the harmonious, for in dwelling upon the nobler images, it is probable that we might fall into the error of supposing that the Celestial Intelligences are some kind of golden beings, or shining men flashing like lightning, fair to behold, or arrayed in glittering apparel, raying forth harmless fire, or with such other similar forms as are assigned by theology to the Celestial Intelligences. But lest this thing befall those whose

mind has conceived nothing higher than the wonders of visible beauty, the wisdom of the venerable theologists, which has power to lead us to the heights, reverently descends to the level of the inharmonious dissimilitudes, not allowing our irrational nature to remain attached to those unseemly images, but arousing the upward-turning part of the soul, and stimulating it through the ugliness of the images; since it would seem neither right nor true, even to those who cling to earthly things, that such low forms could resemble those Supercelestial and Divine Contemplations. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that no single existing thing is entirely deprived of participation in the Beautiful, for, as the true Word says, all things are very beautiful.

Holy contemplations can therefore be derived from all things, and the above-named incongruous similitudes can be fashioned from material things to symbolize that which is intelligible and intellectual, since the intellectual has in another manner what has been attributed differently to the perceptible. For instance, passion in irrational creatures arises from the impulse of appetency, and their passion is full of all irrationality; but it is otherwise with intellectual beings in whom the energy of passion must be regarded as denoting their masculine reason and unwavering steadfastness, established in the changeless heavenly places. In the same manner, by desire in irrational creatures we mean the instinctual innate tendency towards temporal material things, or the uncontrolled inborn appetites of mutable creatures, and the dominating irrational desires of the body which urge the whole creature towards that for which the senses crave.

But when, using unlike images, we speak of desire in connection with Intellectual Beings we must understand by this a divine love of the Immaterial, above reason and mind, and an enduring and unshakable superessential longing for pure and passionless contemplation, and true, sempiternal, intelligible participation in the most sublime and purest Light, and in the eternal and most perfect Beauty. And incontinence we must understand as that which is intense and unswerving and irresistible because of its pure and steadfast love of the Divine Beauty, and the undeviating urge towards That Which most truly is to be desired.

In the case of the irrational or the insensitive things, such as brutes among living creatures, or inanimate objects, we rightly say that these are deprived of reason, or of sense-perception. But

we fittingly proclaim the sovereignty, as Supermundane Beings, of the Immaterial and Intellectual Natures over our discursive and corporeal reasoning and sense-perceptions, which are remote from those Divine Intelligences.

It is therefore lawful to portray Celestial Beings in forms drawn from even the lowest of material things which are not discordant since they, too, having originated from That Which is truly beautiful, have throughout the whole of their bodily constitution some vestiges of Intellectual Beauty, and through these we may be led to immaterial Archetypes; the similitudes being taken, as has been said, dissimilarly, and the same things being defined, not in the same way, but harmoniously and fittingly, in the case both of intellectual and sensible natures.

We shall see that the theologians mystically employ symbolical explanations not only in the case of the Celestial Orders, but even for the presentation of the Deific Principles Themselves. And sometimes they celebrate Deity Itself with lofty symbolism as the Sun of Justice, as the Morning Star rising mystically in the mind, or as Light shining forth unclouded and intelligibly; and sometimes they use images of things on earth, such as fire flashing forth with harmless flame, or water affording abundance of life symbolically flowing into a belly and gushing out in perpetually overflowing rivers and streams.

The lowest images are also used, such as fragrant ointment, or the corner-stone, and they even give It the forms of wild animals and liken It to the lion and panther, or name It a leopard, or a raging bear bereaved of its young. I will add, furthermore, that which appears most base and unseemly of all, namely that some renowned theologians have represented It as assuming the form of a worm. Thus all those who are wise in divine matters, and are interpreters of the mystical revelations, set apart in purity the Holy of Holies from the uninitiated and unpurified, and prefer incongruous symbols for holy things, so that divine things may not be easily accessible to the unworthy, nor may those who earnestly contemplate the divine symbols dwell upon the forms themselves as the final truth. Therefore we may celebrate the Divine Natures through the truest negations and also by the images of the lowest things in contrast with Their own Likeness.

Hence there is no absurdity in portraying the Celestial Natures, for the reasons mentioned, by discordant and diverse symbols: for

possibly we ourselves might not have begun to search into the mysteries which lead us to the Heights through the careful examination of the holy Word, had not the ugliness of the imagery of the Angels startled us, not suffering our minds to dwell upon the discordant figures, but stimulating it to leave behind all material attachments, and training it by means of that which is apparent to aspire devoutly to the supermundane ascent.

Let these things suffice touching the corporeal and inharmonious forms used for the delineation of Angels in the sacred Scriptures. We must proceed to the definition of our conception of the Hierarchy Itself, and of the blessings which are enjoyed by those who participate in It. But let our Leader in the discourse be my Christ (if thus I dare name Him) Who inspires all hierarchical revelation. And do thou, my son, listen, according to the law of our hierarchical tradition, with meet reverence to that which is reverently set forth, becoming through instruction inspired by the revelations; and, treasuring deep in the soul the holy mysteries, preserve them in their unity from the unpurified multitude: for, as the Scriptures declare, it is not fitting to cast before swine that pure and beautifying and clear-shining glory of the intelligible pearls.

CHAPTER III

What is Hierarchy, and what the Use of Hierarchy?

Hierarchy is, in my opinion, a holy order and knowledge and activity which, so far as is attainable, participates in the Divine Likeness, and is lifted up to the illuminations given it from God, and correspondingly towards the imitation of God.

Now the Beauty of God, being unific, good, and the Source of all perfection, is wholly free from dissimilarity, and bestows Its own Light upon each according to his merit;* and in the most divine Mysteries perfects them in accordance with the unchangeable fashioning of those who are being perfected harmoniously to Itself.

The aim of Hierarchy is the greatest possible assimilation to

* "It is, however, necessary that everything should impart itself to something else; or the Good will not be good, nor Intellect be intellect, nor Soul be soul; unless after that which lives primarily there is also that which has a secondary life, as long as that exists which is primarily vital."—Plotinus, *Against the Gnostics*.

and union with God, and by taking Him as Leader in all holy wisdom, to become like Him, so far as is permitted, by contemplating intently His most Divine Beauty. Also it moulds and perfects its participants in the holy image of God like bright and spotless mirrors which receive the Ray of the Supreme Deity Which is the Source of Light; and being mystically filled with the Gift of Light, it pours it forth again abundantly, according to the Divine Law, upon those below itself. For it is not lawful for those who impart or participate in the holy Mysteries to overpass the bounds of its sacred laws; nor must they deviate from them if they seek to behold, as far as is allowed, that Deific Splendour, and to be transformed into the likeness of those Divine Intelligences.

Therefore he who speaks of Hierarchy implies a certain perfectly holy Order in the likeness of the First Divine Beauty, ministering the sacred mystery of its own illuminations in hierarchical order and wisdom, being in due measure conformed to its own Principle.*

For each of those who is allotted a place in the Divine Order finds his perfection in being uplifted, according to his capacity, towards the Divine Likeness; and what is still more divine, he becomes, as the Scriptures say, a fellow-worker with God, and shows forth the Divine Activity revealed as far as possible in himself. For the holy constitution of the Hierarchy ordains that some are purified, others purify; some are enlightened, others enlighten; some are perfected, others make perfect; for in this way the Divine imitation will fit each one.

Inasmuch as the Divine Bliss (to speak in human terms) is exempt from all dissimilarity, and is full of Eternal Light, Perfect, in need of no perfection, purifying, illuminating, perfecting, being rather Himself the holy Purification, Illumination, and Perfection, above purification, above light, supremely perfect, Himself the Origin of perfection and the Cause of every hierarchy, He transcends in excellence all holiness.

* "A chain likewise extends from on high, as far as to the last of things, secondary natures always expressing the powers of the natures prior to them, progression indeed diminishing the similitude, but all things at the same time, and even such as most obscurely participate of existence, bearing a similitude to the first causes, and being co-passive with each other and with their original causes."—Proclus, *Theology of Plato*, Book VI, Chap. IV.

I hold, therefore, that those who are being purified ought to be wholly perfected and free from all taint of unlikeness; those who are illuminated should be filled full with Divine Light, ascending to the contemplative state and power with the most pure eyes of the mind; those who are being initiated, holding themselves apart from all imperfection, should become participators in the Divine Wisdom which they have contemplated.*

Further it is meet that those who purify should bestow upon others from their abundance of purity their own holiness; those who illuminate, as possessing more luminous intelligence, duly receiving and again shedding forth the light, and joyously filled with holy brightness, should impart their own overflowing light to those worthy of it; finally, those who make perfect, being skilled in the mystical participations, should lead to that consummation those who are perfected by the most holy initiation of the knowledge of holy things which they have contemplated.

Thus each order in the hierarchical succession is guided to the Divine co-operation, and brings into manifestation, through the Grace and Power of God, that which is naturally and supernaturally in the Godhead, and which is consummated by Him superessentially, but is hierarchically manifested for man's imitation, as far as is attainable, of the God-loving Celestial Intelligences.

* "For everything which is converted hastens to be conjoined with its cause and aspires after communion and colligation with it."—Proposition XXXII. Proclus, *Metaphysical Elements*.

"The soul ought first to examine its own nature, to know whether it has the faculty of contemplating spiritual things, and whether it has indeed an eye wherewith to see them, and if it ought to embark on the quest. If the spiritual is foreign to it, what is the use of trying? But if there is a relationship between us and it, we both can and ought to find it."—Plotinus, *Ennead*, V. I. 3.

BUDDHIST JEWELS

DHARMAKĀYA (TATHAGATA)

In all beings there abideth the Dharmakāya;
 With all virtues dissolved in it, it liveth in eternal calmness.
 It knoweth not birth nor death, coming nor going;
 Not one, not two; not being, not becoming;
 Yet present everywhere in worlds of beings;
 This is what is perceived by all Tathagatas.
 All virtues, material and immaterial,
 Dependent on the Dharmakāya, are eternally pure in it.

Like unto the sky is the ultimate nature of the Dharmakāya;
 Far away from the six dusts, it is defilement-free.
 Of no form and devoid of all attributes is the Dharmakāya,
 In which are void both actor and action:
 The Dharmakāya of all Buddhas, thus beyond all
 comprehension,
 Quells all the struggles of sophistry and dialectics,
 Distances all the efforts of intellection,
 Thoughts all are transcended in it, and suchness alone
 abideth.

NON-ACTION

As the vacuity of sky,
 Being so clear and free of cloud and fog,
 Upon the earth below,
 Betrays no signs a shower to give:
 So the enlightened
 Betray no learning, no intelligence:
 And we, sentient beings,
 Can trace no efforts in their deliverance of the Law.

SOME NEO-PLATONIC TEACHINGS ABOUT PRAYER

I. IAMBlichus ON THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF PRAYER.*

The great value of prayer and the necessity for a life of prayer are brought out in all the Platonic writings. The Neo-Platonists all concur in their explanation of the primary purpose of prayer, which is the assimilation of the human soul to Divinity, and in their emphasis on the soul's need for prayer, since the Divine Gifts are received in the measure in which the soul is able to open itself to That Which is Above.

Iamblichus mentions three chief species of prayer:

i. The collective species. This prayer draws the soul into unity, produces a contact with Divinity, and opens the soul to the reception of the Light, Life, and Power of God. This kind of prayer, therefore, "subsists as a leader of light and knowledge" to the soul.

ii. The connective, which is more perfect than the collective prayer. Iamblichus calls this prayer "a bond of consent and communion with the Gods." It is a more intense and fervent degree of prayer, for it energizes the soul to receive within itself "a copious communication of Their benefits," and it perfects "the whole of our operations prior to our intellectual conceptions." That is, it perfects the soul in spiritual insight, or noesis.

iii. The unitive prayer, which he calls "the seal of ineffable union with the Divinities." This is the most perfect of the species of prayer; for the soul through this prayer realizes within itself the Power and Authority of the Gods. In this prayer of union it is caused to "repose in the Gods as in a Divine and Never-failing Port."

By means of these three kinds of prayer the soul "in suppliant adoration" is enabled to participate in "all the Divine Measures" and "the Friendship of the Gods" from Whom three fruits are received, "like the Hesperian apples of gold." The first of these

* All the quotations are translations from Iamblichus by Thomas Taylor.

fruits pertains to illumination, the second to a "communion of operation" by which the soul becomes a co-worker with the Gods, and the third fruit is the energizing of the soul by the "perfect plenitude of Divine Fire." In the words of Iamblichus, true prayer results in "the nourishment of the soul's intellectual vigour, the enlargement of its receptive capacity, and the provision of a divine key which unfolds to man the deep Mysteries of the Gods; accustoms us to the splendid rivers of Supernal Light; in a short time perfects our inmost recesses, and disposes them for the ineffable embrace and contact of the Gods; and does not desist until it raises us to the summit of all."

"It also gradually and silently draws upwards the manners of our soul, by divesting them of everything foreign to a divine nature, and clothes us with the perfections of the Gods. Besides this, it produces an indissoluble communion and friendship with Divinity, nourishes a divine love, and inflames the divine part of the soul."

Of the relation of the Gods to the suppliant soul, Iamblichus writes: "Prayers are not to be directed to the Gods as if They were passive and could be moved by supplications: for the Divine Irradiation which takes place through the exercise of prayer operates spontaneously, and is far remote from all material attraction: since it becomes apparent through Divine Energy and Perfection, and as much excels the voluntary motion of our nature as the Divine Will of the Good surpasses our human election. Through this Volition the Gods, Who are perfectly benevolent and merciful, pour Their Light unstintingly upon the supplicating priests whose souls they call upwards to Their own Divine Natures; impart to them a union with Themselves, and accustom their souls, even when bound in body, to separate themselves from its dark embrace, and to be led back by an ineffable energy to their Eternal and Intelligible Original.

"It is evident, indeed, that the safety of the soul depends on such Divine Operations. For while the soul contemplates divine visions it acquires another life, employs a different energy, and may, with the greatest propriety, be considered as no longer ranking in the order of man. For it often lays aside its own human life, and changes it for the most blessed energy of the Gods. But if an ascent to the Gods through the ministry of prayer confers on the priests purity from passion, freedom from the bonds of generation, and a union with a Divine Principle, how can there be

anything passive in the efficacy of prayer? For invocation does not draw down the Pure and Impassive Gods to us who are passive and impure; but on the contrary, renders us who have become, through generation, impure and passive, immutable and pure.

"But neither do invocations conjoin, through passion, the priests with the Divinities, but afford an indissoluble communion of connection through that friendship which binds all things in union and consent. Nor do invocations incline the Intellect of the Gods towards man, as the term seems to imply; but according to the decisions of truth they render the will of men properly disposed to receive the participations of the Gods; leading it upwards, and connecting it with the Divinities by the sweetest and most alluring persuasion. And on this account the sacred Names of the Gods, and other Divine symbols, from their anagogic nature, are able to connect invocations with the Gods Themselves."

This is summed up in another part of the same work, where Iamblichus writes, "That which in our nature is divine, intellectual, and one, or (as you may be willing to call it) intelligible, is perfectly excited by prayer from its dormant state; and when excited vehemently seeks that which is similar to itself, and becomes conjoined with its own perfection. . . . Nor are our supplications to be considered as foreign from the purity of Intellect, but since the Gods excel us both in power and purity, and all other advantages, we shall act in the wisest manner by invoking Them with the most vehement supplications. For a consciousness of our own nothingness when we compare ourselves with the Gods, naturally leads us to the exercise of prayer. But through the benefits resulting from supplication, we are in a short time brought back to the object of supplication, acquire its similitude from intimate converse, and gradually obtain Divine perfection, instead of our own imbecility and imperfection.

"Whenever any similitude is present, whether greater or less, it is sufficient to the connection of which we are now discoursing; since there is nothing which approaches to a kindred alliance with the Divine, though in the smallest degree, to which the Gods are not immediately present and united. A connection, therefore, as much as is possible, subsists between prayers and the Gods."

II. PROCLUS ON THE REASON FOR PRAYER, AND THE PRE-REQUISITES FOR TRUE PRAYER*

Proclus, one of the greatest of the Neo-Platonists, in his *Commentary on the Timaeus* deals with part of the doctrine of Iamblichus about Prayer, and himself gives expression to some very lofty and beautiful teachings upon this subject.

In discussing the reason which underlies man's need for prayer he begins by pointing to the Infinite ONE, and then indicates the manner in which all beings and things which proceed into manifestation through the power of the Gods participate to some degree in the Divine; showing that this Immanence of God is the cause through which all things tend to return to Him. Proclus continues, "All beings are contained by the Gods, and reside in Their Natures after the manner of a circular comprehension. Hence, by a wonderful mode of subsistence, all things proceed and yet are not, nor indeed can they be, separated from the Gods. But they are, after a manner, established in the Divine Natures, and they proceed themselves. But since, in consequence of their progression, it is requisite that they should be converted and return, and imitate the egress, and conversion of the Gods to Their Ineffable Cause, that the natures, thus disposed, may again be contained by the Gods, and the first Unities, . . . they receive from hence a certain secondary perfection by which they may be able to convert themselves to the Goodness of the Gods; that their principle being rooted in the Divinities, they may again, by conversion, abide in Them and form, as it were, a circle which originates from and terminates in the Gods. All things, therefore, both abide in and convert themselves to the Gods, receiving this power from the Divinities; Nature perfecting her progeny according to certain characteristics of the Gods.

"The Demiurgus of the universe, therefore, by a much greater priority impressed those symbols in souls by which they might be able to abide in themselves, and again convert themselves to the Source of their being: through the symbol of unity conferring on them stability; but through intellect imparting to them the power of conversion.

"And to this conversion prayer is of the greatest utility: for it conciliates the beneficence of the Gods through those ineffable

* The quotations are from the translations of Thomas Taylor.

symbols which the Father of the universe has disseminated in souls. It likewise unites those who pray with those to whom prayer is addressed; conjoins the Intellect of the Gods with the discourses of those who pray; excites the will of those who perfectly comprehend good, and produces in us a firm persuasion that They will abundantly impart to us the beneficence which They contain: and lastly, it establishes in the Gods whatever we possess.

“But to a perfect and true prayer there is required, first, a knowledge of all the Divine Orders to Which he who prays approaches, for neither will anyone accede in a proper manner unless he intimately beholds Their distinguishing properties: and hence it is that the Oracle admonishes, ‘that a fiery intellection obtains the first order in sacred veneration.’ But afterwards there is required a conformation of our life with That Which is Divine; and this accompanied with all *purity, chastity, discipline, and order*. For while we present ourselves to the Gods, They will respond with beneficence, and our souls will be subjected to Theirs, and will participate in the excellences of a Divine Nature. In the third place a certain contact is necessary from whence, with the more exalted part of the soul, we touch the Divine Essence, and verge to a union with Its Ineffable Nature. But there is yet further required an accession and inhesion (for thus the Oracle calls it when it says, ‘The mortal adhering to Fire will possess a Divine Light’) from whence we receive a greater and more illustrious part of the Light proceeding from the Gods. In the last place, a union succeeds with the Unity of the Gods, restoring and establishing unity to the soul, and causing our energy to become one with Divine Energy: so that in this case we are no longer ourselves, but are absorbed, as it were, in the Nature of the Gods, and, residing in Divine Light, are entirely surrounded with Its splendour. And this is, indeed, the best end of prayer, the conjunction of the Soul’s conversion with its permanency; establishing in unity whatever proceeds from the Divine Unities; and surrounding our light with the Light of the Gods.

“Prayer, therefore, is of no small assistance to our souls in ascending to their native region: nor is he who possesses virtue superior to the need for that good which proceeds from prayer, but the very contrary takes place; since prayer is not only the cause of our ascent and reversion, but with it is connected piety to the Gods, that is, the very summit of virtue.

"It is necessary, therefore, that he who generously enters on the exercise of prayer should experience the responses of the Gods, and should excite in himself Divine conceptions, full of intellectual light: for it is the grace and benignity of more exalted Beings which leads most effectively to Their communion with our nature. And it is requisite, without intermission, to dwell in the veneration of Divinity: for, according to the poet, 'The Gods are accustomed to be present with the mortal constantly employed in prayer.' It is likewise necessary to preserve a stable order of Divine Works, and to produce those virtues which purify the soul from the stains of generation, and elevate her to the regions of Intellect, together with *faith, truth, and love*: to preserve this triad and hope of Good, this immutable perception of Divine Light, and segregation from every other pursuit; that thus solitary, and free from material concerns, we may become united with the solitary Unities of the Gods: since he who attempts by multitude to unite himself with Unity acts preposterously, and dissociates himself from Divinity. For as it is not lawful for anyone to conjoin himself by that which is not with that which is, so neither is it possible through multitude to be conjoined with Unity.

"Such, then, are the consequences primarily apparent in prayer, namely, that its essence is the cause of associating our soul with the Gods; and that on this account it unites and conjoins all inferior beings with all superior Beings. For, as the great Theodorus says, 'All things pray, except the FIRST.'

"But the perfection of prayer, beginning from more common goods, ends in Divine conjunction, and gradually accustoms the soul to Divine Light. And its efficacious and vigorous energy both replenishes us with good, and causes our concerns to be common with those of the Gods. We may also rationally suppose that the causes of prayer, so far as they are *effective*, are the vigorous and efficacious Powers of the Gods, converting and calling upwards the soul to the Gods Themselves. But that so far as they are *perfective*, they are the Immaculate Goods of the soul, from the reception of which souls are established in the Gods. And again, so far as they are *paradigmatical*, they are the primary Fabricating Causes of beings, proceeding from the Good, and conjoined with It by an ineffable union. But that so far as

they are *formal*, or possess the proportion of forms, they render souls similar to the Gods, and give perfection to the whole life of the soul. Lastly, so far as they are *material* causes, or retain the proportion of matter, they are marks or symbols conferred by the Demiurgus on the essences of souls, that they may be wakened to a reminiscence of the Gods Who produced both them, and whatever else exists."

III. THE ELEVATION OF THE SOUL TO DIVINITY

From the Treatise of Dionysius (the Areopagite) on the Divine Names

Divinity is present to all things, but all things are not present to Him; but when we invoke Him with all-sacred prayers, an unclouded Intellect, and an aptitude to Divine union, then we also are present to Him. For He is neither in place, that He may be absent from anything, nor does He pass from one thing to another. But, indeed, to assert that He is in all things, falls far short of that Infinity Which is Above, and Which comprehends all things. Let us, therefore, extend ourselves by prayer to the more sublime intuition of His Divine and beneficent Rays. Just as if a chain, consisting of numerous lamps, were suspended from the summit of Heaven and extended to the earth. For if we ascended by this chain by always alternately stretching forth our hands, we should appear, indeed, to ourselves, to draw down the chain, though we should not in reality, it being present upwards and downwards, but we should elevate ourselves to the more sublime splendours of the abundantly luminous rays. Just as, on the contrary, if anyone standing in a ship pushes against a rock fixed in the sea, he indeed effects nothing in the firm and immovable rock, but causes himself to recede from it: and by how much the more he pushes against (it), by so much the more he is repelled from the rock.

Hence, prior to every undertaking, and especially that which is theological, it is necessary to begin from prayer, not as if drawing down that Power Which is everywhere present, and is at the same time nowhere, but as committing and uniting ourselves to It by Divine recollections and invocations.

IV. HIEROCLES ON PRAYER

*From his Commentary on the Golden Verses of the Pythagoreans**

“Betake yourself to the work, having implored the Gods to bring it to perfection.”

The verse briefly describes all that contributes to the acquisition of good, namely, the self-moved nature of the soul, and the co-operation of Divinity. For though the election of (all) things beautiful is in our power, yet, as we possess our freedom of the will from Divinity, we are perfectly indigent of His co-operating with and perfecting the things which we have chosen. For our endeavour appears to be similar to a hand extended for the reception of things beautiful; but that which is imparted by Divinity is the supplier and the fountain of the gift of good. And the former, indeed, is naturally adapted to discover things beautiful, but the latter to unfold them to him by whom they are rightly explored.

But prayer is the medium between two boundaries, namely, between investigation by us, and that which is imparted by Divinity, properly adhering to the Cause which leads us into existence and perfects us in well-being. For how can anyone receive well-being unless Divinity imparts it? And how can Divinity, Who is essentially disposed to give, give to him who does not ask, though his impulses arise from the freedom of his will? That we may not, therefore, pray only in words, but may also corroborate this by deeds; and that we may not confide only in our own energy, but may also beseech Divinity to co-operate with our deeds, and may conjoin prayer to action, as form to matter; and in short, that we may pray for what we do, and do that for which we pray, the verse conjoining these two says: “Betake yourself to the work, having implored the Gods to bring it to perfection.” For neither is it proper alone to engage with alacrity in beautiful actions, as if it were in our power to perform them with rectitude without the co-operation of Divinity; nor yet should we be satisfied with the words of mere prayer while we contribute nothing to the acquisition of the things which we request. For thus we shall either pursue atheistical virtue (if I may be allowed so to speak) or unenergetic prayer;

* Translated by Thomas Taylor.

of which the former, being deprived of Divinity, takes away the essence of virtue; and the latter, being sluggish, dissolves the efficacy of prayer. For how can anything be beautiful which is not performed according to the Divine Rule? And how is it possible that what is done according to this should not entirely require the co-operation of Divinity for its subsistence? For virtue is the image of Divinity in the rational soul; but every image requires its paradigm in order that it may be generated, nor is that which it possesses sufficient, unless it looks to That from the similitude to which it possesses the beautiful. It is proper, therefore, that those should pray who hasten to energetic virtue, and having prayed, that they should endeavour to possess it. It is likewise requisite that they should do this looking to That Which is Divine and Splendid, and should extend themselves to philosophy, adhering at the same time in a becoming manner to the First Cause of Good. For that Tetractys, the Fountain of perennial Nature, is not only the Eternal Cause of being to all things, but likewise of well-being; extending proper good through the whole world, like undecaying and intellectual light. But the soul, when she properly adheres to this light, and purifies herself like an eye to acuteness of vision, by attention to things beautiful, is excited to prayer: and again, from the plenitude of prayer she extends her endeavours, conjoining actions to words, and by Divine conferences giving stability to worthy deeds. And discovering some things, and being illuminated in others, she endeavours to effect what she prays for, and prays for that which she endeavours to effect. And such, indeed, is the union of endeavour and prayer.

EXTRACTS FROM THE WRITINGS OF FLOYER SYDENHAM

ON IDEAS

[Floyer Sydenham, who was born in 1710, was one of the earliest English translators of Plato. He was educated at Wadham College, Oxford, where he took the degree of M.A. in 1734.

Between the years 1759 and 1780 Sydenham published translations of *Io*, *The Greater and Lesser Hippias*, *The Banquet*, *The Rivals*, *The Meno*, *The First and Second Alcibiades* and *Philebus*, and these were collected in three quarto volumes, together with *A Dissertation on the Doctrine of Heraclitus*, from which the following extracts are derived.

Sydenham did not receive adequate reward for his labours, and he died in a debtors' prison in the year 1787.

Sydenham's translations were subsequently revised, and included by Thomas Taylor, the great English Platonist, in his complete translation of Plato, which appeared in 1804.]

Ideas are pure and unmixed with images and sensible objects in the Divine Mind alone: for This alone is free from body; This alone is seated in the Infinity of (Primal) Matter, which It hath for Its subject to act on and to form, but is not reciprocally acted upon, nor any way influenced by matter, being prior to all body or matter formed, as cause in the order of things must always be prior to effect. Whereas all human minds are in bodies, that is, in portions of matter bounded by form, and endued with qualities which totally darken the mind or rational soul at her first entrance into body, and either stupify or suppress all her energetic powers. Nor do these dormant powers of energizing awake from their insensibility till excited by the sensible images of outward objects. The rational soul is acted on by body, in this manner, long before she can act on body. Afterwards, as the blood and spirits* are expanded, by the same slow degrees she finds room to expand herself, and more and more ideas arise in her, beginning from First Principles, proceeding to universals, and thence on to more or less general principles, in proportion as the outward world opens to her view, and as more and more sensible images enter

* "Blood" and "spirits" mean respectively physical and imaginative energies.

the imagination. All this while, no ideas are excited in her any other way than through the images of particular and sensible objects; for it is only from an easy though rapid induction of particulars (a very few indeed are found sufficient), that the human mind spontaneously, and without the least labour, rises to universals. Then indeed, when she has attained these heights, this region of science, she has no more need of new sensible objects. Carried by her own inward energies, she travels on from one conception to another, along the chain in which they are linked together, as far as her strength permits. But imagination and memory travel all the way with her, and attend every step she takes; for the mind, having never been used to view her innate Ideas naked, but always clothed as it were with the images of sensible objects, hath need of new images to help her dull eye in viewing ideas new to her. And these new images imagination supplies her with, by joining together and compounding those images of former sensible objects, with which the memory is stored. Now since all corporeal things are in perpetual motion and mutation, and since the images are of sensible, corporeal objects, whatever ideas the mind sees no otherwise than in and through these images must appear to her as partaking of the same motion and mutation. The human mind, indeed, by exercising her own faculty of reason, may acquire science, and consequently may know that all Ideas, the only objects of science, are, in themselves, eternal, motionless, and immutable: by withdrawing her attention from things sensible and outward, and by transferring it to things Intelligible, and inward to her own being, she may endeavour to purify her own ideas, and to strip them of those corporeal images with which they are invested: by the constant practice of applying herself thus to right reason, she may gain a habit of directing her sight continually toward that brightest place in the soul where the Divine Intellect shines, the place of pure Ideas. But she cannot behold them steadfastly unless they are shadowed over by those fleeting clouds, the images of things sensible. Thus in morals, for instance, she may attain the power of keeping her eye fixed on Ideal Rectitude; and having always in her view the beauty of Universal Justice, or Honesty and Goodness, she may love it always above all things, and habitually will to conform herself to It in all that part of human life which she conducts: but when she comes to apply this Idea to any

particular action to be done, immediately arise doubt and uncertainty; a thousand varying circumstances attend it; what is right in the beginning is often wrong before the action is completed; the end or object changes its appearance; the conditions of the persons to be affected by it, their merits and demerits, their rights and their necessities are, or seem to be, altered, either absolutely, or at least relatively to us, the doers. The difficulty of ascertaining the quantity of these merits and demerits, these rights and necessities of others, increases the uncertainty of what is just and good for us to do in any particular case. If then the science of Universal Justice be of so difficult and doubtful application to the particulars of our own conduct in determining what ought to be done—how much more so must it be in forming judgments of the moral conduct of other men! Love of Truth, and other innate affections, true prudence, and a variety of passions, the strong bias of natural inclination or of a settled temper, and sudden starts of fancy or of humour, all take their turns to govern: so various and changeful a thing is the mind of man! Nay, so unfixed are the true characters of the many, that we may say fairly, and without exaggeration, allowed only to orators and poets, that

Most men have no characters at all.

But further, not only is it quite impossible for the greatest master of moral science, not being within the consciences of men, to know with certainty who is a thoroughly honest and good man; it is no less impossible to judge infallibly concerning the actions of others, than it is concerning their minds or motives. Not only integrity and equity, candour and benevolence are here requisite, but such a complete knowledge of all the circumstances attending their actions, as even in our own we have observed is so difficult to attain.

And if it appears also, from what we have just now said, that it is impossible to form with certainty a right judgment of them in any particular case, it must thence be inferred that human actions are not the objects of knowledge to man, but of opinions only. Now opinion reaches no farther than to probability in judging of the truth of things; and since it has no stable or fixed foundation, it is always tottering, and by turns leaning to opposite sides. Whence it is that, with regard to the justice or goodness of any particular moral action, not only is it rare to find any two men exactly in agreement, but scarcely will any one man be found,

however fraught with moral science, agreeing always with himself. This indeed does not impeach the reality of that science or the certainty of its maxims: it proves nothing more than the uncertainty of human judgment in applying those maxims to particular cases, which always are uncertain. But let morality, considered in its own nature, be ever so really a science, and be the maxims of it ever so fixed and permanent, yet, considered as objects of the human mind, these maxims are as transient as the objects of imagination whose stability depends on the strength of memory. The remembrance of them is like the remembrance of past sensible objects—it comes and goes. A due attention to our necessary affairs in human life brings on a temporary oblivion of the objects of both the kinds, sensible and mental. The mind indeed may, and sometimes does, regain her lost science, by recollecting those her pristine Ideas, which had been dissipated and were vanished: as she often recovers also the remembrance of those sensible objects which she had quite forgotten. The difference between the two cases lies in the different nature of the objects. In the latter case, the objects being external and foreign to the mind, she recovers the remembrance of these in no other way than by fresh objects, similar to the past, presenting themselves to her through the senses and awakening, though faintly, her former images. But in the other case, the objects being natural to the mind, she recovers them of herself by means of meditation. In this case, therefore, she is properly said to recollect herself, for she collects again those maxims and subsequent truths of science by deducing them from Principles which she finds within herself, in the same manner as she had done formerly, but with much more ease and expedition as having been before *actually* acquainted with them all. That such, at least is the process in which the mind through meditation regains any science which once had been possessed by her, but afterwards had slipped away out of her memory, is most certain. For until she has recollected all the truths of that science, and linked them one to another in a chain of deductions, she has not regained the science. And hence, we may apprehend the propriety of the metaphor used by Plato, when he calls a man's first acquisition of any sciential truths by the name of *Reminiscence*. Be this as it may, thus much is evident, that ideas in the mind, as well as images in the imagination, pass and repass continually, though with this difference—that images of sensible

things become fainter and fainter still in the imagination as they become more and more remote in time from those things of which they are the images ; whereas ideas in the mind are, at their return, always found to have increased in brightness. . . . The worth and dignity of every mind is in proportion to the absolute worth and real dignity of the objects of that mind. Pure Ideas are of all the objects of mind the noblest and most excellent, as being the measures of all things in outward nature, and the standards of the worth and dignity of these in their several kinds. Pure Ideas are the objects only of pure Mind, that is, of Mind unmixed with body. No mind is pure and wholly exempt from body except the Universal and Divine Mind. From these premises it follows, not only that this Divine Mind is supremely excellent, but also that His supreme Excellence originates in the superior excellence of His Ideas, above those of any particular mind. It follows further, that, although these Ideas constitute His Essence, and are Himself—considered as the Object of His own Contemplation—yet, thus considered, He is superior even to Himself, considered as the *Contemplator*. We shall also lay down a truth or two more as sufficiently clear from the Philosophy of Plato—the Ideas of the Divine Mind are not many, distinct, and separate, like those of the human mind, but many included all of them in *One*. This one all-comprehensive Idea, the sole and constant Object of the Divine Intellect, is at once the Final and the Formal Cause of all things in Nature. Considered as the latter it is termed by Plato, in his *Banquet*, the Beautiful Itself ; in his *Philebus*, Measure Itself ; in his *Republic*, Justice Itself, the Law of all rational beings. Considered as the Final Cause of all things in Nature, this Universal Idea, One and the Same everywhere and always, is by the same philosopher, in his *Parmenides*, termed The One, or One Itself ; in his *Philebus*, Truth Itself, the Cause of Stability ; and in his *Republic*, Good Itself.

JEWELS

(FROM IAMBLICHUS)

As we live through the soul, it must be said that by virtue of this we live well; just as since we see through the eyes, it is by virtue of these that we see well.

We should betake ourselves to virtue as to an inviolable temple, in order that we may not be exposed to any ignoble insolence of the irrational element of the soul.

The theorems of Philosophy are to be enjoyed as much as possible, as if they were ambrosia and nectar; for the pleasure arising from them is genuine, incorruptible, and divine.

If vigour of the senses is desirable, much more should prudence be sought; for it is as it were the sensitive vigour of our practical intellect. And as by the former we are protected from deception in sensations, so through the latter we avoid false reasoning in practical affairs.

We should adorn a temple with gifts, but the soul with disciplines.

Just as land must be specially cultivated by him who wishes to obtain from it the best fruit, so the soul should be most carefully and attentively cultivated, in order that it may produce fruit worthy of its nature.

Philosophy is indeed the science of living perfectly, and is, above all things, to speak briefly, the cause to souls of a perfect life.