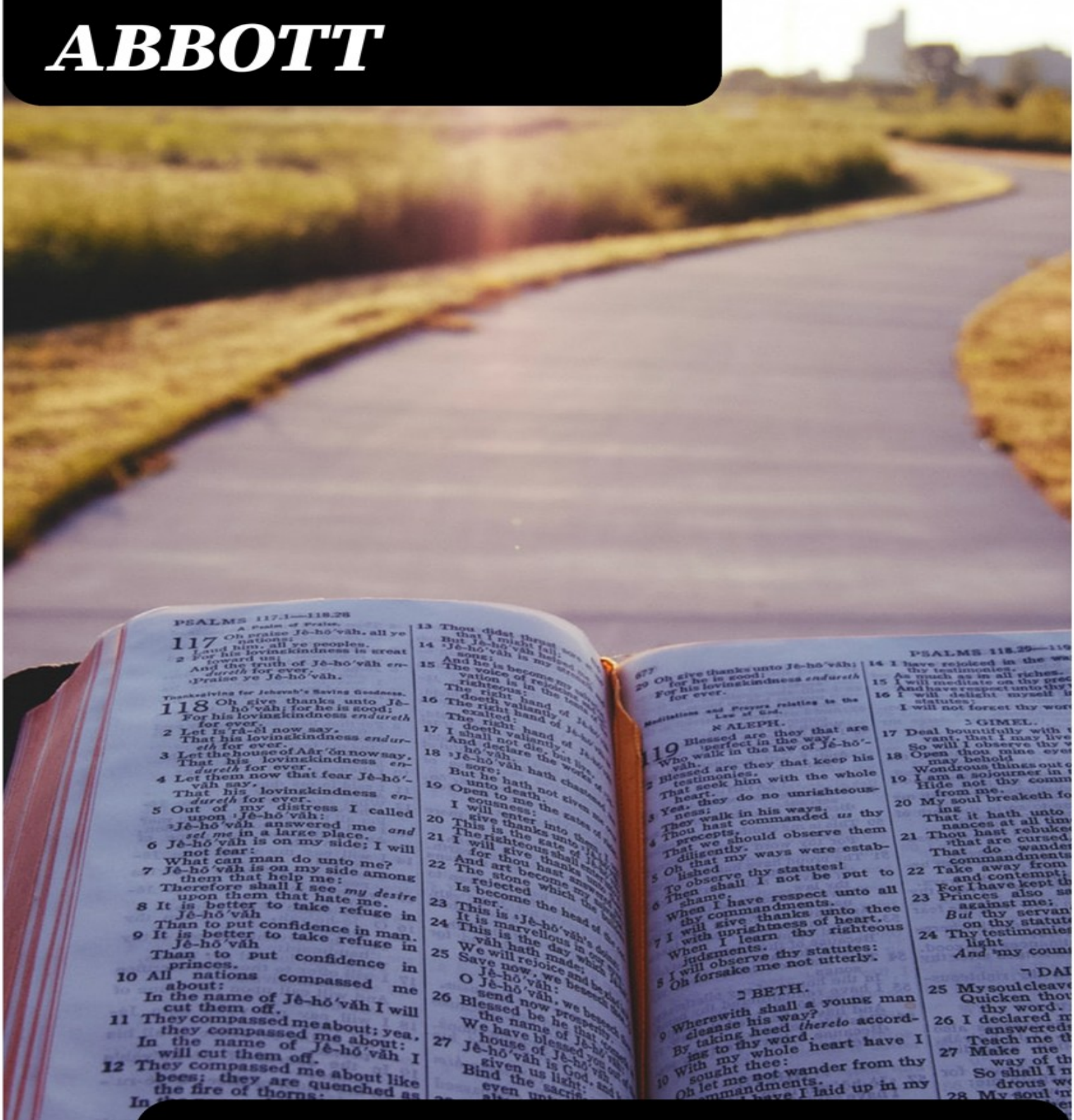
EDWIN ABBOTT ABBOTT



SILANUS THE CHRISTIAN

Edwin Abbott Abbott

Silanus the Christian

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Table of Contents

PREFACE

Table of Contents

Many years have elapsed since the author was constrained (not by *a priori* considerations but by historical and critical evidence) to disbelieve in the miraculous element of the Bible. Yet he retained the belief of his childhood and youth—rooted more firmly than before—in the eternal unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the supernatural but non-miraculous incarnation of the Son as Jesus Christ, and in Christ's supernatural but non-miraculous resurrection after He had offered Himself up as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The belief is commonly supposed to be rendered impossible by the disbelief. This book is written to shew that there is no such impossibility.

The vast majority of the worshippers of Christ base their worship to a very large extent—as the author did in his early youth under the cloud of Paley's *Evidences*—on their acceptance of His miracles as historical facts. In the author's opinion this basis is already demonstrably unsafe, and may be at any moment, by some new demonstration, absolutely destroyed.

Nevertheless such worshippers, if their worship is really genuine—that is to say, if it includes love, trust, and awe, carried to their highest limits, and not merely that kind of awe which is inspired by "mighty works"—will do well to avoid this book. If doubt has not attacked them, why should they go to meet it? In pulling up falsehood by the roots there is always a danger of uprooting or loosening a truth

that grows beside it. Historical error, if honest, is better (and less misleading) than spiritual darkness. For example, it is much better (and less misleading) to remain in the old-fashioned belief that a good and wise God created the world in six days than to adopt a new belief that a bad or unwise or careless God—or a chance, or a force, or a power—evolved it in sixty times six sextillions of centuries.

To such genuine worshippers of Christ, then, as long as they feel safe and sincere in their convictions, this book is not addressed. They are (in the author's view) substantially right, and had better remain as they are.

But there may be some, calling themselves worshippers of Christ, who cannot honestly say that they love Him. They trust His power, they bow before Him as divine; but they have no affection at all for Him, as man, or as God. What St Paul described as the "constraining" love of Christ has never touched them. And yet they fancy they worship! To them this book may be of use in suggesting the divinity and loveableness of Christ's human nature; and any harm the book might do them can hardly be conceived as equal to the harm of remaining in their present position. One may learn Christ by rote, as one may learn Euclid by rote, so as to be almost ruined for really knowing either. For such learners the best course may be to go back and begin again.

It is, however, to a third class of readers that the author mainly addresses himself. Having in view the experiences of his own early manhood, he regards with a strong fellow feeling those who desire to worship Christ and to be loyal and faithful to Him, if only they can at the same time be

loyal and faithful to truth, and who doubt the compatibility of the double allegiance.

These, many of them, cannot even conceive how they can worship Christ at the right hand of God, or the Son in the bosom of the Father in heaven, unless they first believe in Him as miraculously manifested on earth. Not being able to accept Him as miraculous, they reject Him as a Saviour. To them this book specially appeals, endeavouring to shew, in a general and popular way—on psychological, historical, and critical grounds—how the rejection of the claim made by most Christians that their Lord is miraculous, may be compatible with a frank and full acceptance of the conclusion that He is, in the highest sense, divine.

Detailed proofs this volume does not offer. These will be given in a separate volume of “Notes,” shortly to be published. This will be of a technical nature, forming Part VII of the series called Diatessarica. The present work merely aims at suggesting such conceptions of history, literature, worship, human nature, and divine Being, as point to a foreordained conformation of man to God, to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, of which the fulfilment may be traced in the Christian writings and the Christian churches of the first and second centuries.

It also attempts, in a manner not perhaps very usual, to meet many objections brought against Christianity by those who assert that its records are inadequate, inaccurate, and contradictory. Instead of denying these defects, the author admits and emphasizes them as being inseparable from earthen vessels containing a spiritual treasure, and as (in some cases) indirectly testifying to the divinity of the Person

whom the best efforts of the best and most inspired of the evangelists inadequately, though honestly, portray. Specimens of these defects are freely given, shewing the modifications, amplifications, and (in some case) misinterpretations or corruptions, to which Christian tradition was inevitably exposed in passing from the east to the west during a period of about one hundred and thirty years, dating from the Crucifixion.

These objects the author has endeavoured to attain by sketching an autobiography of an imaginary character, by name Quintus Junius Silanus, who in the second year of Hadrian (A.D. 118) becomes a hearer of Epictetus and a Christian convert, and commits his experiences to paper forty-five years afterwards in the second year of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Verus (A.D. 163).

EDWIN A. ABBOTT.

Wellside, Well Walk,
Hampstead.
28 Aug. 1906.

SUMMARY

Table of Contents

Quintus Junius Silanus, born 90 A.D., goes from Rome at the suggestion of his old friend Marcus Æmilius Scaurus, to attend the lectures of Epictetus in Nicopolis about 118 A.D.

Scaurus (like Silanus, an imaginary character) born about 50 A.D., is a disabled soldier, and has been for many years a student of miscellaneous Greek literature, including

Christian writings. In reply to a letter from Silanus, extolling his new teacher, Scaurus expresses his belief that Epictetus has passed through a stage of infection with “the Christian superstition,” from which he has borrowed some parts of the superstructure while rejecting its foundation.

Silanus, in order to defend his teacher Epictetus from what he considers an unjust imputation, procures the epistles of Paul. His interest in these leads him to the “scriptures” from which Paul quotes. Thence he is led on to speculate about the nature of the “gospel” preached by Paul, and about the character and utterances of the “Christ” from whom that “gospel” originated. The epistles convey to him a sense of spiritual strength and “constraining love.” He determines to procure the Christian gospels.

During all this time he is occasionally corresponding with Scaurus and attending the lectures of Epictetus, which satisfy him less and less. Contrasted with the spiritual strength in the epistles of Paul the lectures seem to contain only spiritual effervescence. And there is an utter absence of “constraining love.”

When the three Synoptic gospels reach Silanus from Rome, he receives at the same time a destructive criticism on them from Scaurus. Much of this criticism he is enabled to meet with the aid of the Pauline epistles. But enough remains to shake his faith in their historical accuracy. Nor does he find in them the same presence that he found in the epistles, of “constraining love.” The result is, that he is thrown back from Christ.

At this crisis he meets Clemens, an Athenian, who lends him a gospel that has recently appeared, the gospel of John.

Clemens frankly admits his doubts about its authorship, and about its complete accuracy, but commends it as conveying the infinite spiritual revelation inherent in Christ less inadequately than it is conveyed by the Synoptists.

A somewhat similar view is expressed by Scaurus, though with a large admixture of hostile criticism. He has recently received the fourth gospel, and it forms the subject of his last letter. While rejecting much of it as unhistorical, he expresses great admiration for it, and for what he deems its fundamental principle, namely, that Jesus cannot be understood save through a “disciple whom Jesus loved.”

While speculating on what might have happened if he himself had come under the influence of a “disciple whom Jesus loved,” Scaurus is struck down by paralysis. Silanus sets sail for Italy in the hope of finding his friend still living. At the moment when he is losing sight of the hills above Nicopolis where Clemens is praying for him, Silanus receives an apprehension of Christ’s “constraining love” and becomes a Christian.

No attempt has been made to give the impression of an archaic or Latin style. Hence “Christus” and “Paulus” are mostly avoided except in a few instances where they are mentioned for the first time by persons speaking from a non-Christian point of view. Similar apparent inconsistencies will be found in the use of “He” and “he,” denoting Christ. The use varies, partly according to the speaker, partly according to the speaker’s mood. It varies also in quotations from scripture according to the extent to which the Revised Version is followed.

The utterances assigned to Epictetus are taken from the records of his sayings by Arrian or others. Some of these have been freely translated, paraphrased, and transposed; but none of them are imaginary. When Silanus says that his friend Arrian “never heard Epictetus say” this or that, the meaning is that the expression does not occur in Epictetus’s extant works, so far as can be judged from Schenkl’s admirable Index.

The words assigned to Arrian, Silanus’s friend, when speaking in his own person, are entirely imaginary; but the statements made about Arrian’s birthplace and official career are based on history.

Any words assigned by Scaurus to his “friend” Pliny, Plutarch, or Josephus, or by Silanus to “the young Irenæus,” or Justin, may be taken to be historical. The references will be given in the volume of Notes.

Scaurus and Silanus occasionally describe themselves as “finding marginal notes” indicating variations in their MSS. of the gospels. In all such cases the imaginary “marginal notes” are based on actual various readings or interpolations which will be given in the volume of Notes. Most of these are of an early date, and may be based on much earlier originals; and care has been taken to exclude any that are of late origin. But the reader must bear in mind that we have no MSS. of the gospels, and therefore no “marginal notes,” of so early a date as 118 A.D.

ERRATA.

Table of Contents

Page 49, *for* “offending to” *read* “offending.”

” 134, *for* “a divine” *read* “divine.”

CHAPTER I
THE FIRST LECTURE

Table of Contents

"*I forbid you to go into the senate-house.*" "*As long as I am a senator, go I must.*" Two voices were speaking from one person—the first, pompous, coarse, despotic; the second, refined, dry, austere. There was nothing that approached stage-acting—only a suggestion of one man swelling out with authority, and of another straightening up his back in resistance. These were the first words that I heard from Epictetus, as I crept late into the lecture-room, tired with a long journey over-night into Nicopolis.

I need not have feared to attract attention. All eyes were fixed on the lecturer as I stole into a place near the door, next my friend Arrian, who was absorbed in his notes. What was it all about? In answer to my look of inquiry Arrian pushed me his last sheet with the names "Vespasian" and "Helvidius Priscus" scrawled large upon it. Then I knew what it meant. It was a story now nearly forty years old—which I had often heard from my father's old friend, Æmilius Scaurus—illustrating the duty of obeying the voice of the conscience rather than the voice of a king. Epictetus, after his manner, was throwing it into the form of a dialogue:—

"*Vespasian.* I forbid you to go into the senate-house.

"*Priscus.* As long as I am a senator, go I must.

"*Vespasian.* Go, then, but be silent.

"*Priscus.* Do not ask my opinion, and I will be silent.

"*Vespasian.* But I am bound to ask it.

“*Priscus.* And I am bound to answer, and to answer what I think right.

“*Vespasian.* Then I shall kill you.

“*Priscus.* Did I ever say that I could not be killed? It is yours to kill; mine, to die fearless.”

I give his words almost as fully as Arrian took them down. But his tone and spirit are past man’s power to put on paper. He flashed from Emperor to Senator like the zig-zag of lightning with a straight down flash at the end. This was always his way. He would play a thousand parts, seeming, superficially, a very Proteus; but they were all types of two characters, the philosopher and the worldling, the follower of the Logos and the follower of the flesh. Moreover, he was always in earnest, in hot earnest. On the surface he would jest like Menander or jibe like Aristophanes; but at bottom he was a tragedian. At one moment he would point to his halting leg and flout himself as a lame old grey-beard with a body of clay. In the next, he was “a son of Zeus,” or “God’s own son,” or “carrying about God.” Never at rest, he might deceive a stranger into supposing that he was occasionally rippling and sparkling with real mirth like a sea in sunlight. But it was never so. It was a sea of molten metal and there was always a Vesuvius down below.

I suspect that he never knew mirth or genial laughter even as a child. He was born a slave, his master being Epaphroditus, a freedman of Nero’s and his favourite, afterwards killed by Domitian. I have heard—but not from Arrian—that this master caused his lameness. He was twisting his leg one day to see how much he could bear. The boy—for he was no more—said with a smile, “If you go on,

you will break it," and then, "Did not I tell you, you would break it?" True or false, this story gives the boy as I knew the man. You might break his leg but never his will. I do not know whether Epaphroditus, out of remorse, had him taught philosophy; but taught he was, under one of the best men of the day, and he acquired such fame that he was banished from Rome under Domitian, with other philosophers of note —whether at or before the time when Domitian put Epaphroditus to death I cannot say. In one of his lectures he described how he was summoned before the Prefect of the City with the other philosophers: "Come," said the Prefect, "come, Epictetus, shave off your beard." "If I am a philosopher," he replied, "I am not going to shave it off." "Then I shall take your head off." "If it is for your advantage, take it off."

But now to return to my first lecture. Among our audience were several men of position and one at least of senatorial rank. Some of them seemed a little scandalized at the Teacher's dialogue. It was not likely that the Emperor would take offence, for in the second year of Hadrian we were not in a Neronian or Domitian atmosphere; moreover, our Teacher was known to be on good terms with the new Emperor. But perhaps their official sense of propriety was shocked; and, in the first sentence of what follows, Epictetus may have been expressing their thoughts: "'*So you, philosophers, teach people to despise the throne!*' Heaven forbid! Which of us teaches anyone to lay claim to anything over which kings have authority? Take my body, take my goods, take my reputation! Take my friends and relations!

‘Yes,’ says the ruler, ‘but I must also be ruler over your convictions.’ Indeed, and who gave you this authority?”

Epictetus went on to say that if indeed his pupils were of the true philosophic stamp, holding themselves detached from the things of the body and with their minds fixed on the freedom of the soul, he would have no need to spur them to boldness, but rather to draw them back from over-hasty rushing to the grave; for, said he, they would come flocking about him, begging and praying to be allowed to teach the tyrant that they were free, by finding freedom at once in self-inflicted death: “Here on earth, Master, these robbers and thieves, these courts of justice and kings, have the upper hand. These creatures fancy that they have some sort of authority over us, simply because they have a hold on our paltry flesh and its possessions! Suffer us, Master, to shew them that they have authority over nothing!” If, said he, a pupil of this high spirit were brought before the tribunal of one of the rulers of the earth, he would come back scoffing at such “authority” as a mere scarecrow: “Why all these preparations, to meet no enemy at all? The pomp of his authority, his solemn anteroom, his gentlemen of the chamber, his yeomen of the guard—did they all come to no more than this! These things were nothing, and I was preparing to meet something great!”

On the scholar of the unpractical and cowardly type, anxiously preparing “what to say” in his defence before the magistrate’s tribunal, he poured hot scorn. Had not the fellow, he asked, been practising “what to say”—all his life through? “What else,” said he, “have you been practising? Syllogisms and convertible propositions!” Then came the

reply, in a whine, “Yes, but he has authority to kill me!” To which the Teacher answered, “Then speak the truth, you pitiful creature. Cease your imposture and give up all claim to be a philosopher. In the lords of the earth recognise your own lords and masters. As long as you give them this grip on you, through your flesh, so long must you be at the beck and call of every one that is stronger than you are. Socrates and Diogenes had practised ‘what to say’ by the practice of their lives. But as for you—get you back to your own proper business, and never again budge from it! Back to your own snug corner, and sit there at your leisure, spinning your syllogisms:

‘In thee is not the stuff that makes a man
A people’s leader.’”

Thence he passed to the objection that a judicial condemnation might bring disgrace on a man’s good name. “The authorities, you say, have condemned you as guilty of impiety and profanity. What harm is there in that for you? This creature, with authority to condemn you—does he himself know even the meaning of piety or impiety? If a man in authority calls day night or bass treble, do men that know take notice of him? Unless the judge knows what the truth is, his ‘authority to judge’ is no authority. No man has authority over our convictions, our inmost thoughts, our will. Hence when Zeno the philosopher went into the presence of Antigonus the king, it was the king that was anxious, not the philosopher. The king wished to gain the philosopher’s good opinion, but the philosopher cared for nothing that the king could give. When, therefore, you go to the palace of a great ruler, remember that you are in effect going to the shop of a shoemaker or a grocer—on a great scale of course, but still

a grocer. He cannot sell you anything real or lasting, though he may sell his groceries at a great price."

At the bottom of all this doctrine about true and false authority, there was, as I afterwards understood, a belief that God had bestowed on all men, if they would but accept and use it, authority over their own wills, so that we might conform our wills to His, as children do with a Father, and might find pleasure, and indeed our only pleasure, in doing this—accepting all bodily pain and evil as not evil but good because it comes from His will, which must be also our will and must be honoured and obeyed. "When," said he, "the ruler says to anyone, 'I will fetter your leg,' the man that is in the habit of honouring his leg cries, 'Don't, for pity's sake!' But the man that honours his will says, 'If it appears advisable to you, fetter it'."

"*Tyrant.* Won't you bend?

"*Cynic.* I will not bend.

"*Tyrant.* I will show you that I am lord.

"*Cynic.* You! impossible! I have been freed by Zeus. Do you really imagine that He would allow His own son to be made a slave? But of my corpse you *are* lord. Take it."

In this particular lecture Epictetus also gave us a glimpse of a wider and more divine authority imparted by God to a few special natures, akin to Himself, whereby, as God is supreme King over men His children, so a chosen few may become subordinate kings over men their brethren. Like Plato, he seemed to look forward to a time when rulers would become philosophers, or else philosophers kings. Nero and Sardanapalus, Agamemnon and Alexander, all came under his lash—all kings and rulers of the old *régime*.

Not that he denied Agamemnon a superiority to Nero, or the right to call himself “shepherd of the people” if he pleased. “Sheep, indeed,” he exclaimed, “to submit to be ruled over by you!” and “Shepherd, indeed, for you weep like the shepherds, when a wolf has snatched away a sheep!”

From these old-fashioned rulers he passed to a new and nobler ideal of kingship: “Those kings and tyrants received from their armed guards the power of rebuking and punishing wrongdoing, though they might be rascals themselves. But on the Cynic”—that was the term he used—“this power is bestowed by the conscience.” Then he explained to us what he meant by “conscience”—the consciousness of a life of wise, watchful, and unwearied toil for man, with the co-operation of God. “And how,” he asked, “could such a man fail to be bold and speak the truth with boldness, speaking, as he does, to his own brethren, to his own children and kinsfolk? So inspired, he is no meddler or busybody. Supervising and inspecting the affairs of mankind, he is not busying himself with other men’s matters, but with his own. Else, call a general, too, a busybody, when he is busy inspecting his own soldiers!”

This was, to me, quite a new view of the character of a Cynic. But Epictetus insisted on it with reiteration. The Cynic, he said, was Warrior and Physician in one. As a warrior, he was like Hercules, wandering over the world with his club and destroying noxious beasts and monsters. As a physician, he was like Socrates or Diogenes, going about and doing good to those afflicted with sickness of mind, diagnosing each disease, prescribing diet, cautery, or other remedy. In both these capacities the Cynic received from

God authority over men, and men recognised it in him, because they perceived him to be their benefactor and deliverer.

There are, said Epictetus, in each man two characters—the character of the Beast and the character of the Man. By Beast he meant wild or savage beast, as distinct from tame beast, which he preferred to call “sheep.” “Sheep” meant the cowardly, passive-greedy passions within us. “The Beast” meant the savage, aggressive-greedy nature, not only stirring us up to external war against our neighbours, but also waging war to the death against our inward better nature, against the “Man.” The mark or stamp of the Beast he connected with Nero. “Cast it away,” he said. The opposite mark or stamp he connected with the recently deceased Emperor, Trajan. If we acted like a beast, he warned us that we should become like a beast, and then, according to his customary phrase, “*You will have lost the Man*.” And was this, asked he, nothing to lose? Over and over again he repeated it: “*You have thrown away the Man*.” It was in this light—as a type of the Man—that he regarded Hercules, the first of the Cynics, the Son of God, going on the errands of the Father to destroy the Beast in its various shapes, typifying an armed Missionary, but armed for spiritual not for fleshly warfare, destroying the Beast that would fain dominate the world. But it was for Diogenes that he reserved his chief admiration, placing him (I think) even above Socrates, or at all events praising him more warmly—partly, perhaps, out of fellow-feeling, because Diogenes, too, like himself, had known what it was to be a slave. Never shall I forget the passage in this lecture in which he

described Alexander surprising the great Cynic asleep, and waking him up with a line of Homer:—
“To sleep all night suits not a Councillor,”
—to which Diogenes replied at once in the following line, claiming for himself the heavy burden (entrusted to him by Zeus) of caring like a king for all the nations of the earth:—
“Who holds, in trust, the world’s vast orb of cares.”

Diogenes, according to our Teacher, was much more than an Æsculapius of souls; he was a sovereign with “the sceptre and the kingdom of the Cynic.” Some have represented Epictetus as claiming this authority for himself. But in the lecture that I heard, it was not so. Though what he said might have been mistaken as a claim for himself, it was really a claim for “the Cynic,” as follows. First he put the question, “How is it possible for one destitute, naked, homeless, hearthless, squalid, with not one slave to attend him, or a country to call his own, to lead a life of equable happiness?” To which he replied, “Behold, God hath sent unto you the man to demonstrate in act this possibility. ‘*Look on me, and see that I am without country, home, possessions, slaves; no bed but the ground, no wife, no children—no palace to make a king or governor out of me—only the earth, and the sky, and one threadbare cloak! And yet what do I want? Am I not fearless? Am I not free? When saw ye me failing to find any good thing that I desired, or falling into any evil that I would fain have avoided? What fault found I ever with God or man? When did I ever accuse anyone? Did anyone ever see me with a gloomy face? How do I confront the great persons before whom you, worldlings, bow abashed and dismayed? Do not I treat them*

as cringing slaves? Who, that sees me, does not feel that he sees in me his natural Lord and Master?'"

I confess that up to this point I had myself supposed that he was speaking of himself, standing erect as ruler of the world. But in the next instant he had dropped, as it were, from the pillar upon which he had been setting up the King, and now, like a man at the pedestal pointing up to the statue on the top, he exclaimed, "Behold, these are the genuine Cynic's utterances: this is his stamp and image: this is his aim!"

He passed on to answer the question, What if the Cynic missed his aim, or, at least, missed it so far as exerting the royal authority over others? What if death cut his purpose short? In that case, he said, the will, the purpose, the one essential good, had at all events remained in its purity; and how could man die better than in such actions? "If, while I am thus employed, death should overtake me, it will suffice me if I can lift up my hands to God and say, 'The helps that I received from thee, to the intent that I might understand and follow thy ordering of the universe, these I have not neglected. I have not disgraced thee, so far as in me lay. See how I have used these faculties which thou hast given me! Have I ever found fault with thee? ever been ill-pleased with anything that has happened or ever wished it to happen otherwise? Thou didst beget me, and I thank thee for all thou gavest me. I have used to the full the gifts that were of thy giving and I am satisfied. Receive them back again and dispose them in such region as may please thee. Thine were they all, and thou hast given them unto me.'" Then, turning to us, he said, "Are you not content to take

your exit after this fashion? Than such a life, what can be better, or more full of grace and beauty? Than such an end, what can be more full of blessing?”

There was much more, which I cannot recall. I was no longer in a mood to note and remember exact words and phrases, and I despair of making my readers understand why. Able philosophers and lecturers I had heard before, but none like this man. Some of those had moved me to esteem and gained my favourable judgement. But this man did more than “move” me. He whirled me away into an upper region of spiritual possibility, at once glad and sad—sad at what I was, glad at what I might be. Alcibiades says in the Symposium of Plato that whereas the orator Pericles had only moved his outer self to admiration, the teaching of Socrates caught hold of his very soul, “whirling it away into a Corybantic dance.” I quoted these words to Arrian as we left the lecture-room together, and he replied that they were just to the point. “Epictetus,” he said, “is by birth a Phrygian. And, like the Phrygian priests of Cybele, with their cymbals and their dances, he has just this power of whirling away his hearers into any region he pleases and making them feel at any moment what he wishes them to feel. But,” added he thoughtfully, “it did not last with Alcibiades. Will it last with us?”

I argued—or perhaps I should say protested—at considerable length, that it would last. Arrian walked on for a while without answering. Presently he said, “This is your first lecture. It is not so with me. I, as you know, have heard Epictetus for several months, and I admire him as much as you do, perhaps more. I am sure he is doing me good. But I

do not aim at being his ideal Cynic. '*In me is not the stuff*'—I admit his censure—that makes a man into a King, bearing all the cares of all mankind upon his shoulders. My ambition is, some day, to become (as you are by birth) a Roman citizen"—he was not one then, nor was he Flavius Arrianus, but I have called him by the name by which he became known in the world—"and to do good work in the service of the Empire, as an officer of the State and yet an honest man. For that purpose I want to keep myself in order—at all events to some reasonable extent. Epictetus is helping me to do this, by making me ashamed of the foul life of the Beast, and by making me aspire to what he calls 'the Man.' That I feel day by day, and for that I am thankful.

"But if you ask me about the reality of this 'authority,' which our Teacher claims for his Cynic, then, in all honesty, I must confess to doubts. Socrates, certainly, has moved the minds of civilised mankind. But then he had, as you know, a 'daemonic something' in him, a divine voice of some kind. And he believed in the immortality of the soul—a point on which you have not yet heard what Epictetus has to say. As to Diogenes, though I have always faithfully recorded in my notes what our Teacher says about him, yet I do not feel that the philosopher of the tub had the same heaven-sent authority as Socrates, or as Epictetus himself. And, indeed, did you not yourself hear to-day that God gives us authority over nothing but our own hearts and wills? How, then, can the Cynic claim this authority over others, except as an accident? But I forget. Perhaps Epictetus did not mention to-day his usual doctrine about 'good' and 'evil,' about 'peace of mind' and about the 'rule' of our neighbours as being 'no

evil’ to us. It reappears in almost every lecture. Wait till you have heard this.

“Again, as to the origin of this authority, the Teacher tells us that it is given by God—or by Gods, for he uses both expressions. But by what God or Gods? Is not this a matter of great importance? Wait till you have heard him on this point. Now I must hasten back to my rooms to commit my notes to writing while fresh in my memory. We meet in the lecture-room to-morrow. Meantime, believe me, I most heartily sympathize with you in your admiration of one whom I account the best of all living philosophers. I have all your conviction of his sincerity. Assuredly, whencesoever he derives it, he has in him a marvellous power for good. The Gods grant that it may last!”

CHAPTER II
EPICTETUS ON THE GODS

Table of Contents

Arrian was right in thinking that the next lecture would be on the Gods. I had come to Nicopolis at the end of one of the lecture-courses, and had heard its conclusion—the perfecting of the Cynic. The new course began by describing the purpose of God in making man.

But at the outset the subject was, not God, but the Logos—that word so untranslateable into our Latin, including as it does suggestions of our Word, Discourse, Reason, Logic, Understanding, Purpose, Proportion, and Harmony. Starting from this, Epictetus first said that the only faculty that could, as it were, behold itself, and theorize about itself, was the faculty of the Logos, which is also the faculty with which we regard, and, so to speak, mentally handle, all phenomena. From the Logos, or Word, he passed to God, as the Giver of this faculty: “It was therefore right and meet that this highest and best of all gifts should be the only one that the Gods have placed at our disposal. All the rest they have not placed at our disposal. Can it be that the Gods did not wish to place them in our power? For my part, I think that, if they had been able, they would have entrusted us also with the rest. But they were absolutely unable. For, being on earth, and bound up with such a body as this”—and here he made his usual gesture of self-contempt, mocking at his own lame figure—“how was it possible that we should not be prevented by these external fetters from receiving those other gifts? But what says Zeus?”—with

that, the halting mortal, turning suddenly round, had become the Olympian Father addressing a child six years old: "*Epictetus, if it had been practicable, I would have made your dear little body quite free, and your pretty little possessions quite free too, and quite at your disposal. But as it is, don't shut your eyes to the truth. This little body is not your very own. It is only a neat arrangement in clay.*"

After a pause, the Epictetian Zeus continued as follows, falling from "I" to "we." Some of our fellow-scholars declared to Arrian after lecture that Epictetus could not have meant this change, and they slightly altered the words in their notes. I prefer to give the difficult words of Zeus as Arrian took them down and as I heard them: "*But, since I was not able to do this*, WE *gave you a portion of* OURSELVES, *this power*"—and here Epictetus made believe to put a little box into the child's hand, adding that it contained a power of pursuing or avoiding, of liking or disliking—"*Take care of this, and put in it all that belongs to you. As long as you do this, you will never be hindered or hampered, never cry, never scold, and never flatter.*"

The change from I to WE was certainly curious; and some said that "we gave," *edōkamen*, ought to be regarded as two words, *edōka men*, "I gave on the one hand." But "on the one hand" made no sense. Nor could they themselves deny that Epictetus made Zeus say, first, "*I* was not able," and then, "a part of *ourselves*." I think the explanation may be this. Epictetus had many ways of looking at the Divine Nature. Sometimes he regarded it as One, sometimes as Many. When he thought of God as supporting and controlling the harmonious Cosmos, or Universe, then God was One—

the Monarch or General to whom we all owed loyal obedience. Often, however, “Gods” were spoken of, as in the expression “Father of Gods and men,” and elsewhere. Once he reproached himself (a lower or imaginary self) for repining against the Cosmos because he was lame, almost as if the Cosmos itself were Providence or God: “Wretched creature! For the sake of one paltry leg, to impeach the Cosmos!” But he went on to call the Cosmos “the Whole of Things.” And then he called on each man to sacrifice some part of himself (a lame man, for example, sacrificing his lame leg) to the Universe: “What! Will you not make a present of it (*i.e.* the leg) to the Whole of Things? Let go this leg of yours! Yield it up gladly to Him that gave it! What! Will you sulk and fret against the ordinances of Zeus, which He—in concert with the Fates present at your birth and spinning the thread for you—decreed and ordained?”

I remember, too, how once, while professing to represent the doctrines of the philosophers in two sections, he spoke, in the first section, of “Him,” but in the second, of “Them,” thus: “The philosophers say that we must in the first place learn this, the existence of *God*, and that *He* provides for the Universe, and that nothing—whether deed or purpose or thought—can lie hidden from *Him*. In the next place [we must learn] of what nature *They* (*i.e.* the Gods) are. For, of whatever nature *They* may be found to be, he that would fain please *Them* and obey [Them] must needs endeavour (to the best of his ability) to be made like unto *Them*.”

What did he mean by “THEM”? And why did he use THEM directly after HIM? I believe he did it deliberately. For in the very next sentence he expressed God in a neuter adjective,

“If THE DIVINE [BEING] is trustworthy, man also must needs be trustworthy.” He seemed to me to pass from masculine singular to masculine plural and from that to neuter singular, as much as to say, “Take notice. I use HIM, THEM, and IT in three consecutive sentences, and all about God, to shew you that God is not any one of these, but all.”

Similarly, after condemning the attempt of philosophers to please the rulers of the earth, he said, “I know whom I must needs please, and submit to, and obey—God and *those next to Him*.” But then he continued in the singular (“*He* made me at one with myself” and so on). And I think I may safely say that I never heard him allow his ideal philosopher or Cynic to address God in the plural with “ye” or “you.” It was always “thou,” as in the utterance I quoted above—“Thine were they all and thou gavest them to me.”

Well, then, whom did he mean by “those next to” God? I think he referred to certain guardian angels—“daemons” he called them, and so will I, spelling it thus, so as to distinguish it from “demon” meaning “devil”—one of whom (he said) was allotted by God to each human being. This, according to Epictetus, did not exclude the general inspection of mankind by God Himself: “To each He has assigned a Guardian, the Daemon of each mortal, to be his guard and keeper, sleepless and undeceivable. Therefore, whenever you shut your doors and make darkness in the house, remember never to say that you are alone. For you are not alone. God is in the house, and your Daemon is in the house. And what need have these of light to see what you are doing?”

This guardian Daemon, or daemonic Guardian, was said by some of our fellow-scholars to be the portion of the divine Logos within us, in virtue of which our Teacher distinguished men from beasts. Notably did he once make this distinction—in answer to some imaginary questioner, who was supposed to class man with irrational animals because he is subject to animal necessities. “Cattle,” replied Epictetus, “are works of God, but not preeminent, and certainly not parts of God; but thou”—turning to the supposed opponent—“art a fragment broken off from God; thou hast in thyself a part of Him. Why then ignore thy noble birth? Why dost thou not recognise whence thou hast come? Wilt thou not remember, in the moment of eating, what a Being thou art—thou that eatest—what a Being it is that thou feedest? Wilt thou not recognise what it is that employs thy senses and thy faculties? Knowest thou not that thou art feeding God, yea, taking God with thee to the gymnasium? God, God dost thou carry about, thou miserable creature, and thou knowest it not!”

We were rather startled at this. In what sense could a miserable creature “carry about God”? Epictetus proceeded, “Dost thou fancy that I am speaking of a god of gold or silver, an outside thing? It is within thyself that thou carriest Him. And thou perceivest not that thou art defiling Him with impure purposes and filthy actions! Before the face of a mere statue of the God thou wouldst not dare to do any of the deeds thou art daily doing. Yet in the presence of the God Himself, within thee, looking at all thy acts, listening to all thy words and thoughts, thou art not ashamed to continue thinking the same bad thoughts and doing the