On the Delay of Divine Justice

Plutarch

(First Century A.D.)

1. Epicurus, having said such things, O Cinius, before any one could reply, while we were at the farther end of the porch, went hastily away. But we, somewhat amazed at the man’s rudeness, stood still, looking at one another without speaking, and then turned and resumed our walk.

Then Patrocleas [Plutarch’s son-in-law] commenced the conversation, saying, — What then? Do you see fit to drop the discussion? or will you answer his argument as if he were present, though he has taken himself away?

Tlmon [Plutarch’s brother] then said, — If he threw a javelin at us as he went away, it certainly would not be well for us to take no notice of the weapon still sticking in our sides. Brasidas [Brasidas, the most distinguished Spartan general, and the leader of the Spartan forces, in the earlier part of the Peloponnesian war, was slain near Araphipolis, at the moment of victory], indeed, as we are told, drew out the spear from his own body, and killed with it the man who had hurled it at him. But it is no concern of ours to retaliate on those who fling at us misplaced and false reasoning; it is enough for them if we reject their arguments before they affect our belief.

Then I said, — Which of the arguments that he urged moved you the most? For the man, as if inspired both by wrath and by scorn, brought together against the Divine Providence many things heaped up in confusion, yet no well-ordered reasons, but such miscellaneous cavils as could be gathered here and there.

2. Patrocleas then said, — The slowness and procrastination of the Deity in the punishment of the wicked seem to me the most mysterious of all things; and now, under these arguments, I find myself a new and fresh
adherent to the doctrine in behalf of which they are urged. Indeed, I used a long time ago to be vexed by that saying of Euripides:—

"He lingers; such the nature of the gods." [Orestes]

While in no respect, least of all toward wicked men, is it fitting that God should be dilatory; for they are in no wise dilatory or slow in ill-doing, but are hurried on to evil by their passions with the utmost impetuosity. Indeed, as Thucydides says [in a speech of Cleon in favor of the slaughter of the men and the enslavement of the women and children of Mytilene, History of the Peloponnesian War, III, 38, 1], punishment close at hand bars the way to those who most hope to gain by guilt. Moreover, no debt overdue, equally with the delay of due punishment, renders the person wronged utterly hopeless and depressed, while it confirms the evil-doer in boldness and audacity. On the other hand, punishments directly inflicted on those who are bold in evil are at once preventive of future crimes, and a source of great consolation to those who have suffered wrong. I am therefore troubled by the saying of Bias [one of the seven wise men of Greece], which often recurs to me, when he told a man of bad character that he had no fear that he would go unpunished, but feared that he himself might not live to see him punished. What good, indeed, did the punishment of Aristocrates [Aristocrates, king of Orchomenus in Arcadia, joined the Messenians in war against Sparta, and was bribed by the Lacedaemonians to betray his allies in the battle of Taphrus] do to the Messenians who were slain before it came upon him? He betrayed them in the battle of Taphrus, yet, not being found out for twenty years, he reigned over the Arcadians all that time, till at length his treachery was discovered and met with its due penalty; but the victims of his crime had ceased to be. Again, what comfort did any of the Orchomenians who lost children, friends, and kindred by the treachery of Lyciscus derive from the disease that many years afterward seized him and consumed his body, while he, when he dipped and washed his feet in the river, always prayed, with oaths and curses, that his limbs might rot if he had ever been guilty of treason and injustice? Indeed, not even the children's children of those who were then murdered could have witnessed at Athens the snatching of the contaminated bodies of the murderers from their graves, and their transportation beyond the boundaries of the state. Hence, Euripides is absurd, when, to dissuade from crime, he says: —

"No haste has Justice; dread not her approach;
She strikes no mortal heart with sudden blow;
But noiseless, with slow step, she glides along,
To smite the guilty when their hour has come."
It seems to me that it is no other considerations than these that lead bad men to encourage themselves, and to give themselves free scope for guilty enterprise, inasmuch as the fruit of wrong-doing is quickly ripe and in full sight, while punishment is late, and lingers far behind the enjoyment derived from the guilt.

3. When Patrocleas had thus spoken, Olympicus, taking up the thread of his discourse, said, — It should also be observed, Patrocleas, how exceedingly great is the mischief resulting from the delay and procrastination of the Deity about these matters, since the tardiness of retribution takes away faith in Providence; and because chastisement for the wicked does not ensue immediately upon the performance of an evil deed, but comes upon them afterward, they place it to the account of misfortune, call it ill-luck and not punishment, and so are in no wise profited by it, — being grieved indeed for what befalls them, but not led to repentance for their ill-doing. For as the punishment of the whip and the spur immediately on a horse’s stumbling or shying corrects him and puts him on right behavior, while beating and twitching of the reins and shouting at him at a later period seem to him for some other purpose than discipline, and thus annoy him without teaching him, so guilt rebuked and checked by punishment after each of its wrong-doings and transgressions might gradually become conscience-stricken, and be brought to the fear of God, as presiding over the affairs and experiences of men with a justice that does not linger; but justice hesitating and slow-paced, as Euripides describes it, and falling upon the wicked as if by chance, being vague, untimely, and out of due order, seems like a merely fortuitous event rather than ordained by Providence. Thus, I do not see what use there is in those mills of the gods said to grind so late [hexameter verse from some unknown poet, quoted by Sextus Empiricus in the third century:— "The mills of the gods grind late, but they grind fine."] as to render punishment hard to be recognized, and to make wickedness fearless.

4. These things having been uttered, and I being wrapped in thought, Timon said, — Shall I now put the climax to this reasoning on the side of scepticism, or shall I rather suffer Plutarch to argue against what has already been brought forward?

Then I said, — What need is there of bringing on the third wave, and utterly whelming the subject in doubt and difficulty, if one is not able to refute what was urged at the outset, and to set aside the objections already offered? First, then, taking our start from the home-altar of reverence for all that is divine, — the heritage of the philosophers of the Academy, — we shall piously refrain from speaking about these things as if we had certain
knowledge of them. For it is less presumptuous for one unskilled in music
to discourse about it, or for one not versed in military science to give his
judgment in matters relating to the conduct of war, than for us to pretend to
look through the things that appertain to God and to superior spirits, mere
men as we are, like unskilled observers who should undertake to pass
sentence on the skill of artists by their own conjectures and surmises. It is
not easy, indeed, for a common person to comprehend a physician's
reasons for using the knife later, and not earlier, or for ordering a bath, not
yesterday, but to-day; and still less is it easy or safe for a mortal to say of
God anything except that he, best knowing the fit time for the curing of
wickedness, applies to every evil-doer punishment as the appropriate
medicine, and this not of the same intensity, nor at one and the same
interval of time, for all. Now that the medical treatment of souls, termed
punishment and justice, is the greatest of all arts, Pindar, with myriads of
others, testifies, calling God, the chief and lord of all, the supremely good
artificer, as being the author of justice, to whom it belongs to allot to each
of the guilty the time, mode, and measure of his punishment. Moreover,
Plato says that Minos, although the son of Zeus, became his disciple in
this art, so that it is not possible for one who has not been a learner in it
and acquired skill in it, to proceed aright in the administration of justice, or
to pass an intelligent judgment on its administration by another. Even the
laws which men make do not always have a justifying reason that is simple
and generally manifest; but some of their enactments seem very
ridiculous. Thus, in Lacedaemon, the Ephori when they come into office
make immediate proclamation that no man shall let the beard on the upper
lip grow, and that the laws must be so obeyed that they shall never be
annoying to the citizens. Thus too, the Romans strike the slaves whom
they are going to emancipate with
a slender twig [the slave was brought before the magistrate, whose lictor
laid a rod or wand on his head]. They also, when they make their wills,
appoint certain persons their heirs, and sell their property to other persons
[in this, which was one of several modes in which wills were made in
Rome, the testator made a fictitious sale of his property to a friend], which
appears absurd. But the most absurd of all seems that enactment of
Solon, that, in case of an insurrection in the city, he who does not attach
himself to either party, or act on either side, shall be branded with civic
infamy. In fine, one who understood not the purpose of the lawgiver, nor
comprehended the reasons for the individual statutes, might enumerate
many instances of foolish legislation. What wonder is it then, if, while
human affairs are so difficult to be understood, it is not easy to say
concerning the gods why they punish some transgressors later, some
earlier?
5. These things I say, not as a pretense for getting rid of the subject, but as an apology for the liberty which I crave in discussing it, that my discourse, as if looking to some ultimate harbor or refuge, may proceed with the greater assurance to resolve the doubt. But first see how, as Plato says, God, making himself conspicuous as the example of all things good, bestows human virtue, in some sort his own likeness, on those who are able to be followers of God. For nature throughout, being first in a state of chaos, had the beginning of its change, and of its becoming an orderly universe, by means of a resemblance to and a participation in the Divine idea and the Divine virtue. The same author says that nature kindled sight in us, that the soul by seeing and admiring the heavenly bodies, accustoming itself to behold and admire what is becoming and orderly, might hate unseemly and vagrant passions, and might shun rash and haphazard conduct, as the source of all wickedness and vice. For it has fallen to man's lot to enjoy from God no greater gift than the capacity of being formed to virtue by the imitation of those things in God that are beautiful and good. Thus also to bad men he appoints punishment with a lingering and leisurely stroke, not because he fears mistake or reason for repentance were he to punish more promptly, but in order to expel from us the brutish and impetuous element that there is in punishment, and to teach us not to fall upon those who have injured us with anger, nor when

"Revenge, outleaping all restraint of reason,"

blazes and rages, as if we were bent on appeasing thirst or hunger, but, imitating his clemency and long-suffering, to proceed to chastisement deliberately and cautiously, choosing, as helping us to take the wiser counsel, the time that shall give us the least reason for repentance. As Socrates said, it is not so bad to drink turbid water to excess as for a temper agitated and overwhelmed by anger and rage, before it can be settled and clarified, to satiate itself in the punishment of a kinsman or a neighbor. For it is not, as Thucydides says, the retribution nearest in time to the injury received, but that which lies the farthest from it, that obeys the law of fitness. As anger, according to Melanthius,

"By deeds depraved and dire casts reason out,"

so reason performs right and moderate deeds, putting anger and resentment to flight. Hence it is that men are made meek by the examples of other men; as when they hear how Plato, having lifted his staff over his servant's head, stood still for a long time, punishing his own anger, as he said; and how Archytas, learning of some misconduct and disorder of his laborers in the field, conscious that he was becoming resentful and bitter in
his feeling toward them, did nothing except to say, as he left them, "It is fortunate for you that I am angry." But if the reported sayings and doings of men can tone down the harshness and severity of anger, how much more fitting is it that we — seeing that God, to whom there is no need of delay nor possibility of repentance, yet puts off punishment into the future, and awaits its fitting time — should ourselves be circumspect in these matters, and should regard as a Divine part of virtue the clemency and long-suffering which God manifests, reforming few indeed by punishment, but by the slowness of punishment benefiting and admonishing many!

6. Let us next consider, in the second place, that punishments inflicted by men have no purpose but retaliation, terminating in the suffering of the wrong-doer, and going no farther. They thus follow hard upon the offenses, as a dog barking at the offender's heels, and pursue evil deeds close in their rear. But God probably sees through the dispositions of the diseased souls to which he draws nigh in judgment, knows whether they show an inclination to repentance, and grants time for reformation to those whose guilt has not been excessive or irreclaimable. For, aware what endowment of virtue souls bring from him when they come into the world, and how strong and imperishable in them is this native nobleness, which, though — corrupted by bad association and nurture — it may blossom into evil contrary to nature, yet when cured restores some men entirely to proper habits of life, he therefore does not punish all alike; but the incurable he speedily takes out of being, and cuts them off, inasmuch as it is not only harmful to others, but, most of all, injurious to the sinner's own self, to be always conversant with wickedness. On the other hand, to those whose sins probably proceeded rather from ignorance of the good than from preference for what is vile, he gives time for a change of character; but if they continue as they are, he executes justice on them too, and there is no danger of their escaping. Now see what changes have taken place in the habits and lives of men. Therefore the changeable part of the life or character is designated by a word denoting turn, and also by a word denoting habit, because habit constitutes a large part of the character, and, when adopted, has commanding influence. I am inclined to think, indeed, that the ancients ascribed to Cecrops [a man in the upper part of his body; in the lower, a dragon] a double nature, not, as some say, because from a good king he became a fierce and dragon-like tyrant, but, on the other hand, because, having been in the beginning perverse and an object of terror, he afterward ruled with meekness and kindness. But if this is an open question, we know concerning Gelon [Gelon first obtained the sovereignty of Gela in Sicily, by setting aside the minor sons of the late king, of whom he had been appointed guardian] and Hieron [brother and
successor of Gelon] of Sicily, and Peisistratus [Peisistratns obtained supreme power in Athens no less than three times], the son of Hippocrates, that, getting possession of absolute power by foul means, they used it to good purpose. Gaining the ascendancy unlawfully, they governed with moderation and for the public welfare. Indeed, they made excellent laws, gave great encouragement to agriculture, and converted their subjects from scoffers and babblers into sober citizens and industrious men. Gelon also, being an excellent military commander and conquering the Carthaginians in a great battle, refused to conclude the peace which they sought, till he had procured the insertion in the treaty of a promise on their part to cease offering children to Cronus. Lydiades [Lydiades rose from an obscure condition to a despotic sovereignty over Megalopolis] at first exercised a tyrannical sway in Megalopolis; but during his reign becoming a different man, and inspired with hatred for injustice, he restored laws to the citizens, and then, fighting with their enemies, fell gloriously in his country's cause. If one had killed Miltiades when he was a tyrant in Chersonesus, or had prosecuted and slain Cimon when he was living with his sister as his wife [Elpinice, whose first husband was Cimon, was his father's daughter; but they had different mothers], or had the people banished Themistocles from the city when he went about making riot and doing mischief, and showed his insolence in the market-place, sentencing him to exile as Alcibiades was afterward sentenced, would not the Marathons have been lost to us? and the Eurymedons? and the beautiful

"Euboean headland, where the sons of Athens
Laid the fair corner-stone of liberty?"

[The first naval battle between the Grecian forces and Xerxes was fought off Artemisium. Themistocles commanded the Athenian portion of the fleet, and the splendid victory was ascribed, in great part, to his skill and prowess. From Pindar, — commemorative of this battle.]

Great natures, indeed, produce nothing small. Because of the intensity of their impulses, what is strong and efficient in them does not remain idle; but they are tossed to and fro as on an ocean before attaining to a fixed and established character. Therefore, as one unskilled in husbandry, seeing a tract of country full of prickly shrubs and weeds, abounding in vermin, and having much stagnant water and a great deal of mud, would not make choice of it, while to one who has learned to discriminate and judge, these very things indicate strength and all other good qualities in the soil, and show that it can be plowed without resistance, so in like manner there are great natures that bring forth many things annoying and blameworthy, the roughness and thorniness of which so put us out of
patience that we might think it best to cut them off and to prevent all further growth; while the better Judge, discerning from these very tokens the excellence and nobleness that lie beneath them, awaits maturity as the coadjutor of reason and virtue, and the period when the nature once so wild shall yield fruit that is not wild.

7. Enough has been said on this point. To pass to another consideration, do you not think that it was wise in some of the Greek states to copy the Egyptian law, that a woman with child under sentence of death shall have her sentence suspended till her child is born?

We think so, — they all said.

Then I continued, — If one cannot bear children, yet will be able in process of time to bring forth into the light some clandestine transaction or conspiracy, or will disclose some lurking evil, or will become the author of some salutary counsel, or will invent a supply for some urgent need, is not he who awaits the benefit that will accrue from delay in punishing such a man wiser than he who would put the offender out of the way at once? So I think.

And so do we, said Patrocleas.

You are right, said I. For consider that, if Dionysius [before Dionysius the elder obtained the undisputed sovereignty of Syracuse, Sicily had been devastated by the Carthaginians, and several of its chief cities destroyed] had been punished in the beginning of his tyrannical reign, none of Greek descent would ever have lived again in Sicily after its devastation by the Carthaginians. Nor, if Periander [Periander was the tyrant of Corinth in the seventh century B.C.] had been speedily punished, would Greeks have again inhabited Apollonia, or Anactorium, or the peninsula of the Leucadians [the island of Leucadia was a peninsula in Homer’s time]. I think, too, that Cassander’s punishment was delayed, that Thebes might be repeopled. [Alexander destroyed Thebes; twenty years afterward Cassander rebuilt it.] The larger part of the strangers that had plundered the temple [that is, this temple of Delphi, the scene of the dialogue], and afterwards went to Sicily with Timoleon, perished wretchedly in their guilt, but not till they had conquered the Carthaginians, and put an end to their oppressive rule. [In the Phocian war two Phocian leaders with their associates seized the treasure deposited in the temple at Delphi, and used it to hire foreign mercenaries. Those concerned in the robbery were wandering as outlaws in Peloponnesus, when Timoleon enlisted them for service in Sicily against the Carthaginians.] Indeed, the Deity uses some
bad men as public executioners to punish others, and then destroys the executioners themselves. This, I think, has been the case with most tyrants. For as the gall of the hyena, and the saliva of the sea-calf, and other parts of loathsome beasts, have a certain virtue in the cure of diseases, so upon some who need severe chastisement God inflicts the implacable bitterness of a tyrant or the annoying oppression of a chieftain, and removes not what pains and troubles them till the disease is cured and purged away. Such a medicine was Phalaris [of the brazen bull] to the people of Agrigentum, and Marius to the Romans. God indeed expressly foretold to the people of Sicyon that they would of necessity be severely scourged, for seizing as of their own city Teletias, a Cleonaean youth, who had been crowned in the Pythian games, and then tearing him in pieces. Accordingly Orthagoras, and after him Myron and Cleisthenes and their satellites, put an end to their lawlessness. But the Cleonaeans, not chancing to have the same curative treatment, came to naught. Hear also Homer, when he says,

"A son endowed with every virtue sprang
   From parentage that gave no sign of virtue."

This son of Copreus, of whom he thus speaks, achieved indeed no splendid or noble deeds; but the posterity of Sisyphus, and that of Autolycus, and that of Phlegyas, bloomed forth in the glories and virtues that belong to great kings. Pericles sprang from an infamous Athenian family [one of his maternal ancestors had been cursed, and banished from Athens, a century and a half before his birth, for an insurrectionary enterprise], and Pompey the Great in Rome was the son of Strabo [he was killed by lightning, which the people regarded as a retributive bolt from heaven], whom the Roman people so hated that they cast his dead body out of doors and trod it under foot. What wonder is it then, if, as the farmer does not cut down the thorn-bush till he has taken from it the green shoots which he uses as salad, nor do the Libyans burn the cistus till they have collected the balsam which it yields, so God does not destroy the evil and thorny root of an honorable and royal race till the appropriate fruit springs from it? For it was better for the Phocians to have lost ten thousand of the cattle and horses of Iphitus, and a larger amount of gold and silver than was ever abstracted from Delphi, than that Odysseus [Autolycus was the father of Anticleia, and it was he that stole the cattle of Iphitus] or Aesculapius [Aesculapius in Grecian fable was the son of Apollo by Coronis, the daughter of Phlegyas, who set fire to his Delphian temple] should not have been born, or that the world should have failed of the good and eminently useful men who have been the sons of wicked and depraved fathers.
8. But must we not think it better that punishments should take place in fitting time and way, than that they should be inflicted speedily and promptly? There was a fitness in the case of Callippus, who with the very same dagger with which he had procured the death of Dion while feigning to be his friend was himself killed by the friends of Dion [Dion obtained supreme power in Syracuse, though not the title of King, on the expulsion of Dionysius the younger]; and in that of the murderer of Mitius of Argos, who was killed in a riot, and whose brazen statue in the market-place fell with fatal issue on the man who had killed him. You, Patrocleas, must, I am sure, know about Bessus the Paeonian, and Aristo the Oetaean, the commander of the foreign soldiers.

No, by Zeus, said Patrocleas, I do not know, but I want to know about them.

Aristo [Eriphyle received a golden necklace as a reward for betraying her husband Amphiaras, who secreted himself to avoid going to the Theban war in which it was predicted that he should perish. His son Alcmaeon avenged his father by killing his mother, and then made of the necklace a sacred deposit in the temple at Delphi. Aristo was the commander of one of the bands of mercenaries hired by the pillage of the temple], said I, by leave of the tyrants [the Phocian leaders who committed this sacrilege], took away the ornaments of Eriphyle deposited here [in this temple], and carried them as a present to his wife; but his son, being for some reason angry with his mother, set the house on fire, and burned all that were in it. Bessus, it is said, killed his father, and escaped detection for a long time. But at length, going to supper among strangers, he shook down a swallow's nest with his spear, and killed the young birds; and when those present asked, as was natural, what had provoked him to do so strange a thing, he said, "Do they not, even of old, bear false witness against me, and cry out that I killed my father?" Those who heard him, marvelling at what he said, told the king, and, on investigation, Bessus suffered due punishment.

9. What I have said thus far has been said on the supposition that, as is generally thought, there is an actual delay in the punishment of the wicked. But as to what may yet be said on this point, it may be well for us to listen to Hesiod, who maintains, not, with Plato, that punishment is a suffering that follows wrong-doing, but that it is a twin birth with wrong-doing, springing from the same soil and the same root; for he says,

"Bad counsel does most harm to him who gives it,"

and,

"Who does another wrong himself most wrongs."

The cantharis [the Spanish fly, which was used for medicinal purposes in very early times], by a certain contrast in the elements of its physical structure, is said to contain within itself the antidote for the wound which it makes.

But — the converse of this — guilt, bringing with itself into being its own pain and punishment, not subsequently to, but in the very act of wrong-doing receives its penalty. The malefactor who is to be crucified carries his cross with his own body; and in like manner wickedness creates from itself, to be borne by itself, each several form of chastisement, being, so to speak, an expert artificer of a wretched life, attended by thronging fears and distressing emotions, by ceaseless remorse and constant perturbation. But some persons are like children, who, often seeing in the theatres malefactors in gold-embroidered tunics and purple mantles, crowned and dancing, admire and applaud them as happy beings, until they appear on the stage goaded and scourged, and with fire streaming from their gay and finely wrought apparel. For many of the wicked, surrounded by large families, and possessed of places of high command and extended authority, are not visibly punished till they are seen slain or hurled down a precipice, which ought to be called, not punishment, but the end or consummation of punishment. As Plato says that Herodicus, the Selymbrian, being attacked with phthisis, an incurable disease, and being the first to unite gymnastics with the healing art, made death long for himself and for those similarly affected; so too such of the wicked as seem to escape immediate punishment receive, not after a long time, but during a long time, not a slower, but a longer punishment; nor are they punished when they grow old, but they grow old in a state of punishment. Yet it is only to you that I speak of a long time; for to the gods any period of human life is as nothing, and "now, not thirty years hence," is to them as it would be to us for a malefactor to be put to torture or hanged this evening, and not to-morrow morning. Besides, one is kept in life as in a prison that has no outlet or mode of escape; yet he may enjoy frequent feasts, may transact business, may receive presents and kindnesses, like the men who play with dice or at draughts in prison, with the rope hanging over their heads.

10. Indeed, why may I not say that those under sentence of death are not punished till their heads are cut off, — and that he who has been condemned to drink hemlock, and then goes about and remains
unaffected till his legs grow heavy, is not punished until he is overpowered by the deadening of the muscles and the congealing of the blood, combined with the loss of consciousness, — if we confine the name of punishment to the last stage of punishment, and leave out of the account the sufferings, and terrors, and apprehension, and remorse, which in the mean while prey upon every guilty soul? As well might we maintain that a fish that has swallowed the hook is not caught till we see it roasted by the cook or cut up on the table. For every wrong-doer is in the grasp of justice so soon as he has swallowed as a bait the pleasure connected with his sin, having a conscience resting heavily upon him, and driven hither and thither in the endeavor to expiate his guilt,

"As the impetuous tunny plows the sea."

Up to the time when the crime is committed, the well-known assurance and audacity of guilt are strong and efficient; but afterward the excitement subsides like a wind that dies away, and the mind, enfeebled and dispirited, becomes subject to fears and superstitions, — so that Clytemnestra's dream, as related by Stesichorus, is in conformity with experience and truth. The verses are:

"A dragon seemed to come with blood-smeared head, 
And took the form of King Pleisthenides." [Agamemnon, the husband of Clytemnestra, whom she murdered on his return from Troy, was the son of Pleisthenes.]

Indeed, visions in sleep, noonday apparitions, oracles, peals of thunder, and whatever events can seem to take place by the agency of God, are fraught with tempests and terrors for those who are in this condition. Thus, it is said that Apollodorus [Apollodonis, king of the small state of Cassandreia, was regarded as having been unsurpassed in tyranny, cruelty, and debauchery] once in his sleep saw himself flayed by Scythians, then boiled, and his own heart speaking out of the caldron, and saying, "I have brought all this upon thee"; and again, that he saw his daughters on fire, their bodies in flames, running round him in a circle. It is said, too, that Hipparchus, the son of Peisistratus, shortly before his death, saw Aphrodite sprinkling blood upon his face from a vial. The friends of Ptolemy surnamed Ceraunus [Ptolemy Ceraunus was the eldest son of Ptolemy Soter; but, on account of his violent passions and moral obliquity, his father designated a younger son as his successor. Ceraunus then emigrated to Macedonia, became intimate with Seleucus, murdered him treacherously, and himself assumed the sovereignty; but in less than a year he was defeated by the Gauls who then first invaded that region, was taken prisoner, and was put to death with the utmost barbarity] saw him
summoned to the tribunal by Seleucus, with vultures and wolves for his judges, while he was distributing large portions of flesh to his enemies. Pausanias [the Pausanias referred to is the Spartan viceroy and general of that name], having sent to seize by force Cleonice, a free-born maiden in Byzantium, that he might have her company by night, and then, in consequence of some unaccountable mental disturbance or suspicion, killing her when she arrived, often saw her in his dreams, saying to him,

"Come quick to judgment; lust works woe to man."

The vision not being discontinued, it is said, he set sail for the oracle of the dead at Heracleia, and there, by fitting propitiatory sacrifices and libations, he called up the maiden's soul; and she, coming into his presence, told him that he should rest from these troubles on his arrival at Lacedaemon. As soon as he arrived there, he died.

11. Thus, if there is nothing for the soul after death, that is, if death is the end of all reward and punishment, one might be disposed to say that the Deity deals indulgently and leniently with those of the wicked who are soon punished and die early. For were it maintained that in their lifetime the wicked incur no other evil than the conviction that wrong-doing is utterly fruitless and graceless, and for the many and great conflicts of mind that it costs confers no benefit nor anything worthy of endeavor, the perception of this alone is fatal to the soul's happiness. It is with the evil-doer as with Lysimachus [one of Alexander's generals, and after Alexander's death king of Thrace], who, compelled by thirst to surrender his person and his command to the Getae, having quenched his thirst and being at the same time made a prisoner, exclaimed, "Alas for my guilt in suffering myself to be deprived of so great a kingdom for so brief a pleasure!" It is, indeed, in a case like this, exceedingly difficult to resist the necessity created by a natural appetite. But when a man, either from inordinate desire for wealth, or from envy of those possessed of civic honor and power, or for the sake of some sensual gratification, commits an unlawful and abominable deed, and, after the thirst and madness of passion have subsided, sees in due time the vile and fearful traits of character which lead to crime established permanently within him, while he can discern in himself nothing useful, or serviceable, or profitable, is it not probable that the thought often occurs to him that for vainglory or for slavish and fruitless pleasure, he has set at naught the greatest and best things that are accounted right among men, and thus whelmed his life in shame and trouble? For as Simonides [Simonides is said to have been the first poet who eulogized the subjects of his verse from mercenary motives] said in jest that he found the chest of money always full, that of thanks empty, so the wicked, having a clear view
of their own guilt, find it — after the indulgence which yields for the moment an empty pleasure — utterly devoid of hope, and always laden with fears and griefs, with cheerless memories, suspicion of what the future may bring, and distrust of the present. Thus, as we hear Ino say on the stage, repenting of what she has done, —

"Dear women, tell me how, as at the first,
As if this deed of mine were uncommitted,
The house of Athamas may be my home," [The myths about Ino are various, and mutually inconsistent. According to some she killed, according to others she endeavored to kill, the children of her husband, Athamas, by a former wife. She at length leaped into the sea, and emerged a goddess, under the name of Leucothea.]

so it is probable that the soul of every evil-doer discusses these things within itself, and considers how it can by any possibility evade the memory of its misdeeds, cast out from itself the consciousness of them, and, becoming pure, start as if from the beginning on a new life. For wickedness manifests neither courage, nor modesty, nor consistency, nor steadfastness in the objects of its preference, — unless, by Zeus, we admit that evil-doers are wise; but where avarice, and eager voluptuousness, and implacable envy, are associated with malice and depravity, there also, on examination, you may see beneath the surface superstition, and effeminate indolence, and dread of death, and an abrupt vacillation of impulses, and an arrogant pretense to undeserved honor. Men of this character fear those who blame them, and at the same time dread those who praise them, as those whom they have wronged by their hypocrisy, and as persons especially hostile to the wicked, as is evinced in their cordial commendation of those who seem to be good. Indeed, the hardness in depravity, as in bad iron, is brittle, and what seems in it to have the greatest power of resistance is easily broken in pieces. Hence, in process of time, as bad men come to the knowledge of themselves, they are depressed, and grow peevish, and hold their own manner of life in abhorrence. When a mean man restores a deposit entrusted to his care, or gives security for a friend, or with honorable ambition confers gifts and services on his country, and immediately repents and is in trouble for what he has done, because of the utter instability and vacillation of his mind, — and when some who are applauded in the theatre for their generosity groan as their love of glory is merged in their love of money, — can it be that those who, like Apollodorus [Apollodorus is said to have bound his associates in some movement for his own aggrandizement by bringing them together at a festival, and at its close giving them evidence that they had been feeding
on human victims], sacrifice men in the interest of their tyrannies and conspiracies, or like Glaucus [Glaucus, a Lacedaemonian, had a high reputation for integrity, and on the ground of it received from a foreigner a deposit of a large sum of money. When the owner's sons claimed the deposit, he disclaimed all knowledge of it], the son of Epicycles, plunder the property of their friends, do not feel remorse, nor hate themselves, nor suffer grief, for the crimes that they have committed? I, indeed, if it is not irreverent thus to speak, do not think that those who work iniquity need any avenger among gods or men; but their own life suffices for their punishment, being utterly corrupted and kept in constant agitation by their guilt.

12. Consider now whether our discussion has exceeded a reasonable time.

Timon replied, — Perhaps so, with reference to the time that will yet be required; for I am going to bring forward the last doubt as a combatant held in reserve, since the others have been fairly conquered. What Euripides with the utmost boldness of speech inveighs against the gods for doing, namely, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, account us as tacitly charging upon them. Certainly, if those who have done wrong were themselves punished, there is no justice in chastising those who have done no wrong; for it is not right to punish even the evil-doers in their own person twice for the same offense; and if the gods, in their remissness failing to punish the guilty, afterward inflict penalties on the innocent, they do not fittingly make amends for their slow doing by unrighteous doing. Take the case of Aesop. It is said that he came hither with money furnished by Croesus, intending to offer a magnificent sacrifice to the god of the temple, and to distribute among the citizens of Delphi four minas apiece. But, as it is reported, having become disaffected toward the people here on account of some affront or quarrel, he made the sacrifice indeed, but sent the rest of the money back to Sardis, not thinking the men of Delphi worthy of the gift. They then raised against him the charge of sacrilege, and put him to death by throwing him from yonder cliff, which they call Hyampeia. From that time it is said that the god was angry with them, and made their soil unfruitful, and sent among them all kinds of strange diseases, so that they went round among the public assemblies of the Grecian cities, proclaiming with earnest entreaty that whoever would demand justice of them in behalf of Aesop should receive full satisfaction. But not until the third generation came Idmon, the Samian, not related to Aesop, except as the descendant of those who had bought him at Samos, and to him the Delphians made satisfaction in the ways
prescribed, and were freed from their calamities. It was on that account, it is said, that the people changed the place of punishment for sacrilege from Hyampeia to the cliff called Nauplia. Now those who hold the memory of Alexander in the fondest regard, of whom I am one, do not approve of his sacking the city of Branchidae [A small town in Central Asia, built by the Branchidae, who were priests and custodians of the temple of Apollo Didymeus in an Ionian city bearing their name, near Miletus], and destroying its inhabitants of all ages, because their great-grandfathers had treacherously delivered up the temple of Miletus. So Agathocles, the tyrant of Syracuse, derided and teased the Corcyraeans [it was at Scheria, according to Homer, that Odysseus was kindly received by Nausicaa, entertained sumptuously by King Alcinous, her father, and provided with the ship on board of which he reached Ithaca], when they asked him why he ravaged their island, saying, "By Zeus, because your fathers showed hospitality to Odysseus." Again, when the people of Ithaca complained that his soldiers were stealing their sheep, he replied, "Your king not only did the like, but put out the shepherd's [Polyphemus] eye." But is not Apollo more unreasonable than these men whom I have named, if he is now ruining the Pheneatae by stopping up the outlet of their streams, and putting their whole country under water [the territory of Pheneus is so situated at the confluence of two mountain streams as to be of necessity liable to inundation. There was an old canal, said to have been constructed by Hercules, and designed to carry off" any abnormal excess of water; but it had early become obstructed and useless, and Pliny says that there had been no less than five periods when the region had been entirely devastated by the overflow of the rivers], because Hercules is said a thousand years ago to have stolen the oracular tripod and carried it to Pheneus? And was he less unreasonable in announcing to the Sybarites that they should see the end of their calamities, when by three destructive visitations they should have appeased the wrath of the Leucadian Hera? [There were three occasions on which the Sybarites incurred the special anger of Hera. Her statue was overturned in some civic commotion. Afterward the people of Sybaris killed thirty members of a delegation from their neighbors of Crotona, and cast out their bodies to be devoured by wild beasts. On this occasion, the goddess was seen by night with an angry and threatening mien. In the third place, a slave who had taken refuge at her altar was pursued and scourged by his master, who held his father's tomb as so much more sacred than her temple that he ceased beating the slave when he sought refuge there.] Nor is it so very long a time since the Locrians ceased sending virgins to Troy.
"With naked limbs, bare feet, and servile guise,
At early dawn they sweep Athene's temple,
Unveiled, while age remorseless steals upon them."

And all this because of the licentiousness of Ajax. [The tradition was that Ajax was guilty of an outrage on Cassandra, the priestess of Athene.] Now where is the reasonableness or rightfulness of these things? Equally little can we commend the Thracians for still tattooing their wives, to avenge Orpheus; or the barbarians about the Po, who wear black, as they say, in mourning for Phaethon, which seems all the more ridiculous when we consider that, while those who lived when Phaethon perished cared nothing at all about the matter, their posterity of the fifth or the tenth generation are changing their garments and mourning for him. Yet this is merely foolish, not atrocious or intolerable. But on what justifiable ground does the anger of the gods, suddenly disappearing, as some rivers do, break out again in a different place, on other people than the evil-doers, terminating only in extreme calamity?

13. As soon as Timon came to a pause, fearing that with a fresh start he might bring forth more and greater absurdities, I instantly asked him, — Do you really think that all these things are true?

If not all, said he, yet if some of them be true, do you not think that the discussion labors under the same difficulty?

Perhaps, said I; and so to persons in a high fever, whether they chance to wear one garment, or to be wrapped in many, the burning heat is nearly or quite the same, and yet it contributes to their relief to remove the multitude of coverings. But if the patient is unwilling to have this done, let him have his own way. Yet most of these stories seem like myths and fictions. But recall to mind the religious festival lately held here, when you saw the magnificent portion of the viands which the heralds took from the table, proclaiming that it was due to the posterity of Pindar, and remember how solemn and sweet this token of honor seemed to you.

But, said he, who would not be delighted by the gracefulness of a commemoration so entirely Grecian and so simply archaic? unless he had, to borrow Pindar's own words, a black heart forged in a cold fire.

There is then no need, said I, of my citing a similar proclamation made in Sparta, "After the Lesbian singer," [Terpander, long dead] in honor and remembrance of the ancient Terpander; for the principle is the same. But you, I suppose, think yourselves superior to other Boeotians, as being of
the race of the Opheltiadae [descendants of Opheltes. He founded a royal line in Boeotia]; you make similar claims among the Phocians [Delphi being in Phocis, the claims on the score of Daiphantus would be availing in all processions and festivities connected with the temple service] by virtue of your descent from Daiphantus [a victory that the Phocians under Daiphantus had gained five hundred years before was still celebrated in Plutarch's time]; and you, indeed, were the first to stand by me and help me in preserving for the Lycormaeans and the Satilaeans their hereditary honor, and the right to wear crowns in public which belongs to the posterity of Hercules, — maintaining that lasting honors and favors are due to those descended from Hercules, because he, though a great benefactor to the Greeks, never received his due of gratitude, or any fitting recompense.

You remind us, said Timon, of a truly noble contest, and of one in which it was especially becoming for a philosopher to take part.

Relax then, my friend, said I, the severity of your accusation, and do not take it so hard if some of the descendants of wicked and depraved people are punished; or else do not welcome or commend the honor rendered to worthy parentage. For if we would retain the reward of virtue in the posterity of the virtuous, we cannot reasonably think that punishments for misdoings ought to fail and cease, but must suppose that they will run on at even pace with the rewards, giving retribution in each case in proportion to desert. But he who gladly sees the posterity of Cimon honored in Athens, yet is vexed and angry at the exile of the descendants of Lachares [Lachares was a demagogue who early in the third century B.C. obtained virtually supreme power in Athens, plundered the Parthenon, stripped the statue of Athene of its ornaments] or of Ariston [Ariston was an Epicurean philosopher, who raised himself to a virtual tyranny in Athens], is very stupid and feeble-minded, or rather has the presumption to take the place of a wrangler and railer against the Divine Being, — accusing him, forsooth, if the children's children of an unrighteous and wicked man seem to prosper, and again accusing him if the posterity of bad ancestors are suffered to decline and to become extinct, — indeed, finding equal fault with God when the children of a good father or those of a bad father fare ill.

14 Let these considerations serve you as defenses against those who are so excessively bitter and objurgatory. But taking up again the beginning of the thread in our discussion concerning God, — obscure, indeed, and with many turnings and windings, — let us direct our way discreetly and deliberately toward what is probable and credible. For not even in the things which we ourselves do can we always state with confidence the
actual and true meaning. Thus we cannot tell why we order the children of those who die of phthisis or of dropsy to sit with their feet in water till the corpse is buried, though it is believed that in this case they neither contract the disease at the time nor are liable to it afterward. Nor, again, can we tell the reason why, when a goat takes into his mouth a piece of snakerooot, the whole flock stand still till the goatherd comes and takes it out of his mouth. There are properties of various objects that are transfused or transmitted in ways incredible as to velocity and distance. In these cases we are indeed more surprised at remoteness of time than of space. Yet it is really more amazing that Athens should have been infected throughout with a pestilence [the plague that raged in Athens early in the Peloponnesian war, of which Thucydides gives so remarkable an account] that began in Aethiopia, and that Pericles should have died of it, and Thucydides should have been attacked by it, than that, if the Delphians and the Sybarites have been wicked, protracted punishment should come upon their posterity. For all properties of objects have mutual action and reaction from their very beginning till now, and bear relations to one another of which, though we are ignorant of the cause, it none the less produces its appropriate effect.

15. Nevertheless, the public calamities of cities have obviously their reason in justice. For a city has unity and continuity like a living creature, not divesting itself of identity by the changes that occur at successive periods of its life, nor becoming a different being from its former self by the lapse of time, but always retaining a conscious selfhood with the peculiarities that belong to it, and receiving the entire blame or praise of whatever it does or has done in its collective capacity, so long as the community which constitutes it and binds it together remains a unit. But dividing it by successive periods of time so as to make of a single city many cities, or rather an infinite number of cities, is like making of one man many men, because he is now elderly, yet once was younger, and still earlier was a mere stripling. This might remind one of the Epicharmians, from whom the sophists derived the cumulative argument, according to which he who used to be in debt now owes nothing, having become a different man, and he who was yesterday invited to supper to-day comes uninvited, being another person. However, different periods of life make greater changes in every one of us than they ordinarily make in cities. One who sees Athens would recognize it thirty years afterward; for the present manners, sports, industries, likings, and resentments of the people closely resemble those of former days. But after a considerable time, scarce a kinsman or friend would recognize a man's countenance and form; while the change of manners readily brought about in a person by differing fashions of intercourse, employment, experience, and legal obligation look
strange and new even to one who has always known him. But yet the man is said to be one and the same man from the beginning to the end. The city in like manner remaining the same, we regard it as involved in the disgrace of its ancestry by the very right by which it shares their glory and their power. Else we shall throw everything into the river of Heracleitus, into which, he says, no one can enter twice, because changing nature is transposing and altering all things.

16. But if a city is one continuous entity, equally so is a race that springs from one original stock and carries along with it certain common tendencies derived from that stock; and that which is born is not, like a manufactured article, separated from him who produced it; for it exists from him, not merely by him, so that it possesses and bears within itself some part of him, which is properly the object of chastisement or of commendation. Not in mere sport I would say that it was more unjust for the Athenians to destroy the brazen statue of Cassander [Athens had been under the government of men who had been virtually Cassander's viceroy], and for the people of Syracuse to cast beyond their borders the body of Dionysius [Dionysius the elder], than for the posterity of those men to suffer punishment. For there was nothing of the nature of Cassander in the statue, and the soul of Dionysius had already left the corpse; but in Nisaeus [Nisaeus was the son of Dionysius the elder, and was sovereign of Syracuse for a short time while his brother Dionysius the younger was in exile], and Apollocrates [Apollocrates was the son of Dionysius the younger, and grandson of the elder. His father in going into exile left him in command of the citadel of Syracuse, which he was soon compelled to surrender], and Antipater and Philip [these were both sons of Cassander], and equally in other sons of wicked parents, there was implanted, and remains continuously, the part of their parents that had the mastery over their lives, and in the children this is not quiescent or inactive, but they live by it, and are nourished by it, and order their conduct by it, and think as it prompts. Nor is it at all marvellous or absurd that, being the children of such men, they should possess their qualities. In fine, I would say that, as in the healing art, whatever is beneficial is therefore right, and as he would be ridiculous who should think it wrong in a case of hip-disease to cauterize the thumb, and when the liver is ulcerated to scarify the upper part of the abdomen, and when the hoofs of oxen are tender to anoint the tips of their horns, equally is he ridiculous who thinks in the matter of punishment that anything else than the cure of wickedness is right, and who is vexed when the remedy is applied to some parts rather than to others, after the manner of those who open a vein to cure ophthalmia. Nor does such a person seem to look beyond the range of his bodily senses;
nor does he bear it in mind that a teacher in whipping one boy admonishes all, and that a general in the capital punishment of one out of ten brings all the guilty men under his command back to their duty. In truth not only is one part of the body cured through another part, but there are certain dispositions of mind and conduct, equally those that are evil and those that tend to reformation, as to which soul is influenced by soul more than body is affected by body. For from body to body the same affection and the same change seem to be transmitted; while in the case under consideration the soul, through the influence of the imagination, becomes worse or better in a degree corresponding to the intensity of hope or fear.

17. While I was still speaking, Olympicus interrupted me, saying, — You seem to have, underlying this reasoning of yours, an hypothesis of prime importance, — the continued existence of the soul.

Yes, said I, inasmuch as you yourselves admit it, or rather did admit it; for the argument from the very beginning proceeded from the supposition that God deals with men according to their merits.

Olympicus replied, — Do you think that it follows from God's dealing with us according to our merits, that souls are either absolutely incorruptible, or destined at least to continue in being for a certain period after death?

I replied, — No, my good friend. God, forsooth, is so petty and so trifling, that — as if we had nothing of the divine in us, nor anything closely resembling him, and stable and firm, but were, as Homer says, mere leaves, like those that wither and perish altogether — he makes such account of us as the women do of their gardens of Adonis, which they tend and cultivate in earthen pots, — souls lasting for a day, blooming in a frail flesh that has no strong root of life, then at once extinguished by any casualty that may chance to occur. But if you choose, making no mention of other gods, look at this one of ours here, and say whether you suppose that he, knowing that the souls of the dying are instantly destroyed when they are exhaled from their bodies, like clouds or smoke-wreaths, should demand so many propitiations for those who die, and such tokens of great reverence and honor for the dead, thus deceiving and deluding those who believe in him. I therefore would not deny the continued existence of the soul, unless some one, like Hercules, should carry off the tripod of the Pythian priestess, and abolish and destroy the oracle. For while even down to our own time many such things are foretold by the oracle as are said to have been announced to Corax of Naxos [Several hundred years ago. Archilochus, the earliest Ionian lyric poet, flourished, and was killed in battle, in the seventh century B.C. This entire passage may be regarded
as an argumentum de concessis, and as such it is perfectly legitimate. The inspiration of the Delphian oracle and priestess was believed in by many of those for whom Plutarch wrote; and to them he said, "Can you believe that all these oracular utterances about expiations for the dead and posthumous honors to be paid to them have had reference to beings that ceased to exist when they ceased to breathe?", it is unholy to deem the soul capable of dying.

Then Patrocleas said, — What was that prediction, and who was that Corax? Both the story and the name are unfamiliar to me.

By no means, said I; but I was to blame in using a by-name instead of the real name. For he who killed Archilochus in battle was named Calondas, as they say, and had Corax for a surname. He, having been first driven out of the temple by the Pytliian priestess because he had killed a man sacred to the Muses, then employing prayers and entreaties with a statement of the case in his own justification, was ordered to go to the residence of Tettix [or, "the home of the grasshopper"] in order to propitiate the soul of Archilochus. This place was Taenarus [this place was on the southernmost cape of Greece. The peninsula which forms this cape had a famous temple of Poseidon, was sacred to the infernal gods, and was the site of an avenue, through a cave, to and from the infernal regions]; for there it is said that Tettix the Cretan arrived with a fleet, built a city, and established himself hard by the oracle of the dead. In like manner, the Spartans were ordered by the oracle to propitiate the soul of Pausanias, and they sent for necromancers from Italy, who by their sacrifices drove the apparition of Pausanias from the temple. [Pausanias, the Spartan, after a career of mingled glory and shame, being detected in treasonable intrigues, took refuge in the temple of Athene. When he was nearly exhausted by hunger the Ephori dragged him out of the temple, and he died at its threshold.]

18. There is then, said I, one course of reasoning which confirms equally the providence of God and the continued life of the human soul, and neither can remain credible if the other is taken away. But to the soul existing after death there is a stronger probability that rewards and punishments are rendered, than there is that they should be fully rendered in this life. For during this life the soul is, like an athlete, in perpetual conflict; but when the conflict is over, then what the soul has deserved is allotted to it. Yet whatever favors or whatever chastisements the soul, being there by itself, receives, are of no concern to us living here, nay, they are disbelieved and they are out of the field of our knowledge; but these penalties that pass on through children and remoter posterity, being manifest to men living here, check and restrain many of the wicked. There
is, indeed, no punishment more shameful or more sorrowful than for men to see their posterity suffering on their account. Were the soul of an impious and lawless man to behold after death, not his statues overthrown, or any honors that he had received cancelled, but his children, or friends, or kindred, or family, suffering great misfortunes and receiving punishment on his account, such a soul would not choose again to be depraved and profligate, — no, not even to obtain honors like those which belong to Zeus. To show this I have a story to tell, which I lately heard; but I hesitate, lest you may think it a myth, while I want to confine myself to what is reasonable.

Do not hesitate by any means, said Olympicus, but tell the story.

The others made the same request.

Then, said I, permit me to finish my reasoning, and afterward we will take up the myth, if indeed it be a myth.

19. Bion says that God in punishing the children of the wicked is more ridiculous than a physician who should administer medicine to a grandson or a son for his grandfather's or his father's illness. But the two things are in some respects unlike, though in others alike and similar. It is true, indeed, that one person's being medically treated does not remove another's illness, nor is one who is suffering from ophthalmia or from fever relieved by seeing another person anointed or plastered; but the punishments of the wicked are inflicted in the sight of all, because it is the office of justice reasonably administered to restrain some by means of the penalties endured by others. But the point in which Bion's comparison really applies to the subject under discussion escaped his discernment. When a man seized with a stubborn, but not necessarily incurable illness, yields up his body to the disease by intemperance and effeminacy, and dies in consequence, if his son, though not seeming to be ill, yet barely has a tendency to the same disease, his physician, or kinsman, or apothecary, or judicious master, putting him upon a rigid diet, taking from him stimulants, delicacies, strong drinks, and opportunities for sensual indulgence, employing medicaments continually, and disciplining his body by gymnastic exercises, excludes and expels the disease, not suffering the minute seed of a grievous bodily affection to grow into an appreciable magnitude. Do we not thus give our advice, thinking it fitting for the children of diseased fathers and mothers to take care of themselves, to be on their guard, and not to lose thought of their inherited liability to disease, but promptly taking the inborn malady in hand, to expel it at the beginning, while it is easily removed and has no fixed seat?
This is perfectly true, they say.

You grant then, I continue, that we do, not what is absurd, but what is necessary, — not what is ridiculous, but what is beneficial, — when we prescribe gymnastic exercises, diet, and medicine for the children of epileptics, or of hypochondriacs, or of sufferers from the gout, not because they are ill, but to prevent them from being ill. For a body born of a diseased body is deserving, not indeed of punishment, but of medical treatment and of vigilance, which if any one sees fit to call the punishment of timidity and feebleness, his opinion is of no account. If then it is worth our while to cherish and to preserve the body born of a diseased body, ought we to permit the congenital likeness of wickedness to spring up and come to growth in a young character, and to wait till, having its issue in vicious passions, it becomes openly manifest, and, as Pindar says, displays the malignant fruit of the inmost soul?

20. In this matter God in his wisdom does not even transcend the sentiment expressed by Hesiod,

"From suppers of the gods the marriage-bed
Approach, and not from rites funereal,"

implying that not only wickedness or virtue, but sadness, and happiness, and all other properties whatsoever, are transmitted from parents, so that those who would be responsible for bringing children into the world should be cheerful, and sweet-tempered, and genial. However, it is not the result of Hesiod's maxim nor the work of human wisdom, but of God, to discern and discriminate likenesses and differences, before they become conspicuous by men's falling through the force of passion into great transgressions. The young of bears and wolves and monkeys, indeed, show at once their inborn disposition, without cover or concealment. But a man's nature, conforming to customs, opinions, and laws, conceals what in it is evil, and often imitates the good, in such a way as either altogether to wipe off and get rid of the native plague-spot of wickedness, or else to keep it long concealed, craftily veiling itself and escaping our notice, so that we are scarcely aware of his depravity when assailed as with a blow or sting by successive instances of his wrong-doing, — imagining, as is our wont, that men become wholly unrighteous when they first perform an unrighteous act, or licentious when they first gratify lust unlawfully, or cowards when they first flee from danger, — a simplicity that may be compared to one's thinking that the stings of scorpions grow when they first use them, or that the poison is generated in vipers at the moment when they bite. No bad man
becomes and first appears bad at the same time; but one has the evil in him from the beginning, and puts it into practice, availing himself of opportunity and ability, the thief in stealing, the tyrant in exercising despotic rule. But God is not ignorant of any man's disposition and nature, inasmuch as he discerns the soul even more than the body; nor does he wait to punish till violence has been committed by the hands, effrontery uttered by the voice, or lasciviousness actualized in fleshly deed. For he does not avenge himself on the wrong-doer as himself suffering wrong, nor is he angry with the robber as having been himself robbed, nor does he hate the adulterer as injured in his own honor; but he often punishes beforehand the adulterers, and the avaricious, and the unrighteous, to cure them, thus removing guilt, as physicians attempt to cure epilepsy, before the fit seizes the patient.

21. We were scandalized a little while ago because the punishment of the wicked is late and slow; yet now we equally call the Divine Providence in question, because for some it checks the vicious temperament and disposition before they become guilty; leaving it out of mind that the potential evil might be worse and more fearful than the crimes that are actually committed, and that which is concealed, than that which is in open view; and unable to comprehend the reasons why it is better to suffer some to do wrong, and to forestall others who are also evilly disposed, — just as medicines are unsuitable for some sick persons, while they are beneficial to some even who are not ill, yet in a more perilous condition than those who are. Nor do the gods visit all the transgressions of the fathers on the children; but if a good man is the son of a bad man, as one in sound health may be the son of an invalid, he is released from the penalty due to his race, as one taken by adoption out of a guilty family. But for a youth who becomes conformed to the likeness of a depraved race, it is certainly fitting that he should receive the punishment of guilt as a due heritage. On the other hand, Antigonus was not punished for the sins of Demetrius [Demetrius Poliorcetes, king of Macedonia, who was guilty of great crimes], nor, to cite other cases of bad men, was Phyleus made to pay the penalty for Augeas [Augeas, having made a contract with Hercules by which a tenth part of his cattle were to be the price for cleansing his stables in a day, refused to pay the price; and Hercules waged with him a war in which he and all his sons but Phyleus perished], nor Nestor for Neleus [the chief offense charged in Grecian myth against Neleus was his refusing to perform expiatory rites for Hercules after he had killed Iphitus, whose father was the friend of Neleus]; for they, though the children of bad men, were good men. But as for those whose nature loves and cherishes
the inborn evil, justice has its course, pursuing with penalty the sinful likeness that is in them. Moreover, as the warts and birth-stains and freckles of fathers, not appearing in their own children, crop out again in the children of their sons and daughters; as a certain Greek woman, giving birth to a black child, when accused of adultery, discovered that she was descended in the fourth generation from an Aethiopian; as among the children of Pytho the Nisibian, said to belong to the Sparti [the sown men, i.e. the armed men that sprang from the teeth of the dragon sown by Cadmus], the one who died lately bore the impress of a spear on his body, — a race-mark after so many ages rising and emerging as from the depths of the sea, — so not infrequently earlier generations conceal and merge ancestral habits and dispositions, while afterward and through later generations the inherited nature comes to flower, and reproduces the family tendency to vice or to virtue.

22. After saying these things, I was silent. But Olympicus, smiling, said, — We are not ready to express our parting commendation of your reasoning, lest we may seem fully satisfied with your arguments, and lose the story. When we have heard that, we will pronounce our final sentence.

Then I spoke as follows: — The Solian [a considerable city in Cilicia], Thespesius, an associate and friend of that Protogenes who was here with us, having led a very dissipated life in his youth, and in a short time squandering his property, for a while on account of his impoverished condition became desperately wicked, and, repenting of his wastefulness, sought in evil ways to become rich again, like those profligates who, when they have wives, do not keep them, but after divorcing them endeavor to corrupt them when they are married to other men. Abstaining from nothing vile that promised pleasure or profit, he got together in a short time a property by no means large, and the most ample reputation for depravity. But he was most widely known in connection with a certain response that was brought from the oracle of Amphilochos. [Amphiilochos was one of the heroes of the Trojan war. The oracle bearing his name at Mallos in Cilicia was said to have been founded by him.] He sent thither, it is said, to ask the god whether he should be better off for the rest of his life. The reply was that he would do better after he died. And this event in some sort happened to him not long afterward. Falling from a precipice and striking his neck on the ground, receiving no wound, but only a shock, he became as one dead, and the third day had already arrived for his funeral. But then, being suddenly aroused from his swoon and returning to himself, he made an incredible change in his manner of life; for the Cilicians know of no other person in his time more honest than he in keeping his engagements,
more religiously devout, more resolutely hostile to his enemies, or more loyal to his friends, so that those about him wanted to know the cause of the change, thinking that such a revolution in one's habits could not have taken place by chance. And they were right, as he told his story to Protogenes and to other equally intimate friends. When his body became unconscious, the feeling at first was such as a pilot would have if he were hurled from his ship into the sea. Then, being somewhat recovered, he seemed to breathe with entire freedom, and to look round in every direction, as if his soul had been a single open eye. He saw nothing that he had ever seen before; but he beheld immensely large stars, at vast distances from one another, emitting a lustre marvellous in tint, and shooting forth rays, on which the soul was borne on the light as in a chariot, in perfect quietness, easily and swiftly.

But — omitting the greater part of what he saw — he said that the souls of the dying rose from beneath like fiery bubbles through the parted air. Then, the bubbles gradually bursting, they came forth, having a human form, but of diminutive size. But they did not move alike; for some sprang forth with wonderful agility, and mounted straight upward, while others, whirling round in a circle like spindles, tending now downward and then again upward, were borne with a complicated and confused movement that could hardly be arrested even in a very long time. He did not, indeed, know who many of these souls were; but seeing two or three whom he recognized, he tried to join them and talk with them. They, however, neither heard him, nor were in possession of their right mind; but, demented and shy, shrinking from sight and touch, they at first flitted round by themselves; then, meeting many souls in the same condition and mingling with them, they moved in all directions without aim or purpose, and gave utterance to inarticulate sounds like battle-cries mingled with strains of lamentation and terror. Others from above, in the zenith of the circumambient heavens, appeared refulgent, and often approached one another in a kindly way, yet avoiding those troubled souls; and they seemed to signify annoyance by shrinking within themselves, and pleasure and approval by the expansion and enlargement of the forms in which they moved.

Among these he said that he saw the soul of a kinsman of his, yet at first was not sure of his identity, as he himself was but a boy when this man died; but the soul, drawing near him, said, "Hail, Thespesius." When he marvelled at this, and replied that his name was not Thespesius, but Aridaeus, the soul said, "It was Aridaeus, but from henceforth it is Thespesius [Thespesius means divine]; for you are not yet dead; but by a certain allotment of the gods you come hither with your perceptive
faculties, while you have left the rest of your soul, like an anchor, in your body. Let it be a token of this to you, both now and hereafter, that the souls of the dead neither cast a shadow nor wink." [Plutarch (Greek Questions, 39) writes: "The Pythagoreans say that the souls of the dead neither give a shadow nor wink."]

Thespesius on hearing this became more self-collected in mind, and, taking a closer look, he saw that there moved along with him a certain dim and shadowy line, while those about him were surrounded with light, and transparent within. However, they were not all equally so. Some, indeed, like the clearest full moon, emitted continuously a uniform and unflickering light; but of the others, some had their bodies streaked with what looked like scales and flabby scourge-marks; some were very much discolored, and disgusting to the sight, like snakes branded all over with black spots; and others, still, had slight scars. The kinsman of Thespesius (for there is nothing to forbid one's giving human titles to disembodied souls), explaining these appearances one by one, told him that Adrasteia, daughter of Necessity and Zeus, holds the highest place of all, ordaining punishment for wrong-doings of every kind, and that of the guilty there was never either great or small that could escape her, whether by craft or by force. But a different mode of punishment is assigned to each of the three custodians and executive ministers that have the guilty in charge. The first of these, swift Poena [Punishment], takes in hand those who are punished at once while in the body and by means of their bodies, yet in a somewhat mild way, and passing over many things that need cleansing. Those the cure of whose guilt is a heavier task the Deity gives over after death to Dice [Justice]. But as for those whom she rejects as utterly incurable, Erinnys [one of the Erinnyes, or Furies], the third and sternest of Adrasteia's subordinate ministers, chasing them as they wander and flee in different directions, removes them all from sight in misery and wretchedness, and plunges them into a destiny too horrible to be told or seen. Of the other chastisements, he compared that of Poena in the earthly life to certain modes of punishment practiced by barbarians. For as among the Persians they strip off and beat the clothes and the turbans of those that are punished [Plutarch in his Apophthegms, says of Artaxerxes Longimanus, who was not an unwise, but an over-indulgent king: "He first ordained as a punishment for his nobles who had offended, that they should be stripped and their garments scourged instead of their bodies; and whereas their hair should have been plucked out, that the same should be done to their turbans"], while the culprits beg with tears that the scourge may be laid aside, — so punishment by loss of wealth or by bodily suffering has not an intensely penetrating power, nor does it lay hold on
the guilt in its own interior seat, but is inflicted generally for appearance's sake, and to make an impression on the bodily senses. [In these forms of punishment, it is the soul's clothes, i. e. the body, not the soul itself, that is punished.] But him who comes hither from these punishments uncorrected and uncleansed Dice takes in hand, open and naked as he is in soul, having nothing whereby to conceal or hide or cover his depravity, but beheld in every direction and by all and in his entire selfhood, and shows him first to his good parents, if good they are, as being despicable to his progenitors and unworthy of them. If they too are bad, he, seeing them punished, and being seen by them, is released only after having long expiated every one of his crimes by pains and sufferings which in magnitude and severity exceed those which come through the body alone, as much as reality is more substantial than a dream. But the scars and scourge-marks after punishment remain in some more conspicuous; in others, less so. "See," said he, "those motley colors of every kind in the souls, — that dark and squalid dye, the pigment of meanness and avarice, — that blood-red and fiery hue, of cruelty and bitterness; where there is a bluish tint, intemperate indulgence in sensual pleasure has as yet hardly been rubbed off; while the malevolence that is united with envy discharges that violet-colored and ulcerous secretion, as the cuttle-fish emits his ink. For, as on the earth the wickedness of the soul controlled by the passions, while the soul controls the body, produces certain shades of complexion, so here such tints mark the last stage of the process of cleansing and correction, by which, the evil affections being altogether expelled, the soul becomes of clear complexion and of a uniform color. But so long as these evil affections remain in a man, certain revivals of the passions take place, accompanied by palpitation and excitement, in some souls slight and soon quenched, in others intensely strong. Of these last some, punished again and again, at length attain a suitable habit and disposition; but others by the force of ignorance and the fascination of sensual pleasure are carried back earthward into the bodies of beasts. For they are inclined to seek this new and lower birth by the predominance of the physical tendency, while reason is feeble, and their mental vision dull. Having in their spiritual state no longer the organs requisite for vicious indulgence, they still crave to satisfy their desires by sensual pleasure, and to give them full play by means of a body. [The body of a brute.] Here, indeed, there is nothing but a certain fruitless shadow and dream of sensual pleasure which has no realization."

When the friend of Thespesius had thus spoken, he led him rapidly to a certain place that appeared immense, toward which he moved directly and easily, transported on light-beams as on wings, — until, coming to a large
and deep cavern, he was deserted by the force that had borne him, and he saw other souls there in a like condition. Clustering together like birds, they flew round the chasm in a circle, but did not dare to cross it. Within, it resembled the caves of Bacchus [there were in Naxos, on Parnassus, and elsewhere various caves dedicated to Bacchus], like them diversified with boughs of trees, and living green, and flowers of every hue; and it exhaled a soft and mild breeze, wafting up odors of wonderful sweetness, and producing an effect similar to that which wine has on those who drink it freely. The souls filled with these sweet perfumes were dissolved in mirth, and kept embracing one another, and jollity and laughter, and every Muse of sport and gladness, had possession of the place all around. The spirit said that by this opening Dionysus [Dionysus as the son of Zeus had a right to leave the abode of the dead, and to claim his seat on Olympus. His mother Semele, being a mortal woman, had no such right; but he rescued her from the dead, and bore her to Olympus, where she became a goddess under the name of Thyone] went up to the gods, and afterward led Semele up by the same way, and that the place is called Lethe [Oblivion]. He did not suffer Thespis to remain there, though he wanted to stay, but took him away by force, teaching him at the same time, and telling him how the mind is melted and soaked by sensual pleasure, while the unreasoning and body-like part of the soul, being thus nourished and made fleshly, calls up the remembrance of the body, and from that remembrance wakes a desire and lodging that draw it toward another birth, or genesis, which is so called as being an inclination toward the earth in the soul that is thus weighed down and water-logged. Then, passing in another direction by as long a route as that previously traversed, Thespis seemed to see from afar a vast basin, and rivers pouring into it, one whiter than the sea-foam or snow, another purple like that which Iris paints on the rainbow, others still with various tints, which, as beheld from a distance, had each its own peculiar lustre. But when he drew near, the circumambient air being more rarefied and the colors fading, the basin lost all of its surpassing beauty except its whiteness. He then saw three daemons sitting together in a triangle, mixing the rivers with one another in certain proportions.

The spirit-guide of Thespis told him, that Orpheus advanced thus far when he was seeking his wife's soul, and, failing in memory, carried back to men a false report that there was in Delphi an oracle that was the common property of Apollo and Night, while in fact Night has nothing in common with Apollo. "But the oracle here," said the spirit, "is common to Night and the Moon, having no earthly limits, but wandering everywhere among men in visions and spectres. From this are dispersed dreams,
mingled, as you see, blending the simple and the true with the false and the grotesque. But you do not see," said he, "the oracle of Apollo, nor can you see it; for the earthly part of your soul cannot release or loose itself for an upward flight, but tends downward as not yet wholly undetached from the body." At the same time, his guide, leading him on, attempted to show him the tripod, shining upon Parnassus through the bosom of Themis [Themis preceded Apollo as the inspirer of the Delphian oracle]; yet, though he wanted to see it, he could get no distinct view of it because of its intense brilliancy. But, in passing, he heard the shrill voice of a woman, uttering in rhythm among other things what sounded to him like the prediction of the time of his own death. The spirit said that it was the voice of a Sibyl [the ancients imagined something like the outlines of a human face in the disk of the moon, and among their myths, or rather poetical fancies, was this of a Sibyl revolving with the moon, and singing, as she rides across the firmament, the fate of men and nations], who, borne round on the face of the moon, sang of things to come. Then he, while he wished to hear more, was forcibly driven, as on successive eddies, in a direction opposite to that in which the moon was rushing on her course. But among the predictions which he caught in passing was one about Vesuvius [the great eruption of A.D. 79], and about the destruction of Dicaearchia [the earlier name of Puteoli] by fire, and also a scrap of verse about the then reigning Emperor [Vespasian, who died in A.D. 79], —

"Good though he be, disease shall soon dethrone him."

After this, they turned to the inspection of those undergoing punishment, and indeed from the very outset they had only mournful and pitiable spectacles. Thespesius, without expecting it, happened among friends and kinsmen and associates under punishment, who in horrible suffering, and under penalties equally shameful and painful, addressed to him their lamentations and wailings.

At length his eyes fell on his own father, coming up from an abyss, covered with scars and scourge-marks, stretching out his hands to him, and not permitted to keep silence, but forced by those presiding over his punishment to confess his blood-guiltiness in the case of certain guests of his who had money, and whom he had killed by poison. There, on earth, he had concealed the deed from all; but being here convicted, he was now enduring such sufferings as his son saw, and they were leading him where he would suffer still more. From amazement and dread, Thespesius dared not offer supplication or intercession for his father; and desiring to return and flee, he no longer saw his gentle and familiar guide. But, forced forward by certain fearful-looking beings, as if it were necessary for him to
advance, he saw that the shades of those who had been openly wicked or who had been punished in this world were not so severely dealt with as others, nor in the same way, having been made aimlessly and slavishly vicious by the unreasoning and passion-driven element of the soul; while as for such as had lived all their days in secret vice, disguised under the pretense and reputation of virtue, others standing round them, as ministers of justice, compelled them with toil and pain to make the soul's interior outermost, which they did, wriggling and twisting themselves in unnatural ways, as the sea-polyps, when they have swallowed the hook, turn themselves inside out. Some of them the tormentors flayed, and then laid them open, showing them inwardly ulcerated and scarred with the depravity in their minds and in the governing principles of their lives. Thespesius said that he saw other souls interwreathed like vipers, two, three, or more together, and devouring one another from remembered enmity and ill will for what they had suffered or done in life.

There were also lakes lying side by side, one of boiling gold, one of lead intensely cold, another of rough iron; and certain daemons, like metal-workers, with their instruments took up and thrust in the souls of those who had been guilty through greed and cupidity. When in the gold they had become fiery and transparent by burning, these daemons plunged them into the lake of lead; and when they had there become frozen like hail, they were transferred to the lake of iron. There they were made horribly black, and were so fractured and bruised by the hardness of the iron, as to look like different beings; and then in this deformed condition they were carried again to the lake of gold, enduring intense torment in these successive transportations. But those suffered most horribly of all who thought that they had been at length released from the hands of justice, yet who were again apprehended for fresh punishment. These were they the punishment of whose guilt passed on to some of their children or descendants. When one of these comes and meets them, he falls upon them with anger, and cries out against them, showing the tokens of his sufferings, reviling and pursuing the souls that long to escape and hide, yet are unable so to do; for the ministers of justice run after them to subject them to fresh chastisement, and push them on, while they from the beginning lament bitterly, well knowing the punishment that awaits them. He said too that some, indeed many, of the souls of the descendants of bad men clustered together, sustained in this posture like bees or bats, and venting in shrieks their indignation at the remembrance of what they had suffered on account of their parents or ancestors.

Last of all, he saw the souls destined to a second birth, by main force,
bent and transformed into all sorts of beasts by artificers who fashioned them by appropriate tools and by blows as upon an anvil, compressing all their parts, reversing some, planing down some, and utterly destroying some, so as to fit them for habits and modes of life other than human. Among these appeared the soul of Nero, having already endured other torments, and now pierced with red-hot nails. The artificers had taken this soul in hand, and given it the form of Pindar's viper [Nero's matricide is here referred to], a form in which the creature after being conceived eats its way to life through its mother's bowels; when, as Thespesius said, a light suddenly shone forth, and from the light came a voice command ing that he should be transformed into another more gentle brute, — one of those croaking creatures that burrow about swamps and ponds [a frog]; for though he had been punished for his wrong-doings, yet something of mercy was due to him from the gods, because he had emancipated the Greeks [he freed the province of Achaia from taxes, and endowed it with certain political rights and privileges], of all his subjects the best race and dearest to the gods.

Thus far Thespesius saw; but when he was about to return to the earth, he was in utter desperation through terror. For a certain woman, of marvellous form and stature, laying hold of him, said, "Come hither, that you may remember these things the better," and she was about to strike him with a red-hot wand such as the encaustic painters use, when another woman prevented her. Then he, as if suddenly forced through a tube by an intensely strong and powerful wind, alighted on his own body, and awoke hard by his own tomb.