

# THE SHRINE *of* WISDOM

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## PERPETUAL FESTIVAL CALENDAR

### INTRODUCTION

In the revision of this Calendar the aim has been to make it more representative of the most important festivals and commemorations of Religion, Philosophy, and Mysticism.

It should be noted that this is a calendar of *fixed* festivals. Since many festivals have a lunar basis, and thus vary from year to year, they cannot be included in a calendar of this nature, but the mystical events celebrated by the most noteworthy of them are given as suggested commemorations.

Many commemorations of a legendary nature are included, also others the exact dates of which are unknown. Proximate or suggested dates are assigned to the majority of these, the former being indicated by the abbreviation (c.) and the latter by (s.d.).

A calendar is an orderly arrangement of the divisions of time; a table or list indicating definite times at which events occur, or things or duties should be performed.

The word calendar is derived from "calends" (Latin), and is akin to "calare," to call or proclaim. It has the additional meanings of a guide, pattern, or example, and a chronicle of the days of festivals and commemorations.

Calendars have been used by man from ancient times. Since he is a rational being man necessarily seeks to introduce order into his life; to divide and classify its principal events into an intelligible system; to record the recurring natural phenomena and seasonal changes, and to fix the most appropriate and favourable times for performing necessary work, as well as for religious and other observances.

Thus the calendars of different races and religions represent fundamental elements in the external and internal life of mankind, and, since they determine many of the factors associated with the activities of most of man's faculties and powers, they have an important influence upon his life and progress.

A certain correspondence is to be found between the development of a people and the kind of calendars which they use: natural elements generally predominate in the calendars of the least cultured races, while in those of the more highly cultured such elements are subordinated to others of a religious and mystical character.

The division and arrangement of the days in the yearly cycle adopted in the calendar of the occidental peoples are said to have been derived from the ancient calendar of Egypt, which was composed of twelve months of thirty days each, and five additional days to complete the year. This form appears to have been used from the remote past. After passing through various forms it was reconstructed by Pope Gregory XIII and published in 1582; hence the title "Gregorian" by which it is now distinguished.

There are various kinds of calendars, such as: Natural, Civil, Scientific and Philosophical, Religious and Mystical.

In the natural class are included calendars connected with agriculture, meteorology, and astronomy, and other subjects pertaining to natural existence and life.

The basic factors in the computation of time and the seasonal changes are the revolution of the earth around the sun, of the moon around the earth, and the rotation of the earth upon its axis.

All processes of natural life and growth are determined chiefly by solar and lunar forces.

Man's mundane life is inseparably related to nature, and, since his physical body is derived proximately from the cosmos and depends upon nature for the supply of its material needs, it is subject to natural laws; and the cyclic changes of the seasons influence it in numberless ways. Thus many natural factors continually enter into man's life.

Moreover, nature is "The Book of God" in which are perpetually revealed the Divine Goodness, Beauty, and Truth, so that man, through beholding, understanding, and conforming



with this revelation, may ascend from the natural to the spiritual world.

Natural elements, therefore, have a right and proper place in a festival calendar. But, unless regarded as symbols of the spiritual and Divine, they should be given a secondary place.

Civil calendars serve a very necessary and useful purpose in the ordering and harmonizing of the external relationships of human life and activities. They are used in connection with social and political life and the numerous conventional, recreational, and legal affairs which enter into it. They are the most arbitrary and variable in character, changing according to man's transient needs and desires, his temporary customs and circumstances, and the fluctuating policies which he adopts.

Scientific and philosophical calendars cover a wide range: a range co-extensive with the field of human thought. As a rational being man investigates whatever comes within the sphere of his cognizance; arranges and classifies the knowledge thus acquired; records the cyclic periods and recurring stages of natural and human activities; formulates theories regarding the laws and principles which underlie and give intelligibility to natural existences and phenomena, and seeks to understand and interpret his relationship to spiritual realities and noumena.

The most important calendars, however, are those connected with man's religious and mystical life and activities—worship, veneration, meditation, contemplation, and the performance of other duties—all of which are means whereby he enters into a realization of his own spiritual and essential nature and becomes united to the ideal and Divine.

It is significant that the names given to the days and months of the year in several calendars are titles of Deities or are associated with religious worship. In some instances even natural events and human activities connected with them have been given designations which invest them with spiritual meanings. For example, three of the months in an ancient Babylonian calendar were called: "The month of the ploughing of the field of God"; "The month of the ear-harvest of the field of God"; and "The month of the Divine Mediator."

Since the Divine is the Source and ultimate Goal of all things, all aspects of human and natural life are seen in their real and highest significance only when considered in their relationship



with Him. Through Divine Providence flows eternally the plenitude of all-sufficing good, in the reception of which everything is endowed with its own proper nature and enabled to fulfil its purpose in the Macrocosmic Order. Moreover, it is by participation in the Divine that man attains to integral perfection; that he experiences his highest bliss, and receives illumination and strength whereby to employ all his faculties and powers in the most useful and beneficial service.

Therefore worship of the Divine is both the primal duty of man and the chief means for the attainment of his greatest blessedness.

Since the most enlightened and holy ones of all times and races have, in the measure of their greatness, achieved perfective union, and since mankind owes to them the teachings concerning the Divine Wisdom, it is a fitting and joyous privilege to venerate them with gratitude and to celebrate at the appropriate times the great events in their lives.

Although these great ones may not now live in this mundane world it is reasonable to believe that their immortal souls are still engaged in the exalted work of humanity's upliftment. They are all in some degree lovers, teachers, and saviours of mankind: and the work which they performed, the truths which they taught, and the devotional, intellectual, and ordinative disciplines which they instituted represent the basic tradition of the whole human race, without which man would be in the dark ages.

One of the greatest benefits conferred by them upon humanity is the luminous examples of their lives which reveal the ideals towards the realization of which all fruitful activities must contribute. In the contemplation of these exemplary lives all may receive inspiration to follow in their footsteps.

Festivals and commemorations are universally kept as holidays or "holy days," and a spirit of rejoicing and "making whole" should accompany all festal celebrations, whether public or private.

The pure forms of religious festivals as originally instituted should be distinguished from any decadent forms into which some of them may have deteriorated.

The Festival Calendar provides a means whereby, through its regular and intelligent use, the consciousness may be



continually linked with the noblest of mankind and their exalted activities.

Thus the observance of festivals and commemorations will aid in the enrichment, ordination, and harmonization of religious, intellectual, and mystical life, and in ensuring to it a perpetual stimulus throughout the year as note after note is struck in harmonious communion with the heroic saints and sages, who exemplify that ideal manhood to the attainment of which every soul is called.

# ABBREVIATIONS

D=Divus (Masc.), Diva  
(Fem.)—a title for  
Saints and Worthy  
Ones of all races.—  
*e.g.*, D. PLATO.

(B) = Buddhist.  
(C) = Christian.  
(E) = Egyptian.  
(G) = Grecian.  
(H) = Hindu.  
(R) = Roman

b. = Born.  
*c.* = About.  
d. = Died.  
s.d. = Suggested  
date.

# OCTOBER

1. D. Marsilio Ficinus, Florentine Neoplatonist, d. 1499 (b. 13/10/1433 A.D.).  
D. Melchisedech (s.d. 2000 B.C.).  
To Sanctus Chamael, Archangel (C.), also to Fides (R.) (Faith).
2. D. Aristotle (G.), d. 322 (b. 384 B.C.).  
To all the Angels.
3. D. Dionysius the Areopagite (C.) (s.d. 5th cent. A.D.).
4. D. Francis of Assisi (C.), d. 1226 (b. 1182 A.D.).
5. Day of Departed Ancestors.
6. D. Cecrops (G.), established Ancient Religion in Greece, 1556 B.C.  
First King of Attica.  
D. Faith (C.), Martyr, d. 237 A.D.
7. Our Lady of Victories.
8. D. Confucius, d. 478 (b. 551 B.C.).
9. D. Denys (C.), Patron Saint of France, d. c. 272 A.D.
10. D. Plotinus, the Master of Religious and Philosophic Mysticism, d. 270 (b. 205 A.D.).
11. Cadmus, Founder of Thebes (s.d. 1493-1432 B.C.).
12. D. Henry More, Cambridge Platonist, b. 1614 (d. 1687 A.D.).
14. Akbar, Founder of Mogul Empire, b. 1542 (d. 15/10/1605 A.D.).
15. D. Theophilus of Alexandria (C.), d. 412 A.D.  
D. Nizami, Sufi Mystical Poet, d. 1203 (b. 1141 A.D.).
16. Demosthenes, Orator and Platonist, d. 322 (b. 382 B.C.).
17. Tibetan Festival of Departed Worthies, lasting until the 23rd.
18. D. Luke (C.), Apostle, d. c. 70-80 A.D.  
D. Pandrosos, Daughter of Cecrops and First Priestess of Minerva (c. 1500 B.C.).
20. Ammonius-Hermiae, Neoplatonist (c. 500 A.D.).
21. Hammurabi, Babylonian King and Lawgiver (c. 2100 B.C.).
22. D. Yen-Hwui, a favourite disciple of Confucius (c. 480 B.C.).  
To Sanctus Gabriel (C.), Archangel.
23. D. Boethius, Christian Platonist, d. 524 (b. 470 A.D.).  
Sun enters Scorpio.
24. To Mithras the Uplifter.  
To Sanctus Raphael (C.), the Archangel, the Healer.
25. D. Taliesin, Druidic Hierarch and Mystical Poet (5th cent. A.D.).
26. Maximus Tyrius, Neoplatonist, b. c. 150 A.D.
27. Empress Suiko (B.) (593-628 A.D.).
28. To Hathor (E.), Aspect of the World Mother.  
DD. Simon and Jude (C.), Apostles, d. c. 107-108 A.D.
29. Keats, Poet, b. 1795 A.D.
30. To Mars (R.), Ares (G.), the Divine Warrior.  
D. Vardhamāna (H.), Great Jain Saint and Sage (c. 600 B.C.).
31. Hallow-e'en, all Hallow's Eve, Vigil of All Saints.



# NOVEMBER

1. D. Thomas Taylor, the Great English Platonist, d. 1835 A.D.  
All Saints' Day, Festum Omnium Sanctorum.  
"Peace Fire" of the Druids, Samhain.
2. All Souls' Day, Commemorate Omnes Fideles Defunctos.
3. Pherecydes of Samos, Orphist, Teacher of Pythagoras (s.d. 600/540 B.C.).
5. D. Pletho (Gemisthus), "The Modern Plato" (c. 1355-1450 A.D.).
6. To the Alvars (H.), twelve Vaishnava Saints.
7. D. Plato, Traditional Festival of the Neoplatonists.
8. D. Erigena (Duns Scotus) (C.) (c. 815-877 A.D.).
9. D. Jāmī, Sūfī Mystical Poet, d. 1492 (b. 7/11/1414).
10. D. Hermias of Alexandria, Neoplatonist (5th cent. A.D.).
11. D. Chu Hsi, Chinese Philosopher (c. 1130-1200 A.D.).
12. D. Nigidius Figulus, first Neopythagorean (s.d. 45 B.C.).
13. The Loss of Osiris, and the Lamentations of Isis begin (E.).
14. Lamentations of Isis (2nd day).  
D. Albertus Magnus d. c. 1280 (b. 1193 A.D.).
15. D. Bodhidharma (B.), took the Eastern Succession to Japan and China  
(c. 6th cent. A.D.).  
D. Gertrude (C.), Mystic, "The Nun" (6th cent. A.D.).
16. Xenophanes, Founder of Eleatic School (c. 550-450 B.C.).  
D. Joseph Glanville, Cambridge Platonist, d. 1680 (b. 1636 A.D.).
17. D. Picus di Mirandola, Neoplatonist, d. 1494 (b. 24/2/1463 A.D.).  
D. Gertrude, the Great (C.), Mystic (c. 1256-1311 A.D.).
18. D. Jacob Boehme, Mystic, d. 1624 (b. 1575 A.D.).
19. D. Basilios Bessarion, Christo-Neoplatonist, d. 1472 (b. c. 1395 A.D.).
20. DD. Praetextatus and Paulina (R.), Models of Priests and Priestesses.
21. Solon, Athenian King and Lawgiver (c. 590 B.C.).
22. Sun enters Sagittarius.  
To Diana (R.), Artemis (G.), Goddess of Nature.  
D. Cecilia (C.), Mystic and Martyr, Patron Saint of Music and of the Blind, d. c. 176-180 A.D.
23. D. Xenocrates, Platonic Successor (c. 396-314 B.C.).
24. D. John of the Cross (C.), Spanish Mystic, d. 1591 (b. 1542 A.D.).
26. D. Paracelsus, Hermetist, b. 1493 (d. 24/9/1541 A.D.).
28. D. Shinram Shonin (B.), Founder of Judo-Shin School (c. 1173-1262 A.D.).
29. Hierocles of Nicomedia, Neopythagorean (3rd cent. A.D.).
30. D. Andrew (C.), Apostle, Patron Saint of Scotland. Disciple of John the Baptist.

## DECEMBER

1. To Poseidon (G.), Neptune (R.), Lord of Planetary Spheres and God of the Sea of Generation.
2. Jan van Ruysbroeck (C.), Dutch Mystic, d. 1381.
3. To Cybele (G.), Rhea (R.), Goddess of the Cosmic Storehouse of Life.  
To Bona Dea, the Good Goddess (R.).  
D. Francis Xavier (C.) (1506-1552 A.D.).
4. To Pallas Athene (G.), Minerva (R.), Goddess of Divine Wisdom.  
D. Clement of Alexandria, Christo-Neoplatonist (c. 150-215 A.D.).
5. Philolaus, Pythagorean (c. 480-370 B.C.).
6. Herodotus (G.), "Father of History" (c. 484-425 B.C.).
7. D. Ambrosius of Milan (C.), b. 340 (d. 4/9/397 A.D.).
8. Mahāyāna Festival of Buddha's Enlightenment and Nirvāna.  
Conception of B.V.M.
10. D. Porphyry, Neoplatonist, disciple of Plotinus (c. 233-304 A.D.).
11. Sa'adi, Persian Mystical Poet (1184-1291 A.D.).
12. D. Averrhoes, Arabian Neoplatonist (1126-1198 A.D.).
13. To Demeter (G.), Ceres (R.), Aspect of the World Mother.
14. De Valadi, French Neoplatonist, disciple of Thomas Taylor, d. 1793.
15. D. Abaris, Druidic Priest (s.d. 620-500 B.C.).
16. D. Tson-Khapa (B.), Greatest of Tibetan Mystics, Reorganizer of Eastern School of "Yellow Caps" (c. 1350-1420 A.D.).
17. Saturnalia (to 21st) in Memory of the World's Golden Age.
18. D. Al Ghazali, Arabian Neoplatonist, d. 1111 (b. 1058 A.D.).
19. D. Origen, Christo-Platonist (c. 185-254 A.D.).
20. D. Quelzalcoatl, Mexican Priest.
21. Winter Festival—The Solstice.  
Sun enters Capricornus.  
D. Molinos (C.), Spanish Mystic, b. 1640 (d. 1697).  
D. Thomas, the Apostle (C.).
22. Rāhula (B.), son and disciple of Buddha (c. 600 B.C.).
23. Plutarchus, Neoplatonist (c. 46-125 A.D.).
24. Christmas Eve: the Juvenalia, Young Folks' Saturnalia.
25. Christmas, Mystical Birth of the Sovereign Sun: Dei Solis Invicti  
Natalitia, Birth of the Invincible One.  
To Jesus, the Christos.  
To Horus (E.), the Reborn Osiris.  
To Mithras, the Unconquerable Sun of Suns.
26. To Saturn (R.), Cronus (G.), Father of Almighty Zeus.  
To Sanctus Orphiel (C.), Archangel.
27. D. John (C.), the Apostle and Evangelist, d. c. 100 A.D.
29. Julian of Norwich (C.), Mystic, b. 1343 (c. 1422 A.D.).
30. D. van Helmont, Hermetist (c. 1577-1644 A.D.).
31. To Vesta (R.), Hestia (G.), "The Mystical Hearth of the Cosmos."  
New Year's Eve, Hogmanay.



# THOMAS TAYLOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK ON PROVIDENCE BY PLOTINUS

The reader will find in the book on Providence many admirable dogmas worthy of the profound and elevated genius of Plotinus. The following information from the adytum of philosophy on this most interesting subject will no doubt be gratefully received by the Platonic student.

Certain philosophers posterior to Plato, on seeing the unstable condition of sublunary things, were fearful that they were not under the direction of Providence and a Divine nature; for such events as are said to take place through fortune, the apparent inequality respecting lives, and the disordered motion of material natures, induced them greatly to suspect that they were not under the government of Providence: besides, the persuasion that Divinity is not busily employed in the evolution of all various reasons, and that He does not depart from His own blessedness, induced them to frame an hypothesis so lawless and dire. For they were of opinion that the passion of our soul, and the perturbation which it sustains by descending to the government of bodies, must happen to Divinity if He converted Himself to the providential inspection of things. Farther still, from considering that different objects of knowledge were known by different gnostic powers; as, for instance, sensibles by sense, doxastics\* by opinion, things scientific by reason, and intelligibles by intellect, and at the same time neither placing sense, nor opinion, nor science in Divinity, but only an intellect immaterial and pure; hence they asserted that Divinity had no knowledge of any other things than the objects of intellect†: for, say they, if matter is external to Him it is necessary that He should be pure from apprehensions which are converted to matter; but being exempt from these, it follows that He must have no knowledge of material natures: and hence the patrons of this doctrine deprived Him of a knowledge of,

\* Objects of opinion.

† This opinion was embraced by the more early Peripatetics.



and providential energies about, sensibles, not through any imbecility of nature, but through a transcendency of gnostic energy; just as those whose eyes are filled with light are said to be incapable of perceiving mundane objects, at the same time that this incapacity is nothing more than transcendency of vision. They likewise add that there are many things which it is good not to know. Thus to the entheastic (or such as are entheused by a Divine inspiration) it is also good to be ignorant of whatever would pervert the Deific energy; and to the scientific not to know that which would defile the intuitive perception of science.

But other philosophers ascribe, indeed, to Divinity a knowledge of sensibles, in order that they may not take away His Providence, but at the same time convert His apprehension to that which is external, represent Him as pervading through the whole of a sensible nature, as passing into contact with the objects of His government, impelling every thing, and being locally present with all things; for say they, He would not otherwise be able to exert a providential energy in a becoming manner, and impart good to everything according to its desert.\*

Others again affirm that Divinity has a knowledge of Himself, but that He has no occasion to understand sensibles in order to provide for them, but that by His very Essence He produced all things, and adorns whatever He has produced, without having any knowledge of His productions. They add, that this is by no means wonderful, since nature operates without knowledge in an unphantastic manner; but that Divinity differs from nature in this, that He has a knowledge of Himself, though not of the things which are fabricated by Him. And such are the assertions of those who were persuaded that Divinity is not separated from mundane natures, and of those who deprived Him of the knowledge of inferior concerns, and of a knowledge operating in union with Providence.

With respect to these philosophers, we assert that they speak truly, and yet not truly, on this subject: for if Providence has a subsistence, neither can there be anything disordered, nor can Divinity be busily employed, nor can He know sensibles through passive sense; but these philosophers, in consequence of not knowing the exempt power and uniform knowledge of

\* This was the opinion of the Stoics.



the Gods, appear to deviate from the truth. For thus we interrogate them: Does not every thing energize in a becoming manner when it energizes according to its own power and nature? as, for instance, does not nature, in conformity to the order of its essence, energize naturally, intellect intellectually, and soul animastically? And when the same thing is generated by many and different causes, does not each of them produce according to its own power, and not according to the nature of the thing produced? Or shall we say that each produces after the same manner: for example, the sun and man generate man according to the same mode of operation, and not according to the natural ability of each, namely, the latter, partially, imperfectly, and with a busy energy, but the former without anxious attention, by its very essence, and totally? But to assert this would be absurd; for a Divine Nature operates in a manner very different from a mortal nature. If, therefore, every thing which energizes, energizes according to its own nature and order, some things divinely and supernaturally, others naturally, and others in a different manner, it is evident that every gnostic being knows, according to its own nature, and that it does not follow that because the thing known is one and the same, on this account the natures which know energize in conformity to the essence of the things known. Thus sense, opinion, and our intellect know that which is white, but not in the same manner: for sense cannot know what the essence is of a thing white, nor can opinion obtain a knowledge of its proper objects in the same manner as intellect; for opinion knows only that a thing is, but intellect knows the cause of its existence. Knowledge therefore subsists according to the nature of that which knows, and not according to the nature of that which is known. What wonder is it therefore that Divinity should know all things in such a manner as is accommodated to His Nature, namely, divisible things, indivisibly; things multiplied, uniformly; things generated, according to an eternal intelligence; totally, such things as are partial; and that, with a knowledge of this kind, He should possess a power productive of all things; or, in other words, that by knowing all things with simple and united intellections, He should impart to every thing being, and a progression into being? For the auditory sense knows audibles in a manner different from the common sense; and



prior to, and different from these, reason knows audibles, together with other particulars which sense is not able to apprehend. And again, of desire, which tends to one thing, of anger, which aspires after another thing, and of *proairesis*, or that faculty of the soul which is a deliberative tendency to things in our power, there is one particular life moving the soul towards all these, which are mutually motive of each other. It is through this life that we say, "I desire," "I am angry," or "I have a deliberative tendency to this thing or that"; for this life verges to all these powers, and lives in conjunction with them, as being a power which is impelled to every object of desire. But prior both to reason and this one life, is the one of the soul, which often says "I perceive," "I reason," "I desire," and "I deliberate," which follows all these energies, and energizes together with them; for we should not be able to know all these, and to apprehend in what they differ from each other, unless we contained a certain indivisible nature, which had a subsistence above the common sense, and which, prior to opinion, desire, and will, knows all that these know and desire, according to an indivisible mode of apprehension.

If this be the case, it is by no means proper to disbelieve in the indivisible knowledge of Divinity, which knows sensibles without possessing sense, and divisible natures without possessing a divisible energy, and which, without being present to things in place, knows them prior to all local presence, and imparts to every thing that which every thing is capable of receiving. The unstable essence therefore of apparent natures is not known by Him in an unstable, but in a definite manner; nor does He know that which is subject to all-various mutations dubiously, but in a manner perpetually the same; for by knowing Himself, He knows every thing of which He is the cause, possessing a knowledge transcendently more accurate than that which is co-ordinate to the objects of knowledge; since a causal knowledge of every thing is superior to every other kind of knowledge. Divinity therefore knows without busily attending to the objects of His intellection, because He abides in Himself, and by alone knowing Himself, knows all things. Nor is He indigent of sense, or opinion, or science, in order to know sensible natures; for it is Himself that produces all these, and that, in the unfathomable depths of the intellection of



Himself, comprehends a united knowledge of them, according to cause, and in one simplicity of perception: as if some one, having built a ship, should place in it men of His own formation, and, in consequence of possessing a various art, should add a sea to the ship, produce certain winds, and afterwards launch the ship into the newly created main. Let us suppose, too, that he causes these to have an existence by merely conceiving them to exist, so that by imagining all this to take place, he gives an external subsistence to his inward images; it is evident that in this case he will contain the cause of everything which happens to the ship through the winds of the sea, and that by contemplating his own conceptions, without being indigent of outward conversion, he will, at the same time, both fabricate and know these external particulars. Thus, and in a still greater degree, that Divine Intellect, the Artificer of the universe, possessing the causes of all things, both gives subsistence to, and contemplates, whatever the universe contains, without departing from the speculation of Himself. But if, with respect to intellect, one kind is more partial, and another more total, it is evident that there is not the same intellectual perfection of all things, but that where intelligibles have a more total and undistributed subsistence, there the knowledge is more total and indivisible, and where the number of forms proceeds into multitude and extension, there the knowledge is both one and multiform. Hence, this being admitted, we cannot wonder on hearing the Orphic verses, in which the theologist says,

“There, in the sight of Jove, the Parent King,  
Th’ immortal Gods and mortal men reside,  
With all that ever was, and shall hereafter be.”

For the Artificer of the universe is full of all intelligibles, and the causes of all things subsist in Him distinctly, and intellectually separated from each other.

In the next place, it is necessary to know that Providence, as the name implies, is an energy prior to intellect, and consequently, from Its transcending all intellectual and sensible natures, is superior to fate, which is a beneficent energy of the Gods, resulting from, and subsisting in, bodies. Hence, whatever is under the dominion of fate is likewise under the dominion of Providence, deriving its connection from fate, but



the good which it possesses from Providence; but, on the contrary, all things which are under the government of Providence are not indigent of fate; for intellectual beings are exempt from its dominion. As there are two genera of things, therefore, the one intellectual and the other sensible, so there are two kingdoms of these, namely, one of Providence, which comprehends intellectual and sensible natures, and the other of fate, which rules over sensibles alone. And Providence differs from fate, in the same manner as a God differs from that which is divine, indeed, but which is so by participation and not according to a primary subsistence. Just as with respect to light, that which subsists in the sun is primary, but that which is in the air secondary; and life is primarily in the soul, but secondarily in the body. Providence therefore is Divine essentially, but fate is something divine, and not a God, for it depends on Providence, and has the same relation to it as an image to its exemplar.

Should it be asked whether Providence extends Itself to all things, to wholes and parts, to eternal and corruptible natures, we reply that even the most minute particulars depend on the beneficent Providence of the Artificer of the universe; for nothing can escape Its all-comprehending power, whether you regard the essence of a thing, or its subsistence as an object of knowledge. It is said, indeed, and with great propriety, that the whole circle has a central subsistence in the centre, since the centre is the cause, but the circle is the thing caused; and on the same account every number subsists monadically in unity. But in the one of Providence all things are contained in a much more exalted manner, since it is far more transcendently one than a centre, and an arithmetical monad.

Hence, nothing but the inaptitude of our nature can resist the all-pervading power of Providence; and, indeed, even in this case Providence is not hindered either in Its knowledge or Its beneficent care of our concerns; but as those who are asleep, or who shut their eyes, enjoy that heat of the sun which is imparted to terrestrial natures, but deprive themselves of His illuminative power, and this through their own free will, and not through the God angrily withdrawing from them His rays; in like manner those who, through a certain depravity, are said to be deprived of the Providence of the Gods, are not entirely beyond the reach of Its influence. For, as the Athenian guest in



Plato well observes, there is not anything so small, that by descending into the profundities of the earth it can escape the inspection of Providence, which beholds all things, and even such as are the least; nor is there any thing so great that it can pass beyond the heavens, and by this means be situated out of the dominions of that Providence which governs the universality of things. Guilty souls, therefore, while they deprive themselves of those powers of the Gods which impart to us every kind of good, necessarily become exposed to that punishment which Divinity benevolently inflicts, in order to bring them from a condition contrary, to one conformable to nature.

Hence, too, since the knowledge of the Gods is transcendently more excellent than the nature of the things known, They must know things past, present, and to come, by one complete and immutable knowledge, and consequently must have a definite apprehension of whatever is contingent. For the knowledge of the Gods does not need to keep pace with the ever-flowing nature of things in generation; nor is there any thing of past or future in the ineffable unity of Their perception, but all things subsist in Them, according to an ever-abiding *now*, which is prior to all temporal representations, and signifies their firm and immutable nature.

Should it be urged that the ambiguous answers which the ancient oracles gave respecting future events prove that the Gods have no definite knowledge of things contingent, we reply, with the great Syrianus, that the knowledge and intelligence of the Gods is very different from the energy of the prophetess, who is, indeed, moved by the Gods, but generates in herself divisible discourse, poetic measures, and ambiguous knowledge; for the nature of that which is illuminated is not such as that which illumines. Besides, oracles were often delivered in ambiguous terms, with a view to the advantage of those that heard them, namely, in order to exercise their cogitative powers; for the Gods make use of us as self-motive natures, as such govern all our actions, and distribute all things to us according to our deserts.

Again, should any one ask why punishments do not immediately follow the perpetration of crimes, but are inflicted afterwards, and sometimes not till long after the accomplishment of guilt, we reply that the ingrafted root of wickedness, like land



which produces thorns (for though the produce of such ground is cut down a thousand times, yet it is always productive of the like), renders the same operations without being mollified by punishment. Providence, therefore, awaits the arrival of that period which It knows will be profitable to the cure of souls: to which we may add, that hasty anger is not a good dispenser of punishments. Plato, being about to scourge one of his servants, was seen for some time holding the whip in an elevated position, and when asked the reason of his standing in that manner, replied that he was punishing his over-hasty anger. Archytas said to his servants in a field who had disobeyed his orders and were expecting to be punished for their neglect, "It is well for you that I am angry." Theano likewise said to her servant, "If I were not angry I should chastise you." It was a law among the Egyptians, that a pregnant woman, who was condemned to die should not be put to death till she was delivered: what wonder is it, therefore, that Providence should preserve those that are worthy of death but at the same time able to accomplish illustrious actions till they have accomplished them? If Themistocles had immediately suffered the punishment which his conduct deserved, when a young man, who would have freed Athens from the Persian evils? Who would have expounded the Pythian oracle? If Dionysius had perished in the beginning of his tyranny, who would have freed Sicily from the Chalcedonians? If Periander had been punished in a short space of time, who would have freed Apollonia, the pleasant island of the Leucadians, and Anactorium, from the machinations of their enemies? To which we may add, that though the time of deferred punishment appears long to us, yet in the eye of Providence it is nothing: as, on the other hand, the place in which we at present reside is perfectly small with respect to the punishment of great offences, but in the infernal regions there are many and indescribable places of punishment, and an innumerable multitude of torments, accommodated to the guilt of the souls that sojourn there.

Besides, such is the magnitude of necessary punishments, that the whole of it does not take place at once: but remorse is naturally implanted in offending souls. For they say, that the tyrant Apollodorus saw himself in a dream scourged and boiled by certain persons, and heard his heart crying aloud from the



kettle, "*I am the cause of these thy torments.*" It is reported, too, of Ptolemy, who was called *Thunder*, that certain of his friends dreamt he was called to the judgement-seat by Seleucus, and that vultures and wolves sat as his judges. And such are the preludes of destined punishment, which are inherent in guilty souls.

Again, should it be asked why certain children are punished for the crimes of their parents (which the Pythian oracle said was the case with the posterity of Pelops, and which Proclus informs us the mysteries evinced), and why cities are punished for the sins of individuals, we reply that the equity of Divine retribution in this particular will become immediately apparent if we direct our attention to the pre-existence of human souls, and consider that many are punished in the present for offences which they have committed in a former life; and that those whose guilt is of a similar kind, are, by the wise administration of Providence, brought together, so as to form one family, or one city, and thus are as much collectively the object of punishment as an offending individual.

Lastly, should it be inquired, since the Providence of Divinity knows all things and reduces them to good, how angels, daemons, heroes, and undefiled souls govern the world in conjunction with the Gods, we reply that the Providence of the Gods is universal and total, but that of Their attendants, partial, subordinate, and limited.

## SEED THOUGHT

Blessed is he who has gained the riches of Divine Wisdom; unhappy is he in whose heart the likeness of the Gods is veiled in darkness.

We cannot bring the Divine near within reach of our eyes or grasp of our hands . . . For He is not furnished with a human head upon his body; He has not arms, springing as two branches from His shoulders; He has no feet, nor legs to run. . . . Rather He is Intellect, holy and ineffable, and that alone, flashing with swift thoughts throughout the whole order of the world.

—*Empedocles*

## NON-ATTACHMENT TO THE WORLD

(From the *Dhammapada*)

Follow not the evil way! Live not in thoughtlessness!  
Follow not false doctrines! Be not a lover of the world.

Rouse thyself! Be not idle! Follow the law of virtue! The virtuous rests in bliss in this world and in the next.

Follow the law of virtue; follow not that of sin. The virtuous rests in bliss in this world and in the next.

Look upon this world as you would on a bubble, look upon it as you would on a mirage: the king of death does not see him who thus looks down upon the world.

Come, look at this world, glittering like a royal chariot; the foolish are immersed in it, but the wise do not grasp it.

He who formerly was reckless and afterwards became controlled, brightens up this world, like the moon when freed from clouds.

He whose evil deeds are replaced by good deeds, brightens up this world, like the moon when freed from clouds.

This world is dark, few only can see here; a few only go to heaven, like birds escaped from the net.

The swans go on the path of the sun, they go miraculously through the air; the wise are led out of this world, when they have conquered Mâra and his train.

If a man has transgressed the one law, and speaks lies, and scoffs at another world, there is no evil he will not do.

The uncharitable do not go to the world of the Gods; fools only do not praise liberality; a wise man rejoices in liberality, and through it becomes blessed in the other world.

Better than sovereignty over the earth, better than going to heaven, better than lordship over all worlds, is the reward of Sotâpatti, the first step in holiness.



## SYNESIUS OF CYRENE

Synesius was a native of Cyrene, a Greek city in North Africa; he himself claimed to be of pure Greek descent. He was born in the latter half of the fourth century A.D., perhaps about the year 360, and he may have attained an age of about seventy years, although some writers think he died ten or fifteen years earlier.

The exact dates of the beginning and end of Synesius' earthly sojourn are unimportant but it is certain that his life was lived in a period of great unrest. The final separation of the Roman Empire into the eastern and western portions took place in 395 A.D. Both were reeling under the stress of repeated barbaric invasions. The invaders were often induced by monetary rewards to enter the service of the state, but their allegiance, obtained in this manner, was always doubtful. The government was corrupt and inefficient; true patriotism was rare and its advice unheeded.

Christianity was politically triumphant but a certain amount of tolerance was still shown to the philosophers who remained true to the Platonic tradition, provided that they did not voice their beliefs too loudly or insistently.

Synesius studied philosophy as a young man at Alexandria under the famous Neo-Platonist Hypatia.

She was of much the same age as himself and with her he maintained a warm friendship and correspondence until the end of their lives.

Hypatia is chiefly known to English readers through Kingsley's novel, but this work is largely at variance with the facts of history. For example, at the time of her death Hypatia was not a young woman but was probably approaching middle age.

Neither can credence be given to the story that she had recourse to witchcraft, since there is no evidence for this, nor indeed would anyone of her high character engage in such practices.

She was the daughter of Theon, a mathematician and philosopher, and became the recognized head of the Alexandrian school of philosophy at the beginning of the fifth century. Her great eloquence and rare modesty, virtue and beauty, combined with her remarkable intellectual gifts, attracted to her lecture-

rooms a large number of pupils. It is said that she was regularly consulted by the governors and magistrates. Indeed, Orestes, the prefect of Alexandria, was her friend and sought her advice. This intimacy led to her death at the hands of a mob of monks and other fanatics, for Orestes was a pagan and in conflict with Cyril, the patriarch of the city, whose complicity in the crime there is little reason to doubt.

Hypatia was, according to Suidas, the authoress of commentaries on the *Arithmetics* of Diophantus of Alexandria, on the conics of Apollonius of Perga and the astronomical canon of Ptolemy. Little is known of her philosophical tenets, but it is evident from the letters written to Synesius that she was the recipient of the Neo-Platonic tradition.

Synesius calls her "My mother, my sister, my instructress and benefactress."

It is recorded that Synesius was annoyed by the airs assumed by some of his fellow-students who had studied at Athens and therefore decided to visit that city himself. This he did about A.D. 403, but he always remained loyal to his own "university" of Alexandria, if it may be so styled, and he regarded Athens as being, at that time, a mere husk of her former self.

It is clear that his intention at that time was to retire to his estates and live the life of a well-to-do man of letters and country gentleman. He was passionately fond of rural pursuits, and, in particular, he was devoted to hunting, dogs and horses.

This plan was thwarted by an appeal made to him by his fellow-citizens that he should proceed to Constantinople to seek redress for the evils which lay heavily upon the province. Thus, even at an early age, his probity and ability were recognized.

It is characteristic of the man that he always obeyed the voice of conscience and benevolence, even against his strongest personal desires. He proceeded to the capital and was forced to wait three years there before obtaining an audience of the emperor. City life was by no means to his taste but he fulfilled his mission.

He married about A.D. 403 and had three children, all of whom predeceased him. His wife was a Christian lady but she does not seem to have filled a very large part in his life, for he rarely mentions her.



Shortly after his marriage his country was invaded by nomad barbarians. Cyrene itself was besieged, the governor could or would do nothing and it was left to Synesius to raise a corps of volunteers to deal with the peril, thus showing that he was not only a philosopher, an orator and a diplomat, but also upon occasion an energetic and courageous soldier. This demonstrates, as does also the example of the Emperor Julian, that true philosophy does not lead to an atrophy of the practical virtues, but directs and fortifies them.

From this time onward his life was full of difficulties. He must have grieved bitterly, as a patriot, over the disasters that were coming upon the State, and his own country was constantly misgoverned from within and assailed from without.

In 409 the people of Ptolemais, one of the five cities of the Libyan Pentapolis, of which Cyrene was another, begged Synesius to become their bishop. This testifies eloquently to the love and trust that he inspired, and also to his courage and energy, for the people feared a succession of evil governors and looked to him to protect them. Strange to say, he had not yet been baptized and it is not known if he was even a professed Christian at that time or a candidate for baptism. Nevertheless, so insistent was the demand of the people and so greatly was he admired, that he was duly consecrated in Alexandria in 410. Returning home, he found that the fears of the people had been justified by the appointment of a corrupt governor, whom Synesius promptly excommunicated, with the result that the man was recalled.

Synesius accepted the bishopric most unwillingly. He stipulated that he was not to be expected to preach anything contrary to his own convictions, and furthermore, that his married life should not be interfered with. But he laments, in a very human manner, that he would have fewer opportunities to indulge his love of philosophy and of the chase and that his well-beloved dogs and bow would see less of him!

In a letter to his friend Olympias (epistle 95) he declares that if his duty as a bishop should be any hindrance to his philosophy, he would relinquish his diocese, abjure his orders and remove to Greece.

Of the gradual change in his beliefs by which, although a disciple of the great Plotinus, he passed to an acceptance, even



if somewhat guarded, of the new religion, we know very little. Liberal thinkers of that period did not view the two teachings as being altogether antagonistic. Evidently he realized that he could best help the thousands of stricken folk who looked to him for help by utilizing the power that Christianity possessed. He was inherently broad-minded and regarded all forms of goodness as proceeding from the Supreme Good. Had he lived to-day he might have been considered something of a free-lance. However, had there been many more like him, the essential harmony of the teachings of the old philosophy and the new religion might have been more generally realized.

In his later years he was forced once again to direct the defence of his city against the barbarians. He speaks of himself as old, but whether he had actually reached old age is open to question. He was perhaps exhausted before his time by his efforts to help others through the troublous times in which he lived. He was naturally a sensitive man, who, because of his kindness of heart and conscientiousness, undertook duties that were repugnant to him and which must have gradually taken toll of his strength. Despite his love of the open air, he may not have been robust.

His writings may be reviewed as follows:

1. *On Kingship*: this, with the exception of certain letters, comes first in order of time. It is the address which he delivered before the youthful Emperor Arcadius in Constantinople about A.D. 399, when on his political mission.

In this work he counsels the young emperor, who was sunk in indolence and luxury and moreover influenced by worthless favourites, to abandon his disastrous and ignoble habits, practise virtue, and place himself at the head of a truly national army. The language is frank and outspoken; the argument is direct and lucid, and the only fault, if such it be, that could be imputed to the oration is that it places before the court an ideal to which there could be small hopes of a response, Arcadius and his entourage being what they were.

Gibbon writes: "The measures which Synesius recommends are the dictates of a bold and generous patriot."

2. *On Providence, or The Egyptian Tale*: this was also written whilst the philosopher was at Constantinople. It is said to deal, under the veil of Egyptian mythology, with the events that



were transpiring around the writer, and these, too, are so treated as to relate them to universal philosophic and moral truths. Osiris appears to correspond to his friend, the prefect Aurelian, and also to the principle of Good, whilst Gainas, the Scythian chieftain who had taken service with the emperor, is represented by Typhos, the wicked brother of Osiris, who stands for the pseudo-principle of evil.

Thus the story has for its principal philosophic object of study the problem of evil and its struggle with the Good. It is of value as a simple presentation of profound truths, but it is perhaps doubtful whether it throws any fresh light upon the matter. Indeed, one may ask whether Synesius possessed a very original mind. The tale is pleasantly written and, in modern parlance, highly moral, Osiris being entirely good and his brother equally depraved.

From this book the following quotation is given:—

“By no means, therefore, should men be indignant, since the evils which happen to them are spontaneous, nor ought they to accuse the Gods of not providently attending to their affairs. For Providence requires that men should exert what they derive from themselves. Nor is it wonderful that there should be evils in the abode of evils; but it is admirable if there is anything here which is not of this kind. For such a thing is a stranger and foreign. This also is from Providence, through which, if we are not negligent, but employ what we possess from It, it is possible for us to be perfectly happy. For Providence is not like the mother of an infant recently born, who must necessarily be occupied in repelling whatever may accede of a painful nature, since the child is yet imperfect and incapable of assisting himself. But Providence resembles that mother, who having caused her child to grow, and furnished him with arms, orders him to use them and repel the evils by which he may be attacked. Philosophize therefore always about these things, and consider the knowledge of them as a thing of the greatest importance to mankind. For men who are pious and at the same time solicitous, admit that there is a Providence, and pay attention to themselves, and do not conceive that the conversion of Divinity to the superintendence of mundane affairs and the use of virtue are discordant with each other.”

Throughout, his standpoint is that of the Neo-Platonist and



there is as yet no sign that he is interested in the faith which he afterwards embraced.

3. *On the Gift of an Astrolabe* was written about the same time and is valuable if only as a reminder of the fact that Synesius was, in addition to his many other pursuits, keenly interested in the science of his time, and, in particular, in astronomy, mathematics and geometry.

4. *Dion* appears to have been written in anticipation of the birth of his eldest son and by way of instructing him in the character of the true philosopher. More especially Synesius was anxious to defend his own devotion to letters and respect for literary elegance and to attack the common belief that philosophical writings might be carelessly put together, without much regard to style and clarity. He was himself a man of wide reading and culture, interested, as we have seen, in the entire intellectual life of his day, and the affectation of uncouthness did not appeal to him.

5. *On Dreams* is probably the next work of our philosopher, and it is one that he himself certainly judged to be his most important publication. In it he claims to have written, after the example of Plato, of profound matters in a recondite manner, so that only the worthy should understand them. He states (a view that may seem strange to modern thought) that divination is one of the most worthy objects of human study: "the universe is a single living creature; and its various parts, being therefore closely connected together, use one another for means of manifesting themselves. The universe is like a great book, written in different languages, which wise men read, some through one kind of divination, others through another; for, since the universe is all in sympathy and harmony, its parts, as members of a single whole—must be mutually related" (Crawford).

In this way he explains the theory of magic and divination. He relates such experiences to the imagination (*phantasia*), an irrational power which stands below reason, and therefore can only be correctly understood by the latter operating in conjunction with real intuition or spiritual insight.

If it is believed that the Deity communicates with men at all, it seems impossible to deny that some kind of illumination may come in the form of dreams; at the same time the practice of oneiromancy, except by the truly illuminated and philosophical,



might, and often undoubtedly would, degenerate into superstitious absurdities.

The divination referred to by Synesius is the higher form akin to prophetic inspiration, which is concerned with knowledge of universals and essentials; not of particulars and details.

"The sage has then a species of affinity with God, because he endeavours to approach Him by the faculty of knowledge and exerts himself about intuitive thought."

"That which is first necessary is that our souls be sufficiently prepared, so as to be able to receive the illuminations of Intellect and the Divine, and not to be the receptacle of vain images."

"Intellect or Nous contains in itself the ideas of the things which are real, as the ancient philosophy teaches."

"It is for philosophy to teach us what care it is necessary to give imagination, and how we can preserve it from all error. The best of all preparations is to practise especially speculative virtues of that kind which will make life a continual intellectual progression. It is necessary to, as much as possible, prevent the blind and disordered movements of our imagination; in other words, to lean towards the good and forsake the evil, not mixing ourselves more with terrestrial things than is requisite. There is nothing so efficacious as meditation to disperse the enemies that besiege the phantasy."

"But to transcend the phantasy in rational energies is not less difficult than blessed. Hence (says Plato), the possession of intellect and wisdom in old age is desirable above all things, signifying by this, intelligence shining without imagination; because intelligence when conversant with a common life belongs to the phantasy, or at least to mind energizing through the medium of the phantasy."

"The intelligent are led to believe more firmly in Providence by the very things that make the unintelligent disbelieve in it. The soul comes down into the world to act as a free servant; but, only too often, it becomes an actual slave. If we yield to the seductions of matter, it is afterwards most difficult to get free from it. In this contest we require all our strength, we require all the help of Heaven."

6. The treatise *On Baldness* is partly humorous, but not entirely so. This also was manifestly written before he was ordained, for he treats of certain sins in a manner that no devout Christian would adopt in this connection.



Synesius was a humorist of a very high order, and, one might say, he is excelled in this respect by very few writers of the ancient world. He cannot even describe the disgraceful cowardice of certain imperial officers sent to command the troops in his province without being humorous at their expense.

As regards baldness, he explains that animals are covered with hair, man has much less, and bald people, who have least of all, are therefore certainly furthest removed from the irrational kingdoms!

7. Lastly must be mentioned his *Discourses*, *Letters*, *Hymns* and *Homilies*, and also certain lost works, such as an essay *On the Chase* and numerous poems.

The *Discourses* are two in number and treat of the condition of the country in relation to the barbaric irruptions. Their interest, therefore, is political and sociological, rather than philosophical: from the former points of view our understanding of the conditions of the age is greatly indebted to Synesius' more secular writings.

There are ten *Hymns*, which become increasingly imbued with the spirit of Christianity. Their poetic value is, perhaps, not very great but they express many profound truths and possess a distinct inspirational quality.

The *Letters* number over a hundred and fifty and must always occupy an honourable place in literature of their kind. Synesius had many friends and some of them were notable people. To one and all he wrote frankly and easily, discoursing on the many subjects that interested him. He was one of the most versatile of men.

Indeed it has been suggested that Synesius would have been greater had he concentrated his efforts in one direction. Like most many-sided people, he sometimes appeared superficial and perhaps inconsistent. As a thinker he was inferior to his models; as a philosopher and Christian he may possibly have failed at times in fortitude and strength; as a systematic theologian he was by no means profound.

But such failings, if they may in fact be truthfully ascribed to Synesius, render him none the less lovable. The ancient world produced few men more genuinely attractive and, as a human personality, he is for all time.

Hypatia called him "the good of other people."



EXTRACTS ON PROVIDENCE,  
FROM SYNESIUS

"If the soul permits herself to be subdued by the attractions of matter she becomes unhappy."

"The troubles which strike us on different sides are marvelously proper to establish moral order; taking the place of false joys, the chagrins of life purify the soul."

"Coming into this world to be a servant, its service changes into slavery. Without doubt it ought to a certain extent, by virtue of the laws of necessity, to obey nature, but alas! seduced by the attractions of sense life, it resembles those unfortunates who, born free, sell themselves for a time, inflamed by the beauty of a slave; and in order to remain near that which they love, accept the same master.

"This is our condition when we allow ourselves to be charmed with false benefits, by pleasures wholly external, which affect the body only; we appear then to admit that matter is beautiful. Matter takes hold of our admission as if by a secret engagement which we have entered into with it; and later, if we wish to free ourselves from it and resume our liberty, it treats us as deserters, it attempts to regain possession of us, and invokes, so as to make us return under its dominion, the faith due to an engagement.

"It is especially at this time that the soul needs energy and Divine assistance: it is not a small affair to have to break, sometimes even violently, contracted habits; because then according to natural law, all the forces of matter sweep down upon the rebels as if to crush and punish them. Without doubt it is this that is meant by the labours of Hercules, which we read of in the sacred legends, and those combats which other heroes so valiantly sustain, until the day upon which they could elevate themselves to the heights where nature no longer had any hold upon them."

## THE ELEMENTS OF THEOLOGY

PROCLUS \*

## PROPOSITION CXIII

*Every Divine number is unical*

For if a Divine number has a precedaneous cause, namely The One, just as an intellectual number has Intellect, and a psychical number, Soul; and if multitude is everywhere analogous to its cause, it is evident that a Divine number is unical, since The One is God. But this follows because The One and The Good are the same: for The Good and God are the same. For that beyond which there is nothing, and to which all things aspire, is God, and that from which all things proceed, and to which all things tend is The Good. If therefore there is a multitude of Gods, the multitude is unical. But that there is a multitude of Gods is evident; for every principal cause is the leader of an appropriate multitude which is similar and allied to the cause.

## PROPOSITION CXIV

*Every God is a self-perfect unity, and every self-perfect unity is a God*

For if the multitude of unities is twofold, as has been before demonstrated; and some are self-perfect, but others are illuminations from the self-perfect unities, and if a Divine number is allied to and similar to The One and The Good, then the Gods are self-perfect unities. And conversely if there is a self-perfect unity it is a God. For as unity is in the most eminent degree allied to The One, and the self-perfect to The Good, so likewise according to both these the self-perfect participates of the Divine peculiarity and is a God. But if a God were a unity, yet not a self-perfect unity, or a self-perfect hypostasis, yet not a unity, He would be arranged in another order on account of the mutation of the peculiarity.

\* For previous sections see SHRINE OF WISDOM, Nos. 65 to 80.