

THE SHRINE *of* WISDOM

VOL. XVII. NO. 65.

AUTUMN EQUINOX 1935

THE LIFE OF PROCLUS

(FROM MARINUS' "LIFE OF PROCLUS")*

When I consider the magnitude of mind and dignity of character belonging to Proclus, a philosopher of our time, and consider those qualifications and that power of composition which those ought to possess who undertake a description of his life; and lastly, when I regard my own poverty of diction, I am inclined to think it more proper to refrain from such an undertaking. But my scruples are somewhat lessened when I consider that even in temples, those who approach to the altar do not all sacrifice alike. Also I do not think it lawful that I, who was one of his familiars, should be silent concerning his life; and should not, according to my utmost ability, relate such particulars concerning him as are true.

I shall begin, therefore, not according to the usual manner of writers who are accustomed to arrange their discourse in chapters; and I consider that the felicity of this blessed man ought, with the greatest propriety, to be placed as the foundation of this treatise. For I regard him as the most happy of those men who were celebrated in former ages. I do not say happy only from the felicity of wisdom, though he possessed this in the highest degree of all men; nor because he abundantly enjoyed the goods of an animal life; nor, again, on account of his fortune, though this belonged to him in a most eminent degree, for he was supplied with a great abundance of all such things as are called external goods: but I call him happy because his felicity was perfect, complete in all parts.

Having, then, divided virtues according to their kinds into natural, moral, and political, and also into those of a sublimer rank which are wholly conversant with purification and contem-

* Thomas Taylor's translation.

plation, and are therefore called cathartic, and theoretic, and also such as are called theurgic, by which we acquire a similitude with some aspect of Divinity, but omitting such as are superior to these, as beyond the reach of man, we shall begin from such as are more natural, and which are first in the progressions of the human soul, though not first in the nature of things.

This blessed man, then, whose praise is the subject of this treatise, naturally possessed, from the hour of his birth, all those physical virtues which fall to the lot of mankind, the traces of which were manifest in the latest period of his life, and appeared to surround him and invest his body after the manner of a tenacious shell. In the first place, he was endowed with a singular perfection of sensation, which is named corporeal prudence, particularly evident in the nobler senses of seeing and hearing, which are indeed given by the Gods to men for the purpose of philosophizing, and for the greater convenience of the animal life, and which remained entire to this divine man through the whole of his life.

Secondly, he possessed a strength of body which was not affected by cold, and which was neither weakened nor disturbed by any vicious or negligent diet, nor by endurance of labours, though it was employed day and night while he was engaged in prayer, in studying the works of others, in writing books himself, and in conversing with his friends, all of which he performed with such expedition that he appeared to study but one thing alone. But a power of this kind may with propriety be called fortitude of body, from the singular strength employed in such exertions.

The third corporeal virtue with which he was endowed was beauty, which the authors of these names have very properly regarded as having a correspondence with temperance; for just as we consider temperance as consisting in a certain symphony and consent of the powers of the soul, so corporeal beauty is understood to consist in a certain agreement of the organic parts. He was indeed of a most pleasing aspect, not only because he was endowed with this most excellent proportion of body, but because the flourishing condition of his soul beamed through his corporeal frame like a living light, with splendours too wonderful for language to describe. And indeed he was so beautiful that no painter could accurately portray his resemblance, and

all the pictures of him, although very beautiful, were far short of the true beauty of the original.

The fourth corporeal virtue which he possessed was health, which is said to correspond to justice in the soul; for health is a certain justice in the disposition of the corporeal parts, as the other is in the powers of the soul. For justice is a certain habit relating the powers of the soul in their proper duty. Hence that is called health by the physicians which conciliates the jarring elements of the body into union and consent, and which Proclus possessed in such perfection that he was not ill more than twice or thrice in so long a life as seventy-five years.

Such, then, were the corporeal goods that Proclus possessed, and which may be called the forerunners, and as it were messengers of those forms into which we have divided perfect virtue. The first powers and progeny of his soul naturally possessed previous to instruction, and those parts of virtue with which he was adorned, and which Plato reckons the elements of a philosophic nature, must excite the wonder of anyone who considers their excellent quality; for he was remarkable for his memory and ingenuity, he was of a disposition magnificent, gentle, and friendly, and a companion, as it were, of truth, justice, fortitude, and temperance; and his love of truth was so great that he never admitted any prudent dissimulation, but hated falsehood vehemently. Indeed, it is necessary that he who follows truth with so much earnestness and sincerity should be extremely desirous of it from his infancy, since truth is the source of every good, both to Gods and men.

That he despised corporeal pleasures and was an eminent lover of temperance, is sufficiently evident from his love of disciplines and every kind of study; for dispositions of this kind never suffer base and illiberal pleasure to dwell in the mind but are able to excite in the soul, from its own internal operations, the truest pleasure and delight. He was so far removed from avarice that when a boy he despised the wealth of his parents, though very rich, on account of his incredible love towards philosophy. Hence he was far removed from illiberality and from the care of lesser concerns, as he was most studious of the universe, and of everything Divine and human. But from such a disposition of the rational soul, having acquired true magnanimity, he, unlike the multitude, viewed nothing dreadful

in death, so that he by no means feared all that host of molestations which appear terrible to others, and this in consequence of that natural attribute which it is proper to call by no other name than that of fortitude alone. But from all these virtues, I think it must be evident to those who have not experienced his best of dispositions, that he loved equity from a boy; that he was just and mild and by no means difficult or unjust in his associations or contracts. To us he certainly appeared modest and elegant, neither avaricious nor illiberal, neither arrogant nor timid.

But will it not be superfluous to mention the goodness and fertility of his ingenuity? Especially among those who know and who have heard that he was full of the most beautiful disciplines, and who are acquainted with the multitude he produced and published to the world, so that he alone seemed to have drunk nothing of the cup of oblivion, as he was endowed with a power of memory which was never disturbed, and that which belongs to the oblivious never happened to him: besides, he never neglected fresh knowledge, as of possessing a sufficiency of disciplines.

He was most remote from a nature rustic and coarse, and was particularly disposed to cultivated endowments, for on account of his singular urbanity and festivity (without transgressing the bounds of true honesty) in his common associations, sacred feasts, and other actions, he attracted and charmed his companions, and always dismissed them more cheerful and pleased.

His mother was Marcella, and his father Patricius, both of the Lycian nation. Minerva, the tutelar Goddess of Byzantium, received him when born, and afterwards provided for his well-being when he was numbered among boys and young men, for she appeared to him in a dream and exhorted him to the study of philosophy, from whence arose his great devotion to this Goddess. His parents brought him into their native country Zanthus, consecrated to Apollo, and I cannot but think that this country happened to him by a certain Divine Providence, so that he, who was to be the prince of all sciences, should be educated under the presiding deity of the Muses. Here, being trained in the most elegant manners, he pursued moral virtues, and was accustomed to right conduct and to a rejection of that which is base.

At that time the love of the Gods manifestly appeared, for being once attacked by some disease of body so that it appeared very difficult and scarcely possible to cure him, there stood at his bed a youth of more than ordinary appearance, so that even previous to the declaration of his name he might be known as Apollo: but the God, proclaiming who he was, and pronouncing his name, touched the head of Proclus (for he stood reclining his head on Proclus' pillow), and having immediately restored him to health, vanished from his sight.

Having, for a short time in Lydia, applied himself to grammar, Proclus went to Alexandria in Egypt, bringing with him very singular moral virtues by which he excited towards himself the love of the masters resident in that place. Hence Leonas the rhetorician, who was illustrious among many of that profession who were then at Alexandria, not only made him a partaker of his studies, but thought him worthy to become his domestic, and ordered that he should be supplied with food together with his wife and children, no otherwise than if he had been his true son. He likewise took care to procure him the notice of the principal men in Egypt, who being wonderfully delighted with the keenness of the youth's ingenuity, and with the elegance and integrity of his morals, reckoned him among their greatest friends. He was also instructed by Orion the grammarian, whose ancestors discharged the sacerdotal office among the Egyptians, and he also went to the schools of the Roman teachers and made great progress in their language, for he was at first led to the study of his father's profession, in which he was illustrious, his employment being the study of law in the royal city. But when it appeared how vehemently the young man was delighted with the study of rhetoric, as he had not yet touched the writings of the philosophers, he both acquired great glory from his acquisitions, on account of the elegance of his discourse and his celerity in learning, and became the admiration of his fellow pupils and masters.

While he yet frequented the rhetorical school, the sophist Leonas made him the companion of his journey to Byzantium, and on his return his tutelar Goddess exhorted him to philosophy, and to visit the Athenian schools: but having first returned to Alexandria and bid farewell to rhetoric and the other arts he had formerly studied, he gave himself up to the discourses of

the philosophers then resident at Alexandria, who were so delighted with the youth that Olympiodorus,* who instructed him in the teachings of Aristotle, wished Proclus to marry his daughter who was also instructed in philosophy, and Hero, a mathematician and a religious man, committed to him all the doctrines of his religion, and made him his constant companion.

Having surpassed his masters at Alexandria, Proclus went on to Athens. On his arrival he was met by Nicolaus, a rhetorician, and brought into the city. But Proclus, weary from the voyage, sat down at the temple of Socrates, and asked Nicolaus to procure him some water, for he was thirsty. At once Nicolaus brought him water from the fountain at the statue of Socrates, regarding the occurrence as an omen of his future work in the Platonic succession.

Proclus here met the prince of philosophers, Syrianus, who was with a friend, Lachares, also a philosopher. While they were conversing, the sun set, and the new moon appeared from the same house; wherefore having saluted the stranger they endeavoured to dismiss him, as being a young man, that they might adore the Goddess apart. But Proclus, not having proceeded far, also beheld the moon, and laying aside his sandals, saluted the Goddess. Then Lachares, speaking to Syrianus, said, "This is what Plato divinely affirms of great geniuses: that they either produce great good, or its contrary."

Syrianus brought Proclus to Plutarch,† who when he saw the young man, not yet twenty years old, and heard of his love and desire of a philosophic life, immediately made him a partaker of his philosophy, reading to him his own commentary on Aristotle's books on the soul, and on the *Phaedo* of Plato. Plutarch made Proclus live with him in his house, as though he were his son, and on one occasion, seeing his temperance with regard to animal food, he exhorted Proclus not to abstain entirely from animals, but to use them so far as was necessary for the life of the body. After the death of Plutarch, Syrianus made Proclus the companion of his philosophic life, preparing him to be his successor, instructing him in the sacred discipline of Plato by an orderly progression, after having read with him

* Not the famous Neoplatonic philosopher.

† Not the well-known biographer.

all the works of Aristotle: and he was careful that he might survey with him true mysteries with the eyes of his soul, free from material darkness, and with a speculation of intellect refined and pure. Hence Proclus was employed night and day in vigilant energies, and in writing what he had heard, employing his own judgment in the selection and order, and by the time he was twenty-eight years of age he began to compose many works, among the rest his very learned and elegant commentaries on the *Timæus*. From this manner of life, his behaviour also received a greater ornament, since as he advanced in science he accumulated virtue.

Unable himself to engage in public affairs, on account of the greater importance of his own work, he instructed Archiadas, who was a religious man, in the nature, virtues, and duties of a political life, according to the *Laws* and the *Republic* of Plato and the political writings of Aristotle. Proclus also joined in public discussions, giving the most prudent counsels and conferring with the governors concerning equity: not only exhorting them to an impartial administration of justice, but in a manner compelling them by philosophical authority. For he had a certain public care of the morals of princes, and not only instructed them in the art of temperate government by his discourse, but also by his example through the whole of his life; since he was, as it were, the exemplar of temperance to the rest. But he gave a specimen of civil fortitude perfectly Herculean; for since at that time there was, as it were, a sea of troubles upon him, and mighty waves of stormy employments were roused by adverse winds against his upright life, he conducted himself, though in danger, with gravity and an unshaken constancy. When he was once very much molested by the improbity of some violent men, which was both pernicious and dangerous to him, he undertook a journey into Asia, which contributed greatly to his advantage; for a Divine power afforded him this occasion of departure. As he was not unskilful in the more ancient rites of the place, he taught them more accurately in those things pertaining to the Gods, which they happened to have neglected through the long interim of time.

He much promoted and increased literary studies, demanding of the princes rewards for the preceptors according to their deserts. And he compelled the preceptors to be diligent

in their profession, interrogating and discoursing with them in every particular. And if he ever found anyone negligent in his profession he sharply reprov'd him, so that he appeared very vehement and ambitious, because he was both willing and able to give a just determination on every subject: and he was indeed a lover of glory; but this was not a fault in him, because it alone regarded virtue and goodness: and perhaps without an energy of this kind nothing great and excellent would ever subsist in the human mind. But he was in this respect vehement: this I will not deny. Yet at the same time he was gentle; for he was easily pleas'd, and showed in a moment that his anger was as pliable as wax; for almost at the same moment he was transported with reprehension, and yet fill'd with the desire of becoming subservient to their interests, that he might intercede with princes in their names; being moved with a certain conjunction and sympathy of soul.

And here I very opportunely recall a peculiar example of his natural sympathy of soul with others; nor do I think the like was ever related of any other man; for notwithstanding he was unmarried, yet his care of all his familiars and friends and of their wives and children was as great as if he had been some common father, for he bestow'd a singular attention on the life of each, and whenever any of them was afflicted with any disease, he first supplicated the Gods on their behalf; afterwards he gave a prompt attendance on the sick person himself, conven'd the physicians, and thus deliver'd many from imminent dangers. And the greatness of this blessed man's humanity to his servants may be understood, by those who desire it, from his will. But of all his familiars he lov'd Archiadas and his kindred the most, because in the first place their succession was deriv'd from the genus of Plutarch the philosopher, and afterwards on account of that Pythagoric friendship which he maintain'd with Archiadas who was his pupil and companion, and which appears to have been most firm and excellent: for Archiadas desired nothing which was not also the wish of Proclus.

But now, having brought to an end the political virtues which are inferior to the true ones, and terminating them in friendship as their proper bound, we shall now pass to the cathartic, which purify the soul, so that being liberat'd from the body as much as they are able to effect, it may become a spectator of human

concerns and possess a certain similitude with Divinity, which is the soul's best and most exalted end.

The virtues do not all liberate after the same manner, but some more and others less, since there are certain political purgations which adorn their possessors, even while connected with body, and reduce them to a better condition, bringing under the dominion of reason, anger, and desire, and entirely destroying passion and every false opinion: but the cathartic virtues which are superior to these, separate entirely from this truly leaden weight of body, and procure an easy flight from mundane concerns. And in these our philosopher was studiously employed during the whole of his life which was devoted to philosophy; since he both taught by his discourses what they were and after what manner they were conducive to felicity, and in a particular manner conformed his life to their institutions, performing everything which could contribute to the separation of his soul, using prayers both by night and day, lustrations, and other purifications.

But he used meat and drink and other requisite pleasures only so far as was necessary to health, for he was most frugal. He celebrated the more illustrious feasts of almost all nations, not taking occasion to be idle or intemperate, but employing himself in continual prayers, hymns, and the like; for this sentiment was very familiar to this most religious man, that it was proper for a philosopher to be careful not only in the observance of the rites and institutions of his own city, nor of certain nations only, but that he should be the general priest of the universe. And thus he was pure and holy, so far as pertains to the virtue of temperance.

The fortitude of his soul in respect of pain was sufficiently evinced in his last illness; for when he was oppressed and tormented by excruciating pains, he often commanded us to repeat certain hymns, and what is more wonderful, he remembered what he heard of these, though forgetful of almost all human concerns, from the increase of the dissolution of his corporeal part; for when we began to repeat, he supplied what was unfinished of the hymns, together with many of the Orphic verses which we were then reciting. Nor was he only constant in enduring corporeal evils, but much more so in external unfortunate events, for he would say, "so it is, such things are usual," which

seemed to me an evidence of his magnanimity. Besides this, he restrained anger as much as possible, so that it might remain free from all excitation, or that at least reason might not consent to its indulgence. And thus the soul of this blessed man, having collected itself from all parts, and retiring into the depths of its essence, departed, after a manner, from body, while yet it appeared to be contained in its dark receptacle: for he possessed a prudence not like that of a civil nature which is concerned with particulars, but prudence itself, by itself sincere, which is engaged in contemplating and converting itself to itself. He likewise possessed a temperance free from evil, and which is not even moderately influenced by perturbations, and lastly, he acquired a fortitude which does not fear a departure from body. But reason and intellect having obtained in him a perfect dominion, and the inferior powers of his soul no longer opposing themselves to purifying justice, his whole life was adorned with the divine irradiations of genuine virtue.

Our philosopher, advancing now, as it were, by the highest and most mysterious step, ascended to the greatest and most consummate or telestic virtues through the felicity of his nature and the possession of true knowledge. Hence being now purified, and the victor of his nativity, he happily penetrated into the profound recesses of Wisdom, and enjoyed the contemplation of the truly blessed spectacles She contains: no longer requiring prolix dissertations or demonstrations for the purpose of collecting the science of these, but with a simple vision and energy of intellect, beholding the exemplar of the Divine Mind, he obtained a virtue which cannot with sufficient propriety be called prudence, but is more properly named wisdom, or if possible, something still more venerable and divine.

The philosopher, energizing according to this virtue, easily comprehended all the theology of the Greeks and Barbarians, and whatever is shadowed over by the figments of fables, and placed it in a clear light, for the use of those who are willing and able to pursue its latent signification. Having interpreted divinely everything of this kind, and showing the symphony between them all, and at the same time investigating all the writings of the ancients, he made judicious use of all that was genuinely wise in them, and that was approved by common consent, rejecting anything which was of a dissonant nature as vicious

and false. Whenever he met with anything contrary to wisdom, even though apparently similar in its nature, this he vigorously refuted by a diligent examination. Nor did he employ less force and perspicuity in his association with other men, for he was a man laborious to a miracle, and often in one day gave five, and sometimes more lectures, and wrote besides many verses, often to the number of seven hundred; besides this, he often frequented the society of other philosophers and spent the evening in their company, ceasing from the labour of writing. And all these employments he followed in such manner as not to neglect his nightly and vigilant piety to the Gods, and he also supplicated Them at sunrise, midday, and sunset.

He was the parent of many teachings previously unknown, which the reader of his works will meet in great variety, both in physics and in more intellectual and divine fields. To those who heard him interpreting and delivering the Platonic and Socratic teachings in his yearly schools he seemed full of divine inspiration, for from his wise mouth came words like whitest and most thickly falling snow, and his eyes shone with a bright radiance, and the rest of his countenance was resplendent with divine light.

Having now discoursed concerning the contemplative wisdom of the philosopher, though in a manner but little suited to its dignity, it remains that we now speak of the justice pertaining to this kind of virtues. This, unlike that of which we spoke before, is not found in distribution or proportion, and is equally far from the self-energizing justice by which all things are directed only to the rational soul. In the justice of which we now speak every energy is referred to Intellect and the Deity, and this our philosopher showed in the most exalted manner. He scarcely rested from his daily labours, or refreshed his body with sleep, and perhaps even then was not free from meditation and contemplation. This is certain, that having very speedily roused himself from sleep, as from a certain torpor of the soul, he greeted the morning, the time of prayer, and lest the greater part of the night should glide from him without advantage, as he was lying alone in his bed he either composed hymns, or examined and fortified those teachings which afterwards in the daytime he committed to writing.

After a similar manner he pursued that temperance which

has affinity with these virtues, and which consists in a conversion of the soul to Intellect, so as not to suffer itself to be touched or moved by any other concerns. Lastly, he joined fortitude in alliance with these, zealously aspiring, by a certain perfect method, after that liberty which is ignorant of all passion, and which he perceived was natural to the Divine object of his contemplation. And thus, through the whole of his conduct he did not lead the life of a man merely good, to which, as Plotinus says, the political virtues may lead, but leaving this far behind him, he endeavoured to change it for one far more perfect and divine—the life of the Gods Themselves; since to become similar to These, and not to virtuous men, was the great object of his endeavours.

He had rendered virtues of this kind familiar to himself while he frequented the philosopher Syrianus, and studied and unfolded the commentaries of the ancients; but he received from the mouth of his teacher certain small seeds, as it were, of the Orphic and Chaldean theology, although he was prevented from hearing the complete teaching of his master on the Orphic verse. However, he applied himself with the greatest diligence to the written commentaries of Syrianus upon Orpheus, and being nourished with the copious interpretations of Porphyry and Iamblichus of the Oracles and similar writings of the Chaldeans, he arrived, as much as possible to man at the top of those highest virtues which the divine Iamblichus was accustomed to call theurgic. He laboured with exquisite judgment in collecting the expositions of philosophers prior to his time and unified other Chaldaic teachings and the most excellent of the commentaries on the Divine Oracles, completing this great work in the space of five years: concerning which this divine vision appeared to him in his sleep, for he saw the great Plutarch approach to him, affirming that he should live so many years as he had composed tetrads on the Oracles. Having counted these, he found they amounted to seventy: but that this was a divine dream was evinced by the last part of his life; for though he lived to seventy-five years, he had not the perfect use of his powers in the five last, and his body began to languish exactly at his seventieth year. Even in this period he composed orations and hymns, and wrote some things and conversed with his friends, but his earlier vigour was wanting in each.

Since, as we have said, his incredible study of these concerns procured him a greater and more perfect degree of theurgic virtue, hence he no longer remained in the contemplative order, but was careful to obtain another kind of virtues more excellent than these, for he used the Chaldean assemblies and conferences and their divine and ineffable concealments. And having comprehended these, he learned the manner of expressing them from Asclepigenia, the daughter of Plutarch, who alone at that time preserved the knowledge of the whole theurgic discipline handed down to her by her father.

Having, therefore, shown the theurgic virtues of Proclus, and that he did not less excel in every kind of virtue, and that he was such a man as mortals have not beheld for a long period of time, it remains that we now bring our discourse to a conclusion, since having begun from the felicity of the philosopher and proceeded in its exemplification, our discourse now returns to it again. For we have explained the great goods and providential exertions which were granted to this most excellent man from the Gods, and the help and solicitude which the Gods extended towards him. We have enumerated such things as cannot be reckoned among outward allurements, but entirely depended on his will, such as the upright and illustrious deeds of his soul according to universal virtue, and thus we have shown that his soul arrived in reality at the summit of the most consummate virtue, and was happily established in a perfect life by human and divine goods of every kind.

SEED THOUGHT

Servant of God, well done; well hast thou fought
 The better fight, who single hast maintained
 Against revolted multitudes, the cause
 Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms;
 And for the testimony of truth hast borne
 Universal reproach, far worse to bear
 Than violence: for this was all thy care
 To stand approved of God.

JOHN MILTON.

THE ELEMENTS OF THEOLOGY

PROCLUS

INTRODUCTION*

The Elements of Theology of Proclus is one of the greatest and most profound examples of systematic metaphysics. It is a masterpiece of pure dialectic reasoning, a model of precise, consecutive thought, and an epitome of the basic principles underlying all sound philosophic thought and mysticism.

Thomas Taylor, the great English Platonist, says of it:

“This admirable work contains two hundred and eleven propositions, disposed in a scientific manner, and supported by the firmest demonstrations. They begin from Super-essential Unity, and proceed gradually through all the beautiful and wonderful progressions of Divine Causes, ending in the self-motive energies of soul. They possess all the accuracy of Euclid, and all the subtlety and sublimity necessary to a knowledge of the most profound theology, and may be considered as bearing the same relation to the Pythagoric and Platonic Wisdom, as Euclid’s *Elements* to the most abstruse geometry.”

In its form *The Elements* is abstract, condensed, and metaphysical. It is directly addressed to that higher aspect of the mind which is concerned with essential realities.

Although this work deals primarily with the demonstration of truth, it has more than a philosophical value, for truth is essentially inseparable from goodness and beauty, and may be applied in both actual and ideal life, since it supplies the guiding principles necessary for the intelligent exercise of human activities, without which they can be neither effective nor beneficial.

Since *The Elements of Theology* is concerned with truly universal principles, which can only be comprehended by pure intellect, it is obvious that no amount of ordinary study will suffice for a full realization of its intrinsic value. This is possible only as a result of the intense and persistent exercise of dialectic reason through which the higher powers of the mind are unfolded, and the consciousness is elevated above non-essential particulars to the realms of the real.

* By the Editors of the “Shrine of Wisdom.”

The Elements of Theology has had a marked influence upon many of the most eminent philosophers and mystics of the West as well as of the Near East, and has been used as a basis for their own teachings. The *Liber de Causis*, which was thought to be the work of Aristotle but later recognized as a translation of an Arabian work compiled almost textually from *The Elements*, was one of the most famous and widely circulated books of the Middle Ages and was the source of many of the conceptions of mediaeval thinkers, both Christian and Arabian. Undoubtedly it was the study of Proclus that inspired Dionysius "the Areopagite," whose writings have influenced the whole of Christian thought and mysticism.

About forty different manuscripts of *The Elements* are known, many of which are incomplete and in some degree corrupt. The earliest is believed to date back to the time of Proclus himself. Many of the fifteenth and sixteenth century copies are extant, including three which belonged to Cardinal Bessarion; another copy was made by Marsilio Ficino, and one was in the possession of Pico della Mirandola.

There are several Latin versions of *The Elements*; the first being by William of Morbecca, a friend of Aquinas, in 1268.

The first printed Latin translation was that of Patrizzi in 1583, and the first printed edition of the Greek text was published in 1618.

The first English translation was that of Thomas Taylor, published with *Proclus on Euclid* in 1792, and a later edition with revisions was printed in 1816.

The American Platonist T. M. Johnson translated and published *The Elements* in 1909. In his introduction to the work he acknowledges his debt to Thomas Taylor's translation, and to his many valuable notes, most of which are included in this edition.

There are two recent English translations, one by Ionides in 1917 and the other by E. R. Dodds in 1933. The latter is based on several of the recently available manuscripts and includes a revised form of the Greek text with extensive comments in which the philological side of the subject is developed in a scholarly manner.

The Shrine of Wisdom edition is dedicated to Thomas Taylor—the centenary of whose death occurs on November 1st of this year—in recognition of the great work he performed in the cause

of Truth. It is a reprint of his second translation with a few modifications, but virtually it remains unchanged.

The special value of Thomas Taylor's translation is in its preservation and expression of the true spirit of the teachings of Proclus. The fact that Thomas Taylor was a true Platonist and a proficient dialectician placed him in a position to understand the principles and stages of reasoning in *The Elements* so that he could detect and correct errors which had crept into the text, and add what was necessary to fill in any omissions. He made about a hundred corrections and additions in this particular work, and included a number of interpretative comments which give his translation a unique character.

In *The Elements*, as in all his other translations, his primary object was to re-express as faithfully as possible the essential ideas of the text: other objects he regarded as of quite secondary importance. There is a frequent repetition of terms and phrases which may sometimes appear unnecessary, but this is in keeping with the dialectic method used in the development of the subject.

Although his style and terminology may at first seem difficult and unusual they have a charm of their own, for he had the gift of imparting that subtle spirit of certitude which calls forth an inner response, and brings a deep satisfaction which stimulates a real love of Divine Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

The publication of this edition of *The Elements of Theology* makes available to the general seeker of truth a systematic and synthetic treatise in which everything but the essentials is reduced to the minimum.

Concerning the difficulties of the translation Thomas Taylor says: "The Greek text is very frequently defective in parts essential to the meaning and consequently of necessity to the perfection of the whole. . . . I have never translated anything which required so much intense thought and severe labour in its execution. This indeed must necessarily be the case, if the abstruseness of the subject, the difficulty of finding proper terms, and the defects of the original are properly considered."

Commenting upon the scholarship of Thomas Taylor, T. M. Johnson writes: "The fact that such Continental scholars as Creuzer, Buissonade, Cousin, and others of almost equal standing, endorsed Mr. Taylor's renderings of the classical writers, and adopted many of his emendations of the Greek text, is a note-

worthy proof that his scholarship was of a character that commanded the respect and tribute of all who were capable of appreciating it."

Thomas Taylor devoted his whole life to the work of translating and interpreting the writings of the Pythagorean, Platonic, and Neoplatonic philosophers. He was the first to publish complete English translations of Plato and Aristotle. He also translated many of the writings of Proclus which constitute an enduring contribution to Philosophic Mysticism. The value of his work is heightened by the illuminative comments with which it is enriched: these in many cases exceed in length the actual text.

The times in which he lived were characterized by narrowness of intellectual outlook and religious bigotry, and there was little response to his devoted labours. He worked almost alone, amidst much opposition, and without appreciation save by a few. During most of his life he suffered from ill health, and the material remuneration he received for his labours was very inadequate; but he possessed true faith in Divine Providence and a foresight that mankind would eventually benefit from his unremitting toil.

There has probably not been anyone in modern times who possessed a greater comprehension of the essential teachings of the Platonic and Neoplatonic wisdom or who has been more intensely imbued with its spirit than Thomas Taylor. Thus he was eminently qualified for the transmission of that wisdom.

He dedicated his work "To the Sacred Majesty of Truth."

Concerning the spirit which actuated the great philosophers and the value of their teachings, he says: "The object of the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy was to make its possessors wise and virtuous and to elevate them above the common frailties of degraded humanity, and this end was happily accomplished in its votaries, as their lives abundantly evince." And of the object of his own work he writes: "I had no other view than to benefit those who are capable of being benefited by such sublime speculations."

Thomas Taylor, like Plato and all true Platonists, never loses sight of the Supreme One and thus the earnest student of his writings is always led Godwards.

THE ELEMENTS OF THEOLOGY

PROCLUS*

ON THE ONE

PROPOSITION I

All multitude participates in a certain respect of The One

For if it in no respects participates of *The One*, neither will the whole be one, nor each of the many of which the multitude consists, but there will also be a certain multitude arising from each of these, and this will be the case to infinity. Each of these infinities, likewise, will again be infinite multitude. For participating in no respect of any one, neither according to the whole of itself, nor according to each of the many which it contains, it will be in every respect and according to the whole infinite. Each of the many, whichever you may assume, will either be one, or not one, and if not one, will either be many or nothing. But if each is nothing, the whole which consists of these will be nothing: if each is many, each will consist of infinities infinitely (and this not in capacity, but in energy). These things, however, are impossible. For neither does any being consist of infinities infinitely assumed; since there is nothing more than the infinite; but that which consists of all is more than each: nor is it possible for any thing to be composed from nothing. All multitude, therefore, participates in a certain respect of *The One*.

PROPOSITION II

Every thing which participates of The One is both one and not one

For if it is not *The One* Itself (since it participates of *The One*), being something other than *The One*, it suffers, or is passive to It according to participation, and sustains to become one. If, therefore, it is nothing besides *The One*, it is one alone, and does not participate of *The One*, but will be *The One Itself*. But if it is something besides *The One*, which is not *The One*, but its parti-

* Translated by Thomas Taylor.

participant, it is both *not one*, and *one*, not indeed such a one as *The One Itself*, but *one being*, as participating of *The One*. This, therefore, is not simply one, nor is it that which *The One* is. But it is one, and at the same time a participant of *The One*. Hence, being of itself not one, it is both one and not one, being something besides *The One*. And so far indeed as it abounds, it is not one, but so far as it is passive (to *The One*) it is one. Every thing, therefore, which participates of *The One*, is both one and not one.

PROPOSITION III

Every thing which becomes one, becomes so through the participation of The One, and is one, so far as it suffers the participation of The One

For if things which are not one become one, they doubtless become so by a conjunction and communication with each other, and they sustain the presence of *The One*, not being that which *The One Itself* is. Hence, they participate of *The One* so far as they suffer to become one. For, if they are already one they will not become one; since that which is does not become that which it is already. But if they become one from not one, that is from the privation of *The One*, since a certain one is ingenerated in them, *The One Itself* is prior to them. (And this ingenerated one must be derived from *The One Itself*.) Every thing, therefore, which becomes one, becomes so through the participation of *The One*, and is one, so far as it suffers the participation of *The One*.

PROPOSITION IV

Every thing which is united is different from The One Itself

For if it is united, it will participate in a certain respect of *The One*, so far as it is said to be united. That, however, which participates of *The One*, is both one and not one. But *The One Itself* is not both one and not one. For if this were the case, again the one which is in It would have both these, and this would take place to infinity, there being no *One Itself* at which it is possible to stop; but every thing being one and not one, there will be something united which is different from *The One*. For if *The One* is the same with the united, it will be infinite

multitude. And in a similar manner each of the things of which the united consists will be infinite multitude. Every thing, therefore, which is united is different from *The One Itself*.

PROPOSITION V

All multitude is posterior to The One

For if multitude is prior to *The One*, *The One* indeed will participate of multitude, but multitude which is prior to *The One* will not participate of *The One*, since that multitude existed prior to the subsistence of *The One*. For it will not participate of that which is not; because that which participates of *The One*, is one and at the same time not one; but *The One* will not yet subsist, that which is first being multitude. It is, however, impossible that there should be a certain multitude, which in no respect whatever participates of *The One*. Multitude, therefore, is not prior to *The One*.

But if multitude subsists simultaneously with *The One*, and they are naturally co-ordinate with each other—for nothing temporal will prevent them being so—neither will *The One* of itself be many, nor will multitude be one, as being at one and the same time oppositely divided by nature, if neither is prior or posterior to the other. Hence, multitude of itself will not be one, and each of the things that are in it will not be one, and this will be the case to infinity, which is impossible. Multitude, therefore, according to its own nature, participates of *The One*, and it will not be possible to assume any thing of it which is not one. For not being one, it will be an infinite consisting of infinites; as has been demonstrated. Hence, it entirely participates of *The One*. If, therefore, *The One* which is of Itself one, in no respect participates of multitude, multitude will be entirely posterior to *The One*; participating indeed of *The One*, but not being participated by *The One*.

But if *The One* participates of multitude, subsisting indeed as one according to hyparxis, but as not one, according to participation, *The One* will be multiplied, just as multitude is united on account of *The One*. *The One*, therefore, will communicate with multitude, and multitude with *The One*. But things which coalesce, and communicate in a certain respect with each other, if indeed they are collected together by something else, that

something else is prior to them. But if they themselves collect themselves, they are not opposed to each other. For opposites do not hasten to each other. Hence, if *The One* and multitude are oppositely divided, and multitude so far as multitude is not one, and *The One* so far as one is not multitude, neither will one of these subsisting in the other be one and at the same time two. If, also, there is something prior to them which collects them, this will either be one or not one. But if it is not one, it will either be many or nothing. It will not, however, be many, lest multitude should be prior to *The One*, nor yet will it be nothing. For how can nothing congregate? It is, therefore, one alone. For this which is the one cannot be many, lest there should be a progression to infinity. It is, therefore, *The One Itself*, and all multitude is from *The One Itself*.

CONCERNING UNITY

PROPOSITION VI

Every multitude consists either of things united or of unities

For that each of things many will not be itself multitude alone, and again that each part of this will not be multitude alone is evident. But if it is not multitude alone, it consists either of things united, or of unities. And if, indeed, it participates of *The One* it is united; but if it consists of things of which that which is primarily united consists, it will be unities. For if there is *The One Itself*, there is also that which primarily participates of It, and which is primarily united. But this consists of unities. For if it consists of things united, again things united consist of certain things, and this will be the case to infinity. It is necessary, however, that what is primarily united should consist of unities. And thus we have discovered what we proposed at first (namely, that every multitude consists either of things united, or of unities).

(To be continued)

HERMES

OR A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY CONCERNING
UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR

BY JAMES HARRIS

(BOOK III*)

Chapter III.—Upon the Form, or peculiar character of language.

When to any articulate voice there accedes by compact a meaning or signification, such voice by such accession is then called a word; and many words, possessing their significations (as it were) under the same compact† unite in constituting a particular language.

It appears from hence, that a word may be defined a voice articulate, and significant by compact, and that language may be defined a system of such voices, so significant.

* For the previous section see *Shrine of Wisdom*, Vol. XVI, No. 64, p. 102.

† The following quotation from Ammonius is remarkable:—In the same manner therefore, as local motion is from nature, but dancing is something positive; and as timber exists in nature, but a door is something positive; so is the power of producing a vocal sound founded in nature, but that of explaining ourselves by nouns or verbs, something positive. And hence it is that as to the simple power of producing vocal sounds (which is as it were the organ or instrument to the soul's faculties of knowledge or volition) as to this vocal power I say, man seems to possess it from nature, in like manner as irrational animals; but as to the employing of nouns, or verbs, or sentences composed out of them, in the explanation of our sentiments (the things thus employed being founded not in nature, but in position) this he seems to possess by way of peculiar eminence, because he alone of all mortal beings partakes of a soul, which can move itself, and operate artificially; so that even in the subject of sound his artificial power shows itself, as the various elegant compositions both in metre, and without metre, abundantly prove. *Ammon. de Interpr.*

It is from notions like these concerning language and words, that one may be tempted to call language a kind of picture of the universe, where the words are as the figures or images of all particulars.

Yet it may be doubted, how far this is true. For if pictures and images are all of them imitations, it will follow that whoever has natural faculties to know the originals, will by the help of the same faculties know also the imitations. But it by no means follows, that he who knows any being, should know for that reason its Greek or Latin name.

The truth is, that every medium, through which we exhibit any thing to another's contemplation, is either derived from natural attributes, and then it is an imitation; or else from accidents quite arbitrary, and then it is a symbol.

Now, if it be allowed that in far the greater part of things, not any of their natural attributes are to be found in articulate voices, and yet through such voices are things of every kind exhibited, it will follow that words must of necessity be symbols, because it appears that they cannot be imitations.

Here, however, occurs a question, which deserves attention: "Why in the common intercourse of men with men have imitations been neglected, and symbols preferred, although symbols are only known by habit or institution, while imitations are recognized by a kind of natural instinct?" To this it may be answered, that if the sentiments of the mind, like the features of the face, were immediately visible to every beholder, the art of speech or discourse would have been perfectly superfluous, but now, while our minds lie enveloped and hid, and the body (like a veil) conceals every thing but itself, we are necessarily compelled, when we communicate our thoughts, to pass them to each other through a medium which is corporeal. Hence it is that all signs, marks, imitations, and symbols must needs be sensible, and addressed as such to the senses. Now the senses, we know, never exceed their natural limits; the eye perceives no sounds; the ear perceives no figures nor colours. If therefore we were to converse, not by symbols but by imitations, as far as things are characterized by figure and colour, our imitation would be necessarily through figure and colour also. Again, as far as they are characterized by sounds, it would for the same reason be through the medium of sounds. The like may be said of all the other senses, the imita-

tions still shifting along with the objects imitated. We see then how complicated such imitation would prove.

If we set language therefore, as a symbol, in opposition to such imitation; if we consider the simplicity of the one, and the multiplicity of the other; if we consider the ease and speed with which words are formed (an ease which knows no trouble or fatigue; and a speed, which equals the progress of our very thoughts), if we oppose to this the difficulty and length of imitations; if we remember that some objects are capable of no imitations at all, but that all objects universally may be typified by symbols; we may plainly perceive an answer to the question here proposed, "Why, in the common intercourse of men with men, imitations have been rejected, and symbols preferred."

Hence too we may perceive a reason why there never was a language, nor indeed can possibly be framed one, to express the properties and real essences of things, as a mirror exhibits their figures and their colours; for if language of itself implies nothing more than certain species of sounds with certain motions concomitant; if to some beings sound and motion are no attributes at all; if to many others, where attributes, they are no way essential (such as the murmurs and wavings of a tree during a storm) if this be true—it is impossible the nature of such beings should be expressed, or the least essential property be any way imitated, while between the medium and themselves there is nothing connatural.

It is true, indeed, when primitives were once established, it was easy to follow the connection and subordination of nature, in the just deduction of derivatives and compounds. Thus the sounds, water, and fire, being once annexed to those two elements, it was certainly more natural to call beings participating of the first, watery, of the last fiery, than to commute the terms, and call them by the reverse; but why, and from what natural connections the primitives themselves might not be commuted, it will be found, I believe, difficult to assign a reason, as well in the instances before us, as in most others. We may here also see the reason, why all language is founded in compact, and not in nature; for so are all symbols, of which words are a certain species.

The question remains if words are symbols, then symbols of what? If it be answered, of things, the question returns, of what things? If it be answered, of the several individuals of sense, the

various particular beings, which exist around us, to this, it is replied, may be raised certain doubts. In the first place every word will be in fact a proper name. Now if all words are proper names, how came lexicographers whose express business is to explain words, either wholly to omit proper names, or at least to explain them, not from their own art, but from history?

Again, if all words are proper names, then in strictness no word can belong to more than one individual; but if so, then as individuals are endless, to make a perfect language, words must be endless also; but if endless, then incomprehensible, and never to be attained by the wisest men; whose labours in language upon this hypothesis would be as idle as that study of endless written symbols, which missionaries (if they are to be credited) attribute to the Chinese.

Again, if all words are proper names, or (which is the same) the symbols of individuals; it will follow, as individuals are not only endless, but ever passing, that the language of those who lived ages ago, will be as unknown now, as the very voices of the speakers. Nay, the language of every province, of every town, of every cottage, must be everywhere different, and everywhere changing, since such is the nature of individuals, which it follows.

Again, if all words are proper names, the symbols of individuals, it will follow that in language there can be no general proposition, because upon this hypothesis all terms are particular; nor any affirmative proposition, because no one individual in nature is another. It remains, there can be no propositions, but particular negatives; but if so, then is language incapable of communicating general affirmative truths. If so, then of communicating demonstration. If so, then of communicating sciences, which are so many systems of demonstrations. If so, then of communicating arts, which are the theorems of science applied practically. If so, we shall be little the better for it either in speculation or practice.* And so much for this hypothesis; let us now try another.

If words are not the symbols of external particulars, it follows of course, they must be the symbols of our ideas: for this is

* The whole of Euclid (whose Elements may be called the basis of Mathematical Science) is founded upon *general terms*, and *general propositions*, most of which are *affirmative*.

evident, if they are not symbols of things without, they can only be symbols of something within.

Here then the question recurs, if symbols of ideas, then of what ideas? Of sensible ideas. Be it so, and what follows? Every thing, in fact, which has followed already from the supposition of their being the symbols of external particulars; and that from this plain and obvious reason, because the several ideas, which particulars imprint, must needs be as endless and mutable, as they are themselves.

If then words are neither the symbols of external particulars, nor yet of particular ideas, they can be symbols of nothing else, except of general ideas, because nothing else except these remains. And what do we mean by general ideas? We mean such as are common to many individuals; not only to individuals which exist now, but which existed in ages past, and will exist in ages future; such, for example, as the ideas belonging to the words, man, lion, cedar. Admit it, and what follows? It follows, that if words are the symbols of such general ideas, lexicographers may find employ, though they meddle not with proper names.

It follows that one word may be, not homonymously, but truly and essentially common to many particulars, past, present and future; so that however these particulars may be endless and ever fleeting, yet language notwithstanding may be definite and steady, but if so, then attainable even by ordinary capacities, without danger of incurring the Chinese absurdity.

Again, it follows that the language of those who lived ages ago, as far as it stands for the same general ideas, may be as intelligible now, as it was then. The like may be said of the same language being accommodated to distant regions, and even to distant nations, amidst all the variety of ever new and ever changing objects.

Again, it follows that language may be expressive of general truths; and if so, then of demonstration, and sciences, and arts; and if so, become subservient to purposes of every kind.

Now if it be true "that none of these things could be asserted of language, were not words the symbols of general ideas—and it be further true, that these things may be all undeniably asserted of language"—it will follow (and that necessarily) that words are the symbols of general ideas.

Yet perhaps even here may be an objection. It may be urged, if

words are the symbols of general ideas, language may answer well enough the purpose of philosophers, who reason about general and abstract subjects, but what becomes of the business of ordinary life? Life we know is merged in a multitude of particulars, where an explanation by language is as requisite as in the highest theorems. The vulgar indeed want it to no other end. How then can this end in any respect be answered, if language be expressive of nothing further than general ideas?

To this it may be answered, that arts surely respect the business of ordinary life; yet so far are general terms from being an obstacle here, that without them no art can be rationally explained. How for instance should the measuring artist ascertain to the reapers the price of their labours, had not he first through general terms learnt those general theorems, that respect the doctrine and practice of mensuration?

Suppose, however, this not to satisfy a persevering objector; suppose him to insist, that, admitting this to be true, there were still a multitude of occasions for minute particularizing, of which it was not possible for mere generals to be susceptible; suppose, I say, such an objection, what should we answer? That the objection was just; that it was necessary to the perfection and completion of language, that it should be expressive of particulars, as well as generals. We must however add, that its general terms are by far its most excellent and essential part, since from these it derives "that comprehensive universality, that just proportion of precision and permanence, without which it could not possibly either be learnt, or understood, or applied to the purposes of reasoning and science"; that particular terms have their utility and end, and that therefore care too has been taken for a supply of these.

One method of expressing particulars, is that of proper names. This is the least artificial, because proper names being in every district arbitrarily applied, may be unknown to those who know the language perfectly well, and can hardly therefore with propriety be considered as parts of it. The other and more artificial method is that of definitives or articles, whether we assume the pronominal, or those more strictly so called; and here we cannot enough admire the exquisite art of language, which, without wandering into endlessness, contrives how to denote things endless; that is to say in other words, which, by the small tribe

of definitives properly applied to general terms, know how to employ these last, though in number determinable, to the accurate expression of endless particulars.

To explain what has been said by a single example. Let the general term be man. I have occasion to apply this term to the denoting of some particular. Let it be required to express this particular, as unknown; I say, a man—known; I say, the man—indefinite; any man—definite; a certain man—present and near; this man—present and distant; that man—like to some other; such a man—an endless multitude; many men—a definite multitude; a thousand men—the ones of a multitude taken throughout; every man—the same ones, taken with distinction; each man—taken in order; first man, second man, etc.—the whole multitude of particulars taken collectively; all men—the negation of this multitude; no man. But of this we have spoken already, when we inquired concerning definitives.

The sum of all this is, that words are the symbols of ideas both general and particular; yet of the general primarily, essentially, and immediately; of the particular, only secondarily, accidentally and mediately.

Should it be asked, “why has language this double capacity?” May we not ask, by way of return: Is it not a kind of reciprocal commerce, or intercourse of our ideas? Should it not therefore be framed, so as to express the whole of our perception? Now can we call that perception entire and whole, which implies either intellection without sensation, or sensation without intellection? If not, how should language explain the whole of our perception, had it not words to express the objects, proper to each of the two faculties?

To conclude. As in the preceding chapter we considered language with a view to its Matter, so here we have considered it with a view to its Form. Its Matter is recognized when it is considered as a voice; its Form, as it is significant of our several ideas; so that upon the whole it may be defined: A system of articulate voices, the symbols of our ideas, but of those principally, which are general or universal.

(To be continued)