

ANATOLE FRANCE

THE WHITE
STONE

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The White Stone

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*Καὶ ἔμοιγε δοκεῖτε ἐπὶ λευκάδα πέτρην καὶ δῆμον ὀνείρων
καταδαρθέντες τοσαῦτα ὀνειροπολεῖν ἐν ἀκαρεῖ τῆς νυκτὸς οὔσης.
(*Philopatris*, *xxi*.)*

*And to me it seems that you have fallen asleep upon a white rock, and in
a parish of dreams, and have dreamt all this in a moment while it was night.*

I

A few Frenchmen, united in friendship, who were spending the spring in Rome, were wont to meet amid the ruins of the disinterred Forum. They were Joséphin Leclerc, an Embassy Attaché on leave; M. Goubin, licencié ès lettres, an annotator; Nicole Langelier, of the old Parisian family of the Langeliers, printers and classical scholars; Jean Boilly, a civil engineer, and Hippolyte Dufresne, a man of leisure, and a lover of the fine arts.

Towards five o'clock of the afternoon of the first day of May, they wended their way, as was their custom, through the northern door, closed to the public, where Commendatore Boni, who superintended the excavations, welcomed them with quiet amenity, and led them to the threshold of his house of wood nestling in the shadow of laurel bushes, privet hedges and cytusus, and rising above the vast trench, dug down to the depth of the ancient Forum, in the cattle market of pontifical Rome.

Here, they pause awhile, and look about them.

Facing them rise the truncated shafts of the Columnæ Honorariæ, and where stood the Basilica of Julia, the eye rested on what bore the semblance of a huge draughts-board and its draughts. Further south, the three columns of the Temple of the Dioscuri cleave the azure of the skies with their blue-tinted volutes. On their right, surmounting the dilapidated Arch of Septimus Severus, the tall columns of the Temple of Saturn, the dwellings of Christian Rome, and the Women's Hospital display in tiers, their facings yellower and muddier than the waters of the Tiber. To their left stands the Palatine flanked by huge red arches and crowned with evergreen oaks. At their feet, from hill to hill, among the flagstones of the Via Sacra, narrow as a village street, spring from the earth an agglomeration of brick walls and marble foundations, the remains of buildings which dotted the Forum in the days of Rome's strength. Trefoil, oats, and the grasses of the field which the wind has sown on their lowered tops, have covered them with a rustic roof illumined by the crimson poppies. A mass of *débris*, of crumbling entablatures, a multitude of pillars and altars, an entanglement of steps and enclosing walls: all this indeed not stunted but of a serried vastness and within limits.

Nicole Langelier was doubtless reviewing in his mind the host of monuments confined in this famed space:

"These edifices of wise proportions and moderate dimensions," he remarked, "were separated from one another by narrow streets full of shade. Here ran the *vicoli* beloved in countries where the sun shines, while the generous descendants of Remus, on their return from hearing public speakers, found, along the walls of the temples, cool yet foul-smelling corners, whence the rinds of water-melons and castaway shells were never swept away, and where they could eat and enjoy their siesta. The shops skirting the square must certainly have emitted the pungent odour of onions, wine, fried meats, and cheese. The butchers' stalls were laden with meats, to the delectation of the hardy citizens, and it was from one of those butchers that Virginius snatched the knife with which he killed his daughter. There also were doubtless jewellers and vendors of little domestic tutelary deities, protectors of the hearth, the ox-stall, and the garden. The citizens' necessities of life were all centred in this spot. The market and the shops, the basilicas, *i. e.*, the commercial Exchanges and the civil tribunals; the Curia, that municipal council which became the administrative power of the universe; the prisons, whose vaults emitted their much dreaded and fetid effluvia, and the temples, the altars, of the highest necessity to the Italians who have ever some thing to beg of the celestial powers.

"Here it was, lastly, that during a long roll of centuries were accomplished the vulgar or strange deeds, almost ever flat and dull, oftentimes odious and ridiculous, at times generous, the agglomeration of which constitutes the august life of a people."

"What is it that one sees, in the centre of the square, fronting the commemorative pedestals?" inquired M. Goubin, who, primed with an eye-glass, had noticed a new feature in the ancient Forum, and was thirsting for information concerning it.

Joséphin Leclerc obligingly answered him that they were the foundations of the recently unearthed colossal statue of Domitian.

Thereupon he pointed out, one after the other, the monuments laid bare by Giacomo Boni in the course of his five years' fruitful excavations: the fountain and the well of Juturna, under the Palatine Hill; the altar erected on the site of Cæsar's funeral pile, the base of which spread itself at their feet, opposite the Rostra; the archaic stele and the legendary tomb of Romulus over which lies the black marble slab of the Comitium; and again, the Lacus Curtius.

The sun, which had set behind the Capitol, was striking with its last shafts the triumphal arch of Titus on the towering Velia. The heavens, where to the West the pearl-white moon floated, remained as blue as at midday. An even, peaceful, and clear shadow spread itself over the silent Forum. The bronzed navvies were delving this field of stones, while, pursuing the work of the ancient Kings, their comrades turned the crank of a well, for the purpose of drawing the water which still forms the bed where slumbered, in the days of pious Numa, the reed-fringed Velabrum.

They were performing their task methodically and with vigilance. Hippolyte Dufresne, who had for several months been a witness of their assiduous labour, of their intelligence and of their prompt obedience to orders, inquired of the director of the excavations how it was that he obtained such yeoman's work from his labourers.

"By leading their life," replied Giacomo Boni. "Together with them do I turn over the soil; I impart to them what we are together seeking for, and I impress on their minds the beauty of our common work. They feel an interest in an enterprise the grandeur of which they apprehend but vaguely. I have seen their faces pale with enthusiasm when unearthing the tomb of Romulus. I am their everyday comrade, and if one of them falls ill, I take a seat at his bedside. I place as great faith in them as they do in me. And so it is that I boast of faithful workmen."

"Boni, my dear Boni," exclaimed Joséphin Leclerc, "you know full well that I admire your labours, and that your grand discoveries fill me with emotion, and yet, allow me to say so, I regret the days when flocks grazed over the entombed Forum. A white ox, from whose massive head branched horns widely apart, chewed the cud in the unploughed field; a hind dozed at the foot of a tall column which sprang from the sward, and one mused: Here was debated the fate of the world. The Forum has been lost to poets and lovers from the day that it ceased to be the Campo Formio."

Jean Boilly dwelt on the value of these excavations, so methodically carried out, as a contribution towards a knowledge of the past. Then, the conversation having drifted towards the philosophy of the history of Rome:

"The Latins," he remarked, "displayed reason even in the matter of their religion. Their gods were commonplace and vulgar, but full of common sense and occasionally generous. If a comparison be drawn between this Roman Pantheon composed of soldiers, magistrates, virgins, and matrons and the deviltries painted on the walls of Etruscan tombs, reason and madness will be found in juxtaposition. The infernal scenes depicted in the mortuary chambers of Corneto represent the monstrous creations of ignorance and fear. They seem to us as grotesque as Orcagna's *Day of Judgment* in Santa Maria Novella at Florence, and the *Dantesque Hell* of the Campo Santo of Pisa, whereas the Latin Pantheon reflects for ever the image of a well-organised society. The gods of the Romans were like themselves, industrious and good citizens. They were useful deities, each one having its proper function. The very nymphs held civil and political offices.

"Look at Juturna, whose altar at the foot of the Palatine we have so frequently contemplated. She did not seem fated by her birth, her adventures, and her misfortunes to occupy a permanent post in the city of Romulus. An incensed Rutula, beloved by Jupiter, who rewarded her with immortality, when King Turnus fell by the hand of Æneas, as decreed by the Fates, she flung herself into the Tiber, to escape thus from the light of day, since it was denied her to perish with her royal brother. Long did the shepherds of Latium tell the story of the living nymph's lamentations from the depths of the river. In later years, the villagers of rural Rome, when looking down at night-time over the

bank, imagined that they could see her by the moon's rays, lurking in her glaucous garments among the rushes. The Romans, however, did not leave her to the idle contemplation of her sorrows. They promptly conceived the idea of allotting to her an important duty, and entrusted her with the custody of their fountains, converting her into a municipal goddess. And so it is with all their divinities. The Dioscuri, whose temple lives in its beautiful ruins, the Dioscuri, the brothers of Helen, the sparkling *Gemini*, were put to good use by the Romans, as messengers of the State. The Dioscuri it was, who, mounted on a white charger, brought to Rome the news of the victory of Lake Regillus.

"The Italians asked of their gods only temporal and substantial benefits. In this respect, notwithstanding the Asiatic fears which have invaded Europe, their religious sentiment has not changed. That which they formally demanded from their gods and their genii, they nowadays expect from the Madonna and the Saints. Every parish possesses its Beatified patron, to whom requests are preferred just as in the case of a Deputy. There are Saints for the vine, for cereals, for cattle, for the colic, and for toothache. Latin imagination has re-peopled Heaven with a multitude of living bodies, and has converted Judaic monotheism into a new polytheism. It has enlivened the Gospels with a copious mythology; it has re-established a familiar intercourse between the divine and the terrestrial worlds. The peasantry demand miracles of their protecting Saints, and hurl invectives at them if the miracle is slow of manifestation. The peasant who has in vain solicited a favour of the Bambino, returns to the chapel, and addressing on this occasion the Incoronata herself, exclaims:

"I am not speaking to you, you whoreson, but to your sainted mother."

"The women make the Madre di Dio a confidant of their love affairs. They believe with some show of reason that being a woman she understands, and that there is no need to be on a footing of delicacy with her. They have no fear of going too far – a proof of their piety. Hence we must view with admiration the prayer which a fine lass of the Genoese Riviera addressed to the Madonna: 'Holy Mother of God, who didst conceive without sin, grant me the grace of sinning without conceiving.'"

Nicole Langelier here remarked that the religion of the Romans lent itself to the evolution of Rome's policy.

"Bearing the stamp of a distinctly national character," he said, "it was, for all that, capable of penetrating the minds of foreign nations, and of winning them over by its sociable and tolerant spirit. It was an administrative religion propagating itself without effort together with the rest of the administration."

"The Romans loved war," said M. Goubin, who studiously avoided paradoxes.

"They loved not war for itself," was Jean Boilly's rejoinder. "They were far too reasonable for that. That military service was to them a hardship is revealed by certain signs. Monsieur Michel Bréal tells you that the word which primarily expressed the equipment of the soldier, *ærumna*, subsequently assumed the general meaning of lassitude, need, trouble, hardship, toil, pain, and distress. Those peasants were just as other peasants. They entered the ranks merely because compelled and forced thereto. Their very leaders, the wealthy proprietors, waged war neither for pleasure nor for glory. Previous to entering on a campaign, they consulted their interests twenty times over, and carefully computed the chances."

"True," said M. Goubin, "but their circumstances and the state of the world compelled them ever to be in arms. Thus it is that they carried civilisation to the far ends of the known world. War is above all an instrument of progress."

"The Latins," resumed Jean Boilly, "were agriculturists who waged agriculturists' wars. Their ambitions were ever agricultural. They exacted of the vanquished, not money, but soil, the whole or part of the territory of the subjugated confederation, generally speaking one-third, out of friendship, as they said, and because they were moderate in their desires. The farmer came and drove his plough over the spot where the legionary had a short while ago planted his pike. The tiller of the soil confirmed the soldier's conquests. Admirable soldiers, doubtless, well disciplined, patient, and brave, who fought and who were sometimes beaten just like any others; yet still more admirable peasants.

If wonder is felt at their having conquered so many lands, still more is it to be wondered at that they should have kept them. The marvel of it is that in spite of the many battles they lost, these stubborn peasants never yielded an acre of soil, so to speak.”

While this discussion was proceeding, Giacomo Boni was gazing with a hostile eye at the tall brick house standing to the north of the Forum on top of several layers of ancient substructures.

“We are about,” he said, “to explore the Curia Julia. We shall soon, I hope, be in a position to break up the sordid building which covers its remains. It will not cost the State much to purchase it for the spade’s work. Buried under nine mètres of soil on which stands the Convent of S. Adriano lie the flagstones of Diocletian, who restored the Curia for the last time. We shall surely find among the rubbish a number of the marble tables on which the laws were engraved. It is a matter of interest to Rome, to Italy, nay to the whole world, that the last vestiges of the Roman Senate should see the light of day.”

Thereupon he invited his friends into his hut, as hospitable and rustic a one as that of Evander.

It constituted a single room wherein stood a deal table laden with black potteries and shapeless fragments giving out an earthy smell.

“Prehistorical treasures!” sighed Joséphin Leclerc. “And so, my good Giacomo Boni, not content with seeking in the Forum the monuments of the Emperors, those of the Republic, and those of the Kings, you must fain sink down into the soil which bore flora and fauna that have vanished, drive your spade into the quaternary, and the tertiary, penetrate the pliocene, the miocene, and the eocene; from Latin archæology you wander to prehistoric archæology and to palæontology. The salons are expressing alarm at the depths to which you are venturing. Countess Pasolini would like to know where you intend to stop, and you are represented in a little satirical sheet as coming out at the Antipodes, breathing the words: *Adesso va bene!*”

Boni seemed not to have heard.

He was examining with deep attention a clay vessel still damp and covered with ooze. His pale blue expressive eyes darkened while critically examining this humble work of man for some unrevealed trace of a mysterious past, but resumed their natural hue as the Commendatore’s mind wandered off into a reverie.

“These remains which you have before you,” he presently remarked, “these roughly hewn little wooden sarcophagi and these cinerary urns of black pottery and of house-like shape containing calcined bones were gathered under the Temple of Faustina, on the north-west side of the Forum.

“Black urns containing ashes, and skeletons resting in their coffins as if in a bed, are here to be met with side by side. The funeral rites of the Greeks and the Romans included both those of burial and of cremation. Over the whole of Europe, in prehistoric days, the two customs were simultaneously observed, in the same city and in the same tribe. Does this dual fashion of sepulture correspond with the ideals of two races? I am inclined to believe so.”

Picking up, with reverential and almost ritual gesture, an urn shaped like a dwelling and containing a small quantity of ashes, he went on:

“The men who in immemorial times gave this form to clay, believed that the soul, being attached to the bones and the ashes, had need of a dwelling, but that it did not require a very large house wherein to live the abridged life of the dead. These men were of a noble race which came from Asia. The one whose light ashes I now hold lived before the days of Evander and of the shepherd Faustulus.”

Then, making use of the phraseology of the ancients, he added:

“Those were the days when King Vitulus, King Calf as we should say, held peaceful sway over this country so pregnant with glory. Monotonous pastoral times reigned over the Ausonian plain. These men were, however, neither ignorant nor boorish. Much priceless knowledge had come to them from their forefathers. Both the ship and the oar were known to them. They practised the art of subjecting oxen to the yoke and of harnessing them to the pole. They kindled at will the divine flame. They gathered salt, wrought in gold, kneaded and baked vases of clay. Probably too they began to

till the soil. They do say that the Latin shepherds became agricultural labourers in the fabled days of the Calf. They cultivated millet, wheat, and spelt. They stitched skins together with needles of bone. They wove and perchance made wool false to its whiteness by dyeing it various colours. By the phases of the moon did they measure time. They gazed upon the heavens but to discover in them what was in the world below. They saw in them the greyhound who watches for Diospiter the shepherd who tends the starry flock. The prolific clouds were to them the Sun's cattle, the cows supplying milk to the cerulean countryside. They worshipped the heavens as their Father, and the Earth as their Mother. At eventide, they heard the chariots of the gods, like themselves migratory, roll along the mountain roads with their ponderous wheels. They enjoyed the light of day and pondered with sadness over the life of the souls in the Kingdom of Shadows.

"We know that these massive-headed Aryans were fair, since their gods, made to their own image, were fair. Indra had locks like ears of wheat and a beard as tawny as the tiger's coat. The Greeks conceived the immortal gods with blue or glaucous eyes, and a head of golden hair. The goddess Roma was *flava et candida*:

"Were it possible to make a whole out of these calcined bony fragments, the result would be pure Aryan forms. In those massive and vigorous skulls, in those heads as square as the primary Rome which their sons were to build, you would recognise the ancestors of the patricians of the Commonwealth, the long flourishing stock which produced tribunes of the people, pontiffs, and consuls; you would be handling the magnificent mould of the robust brains which constructed religion, the family, the army, and the public laws of the most strongly organised city that ever existed."

Gently placing the bit of pottery on the rustic table, Giacomo Boni bends over a coffin the size of a cradle, a coffin dug out of the trunk of an oak, and similar in shape to the early canoes of man. He lifts up the thin covering of bark and sap-wood forming the lid of that funeral wherry, and brings to light bones as frail as a bird's skeleton. Of the body, there hardly remains the spinal column, and it would bear resemblance to one of the lowest of vertebrata, such as a big saurian, did not the fullness of the forehead reveal man. Coloured beads, which have become detached from a necklace, are scattered over these bones browned with age, washed by subterraneous waters, and exhumed from clayey soil.

"Look!" says Boni, "at this little boy who was not given the honours of cremation, but buried, and returned as a whole to the earth whence he sprung. He is not a son of headmen, nor a noble inheritor of the traits of a fair race. He belongs to the race indigenous to the Mediterranean, the race which became the Roman *plebs*, and which supplies Italy to the present day with subtle lawyers and calculating individuals. He was born in the Palatine City of the Seven Hills, in days seen dimly through the mist of heroic fables. It is a Romulean boy. In those days, the Valley of the Seven Hills was a morass, and the slopes of the Palatine were covered with reed-thatched huts only. A tiny lance was placed on the coffin to show that the child was a male. He was barely four years old when he fell asleep in death. Then his mother clothed him with a beautiful tunic clasped at the neck, around which she fastened a string of beads. The kinsmen did not begrudge him their offerings. They deposited on his tomb, in urns of black earthenware, milk, beans, and a bunch of grapes. I have collected these vessels and I have fashioned similar ones out of the same clay by the heat of a wood fire lit in the Forum at night. Previous to taking a last farewell of him, they ate and drank together a portion of their offerings; this funeral repast assuaged their sorrow. Child, thou who sleepest since the days of the god Quirinus, an Empire has passed over thy agrestic coffin, and the same stars which shone at thy birth are about to light up the skies above us. The unfathomable space which separates the hours of your life from those of our own constitutes but an imperceptible moment in the life of the Universe."

After a moment's silence, Nicole Langelier remarked:

"It is as difficult to distinguish amid a people the races composing it as to trace in the course of a river the streams which mingle with it. What constitutes, moreover, a race? Do any human races really exist? I see white men, red men, and black men. But, they do not constitute races; they

are merely varieties of the same race, of the same species, which form together fruitful unions and intermingle without ceasing. *A fortiori*, the man of learning knows not several yellow races or several white races. Human beings invent, however, races in pursuance of their vanity, their hatred, or their greed. In 1871, France became dismembered by virtue of the rights of the Germanic race, and yet no German race has an existence. The antiemites kindle the hatred of Christian peoples against the Jews, and still there is no Jewish race.

“What I state on the subject, Boni, is purely speculative, and not with the view of running counter to your ideas. How could one not believe you! Conviction has its home on your lips. Moreover, you blend in your thoughts the profound verities of poetry with the far-spreading truths of science. As you truly state, the shepherds who came from Bactriana peopled Greece and Italy. As you again say, they found there natives of the soil. In ancient days, a belief shared in common by Italians and Hellenes was that the first men who peopled their country were like Erectheus, born of Mother Earth. Nor do I pretend, my dear Boni, that you cannot trace through the centuries the antochthones of your Ausonia, and the immigrants from the Pamir; the former, intelligent and eloquent plebeians; the latter, patricians fully impregnated with courage and faith. For, when all is said, if there are not, properly speaking, several human races, and if still less so several white races, our species assuredly comprises distinct varieties oftentimes stamped with marked characteristics. Hence there is nothing to hinder two or more of these varieties living for a long time side by side without fusing, each one preserving its individual characteristics. Nay, these differences may occasionally, in lieu of vanishing with the course of time under the action of the plastic forces of nature, on the contrary become accentuated more strongly through the empire of immutable customs, and the stress of social institutions.”

“*E proprio vero*,” said Boni in a low tone, as he replaced the oaken lid on the coffin of the Romulean child.

Then, begging his guests to be seated, he said to Nicole Langelier:

“I shall now hold you to your promise, and beg you to read to us that story of Gallio, at which I have seen you at work in your little room in the *Foro Traiano*. You make Romans speak in your script. This is the spot to hear your narrative, here in a corner of the Forum, close by the Via Sacra, between the Capitol and the Palatine. Tarry not with your reading, so as not to be overtaken by the twilight, and lest your voice be quickly drowned by the cries of the birds warning one another of approaching night.”

The guests of Giacomo Boni welcomed the foregoing utterance with a murmur of approval, and Nicole Langelier, without waiting for more pressing entreaties, unrolled a manuscript and read aloud the following narrative.

II GALLIO

In the 804th year of the foundation of Rome, and the 13th of the principality of Claudius Cæsar, Junius Annæus Novatus was proconsul of Achaia. Born of a knightly family of Spanish origin, a son of Seneca the Rhetor and of the chaste Helvia, a brother of Annæus Mela, and of the famed Lucius Annæus, he bore the name of his adoptive father, the Rhetor Gallio, exiled by Tiberius. In his mother's veins flowed the same blood as that of Cicero, and he had inherited from his father, together with immense wealth, a love of letters and of philosophy. He studied the works of the Greeks even more assiduously than those of the Latins. His mind was a prey to noble aspiration. He was an interested student of nature and of what appertains to her. The activity of his intelligence was so keen that he enjoyed being read to while in his bath, and that, even when joining in the chase, he was wont to carry with him his tablets of wax and his stylus. During the leisure moments which he managed to secure in the intervals of most serious duties and most important works, he wrote books on subjects relating to nature, and composed tragedies.

His clients and his freedmen loudly proclaimed his gentleness. His was indeed a genial character. He had never been known to give way to a fit of anger. He looked upon violence as the worst and most unpardonable of weaknesses.

All deeds of cruelty were held in execration by him, save when their true character escaped him owing to the consecration of custom and of public opinion. He frequently discovered, amid the severities rendered sacred by ancestral usage and sanctified by the laws, revolting excesses against which he raised his voice in protest, and which he would have attempted to sweep away, had not the interests of the State and the common welfare been objected from all quarters. In those days, conscientious magistrates and honest functionaries were not few and far between throughout the Empire. There were indeed a number as honest and as impartial as Gallio himself, but it is to be doubted whether another could be found so humane.

Entrusted with the administration of that Greece despoiled of her riches, her pristine glory departed, and fallen from her freedom so full of life into an idle tranquillity, he remembered that she had formerly taught the world wisdom and the fine arts, and his treatment of her combined the vigilance of a guardian with the reverence of a son. He respected the liberties of the cities and the rights of individuals. He showed honour to those who were truly Greeks by birth and education, regretting that their numbers were sorely restricted, and that his authority extended for the greater part over an infamous rabble of Jews and Syrians; yet he remained equitable in dealing with these Asiatics, laying unction to his soul for what he considered a meritorious endeavour.

He dwelt in Corinth, the richest and most densely populated city of Roman Greece. His villa, built in the time of Augustus, enlarged and embellished since then by the pro-consuls who had governed the province in succession, stood on the furthestmost western slopes of the Acrocorinthus, whose foliaged summit was crowned by the Temple of Venus and the groves where dwelt her priests. It was a somewhat spacious mansion surrounded by gardens studded with bushy trees, watered by springs, ornamented with statues, alcoves, gymnasia, baths, libraries, and altars consecrated to the gods.

He was strolling in it on a certain morn, according to his wont, with his brother Annæus Mela, discoursing on the order of nature and the vicissitudes of fortune. The sun was rising, hazy in its white splendour in the roseate heavens. The gentle undulations of the hills of the Isthmus concealed the Saronic shore, the Stadium, the sanctuary of the sports, and the eastern harbour of Cenchreæ. Between the fallow slopes of the Geranean range and the crimson twin-peaked Helicon, one could, however, obtain a glimpse of the quiescent blue waters of the Alcyonium Mare. In the distance,

and to the north, glistened the three snow-capped summits of Parnassus. Gallio and Mela proceeded together as far as the edge of the elevated foreground. At their feet spread Corinth standing on an extensive plateau of pale yellow sand, and sloping gently towards the spumous fringe of the Gulf. The pavements of the forum, the columns of the basilica, the tiers of the hippodrome, the white steps of the porches sparkled, while the gilded roofs of the temples flashed dazzling rays. Vast and new, the town was intersected with straight-running streets. A wide road descended to the harbour of Lechæum, whose shore was fringed with warehouses and whose waters were covered with ships. To the west, the atmosphere reeked with the smoke of the iron-foundries, while the streams ran black from the pollution of the dye-houses, and on that side, forests of pine extending to the edge of the horizon, were lost to sight in the skies.

Gradually, the town awoke from its slumbers. The strident neighing of a horse rent the morning calm, and soon were heard the muffled rumblings of wheels, shouting of waggoners, and the chanting voices of women selling herbs. Emerging from their hovels amid the ruins of the Palace of Sisyphus, aged and blind hags bearing copper vessels on their heads, and led by children, wended their way to draw water from the Pirene fountain. On the flat roofs of the houses abutting the grounds of the proconsul, Corinthian women were spreading linen to dry, and one of them was castigating her child with leek-stalks. In the hollow road leading to the Acropolis, a semi-nude old bronze-coloured man, prodded the rump of an ass laden with salad herbs and chanted between the stumps of his teeth and in his unkempt beard, a slave-song:

“Toil, little ass,
As I have toiled.
Much good will it do you:
You may be sure of it.”

Meanwhile, at the sight of the town resuming its daily labour, Gallio fell a-musing over the earlier Corinth, the lovely Ionian city, opulent and joyous until the day when she witnessed the massacre of her citizens by the soldiery of Mummius, her women, the noble daughters of Sisyphus, sold at auction, her palaces and temples the prey of flames, her walls razed to the ground, and her riches piled away into the Liburnian ships of the Consul.

“Hardly a century ago,” he remarked, “the work wrought by Mummius still stood revealed in all its horror. The shore which you see, brother mine, was more of a desert than the Libyan sands. The divine Julius rebuilt the town wrecked by our arms, and peopled it with freedmen. On this very strand, where the illustrious Bacchiadæ formerly revelled in their haughty indolence, poor and rude Latins settled, and Corinth entered upon a new lease of life. She grew rapidly, and realised how to take advantage of her position. She levies tribute on all ships which, whether from the East or from the West, cast anchor in her two harbours of Lechæum and Cenchreæ. Her population and wealth increase apace under the ægis of the Roman peace.

“What blessings has not the Empire bestowed throughout the world! To the Empire is due the profound tranquillity which the countryside enjoys. The seas are swept of pirates, and the highways of robbers. From the befogged Ocean to the Permulic Gulf, from Gades to the Euphrates, the trading of merchandise proceeds in undisturbed security. The law protects the lives and property of all. Individual rights must not be infringed upon. Liberty has henceforth no other limits than its lines of defence, and is circumscribed for its own security alone. Justice and reason rule the world.”

Unlike his two brothers, Annæus Mela had not intrigued for honours. Those who loved him, and their name was legion, for he was ever in his intercourse affable and extremely pleasant, attributed his detachment from public affairs to the moderation of a mind attracted by the blessings of tranquil obscurity, a mind which had no other care than the study of philosophy. But those who observed him with greater insight were under the impression that he was ambitious after his own fashion, and that

like Mæcenas, he, a simple knight, was consumed with the envy of enjoying the same consideration as the consuls. Lastly, certain evil-minded individuals believed that they discerned in him the greed of the Senecas for the riches which they affected to despise, and thus did they explain to themselves that Mela had for a long time lived in obscurity in Betica, giving himself up entirely to the management of his vast estates, and that subsequently summoned to Rome by his brother the philosopher, he had devoted himself to the administration of the finances of the Empire, rather than go in the quest of high judiciary or military posts. His character could not be readily determined from his utterances, for he spoke the language of the Stoics, a language equally adapted for the concealment of the weaknesses of the mind and the revelation of the grandeur of one's sentiments. It was in those days the height of elegance to utter virtuous discourse. At any rate, there is no doubt that Mela spoke his thoughts.

He replied to his brother that, although not versed in public affairs like himself, he had had occasion to admire the power and wisdom of the Romans.

"They reveal themselves," he said, "in the most remote parts of our own Spain. But it is in a wild pass of the mountains of Thessaly that I have been made to appreciate at its highest the beneficent majesty of the Empire. I had come from Hypata, a town renowned for its cheeses, and whose women were notorious for witchcraft, and I had been riding for some hours along mountain paths, without coming across a human face. Overcome by the heat and fatigue, I tethered my horse to a tree by the road, and lay down under an arbutus-bush. I had been resting there a short while only, when there came along a lean old man bowed down under a load of branches. Utterly exhausted, he tottered in his steps, and just as he was about to fall, exclaimed: 'Cæsar.' On hearing such an invocation escape the lips of a poor woodcutter in this stony solitude, my heart overflowed with veneration for the tutelary City, which inspires, even unto the farthest lands, the most rustic of minds with so great a conception of its sovereign providence. But sadness and a feeling of distress mingled with my admiration, brother mine, when I reflected upon the injury and insults to which the inheritance of Augustus and the fortune of Rome were exposed through men's folly and the vices of the century."

"I have witnessed on the spot, brother mine," replied Gallio, "the crimes and follies which sadden your mind. My cheek has blanched under the gaze of the victims of Caius from my seat in the Senate. I have held my peace, as I did not despair of better days. I am of the opinion that good citizens should serve the Republic under bad princes rather than shirk their duty in a useless death."

As Gallio was uttering these sentiments, two men, still in their youth and wearing the toga, came up to him. The one was Lucius Cassius, of a Roman family, plebeian but ancient, and having attained distinction. The other, Marcus Lollius, son and grandson of consuls, and moreover of a knightly family, which had sprung from the free town of Terracina. Both had frequented the schools of Athens, and acquired a knowledge of the laws of nature of which those Romans who had not been in Greece were totally ignorant.

At the present moment, they were studying in Corinth the management of public affairs, and the proconsul surrounded himself with them as an ornamental adjunct to his magistracy. Somewhat behind them, the Greek Apollodorus, wearing the short cape of the philosophers, bald of head, and with Socratic beard, sauntered along, with uplifted arm and gesticulating fingers, discussing with himself.

Gallio welcomed all three of them in kindly fashion.

"The rose of dawn is already fading," he said, "and the sun is beginning to shed its steeled darts. Come along, my good friends, to the coolness of the shady foliage beyond."

Saying this, he led them along the banks of a stream whose babbling murmur invited peaceful reflections, until they had reached an enclosure of verdant bushes in the midst of which lay in a hollow an alabaster basin filled with limpid waters on whose surface floated the feather of a dove, which had just bathed in them, and which was now cooing plaintively from a branch. They took their seats on a semicircular marble bench supported by griffins. Laurel and myrtle bushes blended their shadows about it. Statues encircled the enclosure. A wounded Amazon gracefully coiled her arm about her

head. Grief appeared a thing of beauty on her lovely face. A shaggy Satyr was playing with a goat. A Venus, emerging from the bath, was drying her wetted limbs along which a shudder of pleasurable emotion seemed to run. Near by, a youthful Faun was smilingly placing a flute to his lips. His face was partly concealed by the branches, but his shining belly glistened amid the leafage.

"That Faun seems animated," remarked Marcus Lollius. "One could imagine that a gentle breathing was causing his bosom to heave."

"He is true to life, Marcus," said Gallio. "One expects to hear rustic melodies flow from his flute. A Greek slave carved him out of the marble, in imitation of an ancient model. The Greeks formerly excelled in the making of these fanciful statues. Several of their efforts in this style are justly renowned. There is no gainsaying it: they have found the means of giving august traits to the gods and of expressing in both marble and bronze the majesty of the masters of the world. Who but admires the Olympian Zeus? And yet, who would care to be Phidias!"

"No Roman would assuredly care to be Phidias," exclaimed Lollius, who was spending the fortune he had inherited from his ancestry in ornamenting his villa at Pausilypum with the masterpieces of Phidias and Myron brought over from Greece and Asia.

Lucius Cassius was of the same opinion. He argued with some warmth that the hands of a free man were not made to wield the sculptor's chisel or the painter's brush, and that no Roman citizen would condescend to the degrading work of casting bronze, hewing marble into shape, and painting forms on a wall.

He professed admiration for the manners of the ancient times, and vaunted at every opportunity the ancestral virtues.

"Men of the stamp of Curius and Fabricius cultivated their lettuce-beds, and slept under thatched roofs," he said. "They wot of no other statue than the Priapus carved in the heart of a box-tree, who, protruding his vigorous pale in the centre of their garden, threatened pilferers with a terrible and shameful punishment."

Mela, who was well versed in the annals of Rome, opposed to this opinion the example of an old patrician.

"In the days of the Republic," he pointed out, "that illustrious man, Caius Fabius, of a family issued from Hercules and Evander, limned with his own hand on the walls of the Temple of Salus paintings so highly prized that their recent loss, on the destruction of the temple by fire, has been considered a public misfortune. It is moreover related that he did not doff his toga when painting, thus to indicate that such work was not unworthy of a Roman citizen. He was given the surname of Pictor, which his descendants were proud to bear."

Lucius Cassius replied with vivacity:

"When painting victories in a temple, Caius Fabius had in mind those victories, and not the painting of them. No painters existed in Rome in those days. Anxious that the mighty deeds of his ancestors should for ever be present to the gaze of the Romans, he set an example to the artisans. But just as a pontiff or an ædile lays the first stone of an edifice, without exercising for that the trade of a mason or of an architect, Caius Fabius executed the first painting Rome boasted of, without it being permissible to number him with the workmen who earn their livelihood by painting on walls."

Apollodorus signified approval of this speech with a nod, and, stroking his philosophic beard, remarked:

"The sons of Ascanius are born to rule the world. Any other care would be unworthy of them."

Then, speaking at some length and in well-rounded sentences, he sang the praises of the Romans. He flattered them because he feared them. But in his innermost being, he felt nothing but contempt for their shallow intelligences so devoid of finesse. He beslobbered Gallio with praise in these words:

"Thou hast ornamented this city with magnificent monuments. Thou hast assured the liberty of its Senate and of its people. Thou hast decreed excellent regulations for trade and navigation, and

thou dispensest justice with even tempered equity. Thy statue shall stand in the Forum. The title shall be granted to you of the second founder of Corinth, or rather Corinth shall take from you the name of Annæa. All these things are worthy of a Roman, and worthy of Gallio. But, do not think that the Greeks have an exaggerated affection for the manual arts. If many of them are engaged in painting vases, in dyeing stuffs, and in modelling figures, it is through necessity. Ulysses constructed his bed and his ship with his own hands. At the same time, the Greeks proclaim that it is unworthy of a wise man to give himself up to futile and gross arts. In his youth, Socrates followed the trade of a sculptor, and modelled an image of the Charites still to be seen on the Acropolis of Athens. His skill was certainly not of a mediocre order, and, had he so wished, he could, like the most renowned artists, have portrayed an athlete throwing a discus or bandaging his head. But he abandoned like works to devote himself to the quest of wisdom, as commanded by the oracle. Henceforth, he attached himself to young men, not for the purpose of measuring the proportions of their bodies but solely to teach them that which is honest. He preferred those whose soul was beautiful to those of perfect form, differing in this respect from sculptors, painters and debauchees, who consider only external beauty, despising the inner comeliness. You are aware that Phidias engraved on the great toe of his Jupiter the name of an athlete, because he was handsome, and without considering whether he was pure."

"Hence it is," was Gallio's summing up, "that we do not sing the praises of sculptors, while bestowing them on their works."

"By Hercules!" exclaimed Lollius, "I do not know whether to admire most that Venus or that Faun. The goddess seems to reflect coolness from the water still dripping from her. She is truly the desire of gods and men; do you not fear, Gallio, that some night, a lout concealed in your grounds may subject her to an outrage similar to the one inflicted by a profane youth, so it is reported, on the Aphrodite of the Cnidians? The priestesses of her temple discovered one morning traces of the outrage on the body of the goddess, and travellers affirm that from that day until now she bears the indelible mark of her defilement. The audacity of the man and the patience of the Immortal One are to be wondered at."

"The crime did not remain unpunished," affirmed Gallio. "The sacrilegious profaner flung himself into the sea, and fell on the rocks a shapeless mass. He was never again seen."

"There can be no doubt," resumed Lollius, "that the Venus of Cnidus surpasses all others in beauty. But the artisan who carved the one in your grounds, Gallio, knew how to make marble plastic. Look at that Faun; he is laughing, and saliva moistens his teeth and his lips; his cheeks have the fresh bloom of the apple: his whole body glistens with youth. However, I prefer the Venus to the Faun."

Raising his right arm, Apollodorus said:

"Most gentle Lollius, just think a bit, and you will fain admit that a like preference is pardonable in an ignorant individual who follows his instincts and who reasons not, but that it is not permitted to one as wise as yourself. That Venus cannot be as beautiful as that Faun, for the body of woman enjoys a perfection lesser than that of man, and the copy of a thing which is less perfect can never equal in beauty the copy of a thing that is more perfect. No doubt can assuredly exist, Lollius, that the body of woman is less beautiful than that of man, since it contains a less beautiful soul. Women are vain, quarrelsome, their mind occupied with trifles and incapable of elevated thoughts, while sickness oftentimes obscures their intellect."

"And yet," remarked Gallio, "both in Rome and in Athens, virgins and matrons have been held worthy of presiding over sacred rites and of placing offerings on the altars. Nay more, the gods have at times selected virgins to give utterance to their oracular words, or to reveal the future to men. Cassandra wore the bands of Apollo about her head and prophesied the discomfiture of the Trojans. Juturna, to whom the love of a god gave immortality, was entrusted with the guardianship of the fountains of Rome."

"Quite true," replied Apollodorus. "But the gods sell dearly to virgins the privilege of interpreting their wishes, and of announcing future events. While conferring on them the power of

seeing that which is hidden, they deprive them of their reason and inflict madness on them. I will, however, Gallio, grant you that some women are better than some men and that some men are less good than some women. This arises from the fact that the two sexes are not as distinct and separate from each other as one would believe, and that, quite on the contrary, there is something of man in many women, and of woman in many a man. The following is the explanation of this commingling:

“The ancestors of the men who nowadays people the earth sprang from the hands of Prometheus, who, to give them shape, kneaded the clay as does the potter. He did not confine himself to shaping with his hands a single couple. Far too prudent and too industrious to cause the entire human race to grow from one seed and from a single vessel, he undertook the manufacture of a multitude of women and men, in order to secure at once to humanity the advantage of numbers. In order better to carry out so difficult a work, he modelled separately at the outset all the parts which were to constitute both male and female bodies. He fashioned as many lungs, livers, hearts, brains, bladders, spleens, intestines, matrices and generative organs as were required, and, lastly, he made with subtle art, and in sufficient quantity, all the organs by means of which human beings might breathe freely, feed themselves, and enjoy the reproduction of the species. He forgot neither muscles, tendons, bones, blood nor fluids. He next cut out skins, intending to place in each one, as in a sack, the requisite articles. All these component parts of men and women were duly finished, and nothing remained but to put them together, when he was of a sudden invited to partake of supper at the residence of Bacchus. He went thither, crowned with roses, and indulged too freely in libations to the god, returning with tottering steps to his workshop. His brain befogged with the fumes of wine, his eyesight dimmed, and his hands shaky, he resumed his task, greatly to our misfortune. The distribution of organs among human beings seemed to him an easy enough pastime. He knew not what he was about, and was perfectly contented with his job, however badly he accomplished it. He was constantly and inadvertently allotting to woman that which was proper to man, and to man the things pertaining to woman.

“Thus it came about that our first parents were composed of ill-assorted pieces which did not harmonise. And, having mated by choice or at haphazard, they produced beings as incoherent as themselves. Thus has it come about, through the Titan’s fault, that we see so many virile women and so many effeminate men. This also explains the contradictory characteristics to be met with in the firmest of minds and how it is that the most determined character is perpetually false to itself. And, finally, this is why we are all at variance with our own selves.”

Lucius Cassius expressed condemnation of this fable, because it did not teach man to conquer himself, but on the contrary induced him to yield to nature.

Gallio pointed out that the poets and philosophers gave a different interpretation as to the origin of the world and the creation of mankind.

“The fables told by the Greeks,” he said, “should not be believed in too blindly, nor should we hold as truthful, Apollodorus, what they state in particular concerning the stones thrown by Pyrrha. The philosophers are not in accord among themselves as to the principle presiding over the creation of the world, and leave us in doubt as to whether the earth was produced by water, by air, or, as seems more credible, by the subtle heat. But the Greeks wish to know all things, and so they forge ingenious falsehood. How much better it is to confess our ignorance. The past is as much concealed from us as is the future; we are circumscribed by two dense clouds, in the forgetfulness of what was, and in the uncertainty of what shall be. And yet we suffer ourselves to be the playthings of an inquisitive desire to become acquainted with the causes of things, and a consuming anxiety incites us to ponder over the destinies of mankind and of the world.”

“It is true,” sighed Cassius, “that we are everlastingly striving to penetrate the impenetrable future. We toil at this quest with all our might, and call to our aid all kinds of means. Anon we think to attain our object by meditation; again, by prayer and ecstasy. Some of us consult the oracles of the gods; others, fearing not to do that which is forbidden, appeal to the augurs of Chaldaea, or try

the Babylonian spells. Futile and sacrilegious curiosity! For, of what advantage would be to us the knowledge of future things, since they are inevitable! Nevertheless the wise men, still more so than the vulgar herd, feel the desire of delving into the future and of, so to speak, hurling themselves into it. It is doubtless because they hope thus to escape the present which inflicts on them so much that is sad and distasteful. Why should not the men of to-day be goaded with the desire of fleeing from these wretched times? We are living in an age replete with deeds of cowardice, abounding in ignominious acts, and fertile in crimes.”

Cassius spoke at some length in depreciation of the times in which he lived. He lamented the fact that the Romans, fallen from their ancient virtues, no longer found any pleasure except in the consumption of the oysters of the Lucrine lake and of the birds of Phasis river, and that they had no taste except for mummers, chariot-drivers, and gladiators. He deplored the ills which the Empire was suffering from, the insolent luxury of the great, the contemptible avidity of the clients, and the savage depravity of the multitude.

Gallio and his brother agreed with him. They loved virtue. Nevertheless, they had nothing in common with the patricians of old who, having no other care than the fattening of their swine, and the performance of the sacred rites, conquered the world for the better administration of their farms. This nobility of the byre, instituted by Romulus and Remus, was long since extinct. The patrician families created by the divine Julius and by the Emperor Augustus, had passed away. Intelligent men from all the provinces of the Empire had stepped into their places. Romans in Rome, they were nowhere strangers. They greatly surpassed the old Cethegus family by their refined minds and humane feelings. They did not regret the Republic; they did not regret liberty, the recollection of which recalled simultaneously proscriptions and civil wars. They honoured Cato as the heroic figure of another age, without wishing to see so exalted a type of virtue arise on top of fresh ruins. They looked upon the Augustan epoch and the first years of Tiberius as the happiest the world had ever known, since the Golden Age had existed in the imagination of the poets only. They lamented the fact that the new order of things, which had promised the world a long reign of felicity, should have so promptly burdened Rome with an unheard of shame unknown even to the contemporaries of Marius and Sulla. They had, during the madness of Caius, seen the best citizens branded with a hot iron, sentenced to the mines, to labour on the roads, thrown to wild beasts, fathers compelled to be present at the agony of their children, and men shining by their virtues, such as Cremutius Cordus, suffer themselves to die of starvation, in order to cheat the tyrant of their death. To Rome’s shame, be it said, Caligula respected neither his sisters nor the most illustrious dames. And, what filled these rhetors and philosophers with as great an indignation as the one they felt over the rape of the matrons and the assassination of the best citizens, were the crimes perpetrated by Caius against eloquence and letters. This madman had conceived the idea of destroying the poems of Homer, and had caused to be removed from all bookshelves the writings, the portraits, and the names of Virgil and of Livy. Finally, Gallio could not forgive him for having compared the style of Seneca to mortar without cement.

They dreaded Claudius in a somewhat lesser degree, but despised him the more for all that. They ridiculed his pumpkin-like head and his seal-like voice. That old savant was not a monster of wickedness. The worst they could reproach him with was his weakness. But, in the exercise of the sovereign power, such weakness became at times as cruel as the cruelty of Caius. They also bore domestic grievances against him. If Caius had held Seneca up to ridicule, Claudius had banished him to Corsica. It is true that he had subsequently recalled him to Rome and conferred a prætorship on him. But they showed him no gratitude for having thus carried out the behests of Agrippina, in ignorance of what he was commanding. Indignant but long suffering, they left it to the Empress to determine the fate of the aged man, and the choice of the new prince. Many rumours were current to the shame of the unchaste and cruel daughter of Germanicus. They heeded them not, and sang the praises of the illustrious woman to whom the Senecas owed the termination of their misfortune and their rise in honours. As will oftentimes happen, their convictions were in harmony with their

interests. A painful experience of public life had left unshaken their trust in the *régime* established by the divine Augustus, a *régime* placed on a firmer basis by Tiberius, and under which they filled high positions. They were reckoning on a new master to redress the evils engendered by the masters of the Empire.

Gallio produced from the folds of his toga a roll of papyrus.

"Dear friends," he said, "I have learnt this morning, through letters from Rome, that our young prince has married Octavia, the daughter of Cæsar."

A murmur of approval greeted the news.

"We should indeed," continued Gallio, "congratulate ourselves over a union, by virtue of which the prince, combining with his former qualifications those of husband and of son-in-law, becomes henceforth the equal of Britannicus. My brother Seneca never ceases praising in his letters to me the eloquence and gentleness of his pupil who sheds lustre on his youth by pleading before the Senate in the presence of the Emperor. He has not yet completed his sixteenth year, yet he has already won the cases of three unfortunate or guilty cities – Ilion, Bolonia, and Apamea."

"He has not then," asked Lucius Cassius, "inherited the evil disposition of the Domitians, his ancestors?"

"Indeed he has not," replied Gallio. "It is Germanicus who lives anew in him."

Annæus Mela, who was not looked upon as a sycophant, joined in the praise of the son of Agrippina. His praises appeared affecting and sincere, since he pledged them, so to speak, on the head of his son, who was still of tender age.

"Nero is chaste, modest, of a kindly disposition, and religious. My little Lucan, who is dearer to me than my eyes, was his play- and school-mate. Together they practised declamation in the Greek and Latin languages. Together they attempted to indite verse. Never did Nero, in the course of these contests of skill at versification, manifest the slightest symptom of jealousy. Quite the contrary, he enjoyed praising his rival's verses, which, in spite of his tender age, revealed traces here and there of a consuming energy. He sometimes seemed happy to be surpassed by the nephew of his teacher. Such was the charming modesty of the prince of youth! Poets will some day compare the friendship of Nero and Lucan with that of Euryalus and Nisus."

"Nero," the proconsul went on to say, "displays with the ardour of youth a gentle and merciful spirit. Time will but strengthen such virtues."

"Claudius, when adopting him, has wisely acquiesced in the hope expressed by the Senate and the wish of the people. In so doing, he has removed from the Imperial succession a child overwhelmed by the shame of his mother, and has now, by giving Octavia to Nero, secured the accession of a youthful Cæsar whom Rome will delight in. The respectful son of an honoured mother, the zealous disciple of a philosopher, Nero, whose adolescence is illumined with the most agreeable qualities, Nero, our hope and the hope of the world, will remember, when clad in purple, the teachings of the Portico, and will rule the universe with justice and moderation."

"We welcome the omen," remarked Lollius. "May an era of happiness dawn upon the human race!"

"'Tis difficult to predict the future," said Gallio. "Still, we experience no doubts regarding the eternity of the City. The oracles have promised Rome an empire without end, and it would be sacrilegious not to put our faith in the gods. Shall I reveal to you my fondest hope? I joyfully expect the time when peace will reign for ever on the earth, following upon the chastising of the Parthians. Yes indeed, we may, without fear of deceiving ourselves, herald the end of war so hated by mothers. Who is there to disturb the Roman peace henceforth? Our eagles have spread to the confines of the universe. All the nations have experienced our strength and our mercy. The Arab, the Sabæan, the dweller on the slopes of the Hæmus, the Sarmatian who quenches his thirst with the blood of his steed, the Sygambri of the curly locks, the woolly-headed Ethiopian, all come in hordes to worship Rome their protectress. Whence would new barbarians spring? Is it likely that the icy plains of the

North or the burning sands of Libya hold in store enemies of the Roman nation? All Barbarians, won over to our friendship, will lay down their arms, and Rome, the white-haired great-grandmother, tranquil in her old age, will see the nations respectfully grouped about her as her adopted children, dwelling in harmony and love.”

All signified their approval of the foregoing sentiments, excepting Cassius, who shook his head in disagreement.

He felt a pride in his military ancestry while the glory of arms, so greatly extolled by poets and rhetors, kindled his enthusiasm.

“I doubt, my friend Gallio,” he commented, “that nations will ever cease to hate and fear one another. To tell the truth, I should not desire such a consummation. Did war cease, what would become of strength of character, grandeur of soul, and love of country? Courage and devotion would be virtues out of date.”

“Rest assured, Lucius,” said Gallio, “that when men shall cease to conquer one another, they will strive to subdue their own selves. That is the most virtuous attempt they can make, and the most noble use to which they can put their bravery and magnanimity. Yes indeed, the august mother whose wrinkles and whose hairs, blanced by centuries, we worship, Rome, will establish universal peace. Then shall the enjoyment of life be realised. Life under certain conditions is worth living. Life is a tiny flame between two infinite shadows; ’tis our share of the divine essence. During the term of his life, a man is similar to the gods.”

While Gallio was thus discoursing, a dove perched itself on the shoulder of the Venus, whose marble contours gleamed among the myrtles.

“My dear Gallio,” said Lollius with a smile, “the bird of Aphrodite takes delight in thy words. They are gentle and full of gracefulness.”

A slave approached, bearing cool wine, and the friends of the proconsul discoursed of the gods. Apollodorus was of opinion that it was not easy to grasp their nature. Lollius doubted their very existence.

“When thunder peals,” he said, “it all depends upon the philosopher whether it is the cloud or the god who has thundered.”

Cassius, however, did not countenance such thoughtless arguments. He believed in the gods of the Republic. While entertaining doubts as to the extent of their providence, he asserted their existence, as he did not wish to differ from humanity on an essential point. And to support his belief in the faith of his ancestors, he had recourse to an argument he had learnt from the Greeks.

“The gods exist,” he said. “Men have formed their idea of what they are like. Now, it is impossible to conceive an image not based on reality. How would it be possible to see Minerva, Neptune, and Mercury, were there neither Mercury, nor Neptune, nor Minerva?”

“You have convinced me,” said Lollius mockingly. “The old woman who sells honey-cakes in the Forum, outside the basilica, has seen the god Typhon, he with the shaggy head of an ass, and a monster belly. He threw her on her back, threw her clothes over her ears, chastised her while keeping time to each resounding blow, and left her for dead, after polluting her in a disgusting fashion. She has herself told how, even as Antiope, she had been favoured with the visit of an immortal god. It is certain that the god Typhon exists, since he committed an outrage on an old cake-selling hag.”

“In spite of thy mockery, Marcus, I do not doubt the existence of the gods,” resumed Cassius. “And I believe that they enjoy a human form, since it is under that form that they always show themselves to us, whether we slumber or whether we are awake.”

“It would be better,” remarked Apollodorus, “to say that men possess the divine form, since the gods existed before them.”

“My dear Apollodorus,” exclaimed Lollius. “You forget that Diana was first worshipped under the form of a tree, and that several important gods have the shape of an unhewn stone. Cybele is represented, not as a woman should be, with two breasts, but with several teats like a bitch or a sow.

The sun is a god, but being too hot to assume the human form, he has taken the shape of a ball; he is a round god.”

Annæus Mela gently censured this academic jesting.

“All that is related about the gods,” he said, “should not be taken literally. The vulgar herd calls wheat Ceres, and wine Bacchus. But where is to be found the man crazy enough to believe that he drinks and eats a god? Let us indulge in a more exalted knowledge of the divine nature. The gods are but the several parts of nature, and they are all lost in one god, who is nature in its entirety.”

The proconsul signified his approval of the words of his brother, and speaking in a serious strain, defined the attributes of divinity.

“God is the soul of the world; this soul spreads to all parts of the universe, infusing motion and life into it. This soul, a creative flame, penetrating the inert mass of matter, gave shape to the world, governing and preserving it. Divinity, an active force, is essentially good. The matter which it has put to good use, being inert and passive, is bad in certain of its parts. God has been powerless to change its nature. This explains the origin of the evil in the world. Our souls are particles of the divine fire into which they will some day be merged. Consequently, God is within us and he dwells in particular in the virtuous man whose soul is not hampered with gross materialism. This wise man, in whom God dwells, is God’s equal. He should not implore him, but contain him within himself. And what madness it is to pray to God! What an act of impiety it is to petition him! It is tantamount to believing that it is possible to enlighten his intelligence, to change his heart, and to persuade him to mend his behaviour. It is displaying ignorance of the necessity governing his immutable wisdom. He is subjected to Destiny, or, to be more accurate, he is Destiny. His ways are laws to which he is like ourselves subjected. For once that he commands, he obeys for ever. Free and powerful in his submission, it is to himself that he shows obedience. All the happenings in the world are the manifestations of sovereign intentions originating with himself. His helplessness against himself is infinite.”

Gallio’s speech was applauded by his hearers. Apollodorus, however, craved permission to submit a few objections.

“You are right, Gallio,” he said, “when you believe that Jupiter is at the mercy of Anankè and I hold with you that Anankè is the first among the immortal goddesses. But it appears to me that your god, above all admirable in his compass and his perpetuity, had better intentions than luck when he created the world, since he found nothing better wherewith to knead it than a rebellious and ingrate substance, and that the material betrays the workman. I cannot but feel for him over his discomfiture. The potters of Athens are more fortunate. They procure, for the purpose of making vases, a delicate and plastic clay which readily takes and preserves the contours they give it. Hence do their goblets and amphoræ present an agreeable form. Their curves are graceful, and the painter limns with ease figures pleasing to the eye, such as old Silenus bestriding his ass, the toilet of Aphrodite, and the chaste Amazons. When I come to think of it, Gallio, I am of the opinion that if your god was less fortunate than the potters of Athens, ’tis for the reason that he lacked wisdom and that he was a poor artisan. The material at his disposal was not of the best. Still, it was not devoid of all serviceable properties, as you have yourself confessed. Nothing is absolutely good or absolutely bad. A thing may be bad if put to a certain use, while it may be excellent in some other. It would be waste of time to plant olive-trees in the clay used in fashioning amphoræ. The tree of Pallas would not grow in the light and pure soil of which are made the beautiful vases which our victorious athletes receive, blushing the while with pride and modesty. It seems to me, Gallio, that your god, when fashioning the world with a material that was not suitable for the undertaking, was guilty of the mistake which a vine-dresser of Megara would be committing, were he to plant a vine in modelling clay, or were some worker in ceramics to select for the making of amphoræ the stony soil which affords nutriment to the clusters of the grape-vine. Your god, you say, made the universe. He ought certainly to have given form to some other thing, in order to make suitable use of his material. Since the substance,

as you assert, proved rebellious to him, either through its inherent inertia, or through some other bad quality, should he have persisted in putting it to a use it could not respond to, and, as the saying goes, carve his bow out of a cypress? The secret of industry does not consist in accomplishing much, but in doing good work. Why did he not content himself with creating some small thing, say a gnat, or a drop of water, but finish it to perfection?

“I might add further remarks about your god, Gallio, and ask you, for instance, if you do not entertain a fear that from his constant rubbing against matter, he may wear out, just as a millstone becomes worn in the long run in the course of grinding wheat. But such questions are not to be solved in a hurry, and the time of a proconsul is precious. Permit me at least to say to you that you are not justified in believing that your god rules and preserves the world, since, according to your own admission, he deprived himself of intelligence after having become acquainted with all things; of will-power, after having willed all things, and of power, following upon his ability to do what he saw fit. Herein again lay, on his part, a serious mistake, for he was thus an instrument in depriving himself of the means of correcting his imperfect work. So far as I am concerned, I am inclined to believe that god is in reality, not the one you have conceived, but indeed the matter he discovered on a certain day, and which the Greeks have styled chaos. You are mistaken in your belief that matter is inert. It is ever in motion, and its perpetual activity keeps life a-going throughout the universe.”

Thus spake the philosopher Apollodorus. Gallio, who had listened to his speech with some degree of impatience, denied that he had fallen a victim to the mistakes and contradictions with which the Greek charged him. But he failed in refuting successfully the arguments of his opponent, as his intellect was not a subtle one and because he demanded principally of philosophy the means of rendering men virtuous, and because he was interested in useful truths only.

“Try to grasp, Apollodorus,” he said, “that God is none other than nature. Nature and himself are one. God and Nature are the two names of a single being, just as Novatus and Gallio designate one and the same man. God, if you prefer, is divine reason commingling with the earth. You need have no fear that he will wear out through this amalgamation, since his tenuous substance participates of the fire which consumes all matter while remaining unchanged.

“But should, nevertheless,” proceeded Gallio, “my doctrine embrace ill-assorted ideas, do not blame me for it, my dear Apollodorus, but rather give me praise because I suffer a few contradictions to find a place in my mind. Were I not conciliatory as regards my own ideas, were I to confer upon a single system an exclusive preference, I could no longer tolerate the freedom of every opinion; having destroyed my own freedom of thought, I could not readily tolerate it in the case of others, and I should forfeit the respect due to every doctrine established or professed by a sincere man. The gods forbid that I should see my opinion prevail to the exclusion of any other, and exercise an absolute sway on other minds. Conjure up a picture, my dear friends, of the state of manners and morals, were a sufficient number of men firmly to believe that they were the sole possessors of the truth, if, by some impossible chance, they were thoroughly agreed as to that truth. A too narrow piety among the Athenians, who are nevertheless full of wisdom and of doubt, was the cause of the banishment of Anaxagoras and of the death of Socrates. What would happen were millions of men enslaved by one solitary idea concerning the nature of the gods? The genius of the Greeks and the prudence of our ancestors made allowance for doubt, and tolerated the worship of Jupiter under several names. No sooner should a powerful sect come on this ailing earth and proclaim that Jupiter has one name only, than blood would flow the world over, and no longer would there be but one Caius whose madness should threaten the human race with death. All the men of such a sect would be so many Caiuses. They would face death for a name. For a name, they would kill, since it is rather in the nature of men to kill than to die on behalf of what seems to them true and most excellent. Hence it is better to base public order on the diversity of opinions, than to seek to establish it on a universal consent to one and the same belief. A like unanimous consent could never be realised, and in seeking to obtain it, men would become stupid and maddened. For, indeed, the most patent truth is but a vain jangle of words

to the men on whom it is attempted to impose it. You would compel me to believe a thing which you understand, but which passes my understanding. You would thus be forcing upon me not a thing that is intelligible, but one that is incomprehensible. And I am nearer you when holding a different belief, one which I understand. For, in that case, both of us are making use of our reason, and we both possess an intelligent comprehension of our own belief.”

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