

THREE SELECTIONS FROM
Plutarch's
Genius of Sokrates

Who the Genii Are
The Dream of Timarchus
The Care of the Genii

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✧ I ✧



✧ WHO THE GENII ARE ✧



AND Simmias said, ✧ 'I think the Genius of Sokrates was not a vision of some kind, but the discernment of a Voice, which reached him in some particular, peculiar manner; just as in dreams one imagines hearing other people talk, though hearing no real voice. ✧ Nevertheless one receives sometimes in dreams a real, distinct experience. ✧ This may take place because while one sleeps the body enjoys a total stillness and rest, while the condition of those who are awake frequently precludes them from apprehending the motions of the unseen Higher Beings. ✧ For not only the chaos of the passions, but the distractions of very many sorts of business stun us so thoroughly that we can neither hear the warning of the Gods, nor, if heard, centre our attention on them. ✧ But Sokrates, whose pure and passion-free reason had only so much intimacy with his body as might have



Who the Genii Are [1], from
✧ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✧



been unavoidable, felt every motion of the spirit, and was immediately sensitive to every impression. ✱ And these impressions were not derived from a mere sound but from the signal, so to speak, of a Genius who, without voice, affected his reason through the object itself. ✱ For the Voice might be compared to a blow given to the Soul through which she is forced by means of the sense of hearing to take notice of the usual human speech. ✱ But the reason of the Higher Being directs Souls that are fitted for this through the mere touch of the objects thought of, dispensing entirely with the above-mentioned psychic blow.

✱ And the human Soul generally obeys these Higher Beings gladly, whether or not this advance her own desires. ✱ In this manner her desires are not antagonized by contrary passions, permitting herself to be gently and willingly governed as by a bridle. This need not seem incredible, when it is considered that a puny rudder turns round the greatest ships of burden, or that the potter's disks permit themselves easily to be turned around by the hand. ✱ Although these instruments have no soul, nevertheless they are so well adapted to turn around that on



Who the Genii Are [2], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱



account of their smoothness they may be set in motion at the very first touch. ✱ Likewise the human Soul may be directed easier than any other instrument because she is held tense as with ropes by numberless desires. ✱ Hence, as soon as anybody's mental incidence affects her she receives the impulse to move in the direction of the thought. ✱ All the passions and desires reach far down into the thinking portion of the Soul, so that at the very first tremor of the thought, they are, as it were, attracted to it, and proceed to innervate and draw the outer man.

✱ This circumstance gives us an insight into the inherent power of thought. ✱ Bones and nerves have not the slightest sensation, not even the moist flesh; and the heavy body-mass composed of these normally rests inactively quiet. ✱ But just let the Soul lay hold on a thought, and direct her efforts towards it, and lo, in a moment this heavy mass is energized, makes its tendons tense, and hastens to execute the mission as with wings. ✱ For just as a motive merely thought, without any voice, easily sets the body in motion, just in the same manner, methinks, it is not impossible that a human



Who the Genii Are [3], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱



reason might be led by a Higer Reason, a human Soul by a Diviner Soul. ✱ This might take place by a sort of external touch, illustrated by the manner in which answers and questions intermingle in a conversation, and by the intermingling of light and reflection. ✱ For ultimately we recognize another's thought by the help of his voice, just as if we were groping in the dark. ✱ But the thought of the Genii have a certain splendor, so to speak, which of itself streams out upon the worthily receptive, without the intermediation of words or symbols—such symbols as humans are forced to employ one to another; which are therefore only pictures or silhouettes of the thoughts. These themselves are not generally perceived clearly, except of course by those who possess a certain portion of the Divine Light.

✱ The process by which the Voice itself reaches us may also inspire us with confidence. ✱ The Voice is, as it were, conducted into the soul of the hearer by the air that at first is only thrown into vibrations by the single articulate sounds, and later is transmuted into voice and speech. ✱ What wonder then that this air also, which so easily assumes every



Who the Genii Are [4], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱





form and shape, should in like manner receive the thoughts of Higher Beings, and expresses the meaning of the thoughts of the Divine Being or Superior Divine Human Being. ✱ The blows and knocks of soldiers who are digging mines may be noticed easily by the reverberation of the brazen shields, because the sound proceeding upward from the depths is able to throw these into vibration, although remaining unnoticed in any other manner. ✱ This is exactly the state of affairs with the utterances of the Genii. ✱ They elicit no response, nor awake any sympathetic vibration in any except those few whose nature is a quiet temperament and a passionless mood, and whom therefore we call properly Holy and Divine Men.

✱ It is usually supposed that the Genius of a man gives his revelation in sleep only, and it is usually supposed ridiculous and incredible that He should by the same process impress those who are in their waking condition, in their full normal consciousness. ✱ Such a supposition would find analogy in an artist who should play upon a lyre whose strings were loose, but who were unable to perform on one strung tense, and attuned.



Who the Genii Are [5], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱



✱ Evidently the real cause of non-reception is the unrest, the inharmoniousness of the human breast—of all of which our friend Sokrates was entirely free. ✱ Indeed, this had already been prophesied of him as a child, in the Oracle received by his father.

✱ For the Oracle commanded that the father should permit Sokrates to carry out any idea that came into his mind, without forcing him to, or hindering him from anything. ✱ He was to leave him a free rein to his desires, and do for him nothing more than to make vows in his behalf to Zeus of the Market-places, and to the Muses; but beyond this to take no anxiety whatever about his son, inasmuch as he possessed already within himself a Path-finder through his life, which was better than a thousand teachers.

✱ "This, O my dear Phidolaos, is the opinion I have always held about the Genius of Sokrates, both during his lifetime, and since his decease—paying no attention whatsoever to those who accepted a sneeze, or any such thing as a direct revelation from the Gods."



Who the Genii Are [6], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱

❖ THE DREAM OF TIMARCHUS ❖



AND yet', continued Simmias, 'as to that which I have heard Timarchus of Cheronea relate about the matter might easily be considered a fairy-tale, so it may be better to refrain from saying anything further about it.'

❖ 'No, no,' cried Theocritus, 'fairy-tales sometimes hit the truth, more than a little. But, to begin with, tell us who this Timarchus was—I never heard of the man.'

❖ 'No wonder, dear Theocritus,' rejoined Simmias, 'for he died a very young man. ❖ Before his death he begged Sokrates to have him buried next to his son Lamprokles, one of his friends and equal-aged companions.

❖ 'This Timarchus was a youth of lofty thought who had been but of late initiated into Philosophy. ❖ He longed most earnestly to understand the real nature of the Genius of Sokrates.



The Dream of Timarchus, [1] from
❖ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ❖



✱ 'And with this purpose in view, without informing any one but me and Kebes, he descended into the Cave of Trophimus, in the Boetian city of Lebadaea, after he had carefully observed all the ceremonies usual in the Temple of this Oracle. ✱ He staid in the Cave two nights and a day. ✱ The greater number already considered him lost, and his relations already mourned him as dead, when, in the morning, he came out happy and in good spirits. ✱ He expressed gratitude to the Divinities, and after he had torn himself loose from the surrounding crowds, he related to us many marvels he had seen and heard.

✱ 'After he had climbed down to the Oracle, he found himself at first, as he told us, in a deep darkness. ✱ He addressed supplications to the Gods, and for a certain period of time lay without being exactly conscious, whether he was awake or dreaming. ✱ It seemed to him, however, that a sort of blow had struck his head, through which the sutures of his cranium relaxed, so as to afford egress to his Soul. ✱ She immediately swung herself upwards, and after having, to her great delight, disported herself by commingling with the circumambient pure



The Dream of Timarchus [2], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱





pure and transparent air, she seemed to refresh herself from the life-long oppression to which she had been subjected in the body; and then she began to grow larger, just as a sail filled by the wind.

* Hereupon he heard, passing over his head, a charming rustling sound. Looking up, he failed to perceive the Earth any more, but a multitude of Islands, illuminated by a serenely radiant effulgence, revolving cyclically in an ocean shimmering with variegated tints of cerulean blue, thus producing the Aeolian harmony that so delighted Timarchus as to make him understand these were the Isles of the Blest.

* But as he looked beneath himself, he saw a monstrous Abyss, round in form, as if it had been cut out by the falling of a ball. * It was horribly deep, and full of thick darkness, which whirled around restlessly, seemingly endeavoring to overflow the crater. * Timarchus was almost terrified by the sounds which proceeded thence—a thousandfold groaning and howling of living beings, a loud moaning of children, a mingled plaint of men and women, a chaos of screams, which rose up in a horrible roar from the very entrails of the Abyss.



The Dream of Timarchus [3], from
* Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' *





* After some time, without seeing anybody, Timarchus heard the words 'Timarchus, what desirest thou to know?' 'Everything!' rejoined he quickly. 'But first, what is that mass of Stars which are flitting around the Abyss, some dipping into it, others rising out of it again?' 'Then you do not know,' said the Invisible, 'that you are beholding the Genii? Let me explain to you the condition of affairs.

* 'Every Soul, as such, is partaker of the Divine Reason; and there is not one of them entirely devoid of Reason or Thought. * Only that part of a Soul which mingles itself with the flesh and the passions suffers a transformation, and degenerates through appetites or suffering into stupidity. * Nevertheless, not every Soul mingles itself in the same manner. * Some of them sink into the body in their totality, and through passion are entirely corrupted and destroyed during life. * Others mingle themselves only partially, and their purest part remains outside the body, and will in no wise permit itself to be drawn down into the flesh. * It swims on the surface of the Man, so to speak, touching only his head, acting like an upper anchor for the



The Dream of Timarchus [4], from
* Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' *





portion sunk in the body, and which can act as a platform on which the Soul may from time to time refresh herself, in the measure that she is docile, and does not permit herself to be quite overwhelmed by the passions. ✱ That part which is sunk in the body is usually called 'Soul', and that part which remains free from danger, the greater part of men call 'Reason', and imagine it inheres in them, just as if the objects reflected in a mirror inhered in it. ✱ But the Wise believe it is located outside the man, and call it his 'Genius'.

✱ 'Now, as to the Stars you see, you must know that those that seem to grow dim are souls which are just now sinking themselves entirely into the body; those which are growing brighter again, and shine from above, just as if they were swinging themselves up from the depths, and are shaking off from themselves a sort of dark mist like dust, are such souls as are, after death, swimming back out of their bodies. Finally, those which are hovering on high, are Genii of wise and discerning humans.

✱ 'Make an effort, and see whether you can become conscious of the tie by which each of them is united to its Soul.'



The Dream of Timarchus [5], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱



* Timarchus, paying closer attention, noticed that the Stars swayed, some more some less, just as one sees corks swaying on the water-surface, serving as indicators of the nets beneath. * Some, indeed, swayed as much as shuttles do, and could not make any motion in a straight line on account of the unequal, self-confused burden they upheld. * The Voice instructed Timarchus on this point :

* 'Those whose motion is straight and orderly have docile souls, with whom the sub-rational part has, through nourishment and education, been prevented from becoming hard and rough. * But those which flit up and down in a disorderly fashion, behaving as if tugged by a rope are those who have to do with a contrary and poorly-reared nature. * At one time They win the victory, taming the Souls by enforcement on them of higher leadings; but soon, sucked back by the old habit of sinning, the Souls are once more contrary. * For whenever the Genius pulls the cord with which the animal part of the Soul is, as it were, harnessed, this effects what is known as the Repentance of Sins, and Sincere Shame concerning the lusts, desires and motions of the flesh.



The Dream of Timarchus [6], from
* Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' *



* These are the chastisements by which the nobler part holds the Soul in check, as with a bridle, until by repeated punishments, like a tamed animal, she finally becomes so meek as to be obedient to each nod and signal of her Genius without blows or suffering. But such Souls are brought back to their duty very slowly and very late; but those which prove docile to their Genius from birth constitute that class of men known as Soothsayers, whose prayers the Gods respect.

* Of such a kind was the soul of Hermodorus the Klazomenian, which abandoned the body at will, both by day and night, wandering anywhere, and returning after having seen and heard all sorts of things, at all distances. * This she did continually until, through treachery of his own wife, his enemies seized his soul-forsaken body, and burned it together with his house. * But this is not quite accurate: the Soul never entirely abandoned his body; but at times yielding to the Genius, loosened and lengthened the connecting bond, so that she was enabled to travel around the world in such a manner as to report all she had seen and heard outside. * They however, who, during sleep, destroyed his body, are yet



The Dream of Timarchus [7], from
* Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' *



being punished therefor in Tartarus. ✱

✱ 'You will understand all this far more clearly in three months, O youth.

✱ 'Now you may return.'

✱ "As the Voice ceased, Timarchus intended to turn around, to see Who had been conversing with him; but he suddenly felt a racking pain in the head, as if it were being pressed together violently, and now he no longer saw or heard aught of what was transpiring around him. Shortly, however, he came to himself, lying near the entrance of the Cave of Trophonius, just where he had first lain down.

✱ "This is the Dream of Timarchus. ✱ He returned to Athens, and died three months later, as the Voice had prophesied; but when we, marvelling, recounted this Dream to Sokrates, he chode with us that we had told him nothing of it during the life-time of Timarchus, from he would have liked to get the details more exactly."

✱ Hereupon Theanor said, "It seems to me that this Story of Timarchus should be considered sacred, and be preserved unaltered as dedicated to the Divinities; and I should be much astonished if anybody should doubt what we have heard."



The Dream of Timarchus [8], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱

✧ III ✧

✧ THE CARE OF THE GENII ✧



NOW it is not uncommon to speak of the divinity of Nature, and of swans and serpents, and dogs, and horses; why should we then hesitate to assert that Man is divine, and may become a favourite of the Divinities, the more especially as it is granted that the Divinity is the Father of all?

✧ A horse-fancier does not, merely on account of his being such, extend his care to all specimens of the genus Horse indiscriminately; he selects the best one obtainable, separates it from the rest, tends it, cherishes it, and loves it particularly.

✧ Just so do the Higher Beings deal with Us: They impress their Mark only on the Best, whom They separate from the common herd, endow with peculiar and more excellent training, and govern them not indeed with bit and bridle, but by their reason, through certain signs, of which the common herd does not even have the faintest conception.



The Care of the Genii [1], from
✧ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✧



✱ Not all dogs know the signals of the hunters; nor indeed all horses know the signals of the riders; only they who have been properly trained comprehend the task at the first whistle or chirrup, and gladly carry it out. ✱ Even Homer seems to be acquainted with this difference between men. ✱ Some of the soothsayers he calls augurs, others priests; and of some he thinks that they converse with the Gods, and prophesy future events; so,

✱ "Yet the decision reached by the Gods

✱ "In council, was perceived in the spirit

✱ "By Helenos, Priam's son."

Also, "For I have heard

✱ "The Voices of the immortal Gods."

Kings and generals publish their orders by beacons, by the public crier, or by the sound of trumpets; but to their intimates and friends they announce decisions personally by word of mouth.

✱ Just so the Divinity converses personally only with a very few, and that rarely; but He announces decisions to the crowds by signs and omens, wherefrom has arisen the whole art of augury. ✱ So there are never but a very few at any time whom the Divinities single out by such favours, and whom it is Their purpose to make blessed and really divine.



The Care of the Genii [2], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱





✱ But those souls which have freed themselves from generation, who have no further commerce with the body, and now enjoy unbounded freedom, these now become Genii, who, as Hesiod says, care for the weal of Humanity.

✱ Like Athletes, who even when forced by age to discontinue training, do not necessarily cease struggling for fame and bodily perfection, but rather enjoy the spectacle of others exercising, encouraging them, and persistently standing by their side—just like these athletes is it with those Souls who, after liberation from the battles of this life, have been, on account of their former virtues, or rather by them, promoted to the condition and dignity of Genii. ✱ Because of this their promotion, They do not necessarily scorn or ignore the conversations, circumstances and efforts of men; rather, They show kindness to all who are struggling after the same end, support them in their zeal for virtue, and spur them on the more continually by encouragements the closer they seem to be to the goal of their hopes, or indeed, behold them already nearly touching it.

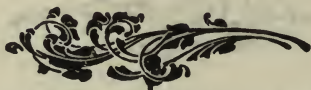


The Care of the Genii [3], from
✱ Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' ✱



* For the Genii do not, indiscriminately, accept the charge of anybody. * When persons are swimming in the ocean, far from the land, and are battling with the waves, by-standers on the shore can do no more than look on silently; but those who are near the shore can be met in the water by persons running through the surf, to help them with hand and voice, and restore them to life. * My friend, the Genii do likewise. * When they see us dive into the floods of business, seizing hold of one thing after another as a hope of salvation, they leave us fight it out alone, that we may learn endurance, and may through our own vim reach port.

* When however a soul through many births has endured willingly and successfully heavy battles, and when, at the end of her course this soul courageously defies danger, and even in the face of defeat struggles, with extreme exertions, to climb upwards, then the Divinity does not dislike to see that the soul's Genius helps her, so the Genius's good offices are given full freedom. * Each Genius has his own soul, which he tries to save by encouragements. * She, being near him, and hearing him is saved; but she who does not, is abandoned to misfortune.



The Care of the Genii [4], from
* Plutarch's 'The Genius of Sokrates' *

