

EPICTETUS

THE TEACHING
OF EPICTETUS

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The Teaching of Epictetus / Being the 'Encheiridion of Epictetus,' with
Selections from the 'Dissertations' and 'Fragments':*

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Epictetus

The Teaching of Epictetus / Being the 'Encheiridion of Epictetus,' with Selections from the 'Dissertations' and 'Fragments'

INTRODUCTION

But for the zeal and ability of one disciple we should not now possess any trustworthy account of the teaching of Epictetus. For, like not a few other sages, he wrote nothing – his teaching was purely oral, delivered, in the form of lectures or discourses, to the students who came to him to receive their education in philosophy. One of these students was Flavius Arrianus, afterwards Senator and Consul of Rome, named by Lucian “one among the first of Roman men,” and known to us chiefly as author of the best history of Alexander the Great which was produced in antiquity. That history is still extant, but posterity owes Arrian still more abundant thanks for the copious notes of

the teaching of Epictetus which he took down from his master's lips in Nicopolis. This record he afterwards published in eight books (whereof only four now remain), entitled the *Dissertations of Epictetus*; and out of these he drew the materials for compiling the little work, the *Encheiridion*, or Manual, of Epictetus, by which this philosopher has hitherto been most generally known.¹

It is clear that the *Dissertations* were not regarded by Arrian as a satisfactory representation of the teaching of his master; that he published them, indeed, with much reluctance, and only when it appeared that unless he did so, certain imperfect versions of his records would be established as the sole sources of authoritative information about Epictetus. These circumstances are explained in a dedicatory letter to his friend Lucius Gellius, prefixed to the edition of the *Dissertations* which Arrian finally resolved to issue. I here translate this document in full: —

“Arrian to Lucius Gellius, hail.

“I did not write [in literary form and composition, συγγράφειν] the words of Epictetus in the manner in which a man might write such things. Neither have I put them forth among men, since, as I say, I did not even write them. But whatever I heard him speak, those things I endeavored to set down in his very words, so to preserve to myself for future times a memorial of his thought and unstudied speech. Naturally, therefore, they are such things as one man might say to another

¹ *The Encheiridion of Epictetus*, Translated into English by T. W. Rolleston. Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1881.

on the occasion of the moment, not such as he would put together with the idea of finding readers long afterwards. Such they are, and I know not how without my will or knowledge they fell among men. But to me it is no great matter if I shall appear unequal to composing such a work, and to Epictetus none at all if any one shall despise his discourse; for when he spoke it, it was evident that he had but one aim – to stir the minds of his hearers towards the best things. And if, indeed, the words here written should do the same, then they will do, I think, that which the words of sages ought to do. But if not, yet let those who read them know this, that when he himself spoke them, it was impossible for the hearer to avoid feeling whatever Epictetus desired he should feel. But if his words, when they are merely words, have not this effect, perhaps it is that I am in fault, perhaps it could not have been otherwise. Farewell!”

The style of the *Dissertations*, as they have reached us, answers very well to the above account of their origin and purpose. They contain much that the world should be as little willing to neglect as anything that Greek philosophy has left us; but they contain also many repetitions, redundancies, incoherencies; and are absolutely devoid of any sort of order or system in their arrangement. Each chapter has generally something of a central theme, but beyond this all is chaos. The same theme will be dwelt on again and again in almost the same phrases; utterances of majestic wisdom are imbedded in pages of tedious argument, and any grouping of the chapters according to a progressive sequence

of ideas will be looked for in vain.

Under these conditions it was evident that the teaching of Epictetus could never win half the influence which its essential qualities fitted it to exercise. And accordingly, as another and better vehicle for this influence, Arrian compiled and condensed from the *Dissertations* the small handbook of the Stoic philosophy known as the *Encheiridion of Epictetus*. This little work has made Epictetus known to very many whom the *Dissertations* would never have reached. It had the distinction – unparalleled in the case of any other Pagan writing, if we except the doubtful *Sententiæ* of Xystus – of being adopted as a religious work in the early Christian Church. Two paraphrases of it – still extant – one of which was specially designed for the use of monastic bodies, were produced about the sixth century a. d., in which very few changes were made in the text, beyond the alteration of Pagan names and allusions to Scriptural ones.

About the same time it was made the subject of an elaborate and lengthy commentary by a Pagan writer, Simplicius, wherein chapter after chapter is dissected, discussed, and explained. It was elegantly rendered into Latin by the well-known scholar of the Renaissance, Angelo Politian, who dedicated his translation to Lorenzo de' Medici. Down to the present day, as numerous translations testify, it has remained the most usual means of access to the thought of Epictetus.

But inestimable as the *Encheiridion* is, he who knows it alone has gained nothing like all that Epictetus has to give. It is a

compendium; and although much more stirring and forcible than is usual with such works, it cannot give us the wealth of interesting allusion, reflection, humor, the bursts of eloquence, the abrupt and biting style, the vivid revelations of personal feeling, which marked the teaching of Epictetus in the form in which he delivered it. It seems, therefore, that to make him as accessible as he can be to those for whom such things have any value or interest, it were necessary to produce from the *Encheiridion* and the *Dissertations* a third work, which should have the advantages of each. This is what I have endeavored to do in the present work. In it the whole of the *Encheiridion* is given, and the divisions of subject-matter into which the *Encheiridion* falls have been observed by the division of my translation into five Books, corresponding with the natural divisions of the *Encheiridion*— Book I., treating of the first principles of the Stoic philosophy; Book II., dealing with the general application of these principles to life; Book III., with man's relations to his fellow-man; Book IV., with his relations to God; Book V., containing, besides a couple of concluding chapters, chiefly practical counsels of behavior on various particular occasions, and *obiter dicta* on the use of the faculties. Such is the scheme of arrangement suggested by the *Encheiridion*; and I have filled it in by setting among the chapters of the *Encheiridion* chapters or passages from the *Dissertations*, selected for their relevancy to the matter in hand. In fact, I have reversed the process by which the *Encheiridion* came into being. It was condensed out of

the *Dissertations*: I have expanded it again by drawing into it a large quantity of material from the original work, and subjecting the new matter thus gained to the system and order of sequence which I found to prevail in the *Encheiridion*. The passages or chapters taken from the *Dissertations* are those which seemed to me most characteristic of the philosophy or the personality of Epictetus, and I have made it my aim to omit nothing which is essential to a full and clear understanding of the message he had to deliver to his generation. Of course there is plenty of room for differences of opinion as to the manner in which this conception has been here carried out; but I hope that the present attempt may do something to win a larger audience for his teaching than former editions could, in the nature of the case, obtain. If this hope should prove to be well founded, I shall expect, some day, to give the present English version a counterpart in a Greek text arranged on the same lines.

I may add here that the reader will find an Index at the end of this volume, in which every paragraph is referred to its original source in the *Dissertations*, *Encheiridion*, or *Fragments*— the references applying to Schweighäuser's standard edition of Epictetus.²

² Epicteti Dissertationum ab Arriano Digestarum Libri IV. et ex Deperditis Sermonibus Fragmenta. Post Io. Uptoni aliorumque curas, denuo ad Codicum M Storurum fidem recensuit, Latina Versione, Adnotationibus, Indicibus illustravit Johannes Schweighäuser, Lipsiæ. MDCCXCIX. Epicteti Manuale et Cebetis Tabula Græce et Latine. Schw. MDCCXCVIII. There are two excellent English translations of the whole extant works of Epictetus – one by Mrs. Carter, published in the last

As regards the style of my translation, I hope the tinge of archaism I have given it will be felt to suit the matter. I could think of no idiom so varied, so flexible even down to its use of various grammatical forms, so well suited alike to colloquy, or argument, or satire, or impassioned eloquence, as Elizabethan English.

So much to make the plan of the present work understood; and the reader may perhaps wish that I would now leave him to the study of it. But there is much in Epictetus the significance of which will not appear to any one who is unacquainted with the general system of Stoic philosophy which formed the basis of Epictetus's ethical teaching. And I hope that the reader will prefer to have such information as is necessary given him in the form of a general introduction rather than in that of a multitude of notes.

The founder of the Stoic philosophy was Zeno, a native of Cyprus, who taught in Athens, about 300 b. c., in that frescoed arcade, or Stoa, which gave its name to his school. His birthplace is worth noting, for Zeno lived at the beginning of that epoch, himself one of the first products of it, in which the influence of the East became strongly apparent in Greek thought; the period called Hellenistic in contradistinction to the purely Hellenic period which ended in the conquests of the Macedonians. In many ways the conditions of life in the Hellenistic period formed

century, the other by the late George Long, M. A. (Bohn Series), to both of which, but especially the latter, I desire to record my great obligations.

the most favorable *milieu* possible for the development of Greek thought upon the only lines which, after Aristotle, it could fruitfully pursue; and this not in spite of, but even because of, the great degradation of political and social life from which all Hellendom then suffered. What the democratic polities were like, on which was laid the problem of confronting Philip of Macedon, we may conjecture from the history of the best known and assuredly not the worst of them, Athens. And the best type of Athenian whose rise to power was favored by the conditions of this time and place was Demosthenes: Demosthenes, the grand historical warning to all peoples against committing their destinies to professional orators; the statesman whose doubtless real veneration for his country and her past served only to make him a more mischievous counselor in her present difficulties; whose splendid power as a wielder of words was scarcely more signal than his incapacity and cowardice when he was called upon to match those words with deeds. Athens, entangling the Thebans in an alliance against Macedon, and then leaving them to face Alexander alone; deifying Demetrius the Besieger for driving out a Macedonian garrison, and allotting him the Parthenon itself to be his lodging and the scene of his unspeakable profligacies; murdering Phocion, the one man who dared to bring sincerity and virtue to her service – Athens was a type of the Greek States of this epoch: too unprincipled for democratic government, too contentious for despotism, too vain to submit to foreign rule, too lacking in valor, purpose, union, to resist it with effect.

Whatever the causes of the change may have been, the conditions of public life in this Hellenistic period were certainly very different from those which prevailed, albeit with decadence, before that vast breaking up of boundaries and destruction of political systems involved in the Macedonian conquests. The successful and inspiring conflict with Persia waged by the Hellenic States had for a time made all Greek hearts to beat with one aspiration, and had brought to the front a race of leaders who were capable of subduing the Greek democracies to their own steadfast and statesmanlike purposes. Public life was then not only a possible but even the most natural career for a man of talent and probity. The small size of the Greek States gave almost every such man an opportunity of action, and so keen and universal was the interest in politics that it threatened to lead Greek philosophy into a region in which philosophy is very apt to lose its vitalizing connection with human consciousness and experience, and to stiffen into barren speculation. In a word, man, as an individual, began to be too much lost sight of in the consideration of man as a citizen; his uses, his duties, the whole worth and significance of his life, came to be estimated too exclusively by his relations to the visible society about him. It was when the great Stoic Chrysippus found himself obliged to stand aloof from all participation in politics – “For if I counsel honorably I shall offend the citizens, and if basely, the Gods” – that such men as he were led to ask themselves: Is there then any sphere of human endeavor out of the reach of the tyranny

of circumstance? If I cannot be a citizen, what am I worth then simply as a man? If I can be nothing to my fellows, what can I be to God? To a state of things, then, which, speaking broadly, made public life impossible to honest men, we owe the noblest ethical system of antiquity; to the enforced concentration of thought upon the individual we owe a certain note of universality till then absent from Hellenic thought.

But stoicism was not the only product of the speculation of this period. Side by side with it there started into being two other systems of philosophy, the necessity for combating which was doubtless of immense service to its development. These were Epicureanism and Pyrrhonism; and as the reader will find Epictetus much concerned with each of them, it may be desirable that I should give some brief account of their cardinal doctrines.

Epicurus was an Athenian. After some residence in Lesbos and Lampsacus, he began to teach in his native city about the year 306 B.C. His ethical views, which are all that concern us here, were of a distinctly unelevating nature. Pleasure, ἡδονή, was pronounced to be for each man the end and aim of his being, and the only rational motive of action. This, however, was not the pleasure of the voluptuary – its highest forms, according to Epicurus, were gained in ἀταραξία and ἀπονία – that is, a cheerful and unanxious temperament, with leisure for contemplation, ends not attainable by the criminal who lives in constant fear of detection, or the luxurious liver in whom satiety produces disgust and weariness.

Certain bodily conditions were, however, regarded as objects in themselves, and partaking of the nature of the absolutely good; and all entanglement in human relationships was discountenanced for the disturbance and distress which such relationships were liable to cause. These doctrines were put in practice by their teacher in inuring himself to a hermit-like simplicity and abstemiousness of life; and his life was philosophically consistent with his doctrines, for it is clear that the end of Pleasure will be most surely gained by him who has fewest wants to gratify. But though the lives of Epicurus and his immediate followers were exceptionally sober and strict, the total effect of his doctrine could not but have been evil. They were purely egoistic in this tendency – they centered each man’s activity and interest upon himself alone, they bade him take no thought for any other earthly or heavenly thing, and taught him that this ideal of indifference was realized in its full perfection by the Gods, who dwelt apart in divine repose while blind necessity had its way with human destiny.

Pyrrho of Elis, a rather earlier teacher than Zeno or Epicurus, who is said to have studied philosophy under Indian Gymnosophists and Chaldean Magi, was the originator in European thought of a great and permanent philosophic movement. His school was inspired by the *Geist der stets verneint*, and the term Skeptic was first devised to describe its attitude. Its strength is in a discovery which inevitably takes place when men begin to reflect upon their own mental operations – the

discovery, namely, that, given a perceiving mind and a perceived object, it is always possible for the former, if it has the power of introspection, to doubt whether it has received a really true and faithful impression of the latter. How can we be assured that external objects are as we perceive them? How can we even be assured that there is any principle of constancy in their relations to our consciousness? The senses often delude us; we are convinced, in dreams, of the reality of appearances which, nevertheless, have no reality – why may not all perception be a delusion? Why may not even our sense of the validity of inference and of the truth of the axioms of geometry be a pure hallucination? With these searching questions the Skeptic cut at the root of all belief, and the problems which they raise have dominated philosophy down to the present day. Nor in two thousand years has any logical answer to them ever been found. Lotze, the last thinker of really first-rate powers that the world has seen, practically abandons all inquiry into theories of perception, and starts with the *assumption* that we are living in a kosmos, not a chaos; that the order, coherence, reason in things to which consciousness testifies, are realities. In antiquity, I may add, the profound problems raised by Pyrrhonism do not seem to have been very profoundly apprehended either by the Pyrrhonists or their opponents. The latter had nothing better to appeal to than that notoriously feeble resource, the *argumentum ad hominem*. If the Pyrrhonist distrusted the evidence of his senses, they asked, why did he avoid walking over precipices or into the sea, or eat

bread instead of earth, or in any way make choice of means for ends? The Pyrrhonist's answer was equally superficial. It anticipated the famous formula of Bishop Butler. Probability, argued they, was the guide of life – having observed certain results to follow from certain antecedents, the prudent man will shape his course in life accordingly, although, as a matter of theory and speculation, he may refuse to believe in the constancy of nature. This answer involves a clear inconsistency. It involves even a greater assumption than that which the Pyrrhonist refused to make as to the credibility of his perceptions – the assumption of the credibility of his recollections. To the thorough-going Skeptic there is no such thing as past experience – he is, as it were, new-born at each instant of his life.

Such, in outline, were the systems against which the Stoic philosophy had to make good its position in the ancient world. From the first there seems to have been no doubt of its ability to do so, although, unhappily, the records which have been preserved of the teaching of its earliest days are few and obscure. The writings of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, and of Chrysippus, his immediate successor in the leadership of the school, have utterly perished, while of Cleanthes, the third of the early Stoic teachers, very little remains beyond the profound and majestic Hymn to Zeus, of which I have given a translation in this work. The complete loss of the hundreds of treatises produced by Chrysippus is especially to be regretted, as he appears to have taken the main part in giving shape and system to the Stoic

philosophy. “Had Chrysippus not been, the Stoa had not been,” was a proverbial saying which testifies to his fame. However, from the accounts of ancient philosophers in Diogenes Laertius, from Plutarch, Seneca, Cicero, and a few other authorities, we can learn pretty clearly what the framework of the Stoic system had grown to be long before Epictetus began to study it.

In antiquity, a philosophic system was expected to have something to say for itself on three different branches of study – Logic, Physics (which included cosmogony and theology), and Ethics. We think of the Stoics chiefly in connection with the last-named of these subjects, but they were no less eminent in the others, and Chrysippus, in particular, was held to have done so much for the science of logic that a saying was current – “If there were dialectic among the Gods, it must be the dialectic of Chrysippus.” Of the Stoic contributions to this science, scarcely any record remains.

Of their physical system, however, much is known, and the reader of Epictetus needs to be acquainted with its general features. These were borrowed from an earlier thinker, Heracleitus, whose central doctrine was that the universe was an eternal flux and transition; everything was in a state of becoming, *ein Werdendes*. At the beginning of things, so far as they can be said to have any beginning, is the Deity in his purest manifestation, which, be it observed, is a strictly material one, a sublimated and ethereal fire, αἰθερῶδες πῦρ. In this fire dwelt the divine creative thought and impulse. The first

step in that process of differentiation in which development consists is the production of vapor, which condensed into water. Two elementary forces play their part in these operations – a movement towards within, and a movement towards without, the one a densifying, the other an expanding and straining force (τόνος). The former gives us solidity in matter, the other the qualities and energies of matter. Thus, by various degrees of density, we get earth, water, atmospheric air, and from air, the common element of earthly fire; and these elements in their various combinations, with their various attributes and powers, gradually produce the successive stages of organic life. Though all these proceed from the substance of the Divine Being, the Stoics recognized, in the derived substance which make up the universe as we have it now, various degrees of purity, of affinity to their original source. Man's body, for instance, with its passions and affections, lies comparatively far from the divine; but his soul is a veritable ray of the primitive fire, *Deus in corpore humano hospitans*. The popular mythology of the day was entirely rejected by the Stoics, although, as Professor Mahaffy points out, they never attempted to “discredit orthodoxy,” but, on the contrary, used its myths and ceremonies with the utmost reverence as vehicles of profound religious truths. But they certainly believed in intelligences above man, yet below the one Supreme Being; thus the stars and the lightning (the reader will observe the allusions in the Hymn of Cleanthes) are in some sense divinities, by virtue of the supposed purity of their fiery

essence.

Thus from the one primitive divine element the Kosmos, with all its hierarchy of being, is evolved. But in the Stoic system πάντα ῥεῖ,³ there is no continuance in any one condition. As in the normal life of all earthly creatures there comes a certain climax or turning point, after which the forces of decay gain slowly but surely on those of growth and resistance, so also runs the history of the universe which includes them all. One by one the steps by which it was formed shall be retraced, and the derived substances which compose it consumed and re-absorbed by that from which they sprang. From matter in its grossest form to its purest, from earth and stone and water to the highest intelligence in men and dæmons and Gods, nothing shall escape this doom of dissolution; everything shall yield up its separate existence, until at last the indestructible element of that primeval fire is again the sole being that remains, and Zeus is “alone in the conflagration,” self-contemplating in the solitudes of thought. But this is not the end. There is no end. The plastic impulse again resumes its sway, and soon another cycle of world-development and world-destruction begins to run its course. In the language of Seneca, “When that fatal day, that necessity of the times, shall have arrived, and it seems good to God to make an end of old things and ordain the better, then shall the ancient order be revoked and every creature be generated anew, and a race ignorant of guilt be given to the earth.”

³ πάντα ῥεῖ, all flows – the cardinal doctrine of the Heraclitean philosophy.

This was the general physical system on which all Stoics were agreed, although there were differences of opinion upon minor points; such as how far these successive cycles resembled each other? some asserting that they did so in the minutest detail, others only in their larger features. It was a system, for all its superstitions, not without grandeur and truth. At bottom it expressed a sense of that phenomenon of ebb and flow, systole and diastole, the action and counteraction of balanced forces, which is perhaps the profoundest law of life.

Two questions arise in connection with the Stoic cosmogony, which we must briefly discuss before proceeding farther. Are we justified in terming their view of the universe a materialistic one? and what was their doctrine of the destinies of the human soul? Now it is certainly the usual practice among writers on philosophy to reckon the Stoics as materialists, and it is unquestionably true that they denied the possibility of any existence which was not corporeal. Strong as they are on the supremacy of the human soul over the human body, sharp as is the line with which they divide these elements, yet the distinction is a moral, not a metaphysical one – each is an actual material substance. But we shall be seriously mistaken, nevertheless, if we place them in the same class with the scientific materialists of the present day. According to the latter, Thought is no necessary moment in the universe, but merely a product of certain accidental combinations of matter, a product which, when these are dissolved, must disappear from existence, without

leaving a trace of its presence behind. Again, according to most modern opponents of the materialistic view, Thought has an independent and immortal being – it existed before matter was, and would continue to exist if all matter were annihilated. The Stoic view differed from each of these modern theories. It held Thought and Matter to be eternal, inseparable, and, indeed, strictly identical. Being in its primitive and purest form was fire, a corporeal substance, but one exhibiting consciousness, purpose, will.

As to the question of the Stoic view of the immortality of the human soul, it does not seem to me to deserve so much discussion as it has received from some commentators. It is obvious that the soul must, in the end, share the lot of all other existences, and be resolved into the Divine Being which was its source. The only question that can arise is whether this resolution takes place at the moment of death, or whether the sense of personal identity persists for a certain period beyond that event; and this question, which Epictetus appears to have been wise enough to leave an open one, is philosophically of very little importance. The soul is immortal, the individual perishes; this is the conclusion of Stoicism, and if we know this, there is little else it can much concern us to know.

The reader who desires to gain a thorough knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy, and of the social and political conditions in which it thrived, will find what he seeks in two works to which I have to express my large indebtedness. One is Zeller's

Philosophie der Griechen (Epikureer, Stoiker u. Skeptiker),⁴ a monument of German research and erudition, in which vast masses of original material for the study of this most interesting, but neglected, epoch of the development of European intellect have been brought together, and interpreted with more than German lucidity and method. The other is Professor Mahaffy's recent volume, *Greek Life and Thought*, a study of the Hellenistic period in various aspects, which the scholar will not read without profit, nor the lay-reader without pleasure.

We turn now to that department of the Stoic philosophy with which the reader of Epictetus is most concerned – its Ethics.

The ethical question resolves itself into a search for the supreme object of human endeavor, the *Summum Bonum*, the absolute and essential good. This, for the Stoic, embodied itself in the formula, “to live according to Nature.” But what is Nature? The will of God, as revealed in the heart and conscience of those who seek to know it, and interpreted through the observation in a reverent and faithful spirit of the facts of life.

Going into the subject more precisely we find certain criteria of moral truth established, *προλήψεις*, as they were called, that is, primitive, original conceptions, or, as I have rendered them in my translation, “natural conceptions,” dogmas by which all moral questions can be tried. If we inquire into the source of these *προλήψεις*, we shall find ourselves mistaken in our disposition to think that the Stoics regarded them as innate ideas.

⁴ An English translation of this work has lately appeared.

Innate they are not, for the Stoics held the soul at birth to be a *tabula rasa*, or blank page, which only experience could fill with character and meaning. But as Seneca says in his inquiry, “Quomodo ad nos prima boni honestique notitia pervenerit,”⁵ although Nature alone could not teach us these things, could not equip us with the knowledge of them before we entered upon life, yet the “seeds” of this knowledge she does give us; the soul of every man has implanted in it a certain aptness or, indeed, necessity to deduce certain universal truths from such observation and experience as are common to all mankind; and these truths, the *προλήψεις*, though not strictly innate, have thus an inevitableness and dogmatic force not possessed by those which one man may reach and another miss in the exercise of the ordinary faculties, by argument, study, and so forth. By these natural conceptions the existence and character of God, and the general decrees of the moral law, are considered to be affirmed. If we inquire further how the Stoic explained the fact that some of these so-called inevitable and universal conclusions are denied in all sincerity by men like Epicurus, who were neither bad nor mad, we strike upon the difficulty which confronts all systems that aim at setting up any absolute body of truth, expressible in human language, in place of that partial, progressive, and infinitely varied revelation of God’s mind and purpose to which the uncolored facts of the world’s religious history seem to testify.

⁵ Ep. 120. 4. ff.

The natural conceptions, as I have said, contain the primary doctrines of ethics. None of these are more important for the Stoic than that which declares essential Good to lie in the active, not the passive side of man; in the will, not in the flesh, nor in anything else which the will is unable to control. But a certain relative and conditional goodness may lie in matters which are yet of no moment to the spiritual man, to that part of him which seeks the essential good. And we must note that when Epictetus speaks of certain things as good or bad or indifferent, he is generally speaking of them in their relation to the spiritual man, and in the most absolute and unconditional sense. No evil can happen to the essential part of man, to that side of him which is related to the eternal and divine, without his own will. Hence the death of a beloved friend, or child, or wife, is no evil; and if it be no evil, we are forbidden to grieve for it, or, in the most usual phrase with Epictetus, we are not to be troubled or confounded by it, *ταράσσεσθαι*. But if this utterance should shock our natural feelings, it will do something which assuredly Epictetus never meant it to do. It is the soul of man which these events cannot injure, and it is the soul which is forbidden to think itself injured by them. Such love of the individual as may be embraced in the larger love of the All, of God – such grief for bereavements and calamities as does not overwhelm the inner man (ii. 19) in a “wave of mortal tumult,” and dull his vital sense of the great moral ends which he was born to pursue, is repeatedly and explicitly admitted by Epictetus. Thus, in iii. 2, we have him

arguing against Epicurus that there are certain natural sympathies between man and his kind, and even convicting Epicurus himself of a secret belief in these sympathies. Epicurus had dissuaded his followers from marriage, and the bringing-up of children, on account of the grief and anxiety which such relations necessarily entail. Not so the Stoics – they pressed their disciples to enter into the ordinary earthly relationships of husband, or wife, or citizen, and this without pretending to have found any means of averting the natural consequences which Epicurus dreaded, although they did profess to have discovered something in man which made him equal to the endurance of them. Again, although the condition of ἀπάθεια, of inward peace, of freedom from passions, is again and again represented by Epictetus as the mark of the perfect sage, we are told that this ἀπάθεια is something quite different from “apathy” – a man is not to be emotionless “like a statue.” And a third passage confirming this view is to be found in Book I., ch. xi. (Schweighäuser), where the conduct of a man who was so afflicted by the illness of his little daughter that he ran away from the house, and would hear news of her only through messages, is condemned, not for the affection and anxiety it proved, but for its utter unreasonableness. “Would you,” asks Epictetus, “have her mother and her nurse and her pedagogue, who all love her too, also run away from her, and leave her to die in the hands of persons who neither love nor care for her at all?” There is a grief which is really a self-indulgence, a barren, absorbing, paralyzing grief, which, to the

soul possessed by it, makes every other thing in heaven and earth seem strange and cold and trivial. From such grief alone Epictetus would deliver us, and I think he would have accepted Mr. Aubrey de Vere's noble sonnet on *Sorrow* as a thoroughly fit poetic statement of Stoic doctrine on this subject: —

“Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee; do thou
With courtesy receive him; rise and bow;
And, ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave;
Then lay before him all thou hast, allow
No cloud of passion to usurp thy brow,
Or mar thy hospitality; no wave
Of mortal tumult to obliterate
The soul's marmoreal calmness: Grief should be
Like joy, majestic, equable, sedate,
Confirming, cleansing, raising, making free,
Strong to consume small troubles; to commend
Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end.”

But the grief that shall do this is a grief that must be *felt*. And Epictetus assuredly never meant to offer the Stoic philosophy as a mere stupefying anodyne. Make the man a Stoic, and something yet remains to do – to make the Stoic a man. One of these purposes was not more the concern of Epictetus than the other. And he pursued both of them with a strength, sincerity, and sanity of thought, with a power of nourishing the heroic fiber in

humanity, which, to my mind, make him the very chief of Pagan moralists.

It is no purpose of mine to fill this preface with information which the reader can gain without doubt or difficulty from the author whom it introduces, and therefore I shall leave him to discover for himself what the positive ethical teaching of Epictetus was like. Nor is it, unhappily, possible to say much upon another subject on which Epictetus gives us little or no information – his own life and circumstances. Arrian wrote a biography of him, but it is now entirely lost, and the biographical details which have been collected from Simplicius, Suidas, Aulus Gellius, and others are very scanty. He was born at Hierapolis, in Phrygia, and became, how is unknown, a slave of Epaphroditus, a freedman and favorite of Nero, who is recorded to have treated him with great cruelty. One day, it is said, Epaphroditus began twisting his leg for amusement. Epictetus said, “If you go on you will break my leg.” Epaphroditus persisted, the leg was broken, and Epictetus, with unruffled serenity, only said, “Did I not tell you that you would break my leg?” This circumstance is adduced by Celsus in his famous controversy with Origen as an instance of Pagan fortitude equal to anything which Christian martyrology had to show;⁶ but it is probably a mere myth which grew up to account for the fact mentioned by Simplicius and Suidas that Epictetus was feeble in body and lame from an early age.

⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, commenting on this narrative, remarks that it only shows how manfully *unavoidable* sufferings may be borne.

Epaphroditus was probably a very bad master, and as a favorite and intimate of Nero's must have been a bad man; but we have to thank him for the fact that Epictetus, while yet a slave, was sent to attend the philosophic lectures of Musonius Rufus, an eminent Stoic of Rome, whom both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius mention with great respect. The system of philosophic training had been at this time long organized. There were masters of repute everywhere, who delivered their instruction in regular courses, received a fixed payment for the same, and under whom crowds of young men assembled from far and near to study science and ethics – to receive, in short, what corresponded to a university education in those days. The curious circumstance that a slave like Epictetus could participate in advantages of this kind is generally explained as the result of a fashionable whim which possessed Roman nobles at this time for having philosophers and men of culture among their slaves. Professor Mahaffy, in his *Greek Life and Thought* (p. 132), commenting on the summons of the two philosophers, Anaxarchus and Callisthenes, to console Alexander after his murder of Cleitus, observes, that it was probably usual to call in philosophers to minister professionally in cases of affliction. From this, to making a philosopher a regular adjunct to a large household, even as the baron of later times kept a fool, the step is not great. But Epaphroditus, one thinks, must have had frequent reason to rue the choice he made in Epictetus, if he expected his domestic philosopher to excuse his misdeeds as Anaxarchus did those of Alexander on

the occasion above mentioned.

In the year 94 a. d. the emperor Domitian issued a decree expelling all philosophers from Rome – an easily explainable proceeding on his part if there were any large number of them who, in the words of Epictetus, were able “to look tyrants steadily in the face.” Epictetus must have by this time obtained his freedom and set up for himself as a professor of philosophy, for we find him, in consequence of this decree, betaking himself to Nicopolis, a city of Epirus. Here he lived and taught to a venerable age, and here he delivered the discourses which Arrian has reported for us. He lived with great simplicity, and is said to have had no servant or other inmate of his house until he hired a nurse for an infant which was about to be exposed, according to the practice of those days when it was desired to check the inconvenient growth of a family, and which Epictetus rescued and brought up. The date of his death is unknown.

And now, reader, I will take my leave of you with Arrian’s farewell salutation to Lucius Gellius, which, literally translated, is *Be strong*. If you need it, I know no teacher better able to make or keep you so than Epictetus. At any rate, to give him a fair chance of doing what it is in him to do for English-speaking men and women is something I have regarded as a sort of duty, a discharge of obligation for his infinite service to myself; which done to the utmost of my powers, the fewest forewords are the best.

T. W. R.

CLEANTHES' HYMN TO ZEUS.⁷

Most glorious of the Immortals, many named, Almighty forever.

Zeus, ruler of nature, that governest all things with law,

Hail! for lawful it is that all mortals should address Thee.

For we are Thy offspring, taking the image only of Thy voice,⁸ as many mortal things as live and move upon the earth.

Therefore will I hymn Thee, and sing Thy might forever.

For Thee doth all this universe that circles round the earth obey, moving whithersoever Thou ledest, and is gladly swayed by Thee.

Such a minister hast Thou in Thine invincible hands; – the two-edged, blazing, imperishable thunderbolt.

For under its stroke all Nature shuddereth, and by it Thou guidest aright the Universal Reason, that roams through all things, mingling itself with the greater and the lesser lights, till it have grown so great, and become supreme king over all.

Nor is aught done on the earth without Thee, O God, nor in the divine sphere of the heavens, nor in the sea,

Save the works that evil men do in their folly —

⁷ Professor Mahaffy, in his *Greek Life and Thought*, quotes the full text of this noble Hymn, which, he thinks, “would alone redeem the Hellenistic age, as it stands before us, from the charge of mere artificiality and pedantry.”

⁸ ἰῆς μίμημα λαχόντες μοῦνον. This is Zeller’s reading, but not Professor Mahaffy’s who has ἐνὸς μίμημα.

Yea, but Thou knowest even to find a place for superfluous things, and to order that which is disorderly, and things not dear to men are dear to Thee.

Thus dost Thou harmonize into One all good and evil things, that there should be one everlasting Reason of them all.

And this the evil among mortal men avoid and heed not; wretched, ever desiring to possess the good, yet they nor see nor hear the universal Law of God, which obeying with all their heart, their life would be well.

But they rush graceless each to his own aim,

Some cherishing lust for fame, the nurse of evil strife,

Some bent on monstrous gain,

Some turned to folly and the sweet works of the flesh,

Hastening, indeed, to bring the very contrary of these things to pass.

But Thou, O Zeus, the All-giver, Dweller in the darkness of cloud, Lord of thunder, save Thou men from their unhappy folly,

Which do Thou, O Father, scatter from their souls; and give them to discover the wisdom, in whose assurance Thou governest all things with justice;

So that being honored, they may pay Thee honor,

Hymning Thy works continually, as it beseems a mortal man.

Since there can be no greater glory for men or Gods than this,

Duly to praise forever the Universal Law.

NOTE: The references in the text refer throughout to the Notes at the end of the volume; each chapter having, where

notes are necessary, its own chapter of Notes.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I the beginning of philosophy

1. Wouldst thou be good, then first believe that thou art evil.

2. The beginning of philosophy, at least with those who lay hold of it as they ought and enter by the door,⁹ is the consciousness of their own feebleness and incapacity in respect of necessary things.

3. For we come into the world having by nature no idea of a right-angled triangle, or a quarter-tone, or a semi-tone, but by a certain tradition of art we learn each of these things. And thus those who know them not, do not suppose that they know them. But good and evil, and nobleness and baseness, and the seemly and the unseemly, and happiness and misfortune, and what is our concern and what is not, and what ought to be done and what not – who hath come into the world without an implanted notion of these things? Thus we all use these terms, and endeavor to fit our natural conceptions to every several thing. *He did well,*

⁹ “Enter by the door” (*cf.* S. John, x. 1). The parallelisms in thought and expression between Epictetus and the New Testament have often been noticed, and the reader will discover many others, to which I have not thought it necessary to draw attention.

rightly, not rightly, he failed, he succeeded, he is unrighteous, he is righteous— which of us spareth to use terms like these? Which of us will defer the use of them till he hath learned them, even as ignorant men do not use terms of geometry or music? But this is the reason of it: we come into the world already, as it were, taught by Nature some things in this kind, and setting out from these things we have added thereto our own conceit.¹⁰ *For how*, saith one, *do I not know what is noble and what is base?* Have I not the notion of it? Truly. *And do I not apply it to things severally?* You do apply it. *Do I not, then, apply it rightly?* But here lies the whole question, and here conceit entereth in. For setting out from things confessed by all, they go on by a false application to that which is disputed. For if, in addition to those things, they had gained also this power of application, what would then hinder them to be perfect? But now since you think that you apply rightly the natural conceptions to things severally, tell me, whence have you this assurance?

– “Because it seems so to me.”

But to another it seems otherwise – and he, too, doth he think his application right or not?

– “He doth think it.”

Can ye, then, both be rightly applying the conceptions in matters wherein your opinions contradict each other?

– “We cannot.”

Have you, then, aught better to show for your application, or

¹⁰ “Conceit:” οἴησις, *Einbildung*.

ought above this, that it seemeth so to you? But what else doth a madman do than those things that to him seem right? And doth this rule suffice for him?

– “It doth not suffice.”

Come, then, to that which is above seeming. What is this?

4. Behold, the beginning of philosophy is the observation of how men contradict each other, and the search whence cometh this contradiction, and the censure and mistrust of bare opinion. And it is an inquiry into that which seems, whether it rightly seems; and the discovery of a certain rule, even as we have found a balance for weights, and a plumb line for straight and crooked. This is the beginning of philosophy. Are all things right to all to whom they seem so? But how can contradictory things be right?

– “Nay, then, not all things, but those that seem to us right.”

And why to you more than the Syrians, or to the Egyptians? Why more than to me or to any other man? Not at all more. Seeming, then, doth not for every man answer to Being; for neither in weights or measures doth the bare appearance content us, but for each case we have discovered some rule. And here, then, is there no rule above seeming? And how could it be that there were no evidence or discovery of things the most necessary for men? There is, then, a rule. And wherefore do we not seek it, and find it, and, having found it, henceforth use it without transgression, and not so much as stretch forth a finger without it? For this it is, I think, that when it is discovered cureth of their madness those that mismeasure all things by seeming alone; so

that henceforth, setting out from things known and investigated, we may use an organized body of natural conceptions in all our several dealings.

5. What is the subject about which we are inquiring? Pleasure? Submit it to the rule, cast it into the scales. Now the Good must be a thing of such sort that we ought to trust in it? *Truly*. And we ought to have faith in it? *We ought*. And ought we to trust in anything which is unstable? *Nay*. And hath pleasure any stability? *It hath not*. Take it, then, and fling it out of the scales, and set it far away from the place of the Good. But if you are dim of sight, and one balance doth not suffice, then take another. Is it right to be elated in what is good? *Yea*. And is it right to be elated then in the presence of a pleasure? See to it that thou say not it is right; or I shall not hold thee worthy even of the balance.¹¹ Thus are things judged and weighed, when the rules are held in readiness. And the aim of philosophy is this, to examine and establish the rules. And to use them when they are known is the task of a wise and good man.

¹¹ “To be elated:” ἐπαίρεσθαι. One might translate, “to be puffed up,” except that that expression is only used in a bad sense, and one may be “elated” in anything that is truly of the nature of the good. The Stoics distinguished between χαρά, joy, and ἡδονή, pleasure; not rejecting or despising the former.

CHAPTER II

on the natural conceptions

1. The natural conceptions are common to all men, and one cannot contradict another. For which of us but affirms that the Good is profitable, and that we should choose it, and in all circumstances follow and pursue it? Which of us but affirms that uprightness is honorable and becoming? Where, then, doth the contradiction arise? Concerning the application of the natural conceptions to things severally. When one saith, *He did well, he is a worthy man*, and another, *Nay, but he did foolishly*, then there is a contradiction among men, one with another. And there is the same contradiction among the Jews and the Syrians and the Egyptians and the Romans; not whether that which is righteous should be preferred to all things and in all cases pursued, but whether this be righteous or unrighteous, to eat the flesh of swine. And ye can discover the same contradiction in the matter of Achilles and Agamemnon. For call them before us: What sayest thou, Agamemnon, Should not that which is right and fair come to pass?

– “That should it.”

And what sayest thou, Achilles, Doth it not please thee that what is fair and right should be done?

– “Of all things this doth most please me.”

Then make application of your natural conceptions. Whence

arose this dispute? The one saith: *I am not bound to deliver up Chryseis to her father.* And the other saith: *Thou art bound.* Assuredly one of them must ill apply the conception of duty. And again the one saith: *Therefore if I should deliver up Chryseis, it is meet that I take his prize from one of you.* And the other: *Wouldst thou, then, take from me my beloved?* He saith: *Yea, even thine.* And *shall I alone, and I alone, have nothing?* And thus ariseth the contradiction.

2. What is it, then, to be educated? It is to learn to apply the natural conceptions to each thing severally according to nature; and further, to discern that of things that exist some are in our own power¹² and the rest are not in our own power. And things that are in our own power are the will, and all the works of the will. And things that are not in our own power are the body, and the parts of the body, and possessions and parents and brethren and children and country and, in a word, our associates. Where now shall we place the Good? To what objects shall we apply it? To those which are in our own power? Then is health not good, and whole limbs and life? and are not children and parents and country? And who will bear with you if you say this? Let us, then, transfer it to these things. Now, can one be happy who is injured, and has missed gaining what is good? He cannot. And can such a one bear himself towards his fellows as he ought? How is it

¹² τὰ μὲν εἰσιν ἐφ' ἡμῖν, τὰ δὲ οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν. A fundamental distinction in the Epictetean system, which he sometimes expresses by the phrases, τὰ ἡμέτερα and τὰ τῶν ἄλλων – things that are our own and things that belong to others; or τὰ ἴδια and τὰ ἀλλότρια – things that are our proper concern, and things that are alien to us.

possible that he should? For I have it of nature that I must seek my own profit. If it profits me to own a piece of land, it profits me to take it from my neighbor. If it profits me to have a garment, it profits me to steal it from the bath. And hence wars, seditions, tyrannies, conspiracies. And how shall I be able to maintain a right mind towards God? for if I suffer injury and misfortune, it cannot be but He neglects me. And what have I to do with Him if He cannot help me? And, again, what have I to do with Him if He is willing to let me continue in the evils in which I am? Henceforth I begin to hate Him. Why, then, do we build temples and set up statues to Zeus as we do to powers of evil, such as Fever?¹³ And how is He now the Saviour and the Raingiver and the Fruitgiver? And verily, all this follows, if we place anywhere in external things the nature and being of the Good.

¹³ On the Mons Palatinus in Rome there stood a temple to Fever. Upton quotes from Gruter, p. xcvi., an interesting inscription to this divinity: Febri. Divæ. Febri. Sanctæ. Febri. Magnæ. Camilla. Amata. Pro. Filio. Male. Affecto. P.

CHAPTER III

the master-faculty

1. Of all our faculties ye shall find but one that can contemplate itself, or, therefore, approve or disapprove itself. How far hath grammar the power of contemplation? Only so far as to judge concerning letters. And music? Only so far as to judge concerning melodies. Doth any of them, then, contemplate itself? Not one. But when you have need to write to your friend, grammar will tell you how to write; but whether to write or not, grammar will not tell. And so with the musical art in the case of melodies; but whether it is now meet or not to sing or to play, music will not tell. What, then, will tell it? That faculty which both contemplates itself and all other things. And what is this? It is the faculty of Reason; for we have received none other which can consider itself – what it is, and what it can, and what it is worth – and all the other faculties as well. For what else is it that tells us that a golden thing is beautiful, since itself doth not? Clearly it is the faculty which makes use of appearances. What else is it that judges of music and grammar, and the other faculties, and proves their uses, and shows the fit occasions? None else than this.

2. Thus the Gods, as it was fit they should, place that only in our power which is the mightiest and master thing, the right use of appearances; but other things are not in our power. Was

it that they did not wish it? I indeed think that had they been able they had made over to us those things also; but this they could in no way do. For being on the earth, and bound up with this flesh and with these associates, how was it possible that as regards these we should not be hindered by external things? But what saith Zeus? “Epictetus, if it were possible, I would have made both this thy little body and thy little property free and unhampered. But forget not now that this is but finely tempered clay, and nothing of thine own. And since I could not do this, I have given thee a part of ourselves, this power of desiring and disliking, and pursuing, avoiding, and rejecting, and, in brief, the use of appearances. Have a care, then, of this, hold this only for thine own, and thou shalt never be hindered or hampered, thou shalt not lament, thou shalt not blame, thou shalt never flatter any man.” What then? Do these seem trifling matters? *God forbid.* Are you, then, not content with them? *At least I pray the Gods I may be.*¹⁴

3. But now having one thing in our power to care for, and to cleave to, we rather choose to be careful of many things, and to bind ourselves to many things, even to the flesh, and to possessions, and to brother and friend, and child and slave. And being thus bound to many things, they lie heavy on us and drag us down. So, if the weather be not fair for sailing, we sit down distraught and are ever peering forth to see how stands the wind.

¹⁴ There is excellent MS. authority for this reading of the passage, which, however, is not Schweighäuser's. The latter reads: “Be content with them, and pray to the Gods.”

It is north. And what is that to us? *When will the west wind blow?* When it shall seem good to it, friend; or to Æolus. For it was not thee, but Æolus whom God made “steward of the winds.”¹⁵ What then? It is right to devise how we may perfect the things that are our own, and to use the others as their nature is. And what, then, is their nature? As it may please God.

¹⁵ “Steward of the winds.” A quotation from Homer, *Od.* x. 21.

CHAPTER IV

the nature of the good

1. The subject for the good and wise man is his own master-faculty, as the body is for the physician and the trainer, and the soil is the subject for the husbandman. And the work of the good and wise man is to use appearances according to Nature. For it is the nature of every soul to consent to what is good and to reject what is evil, and to hold back about what is uncertain; and thus to be moved to pursue the good and to avoid the evil, and neither way towards what is neither good nor evil. For as it is not lawful for the money-changer or the seller of herbs to reject Cæsar's coin, but if one present it, then, whether he will or no, he must give up what is sold for it, so it is also with the soul. When the Good appears, straightway the soul is moved towards it, and from the Evil. And never doth the soul reject any clear appearance of the good, no more than Cæsar's coin. On this hangeth every movement both of God and man.

2. The nature and essence of the Good is in a certain disposition of the Will; likewise that of the Evil. What, then, are outward things? Matter for the Will, about which being occupied it shall attain its own good or evil. How shall it attain the Good? Through not being dazzled with admiration of what it works on.¹⁶

¹⁶ "Through not being dazzled," etc. Ἄν τὰς ὕλας μὴ θαυμάσῃ.

For our opinions of this, when right, make the will right, and when wrong make it evil. This law hath God established, and saith, “If thou wouldst have aught of good, have it from thyself.”

3. If these things are true (and if we are not fools or hypocrites), that Good, for man, lies in the Will, and likewise Evil, and all other things are nothing to us, why are we still troubled? why do we fear? The things for which we have been zealous are in no other man’s power; and for the things that are in others’ power we are not concerned. What difficulty have we now? *But direct me*, sayest thou. And why shall I direct thee? hath not God directed thee? hath He not given thee that which is thine own unhindered and unhampered, and hindered and hampered that which is not thine own? And what direction, what word of command didst thou receive from Him when thou camest thence? “Hold fast everything which is thine own – covet not that which is alien to thee. And faithfulness is thine, and reverence is thine: who, then, can rob thee of these things? Who can hinder thee to use them, if not thyself? But thyself can do it, and how? When thou art zealous about things not thine own, and hast cast away the things that are.” With such counsels and commands from Zeus, what wilt thou still from me? Am I greater than he? am I more worthy of thy faith? But if thou hold to these things, of what others hast thou need? *But perchance these are none of his commands?* Then bring forward the natural conceptions, bring the proofs of the philosophers, bring the things thou hast often heard, bring the things that thyself hast spoken, bring what thou

hast read, bring what thou hast pondered.

CHAPTER V

the promise of philosophy

1. Of things that exist, some are in our own power, some are not in our own power. Of things that are in our own power are our opinions, impulses, pursuits, avoidances, and, in brief, all that is of our own doing. Of things that are not in our own power are the body, possessions, reputation, authority, and, in brief, all that is not of our own doing. And the things that are in our own power are in their nature free, not liable to hindrance or embarrassment, while the things that are not in our own power are strengthless, servile, subject, alien.

2. Remember, then, if you hold things by their nature subject to be free, and things alien to be your proper concern, you will be hampered, you will lament, you will be troubled, you will blame Gods and men. But if you hold that only to be your own which is so, and the alien for what it is, alien, then none shall ever compel you, none shall hinder you, you will blame no one, accuse no one, you will not do the least thing unwillingly, none shall harm you, you shall have no foe, for you shall suffer no injury.

3. Aiming, then, at things so high, remember that it is no moderate passion wherewith you must attempt them, but some things you must utterly renounce, and put some, for the present, aside. For if, let us say, you aim also at this, to rule and to gather riches, then you are like, through aiming at the chief things also,

to miss these lower ends; and shall most assuredly miss those others, through which alone freedom and happiness are won. Straightway, then, practice saying to every harsh appearance—*Thou art an Appearance and not at all the thing thou appearest to be*. Then examine it, and prove it by the rules you have, but first and above all by this, whether it concern something that is in our own power, or something that is not in our own power. And if the latter, then be the thought at hand: *It is nothing to Me*.

CHAPTER VI

the way of philosophy

1. A certain Roman having entered with his son and listened to one lecture, "This," said Epictetus, "is the manner of teaching;" and he was silent. But when the other prayed him to continue, he spake as follows: —

Every art is wearisome, in the learning of it, to the untaught and unskilled. Yet things that are made by the arts immediately declare their use, and for what they were made, and in most of them is something attractive and pleasing. And thus when a shoemaker is learning his trade it is no pleasure to stand by and observe him, but the shoe is useful, and moreover not unpleasing to behold. And the learning of a carpenter's trade is very grievous to an untaught person who happens to be present, but the work done declares the need of the art. But far more is this seen in music, for if you are by where one is learning, it will appear the most painful of all instructions; but that which is produced by the musical art is sweet and delightful to hear, even to those who are untaught in it. And here we conceive the work of one who studies philosophy to be some such thing, that he must fit his desire to all events, so that nothing may come to pass against our will, nor may aught fail to come to pass that we wish for. Whence it results to those who so order it, that they never fail to obtain what they would, nor to avoid what they would not, living, as regards

themselves, without pain, fear, or trouble; and as regards their fellows, observing all the relations, natural and acquired; as son or father, or brother or citizen, or husband or wife, or neighbor or fellow-traveler, or prince or subject. Such we conceive to be the work of one who pursues philosophy. And next we must inquire how this may come about.

2. We see, then, that the carpenter becomes a carpenter by learning something, and by learning something the pilot becomes a pilot. And here also is it not on this wise? Is it enough that we merely wish to become good and wise, or must we not also learn something? We inquire, then, what we have to learn?

3. The philosophers say that, before all things, it is needful to learn that God is, and taketh thought for all things; and that nothing can be hid from Him, neither deeds, nor even thoughts or wishes. Thereafter, of what nature the Gods are. For whatever they are found to be, he who would please and serve them must strive, with all his might, to be like unto them. If the Divine is faithful, so must he be faithful; if free, so must he be free; if beneficent, so must he be beneficent; if high-minded, so must he be high-minded; so that thus emulating God, he shall both do and speak the things that follow therefrom.¹⁷

4. Whence, then, shall we make a beginning? If you will consider this with me, I shall say, first, that you must attend to

¹⁷ Note that in this passage “God” and “the Gods” and “the Divine” are all synonymous terms.

the sense of words.¹⁸

– “So I do not now understand them?”

You do not.

– “How, then, do I use them?”

As the unlettered use written words, or as cattle use appearances; for the use is one thing and understanding another. But if you think you understand, then take any word you will,¹⁹ and let us try ourselves, whether we understand it. But it is hateful to be confuted, for a man now old, and one who, perhaps, hath served his three campaigns! And I too know this. For you have come to me now as one who lacketh nothing. And what could you suppose to be lacking to you? Wealth have you, and children, and it may be a wife, and many servants; Cæsar knows you, you have won many friends in Rome, you give every man his due, you reward with good him that doeth good to you, and with evil him that doeth evil. What is still lacking to you? If, now, I shall show you that you lack the greatest and most necessary things for happiness, and that to this day you have cared for everything rather than for what behooved you; and if I crown all and say that you know not what God is nor what man is, nor Good nor Evil; – and what I say of other things is perhaps endurable, but if I say you know not your own self, how can you endure me, and bear the accusation, and abide here? Never – but straightway you will go away in anger. And yet what evil have I done you?

¹⁸ Or “of names.”

¹⁹ Some texts add “such as Good or Evil.”

Unless the mirror doth evil to the ill-favored man, when it shows him to himself such as he is, and unless the physician is thought to affront the sick man when he may say to him: *Man, dost thou think thou ailest nothing? Thou hast a fever: fast to-day and drink water.* And none saith, *What an affront.* But if one shall say to a man: *Thy pursuits art inflamed, thine avoidances are mean, thy purposes are lawless, thy impulses accord not with nature, thine opinions are vain and lying—* straightway he goeth forth and saith, *He affronted me.*

5. We follow our business as in a great fair. Cattle and oxen are brought to be sold; and the greater part of the men come some to buy, some to sell; and few are they who come for the spectacle of the fair, – how it comes to pass, and wherefore, and who are they who have established it, and to what end. And so it is here, too, in this assembly of life. Some, indeed, like cattle, concern themselves with nothing but fodder; even such as those that care for possessions and lands and servants and offices, for these are nothing more than fodder. But few are they who come to the fair for love of the spectacle, what the world is and by whom it is governed. By no one? And how is it possible that a state or a house cannot endure, no not for the shortest time, without a governor and overseer, but this so great and fair fabric should be guided thus orderly by chance and accident? There is, then, one who governs. But what is his nature? and how doth he govern? and we, that were made by him, what are we, and for what are we? or have we at least some intercourse and link with

him, or have we none? Thus it is that these few are moved, and thenceforth study this alone, to learn about the fair, and to depart. What then? they are mocked by the multitude. And in the fair, too, the observers are mocked by the traders; and had the cattle any reflection they would mock all those who cared for anything else than fodder.

CHAPTER VII

to the learner

1. Remember that pursuit declares the aim of attaining the thing pursued, and avoidance that of not falling into the thing shunned; and he who fails in his pursuit is unfortunate, and it is misfortune to fall into what he would avoid. If now you shun only those things in your power which are contrary to Nature, you shall never fall into what you would avoid. But if you shun disease or death or poverty, you shall have misfortune.

2. Turn away, then, your avoidance from things not in our power, and set it upon things contrary to Nature which are in our power. And let pursuit for the present be utterly effaced; for if you are pursuing something that is not in our power, it must needs be that you miscarry, and of things that are, as many as you may rightly aim at, none are yet open to you. But use only desire and aversion, and that indeed lightly, and with reserve, and indifferently.

3. No great thing cometh suddenly into being, for not even a bunch of grapes can, or a fig. If you say to me now: *I desire a fig*, I answer that there is need of time: let it first of all flower, and then bring forth the fruit, and then ripen. When the fruit of a fig-tree is not perfected at once, and in a single hour, would you win the fruit of a man's mind thus quickly and easily? Even if I say to you, expect it not.

4. To fulfill the promise of a man's nature is itself no common thing. For what is a man? *A living creature, say you; mortal, and endowed with Reason.* And from what are we set apart by Reason? *From the wild beasts.* And what others? *From sheep and the like.* Look to it, then, that thou do nothing like a wild beast, for if thou do, the man in thee perisheth, thou hast not fulfilled his promise. Look to it, that thou do nothing like a sheep, or thus too the man hath perished. *What, then, can we do as sheep?* When we are gluttonous, sensual, reckless, filthy, thoughtless, to what are we then sunken? To sheep. What have we lost? Our faculty of Reason. And when we are contentious, and hurtful, and angry, and violent, to what are we sunken? To wild beasts. And for the rest some of us are great wild beasts, and some of us little and evil ones; whereby we may say, "Let me at least be eaten by a lion."²⁰ But through all these things the promise of the man's nature has been ruined.

5. For when is a complex proposition safe?²¹ When it fulfills its promise. So that the validity of a complex proposition is when it is a complex of truths. And when is a disjunctive safe? When it fulfills its promise. And when are flutes, or a lyre, or a horse,

²⁰ Apparently a proverb, which maybe paralleled in its present application by Luther's "Pecca fortiter."

²¹ A complex or conjunctive proposition is one which contains several assertions so united as to form a single statement which will be false if any one of its parts is false —e. g., "Brutus was the lover and destroyer both of Cæsar and of his country." The disjunctive is when alternative propositions are made, as "Pleasure is either good or bad, or neither good nor bad."

or a dog? What marvel is it, then, if a man also is to be saved in the same way, and perish in the same way?

6. But each thing is increased and saved by the corresponding works – the carpenter by the practice of carpentry, the grammarian by the study of grammar; but if he use to write ungrammatically, it must needs be that his art shall be corrupted and destroyed. Thus, too, the works of reverence save the reverent man, and those of shamelessness destroy him. And works of faithfulness save the faithful man, and the contrary destroy him. And men of the contrary character are strengthened therein by contrary deeds; the irreverent by irreverence, the faithless by faithlessness, the reviler by reviling, the angry by anger, the avaricious by unfair giving and taking.

7. Know, that not easily shall a conviction arise in a man unless he every day speak the same things and hear the same things, and at the same time apply them unto life.

8. Every great power is perilous to beginners. Thou must bear such things according to thy strength. *But I must live according to Nature?* That is not for a sick man.²² Lead thy life as a sick man for a while, so that thou mayest hereafter live it as a whole man. Fast, drink water, abstain for a while from pursuit of every kind, in order that thou mayest pursue as Reason bids. And if as Reason bids, then when thou shalt have aught of good in thee, thy

²² I have followed Lord Shaftesbury's explanation of this passage, which the other commentators have given up as corrupt. It seems clear that whether the passage can stand exactly in the form in which we have it, or not, Lord Shaftesbury's rendering represents what Epictetus originally conveyed.

pursuit shall be well. *Nay, but we would live as sages and do good to men.* What good? What wilt thou do? Hast thou done good to thyself? But thou wouldst exhort them? And hast thou exhorted thyself?²³ Thou wouldst do them good – then do not chatter to them, but show them in thyself what manner of men philosophy can make. In thy eating do good to those that eat with thee, in thy drinking to those that drink, by yielding and giving place to all, and bearing with them. Thus do them good, and not by spitting thy bile upon them.

²³ According to the usual reading, a scornful exclamation – “*Thou* exhort them!” I have followed the reading recommended by Schw. in his notes, although he does not adopt it in his text.

CHAPTER VIII

the cynic.²⁴

1. One of his pupils, who seemed to be drawn towards the way of Cynicism, inquired of Epictetus what manner of man the Cynic ought to be, and what was the natural conception of the thing. And Epictetus said: Let us look into it at leisure. But so much I have now to say to you, that whosoever shall without God attempt so great a matter stirreth up the wrath of God against him, and desireth only to behave himself unseemly before the people. For in no well-ordered house doth one come in and say to himself: *I should be the steward of the house*, else, when the lord of the house shall have observed it, and seeth him insolently giving orders, he will drag him forth and chastise him. So it is also, in this great city of the universe, for here too there is a master of the house who ordereth each and all: Thou art the Sun;

²⁴ The founder of the Cynic school was Antisthenes, who taught in the gymnasium named the Cynosarges, at Athens; whence the name of his school. Zeller takes this striking chapter to exhibit Epictetus's "philosophisches Ideal," the Cynic being the "wahrer Philosoph," or perfect Stoic. (Phil. d. Gr. iii. S. 752.) This view seems to me no more true than that the missionary or monk is to be considered the ideal Christian. Epictetus takes pains to make it clear that the Cynic is a Stoic with a special and separate vocation, which all Stoics are by no means called upon to take up. Like Thoreau, that modern Stoic, when he went to live at Walden, the Cynic tries the extreme of abnegation in order to demonstrate practically that man has resources within himself which make him equal to any fate that circumstances can inflict.

thy power is to travel round and to make the year and the seasons, and to increase and nourish fruits, and to stir the winds and still them, and temperately to warm the bodies of men. Go forth, run thy course, and minister thus to the greatest things and to the least. Thou art a calf; when a lion shall appear, do what befits thee, or it shall be worse for thee. Thou art a bull; come forth and fight, for this is thy part and pride, and this thou canst. Thou art able to lead the army against Ilion; be Agamemnon. Thou canst fight in single combat with Hector; be Achilles. But if Thersites came forth and pretended to the authority, then either he would not gain it, or, gaining it, he would have been shamed before many witnesses.

2. And about this affair, do thou take thought upon it earnestly, for it is not such as it seemeth to thee. *I wear a rough cloak now, and I shall wear it then;*²⁵ *I sleep hard now, and I shall sleep so then. I will take to myself a wallet and staff, and I will begin to go about and beg, and to reprove every one I meet with; and if I shall see one that plucks out his hairs, I will censure him, or one that hath his hair curled, or that goes in purple raiment.* If thou conceivest the matter on this wise, far be it from thee – go not near it, it is not for thee. But if thou conceivest of it as it is, and holdest thyself not unworthy of it, then behold to how great an enterprise thou art putting forth thine hand.

3. First, in things that concern thyself, thou must appear in

²⁵ τριβώνιον, a coarse garment especially affected by the Cynics, as also by the early Christian ascetics.

nothing like unto what thou now doest. Thou must not accuse God nor man; thou must utterly give over pursuit, and avoid only those things that are in the power of thy will; anger is not meet for thee, nor resentment, nor envy, nor pity;²⁶ nor must a girl appear to thee fair, nor must reputation, nor a flat cake.²⁷ For it must be understood that other men shelter themselves by walls and houses and by darkness when they do such things, and many

²⁶ “Nor pity.” Upton, in a note on *Diss.* i. 18. 3. (Schw.), refers to various passages in Epictetus where pity and envy are mentioned together as though they were related emotions, and aptly quotes Virgil (*Georg.* ii. 499): —“Aut doluit miserans inopem, aut invidit habenti.” It will be clear to any careful reader that when Epictetus asserts that certain emotions or acts are unworthy of a man, he constantly means the “man” to be understood as his highest spiritual faculty, his deepest sense of reason, his soul. That we are not to pity or grieve means that that side of us which is related to the divine and eternal is not to be affected by emotions produced by calamities in mere outward and material things. St. Augustine corroborates this view in an interesting passage bearing on the Stoic doctrine of pity (*De Civ. Dei.* ix. 5; *Schw.* iv. 132): —“Misericordiam Cicero non dubitavit appellare virtutem, quam Stoicos inter vitia numerare non pudet, qui tamen, ut docuit liber Epicteti nobilissimi Stoici ex decretis Zenonis et Chrysippi, qui hujus sectæ primas partes habuerunt, hujuscemodi passiones in animum Sapientis admittunt, quem vitiis omnibus liberam esse volunt. Unde fit consequens, ut hæc ipsa non putent vitia, quando Sapienti sic accidunt, ut contra virtutem mentis rationemque nihil possunt.” The particular utterances of Epictetus here alluded to by St. Augustine must have been contained in some of the lost books of the *Dissertations*, as nothing like them is to be found explicitly in those which survive, although the latter afford us abundant means for deducing the conclusion which St. Augustine confirms.

²⁷ This cake seems to form a ridiculous anti-climax. But it appears to have been a vexed question in antiquity whether an ascetic philosopher might indulge in this particular luxury (πλακοῦς). Upton quotes Lucian and Diogenes Laertius for instances of this question being propounded, and an affirmative answer given (in one instance by the Cynic, Diogenes). The youth in the text is being addressed as a novice who must not use the freedom of an adept.

means of concealment have they. One shutteth the door, placeth some one before the chamber; *if any one should come, say, He is out, he is busy.* But in place of all these things it behooves the Cynic to shelter himself behind his own piety and reverence; but if he doth not, he shall be put to shame, naked under the sky. This is his house, this his door, this the guards of his chamber, this his darkness. For he must not seek to hide aught that he doeth, else he is gone, the Cynic hath perished, the man who lived under the open sky, the freeman. He hath begun to fear something from without, he hath begun to need concealment; nor can he find it when he would, for where shall he hide himself, and how? And if by chance this tutor, this public teacher, should be found in guilt, what things must he not suffer! And fearing these things, can he yet take heart with his whole soul to guide the rest of mankind? That can he never: it is impossible!

4. First, then, thou must purify thy ruling faculty and this vocation of thine also, saying: Now it is my mind I must shape, as the carpenter shapes wood and the shoemaker leather; and the thing to be formed is a right use of appearances. But nothing to me is the body, and nothing to me the parts of it. *Death?* Let it come when it will, either death of the whole or of a part. *Flee it!* And whither? Can any man cast me out of the universe? He cannot; but whithersoever I may go there will be the sun, and the moon, and there the stars, and visions, and omens, and communion with the Gods.²⁸

²⁸ Upton quotes from *Cymbeline*: —“Hath Britain all the sun that shines? Day,

5. And, furthermore, when he hath thus fashioned himself, he will not be content with these things, who is a Cynic indeed. But know that he is an herald from God to men, declaring to them the truth about good and evil things; that they have erred, and are seeking the reality of good and evil where it is not; and where it is, they do not consider; and he is a spy, like Diogenes, when he was led captive to Philip after the battle of Chæronea.²⁹ For the Cynic is, in truth, a spy of the things that are friendly to men, and that are hostile; and having closely spied out all, he must come back and declare the truth. And he must neither be stricken with terror and report of enemies where none are; nor be in any otherwise confounded or troubled by the appearances.

6. He must then be able, if so it chance, to go up impassioned, as on the tragic stage, and speak that word of Socrates, “O men, whither are ye borne away? What do ye? Miserable as ye are! like blind men ye wander up and down. Ye have left the true road, and are going by a false; ye are seeking peace and happiness where they are not, and if another shall show you where they are, ye believe him not. Wherefore will ye seek it in outward things? *In the body?* It is not there – and if ye believe me not, lo, Myro!

night, Art they not, but in Britain? Prythee, think, There’s living out of Britain!” But Epictetus means more than this in his allusion to sun and stars. – See Preface, xxiv. This passage would lead us to suppose that Epictetus believed in a personal existence continued for some time after death. In the end, however, even sun and stars shall vanish. – See [ii. 13, 4.](#)

²⁹ Being arrested by Philip’s people, and asked if he were a spy, Diogenes replied, “Certainly I am, O Philip; a spy of thine ill-counsel and folly, who for no necessity canst set thy life and kingdom on the chances of an hour.”

lo, Ophellius.³⁰ *In possessions?* It is not there, and if ye believe me not, lo, Cræsus! lo, the wealthy of our own day, how full of mourning is their life! *In authority?* It is not there, else should those be happy who have been twice or thrice consul; yet they are not. Whom shall we believe in this matter? You, who look but on these men from without, and are dazzled by the appearance, or the men themselves? And what say they? Harken to them when they lament, when they groan, when by reason of those consulships, and their glory and renown, they hold their state the more full of misery and danger! *In royalty?* It is not there; else were Nero happy and Sardanapalus; but not Agamemnon himself was happy, more splendid though he was than Nero or Sardanapalus; but while the rest are snoring what is he doing?"

"He tore his rooted hair by handfuls out." —*Il. x.*

And what saith himself? "I am distraught," he saith, "and I am in anguish; my heart leaps forth from my bosom." — [*Il. x.*] Miserable man! which of thy concerns hath gone wrong with thee? Thy wealth? Nay. Thy body? Nay; but thou art rich in gold and bronze. What ails thee then? That part, whatever it be, with which we pursue, with which we avoid, with which we desire and dislike, thou hast neglected and corrupted. How hath it been neglected? He hath been ignorant of the true Good for which it

³⁰ According to Upton's conjecture, these were gladiators famous for bodily strength; and also, one would suspect, for some remarkable calamity.

was born, and of the Evil; and of what is his own, and what is alien to him. And when it goeth ill with something that is alien to him, he saith, *Woe is me, for the Greeks are in peril.* O unhappy mind of thee! of all things alone neglected and untended. *They will be slain by the Trojans and die!* And if the Trojans slay them not, will they not still die? *Yea, but not all together.* What, then, doth it matter? for if it be an evil to die, it is alike evil to die together or to die one by one. Shall anything else happen to them than the parting of body and soul? *Nothing.* And when the Greeks have perished, is the door closed to thee? canst thou not also die? *I can.* Wherefore, then, dost thou lament: *Woe is me, a king, and bearing the scepter of Zeus?* There is no unfortunate king, as there is no unfortunate God. What, then, art thou? In very truth a shepherd; for thou lamentest even as shepherds do when a wolf hath snatched away one of the sheep; and sheep are they whom thou dost rule. And why art thou come hither? Was thy faculty of pursuit in any peril, or of avoidance, or thy desire or aversion? *Nay,* he saith, *but my brother's wife was carried away.* Was it not a great gain to be rid of an adulterous wife? *Shall we be, then, despised of the Trojans?* Of the Trojan? Of what manner of men? of wise men or fools? If of wise men, why do ye make war with them? if of fools, why do ye heed them?³¹

7. *In what, then, is the good, seeing that in these things it is not?*

³¹ This highly crude view of the Trojan war might have been refuted out of the mouth of Epictetus himself. Evil-doers are not to be allowed their way because they are unable to hurt our souls, but the hurt may be in the cowardice or sloth that will not punish them.

Tell us, thou, my lord missionary and spy! It is there where ye deem it not, and where ye have no desire to seek it. For did ye desire, ye would have found it in yourselves, nor would ye wander to things without, nor pursue things alien, as if they were your own concerns. Turn to your own selves; understand the natural conceptions which ye possess. What kind of thing do ye take the Good to be? Peace? happiness? freedom? Come, then, do ye not naturally conceive it as great, as precious, and that cannot be harmed? What kind of material, then, will ye take to shape peace and freedom withal – that which is enslaved or in that which is free? *That which is free.* Have ye the flesh enslaved or free? *We know not.* Know ye not that it is the slave of fever, of gout, of ophthalmia, of dysentery, of tyranny, and fire, and steel, and everything that is mightier than itself? *Yea, it is enslaved.* How, then, can aught that is of the body be free? and how can that be great or precious which by nature is dead, mere earth or mud?

8. What then? have ye nothing that is free? *It may be nothing.* And who can compel you to assent to an appearance that is false? *No man.* And who can compel you not to assent to an appearance that is true? *No man.* Here, then, ye see that there is in you something that is by nature free. But which of you, except he lay hold of some appearance of the profitable, or of the becoming, can either pursue or avoid, or desire or dislike, or adapt or intend anything? *No man.* In these things, too, then, ye have something that is unhindered and free. This, miserable men, must ye perfect; this have a care to, in this seek for the Good.

9. *And how is it possible that one can live prosperously who hath nothing; a naked, homeless, hearthless, beggarly man, without servants, without a country?* Lo, God hath sent you a man to show you in very deed that it is possible. Behold me, that I have neither country, nor house, nor possessions, nor servants; I sleep on the ground; nor is a wife mine, nor children, nor domicile, but only earth and heaven, and a single cloak. And what is lacking to me? do ever I grieve? do I fear? am I not free? When did any of you see me fail of my pursuit, or meet with what I had avoided? When did I blame God or man? When did I accuse any man? When did any of you see me of a sullen countenance? How do I meet those whom ye fear and marvel at? Do I not treat them as my slaves? Who that seeth me, but thinketh he beholdeth his king and his lord?

10. So these are the accents of the Cynic, this his character, this his design. Not so – but it is his bag, and his staff, and his great jaws; and to devour all that is given to him, or store it up, or to reprove out of season every one that he may meet, or to show off his shoulder.³²

11. Dost thou see how thou art about to take in hand so great a matter? Take first a mirror, look upon thy shoulders, mark well thy loins and thighs. Thou art about to enter thy name for the Olympic games, O man; no cold and paltry contest. Nor canst thou then be merely overcome and then depart; but first thou

³² By wearing his cloak half falling off, in negligent fashion. Nothing is finer or more characteristic in Epictetus than his angry scorn of the pseudo-Stoics of his day.

must be shamed in the sight of all the world; and not alone of the Athenians, or Lacedæmonians, or Nicopolitans. And then if thou hast too rashly entered upon the contest thou must be thrashed, and before being thrashed must suffer thirst and scorching heat, and swallow much dust.

12. Consider more closely, know thyself, question thy genius,³³ attempt nothing without God; who, if He counsel thee, be sure that He wills thee either to be great or to be greatly plagued. For this very agreeable circumstance is linked with the calling of a Cynic; he must be flogged like an ass, and, being flogged, must love those who flog him, as though he were the father or brother of all mankind. Not so, but if one shall flog thee, stand in the midst and shriek out, *O Cæsar, what things do I suffer in the Emperor's peace! Let us take him before the pro-consul.* But what is Cæsar to the Cynic? or what is a pro-consul? or what is any other than He that hath sent him hither, and whom he serveth, which is Zeus? Doth he call upon any other than God? Is he not persuaded, whatsoever things he may suffer, that he is being trained and exercised by God? Hercules, when he was exercised by Eurystheus, never deemed himself wretched; but fulfilled courageously all that was laid upon him. But he who shall cry out and bear it hard when he is being trained and exercised by Zeus, is he worthy to bear the scepter of Diogenes? Hear what Diogenes saith, when ill of a fever, to the bystanders: *Base souls,*

³³ ἀνάκρινον τὸ δαιμόνιον. The allusion evidently is to the genius or divine spirit by which Socrates felt himself guided.

*will ye not remain? To see the overthrow and combat of athletes,
how great a way ye journey to Olympia; and have ye no will to
see a combat between a fever and a man?*

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