ON THE CESSATION OF ORACLES.

Plutarch

I.

Some eagles, or swans, as the legend goes, my Terentius Priscus, starting from the opposite extremities of the earth, met together on the same point at Pytho, around what is now called the “Omphalos:” and in later times Epimenides of Phaestos, putting questions concerning this legend before the god of the place, and having received an unintelligible and ambiguous response, declared that:--

“There is no umbril of the land or sea:
God only knows, man knows not, if there be.”

With good cause, therefore, did the god repulse him when he was testing the ancient story, like some old painting, by the touch.

II. Shortly before the Pythian games held under Callistratus, there happened to be two holy men, met together from the opposite limits of the world at Delphi, visiting me. They were Demetrius the grammarian, returning home to Tarsus out of Britain, and Cleombrotus the Lacedemonian, after long wandering in Egypt, and up and down the region of the Troglodytes, and after voyaging beyond the Red Sea—not for the purpose of trading, but as being a person fond of seeing and fond of learning, having sufficient wealth, and not esteeming it a matter of importance to have more than sufficient, he employed his leisure for such purposes, and was collecting information as the materials for philosophy that had, as he himself expressed it, Theology for its end. Having lately been to the temple of Ammon, he evidently had not been greatly struck with the other things there, but with respect to the unextinguishable Lamp he relates a story well deserving of attention, told him by the priests; namely, that every year it consumes less oil, and that they took this for a proof of the inequality [diminution] of the years always making the last one shorter than that preceding it; for it was to be expected that with a shorter
time the consumption of oil would be less also.

III. When the rest of the company expressed our astonishment, and Demetrius had remarked “that it was ridiculous to draw such important inferences from trifling facts; which was not, as Alcaeus hath it, ‘painting the lion from his talon,’ but the measuring the heavens and universe with a wick and a lamp, and utterly upsetting all mathematics.” Cleombrotus answered, “Those people make no such attempt to upset that science: only they will not concede the point of accuracy to the mathematicians, considering that the calculation of time is more likely to deceive them in the case of movements and revolutions so far remote, than they themselves can be mistaken in the quantity of oil, which they continually observe and watch, on account of the singularity of the fact. And not to allow, my Demetrius, that small things are indications of great, has often been an obstacle to knowledge; for in that case the result will be that we shall deprive ourselves of the demonstrations of many facts, and of the prognostics of many others. And yet it is no insignificant thing which is proved to us, namely that people in the Heroic Age used to smooth their persons with a razor, when we find Homer mentioning a razor; and again, lending on usury, for he speaks of a ‘debt accumulating, neither a recent one, nor yet a small one,’ as though this signified the growth of the obligation. Again, when he styles Night (‘rapid’ or ‘pointed’), you ought to be glad to lay hold upon this epithet, and say this very thing implies the shadow of the earth to be conical out of spherical. The medical art, too, foretells a sickly summer from the multitude of spiders, and from the Spring fig-leaves, when they grow like a crow’s foot—facts omitted by none of those that pretend small things to be the signs of great ones. And who will have the impudence to measure the magnitude of the Sun against a pitcher and a cup of water; or that this square here, which makes what is called an acute angle with the plane, should be the measurement of the altitude by which the . . . . always visible from the horizon is elevated from the poles—for this fact was to be learnt from means like these.

“This was the story told by the oracle-interpreters of the place; wherefore those persons (the objectors) must make some other reply to them, when they, judging according to the rule of their fathers, pronounce that the sun’s appointed course is no longer passable by that luminary.”

IV. Ammonius the philosopher, who was present, exclaimed, “This remark applies not to the sun alone, but to all the visible heavens; for it follows as a matter of course that his revolution from one tropic to the other is thereby contracted, and does not continue to be so large a part of the horizon as the mathematicians say; but grows less, continually suffering contraction
from south to north: whilst our summer is shorter, and the temperature
colder, because he turns his course within (short of) his proper limits, and
touches wider parallels of latitude in the tropical signs. Besides, the
gnomons at Syene are proved to be no longer without casting shadow at
the summer solstice; and several of the fixed stars have passed out of
sight, whilst some touch, and are confounded with each other, from the
failure of the space between. And if you should pretend that whilst all the
rest remain as they were, only the sun grows irregular in his motions, you
will neither be able to assign the cause that accelerates his course alone
out of so vast a number of others; and you will at once throw into confusion
the greatest part of astronomical facts, those connected with the moon
utterly, so that there will be no need of measurement of oil in order to
prove the discrepancy: for the eclipses will convict him of too frequently
casting a shadow on the moon; and the moon also with her shadow . . .
each other, so there is little need to expose the falsity of the assertion at
greater length.” “But yet,” replied Cleombrotus, “I saw the measure of oil
also; for they showed me many curiosities; and the annual quantity fell
short of the most ancient by not a little.” But Ammonius, taking him up,
said:—“Then this fact has escaped the notice of all the other people
amongst whom ever-burning fires are kept up, and maintained for a term of
years, so to speak, without limit? And if one should assume that the story
is true, were it not better to suspect the existence of some coolness or
moisture in the air, by which the flame is deadened, and naturally does not
take hold of or consume so much nutriment; or, on the other hand, to
assign heat and dryness as the cause. For I have long ago heard say
respecting fire, that it burns better in winter through compulsion, because it
is contracted and condensed in itself by the cold, whereas during hot
weather, it grows weak, and becomes dull and relaxed: and if it be kindled
in the sunshine it works worse, and lays hold of the fuel lazily, and
consumes it more slowly. But, above all, one may ascribe the cause to the
oil itself, since it is not unlikely that in old times it was less nutritious, and
more watery, because of its coming from a young tree; but afterwards
when ripened to perfection, and condensed, with an equal quantity it
possesses more strength, and gives better nourishment to the flame—that
is, if we needs must save their theory for the priests of Ammon, however
absurd and unnatural it may appear.”

V. Now Ammonius having finished, “Tell us rather,” said I, “my dear
Cleombrotus, something about the oracle: for great was the ancient fame
of the religion there—but nowadays it appears to have withered away.” But
as Cleombrotus made no reply, and kept his eyes fixed on the ground,
Demetrius put in:—“There is no need to inquire about this matter, or to
discuss the decay of the oracle, but rather, as we see the extinction of
them all in general, except one or two, to consider this subject—for what
reason they have so decayed. For what need is there to cite other
instances, when Boeotia herself, that was so celebrated for oracles in
former times, has now failed utterly like the water-springs, and a great
drought of prophesy hath overspread the land; for in no other place, save
at Lebadeia does Boeotia, afford means to draw from the oracular fount:
as for the rest, either silence or utter desolation has taken possession of
them, and yet, at the time of the Persian War, that of Amphiaraus was in no
less repute than the one at Lebadeia, and [Mardonius], as was natural,
consulted both. And the prophet of the oracle there uttered in the Aeolic
language a response to the envoys of the foreigners, so that none of the
holy men present understood what he was saying: because barbarians
have no partnership in inspiration—neither is it granted unto them to
receive a language that subserves what is ordained. And the slave who
was sent to the temple of Amphiaraus dreamed in the usual sleep, that a
minister of the god appeared, and at first drove him away by word of
mouth alone, on the score that the deity was not at home, but afterwards
pushed him out with his hands, but when he persisted in staying, the
minister took up a good-sized stone, and knocked him on the head; and
these things were, as it were the counterparts of what came to pass, for
Mardonius was beaten not by a king, but by the guardian and ministers of a
king, who was general of the Greeks, and was hit by a stone, and fell, in
the same way as the Lydian fancied he was struck in his sleep. At that
time, too, the oracle at Tagyrae was in a flourishing condition, at which
place the legend goes that the god (Apollo) was born; and of two brooks
that flow past, the one is called the Palm, the other the Olive-tree to this
day: and in the Persian War, Echecrates being prophet there, the god
predicted victory and successive war to the Greeks. And it is said that
during the Peloponnesian War an oracle from Delphi was brought to the
Delians, who had been expelled from their native island, bidding them look
out for the place where Apollo was born, and to perform certain sacrifices
there. And when they had offered these sacrifices, and were disputing
whether the god was born not amongst themselves, but in some other
place, the Pythia gave an additional response that a crow would tell them
the spot. They went off therefore and arrived at Chaeronea, where they
heard their landlady talking with some guests that were going to Tagyrae,
about the oracles; and when the guests, as they were departing, saluted
and addressed their hostess by the name she was called, namely Corone,
the Delians understood the meaning of the response, offered sacrifice,
and obtained permission to return home after no long time. There have
also been manifestations of the divine will at these same oracles more
recent than the above-named events, but now they are completely come to an end, so that it were worth one’s while to inquire at the Pythian oracle respecting the cause of the change.”

VI. And now, walking forward from the Temple, we arrived at the doors of the Hall of the Cnidians; and having passed within, we perceived the friends to whom we were going, sitting down and waiting for us. There was silence on the part of the others, on account of the hour, for they were either engaged in anointing themselves, or else in looking at the wrestlers: then Demetrius said with a smile: “Shall I be wrong, or shall I speak truth? You appear to me to be attending to a spectacle not worth your trouble, for I see you seated very listlessly, and with an idle air upon your countenances.” Then Heraclitus of Megara, taking him up, replied: “Yes, for we are not seeking after the solution of the problem why the verb should lose one of its two lambdas in the future tense, or from what word in the positive the comparative 'cheiron' and 'beltion', or the superlatives 'cheiriston' and 'beliston' are derived; for these and such like questions, perhaps, do contract and consolidate the face. Other subjects you will find people inquiring into and discussing, with their eyebrows in their proper places, and looking untroubled, and not terrific, and not quarrelling with all present.” “Admit us, therefore,” replied Demetrius, and “in company with us follow up the question which has just occurred to us, as being one proper for the place, and, on account of the god, a matter of interest to all, and consider in what way you shall not have to contract your brows in discussing the same.”

VII. As soon therefore as we had joined company and sat down amongst them, and he had laid the question before us, then Didymus the Cynic, by surname Planetiades, jumped up, and striking on the ground two or three times with his staff, cried out, “Ho, ho! A difficult problem, truly, one demanding much investigation, is what you are come to bring us: for it were a wonder, when so much wickedness is spread abroad, if not merely Modesty and Shame (as Hesiod said of old) should have abandoned mankind, but if the divine Providence should not have packed up its oracles out of every quarter, and taken its departure! On the contrary, I propose to you to inquire how it was that oracles did not come to an end long ago, and why Hercules did not for a second time (or else some other of the gods), steal away the Tripod, all bewrayed as it was with filthy and impious questions that people propound to the deity; while some make trial of his cleverness, as though he were a sophist, and others tease him with questions about treasure-troves, successions to property, and illegal marriages: so that Pythagoras is most signally confuted in saying that men
are then at their best when they are going to worship the gods: in such a way, those very thoughts and passions of the soul, which it were but decent to disclaim and to hide, if one’s elder should be present, these same thoughts do they carry naked and fully exposed, into the presence of the gods.” And while he was still intending to speak, Heracleon caught hold of his cloak; I too, being about the most intimate with him of all the company, said: “Stop, my dear Planetiades, from provoking the god, for he is irritable and not good-tempered, for ‘he has been blamed for having been angry with mortals,’ as old Pindar hath it; and whether he is the Sun, or the lord and father of the Sun, and placed at the farthest side of the visible creation—it is not likely he deems unworthy of his voice men as they now are; to whom he is the source of life, of nutrition, of being, and of thought, nor at the same time that Providence, who like a benevolent and kind mother makes and keeps aright every thing for our benefit, should be revengeful in the matter of oracles alone, and take the benefit away from us, after having given it at first—just as though the greatest part of mankind were not evil in more respects than now at the very time when the oracles were established in many places. Come hither, pray, sit down again, and after making a ‘Pythian truce’ with Vice, which you are wont ever to chastise with your speech, assist us in seeking for some other cause of the aforesaid cessation of oracles; but keep the god in good humor, and exempt from blame.” By saying this I effected thus much—that Planetiades walked out through the folding-doors without saying a word.

VIII. There was a silence for a short time, when Ammonius addressing himself to me said, “Take heed, Lamprias, to what we are doing, and look carefully to the argument, as to how we drop the god out of the case. For he that supposes the extinct oracles to have failed from some other reason otherwise than the will of the gods incurs the suspicion of believing that they did not arise, nor had their being through the agency of the gods, but through some third means, since there is no greater and stronger power to take away and extinguish prophecy, it being an operation of the deity. The argument of Planetiades does not satisfy me for many reasons, especially for the inconsistency which he imputes to the god in his, at some places, turning his back upon Vice, and denying it admission to his presence, whilst in other places he admits her, just as though some king or tyrant should shut out the wicked at one door, but admit them at the other and do business with them. But as for the cause—the greatest, satisfactory, nowhere extravagant, everywhere sufficient, reason, and above all others suitable to the character of the gods, is if one should assume this for the final cause, and say that in the general depopulation which the former factions and wars have brought about over nearly all the
world, Greece has had the largest share, so that she, taken altogether, can hardly raise three thousand fighting men, the same number that the single town of Megara sent to Plateae, and that the fact, therefore, that many oracles of the gods are become extinct is nothing else than a proof of the desolation of Greece. I would grant him the credit of exactly hitting the mark. For what use would be an oracle in Tegyrae, as there formerly was, or at Ptoum, where now it would take you a good part of a day to meet a man keeping of sheep! For certainly the latter place, though the most ancient in point of time, and the most celebrated by fame, according to report has now been long deserted and unapproachable in consequence of a terrible animal, a dragon that haunts it, which they improperly assume as the cause, though it is the converse, for it is the desertion that brought the creature thither, and not the creature has caused the desertion of the place. For at what time, as it so pleased God, Greece was strong in cities, and the place was thronged with people, they used to employ two prophetesses, sitting in turn, whilst a third was appointed as assistant to them. At present, there is a single prophetess, and we do not grumble, for she is amply sufficient for those that want her services. We ought not therefore to make the god in fault, for the oracular power that still exists and survives is sufficient for all requirements, and sends away everyone satisfied in what they demand. Just as Agamemnon employed nine criers and yet hardly kept the assembly in order, by reason of its greatness, whereas you will see here in a few days’ time a single voice, in the theater, making itself audible to all; in the same way, in those times, did the oracular power use more voices to speak to more people. But, on the contrary, one would be surprised at the god’s suffering prophecy to run to waste, like so much water, or else to echo to the voices of shepherds and their flocks in the loneliness, after the manner of the rocks.”

IX. When Ammonius had said this, and I remained silent, Cleombrotus addressing me, observed: “You have already conceded the point, that the god did both establish and abolish these oracles here.” “Not so,” I replied, “I assert that no oracle or place of prophecy is abolished through the fault of the god, but as with many other things that she makes and provides for us, Nature produces a wasting away and a deprivation, or to put it better, Matter being itself a deprivation, reverts to itself, and dissolves what was made by the Better Cause; and thus obscurations and extinctions of oracular powers are brought about, inasmuch as God giveth many good things to men, but not one that is everlasting, so that ‘the things of the gods do die, but not God,’ as Sophocles hath it. Their essence and their operation, such as be knowing in Nature and in Matter ought to investigate, their final cause being, as is right, reserved for God. For it is
silly, and very childish to suppose that the god, like the ventriloquist spirits formerly called ‘Eurycles’ now ‘Pythons,’ enters into the bodies of the prophets and makes proclamation, employing their mouths and voices in the way of instruments; for in mixing Himself up with human means, He does not respect His own majesty, neither does He maintain His dignity, nor the superiority of His being.”

X. Then Cleombrotus “You say right; but since the assuming and defining how and how for we must employ the idea of a providence, is a difficult thing, whilst some make out the Deity to be simply the author of nothing at all, others, of all things universally, they miss what is reasonable and proper. Now, they say well who say that Plato having discovered the element that is the subject of the existing qualities (to which element they nowadays give the name of Matter, or Nature), has delivered philosophers from many and great difficulties. But to me those men appear to have solved more and greater difficulties who have made out a family of Daemons, intermediate between gods and men, and after a certain fashion bringing together and uniting in one the society of both; whether this doctrine belong to the Magi and the followers of Zoroaster, or is a Thracian one coming from Orpheus, or Egyptian, or Phrygian, as we may infer from the rites which point in either direction, for we perceive many things belonging to death, and of lugubrious sort in the orgies done and the ceremonies performed of the Greeks. Homer appears to have used both names indifferently, in some places calling the gods ‘daemons;’ Hesiod, however, was the first clearly and distinctly to make four species of rational beings—gods, then daemons ‘numerous and beneficent,’ then heroes, lastly men, the demigods being ranged in the class of heroes. Others make out a change in the bodies equally with the souls, in the same way as water is seen to be produced from earth, air from water, fire from air, in consequence of the essence tending upwards, so from men to heroes, from heroes to daemons, souls of the better kind go through a transition. Of daemons, some few in long process of time, having been thoroughly purified by means of virtue, become partakers of divinity; whilst with others it comes to pass that they do not contain themselves, but becoming relaxed and dissolved again into mortal bodies, they receive an existence without light and without form, like an exhalation. But Hesiod is of opinion that after certain periods of time daemons themselves have an end, for he says, speaking in the person of the Naiad and even obscurely defining the period:--

‘Nine generations lives the noisy Crow
Of lusty men: four times the crow the Stag.
Three stags outlives the Raven: but the Phoenix
Nine times the raven: ten phenices we
The long-haired Nymphs, daughters of mighty Jove.'

This space is calculated at a vast extent of time by people incorrectly understanding the word ‘generation’ (for it really means a year), so that they make the total duration of the life of daemons to be nine thousand seven hundred and twenty years. Most mathematicians assign them a shorter duration, none a longer. Pindar hath said in verse, ‘Nymphs that have allotted them a term of life equal to a tree’s;’ for which cause, too, people call them ‘Hamadryads;’” and whilst he was still speaking, Demetrius interrupting him said, “How do you mean, Cleombrotus, that ‘a generation of man’ means a year, for such a period is neither that of a life that is ‘young,’ or that is ‘old,’ as some people read the passage? But those who read ‘young,’ reckon the generation at thirty years, according to Heraclitus, in which space of time, he who has begotten furnishes that which has sprung from himself capable of propagation in its own turn; whilst they who read ‘old’ in the place of ‘young,’ assign one hundred and eight years to a generation, on the ground that fifty and four years are the mark of the middle of human life, being a number made up out of unity, the two first even numbers, two squares, and two cubes, which calculations Plato too has accepted in his ‘Generation of Souls.’ But the whole story of Hesiod’s seems to have an obscure allusion to the general conflagration, when it is natural to suppose that together with all things moist the Nymphs shall come to an end:--

‘Who haunt the beauteous groves,
The river-fountains and the grassy meads.’”

XII. “I hear,” replied Cleombrotus, “the same story from many people, and I behold the Stoical ‘general conflagration,’ as it devours the verses of Heraclitus and of Orpheus, at the same time attacking the lines of Hesiod: but I do not put up with talk about the destruction of the universe, and as for things impossible, particularly stories about the Crow and the Deer . . . . . . . For the year does not supply all at once within itself (its course) every thing that the seasons bring forth, and the earth produces, neither is it called a “generation” according to the rule with mankind. For you admit, I suppose, that Hesiod calls a man’s lifetime a ‘generation,’ is it not so?” Demetrius assented. “But this also is evident,” Cleombrotus went on, “that both the measure and the things measured are called by the same names: for example, the pint, the quart, the cask, the butt, according to which rule therefore, Unity, which is the smallest measure and beginning of all number, we call ‘number.’ In the same manner, the year by which first we measure the life of man, the poet has styled ‘a generation,’ as
synonymous with the thing measured. For what those philosophers take for their numbers in this calculation have nothing in them, as numbers, of what is considered striking and conspicuous, whereas he has got his nine thousand seven hundred and twenty by the product of the four numbers following, unity being made successively four times four, these being four times squared produce the sum specified. But on these points it is not necessary for us to argue with Demetrius, for if the time be more or if it be less, if it be fixed or if it be indefinite, in which the soul of a daemon comes to an end, and the life of a hero also, the thing at which he is aiming will be proved for him all the same, and by testimony the most clear and ancient, namely, that beings exist, as it were, in the intermediate place between gods and men, that are susceptible of mortal vicissitudes and of involuntary changes, whom it is right for us, according to the law of our fathers, to regard as and name ‘daemons,’ and to hold in reverence.

XIII. “As an illustration of the subject, Xenocrates the friend of Plato, has taken the different kinds of Triangles, comparing the equilateral to the divine, the scalene to the mortal, the isosceles to the nature of daemons. For the first is equal every way, the second unequal every way, the third equal in one way, unequal in another, just as the being of daemons, which has in it mortal passions and divine power. And nature has produced sensible images and visible likenesses of the gods in the sun and stars, of men in flashes of light, comets, and falling meteors, as Euripides hath said in his verse:

‘The man erst sturdy, like some falling star
Is clean gone out, leaving his breath in air.’

But as a mixed body, and truly a copy of a daemon, she (Nature) exhibits to us the moon, through her resembling the revolution (cycles) of the class, and her being subject to visible decrements, augmentations, and changes; from seeing which, some have called her an ‘earthy star,’ some a ‘heavenly earth,’ others the ‘province of Hecate,’ who is at once celestial and infernal. For just as if one should take away the Air, and withdraw that which is between the earth and moon, he would destroy the unity and the connection of the universe, because a void and disunited space would be made in the middle; similarly they who do not admit the existence of the order of daemons, necessarily make gods and men out as having no intercourse and no compact with each other, by taking away the ‘interpreting and communicating being,’ as Plato calls it; or else they force us to mix up and huddle all things together by making the Deity enter into human passions and affairs, and drawing him down to our wants, just as the Thessalian women are said to do the moon. But the craft of the latter
received confirmation amongst women, when Aglaonice, daughter of Hegetor, as they tell, being one skilled in astrology, did always, during an eclipse of the moon, pretend to use enchantment and draw her down. Let us, then, neither listen to people saying that oracles are not divinely inspired, or that certain ceremonies and wild rites are unheeded by the gods; nor, on the other hand, let us imagine that the Deity goes up and down, and is present at, and assists in, things of the sort; but as is right and proper, let us assign these operations to agents, or as it were, servants and clerks of the gods, and believe in daemons, presiding over the performers in the divine rites and mysteries, whilst others go about as punishers of the proud and mighty sinners: some of them Hesiod has styled, very solemnly,

‘Of wealth the pure and sanctified bestowers,
Whose royal privilege is this to do,’

as though doing good were part of the kingly office. For in daemons, as in men, there are degrees of virtue; some having but a feeble and obscure trace, as it were a remnant, of the part subject to passion and destitute of reason, whilst others have in them a large and scarcely extinguishable portion of the same, the vestiges and symbols of which ceremonies, sacrifices, and legends do in many places preserve and lock up interspersed amongst their own proceedings.”

XIV. “Now with respect to matters belonging to the Mysteries, in which one can obtain the plainest manifestations, and hints of the truth respecting daemons, ‘let a bridle be set upon my tongue,’ as Herodotus hath it; but as for festivals and sacrifices, as well as inauspicious and mourning days, upon which the eating of raw flesh, and the tearing to pieces of victims, as also fastings and beatings of the breast are in use, and again in many places, abusive language at the sacrifices and other mad doings attended with tumult and head-tossing, all which I should say they perform for the sake of no one of the gods, but for the purpose of turning away wicked spirits, as being actions propitiatory and soothing to the same. And the human sacrifices offered of old, it is not credible that it was the gods who demanded and accepted them; neither would kings and chiefs have vainly submitted to give up their own children, to cut off their hair as a preliminary, and to slaughter them, but that they were averting and satiating the rage of certain malignant and hardly pacified evil genii, and satisfying of some the furious and imperious lusts, that were neither able nor willing to have intercourse with living bodies, and by the instruments of bodies. But like as Hercules besieged Oechalia for the sake of a maid, so do powerful and impetuous daemons, when craving for a human soul yet enveloped in a
body, and unable to have intercourse with it by the organs of the body, bring upon cities pestilences and barrenness of the earth, and stir up wars and seditions until they get and obtain what they lust after. Some people, on the contrary (as I observed when spending a considerable time in Crete), celebrate an absurd festival, in which they exhibit the headless figure of a man, and say that this was Molos, father of Meriones, who, lying with a nymph against her will, found himself without his head.

XV. And again, all the stories they tell and sing of in legends and hymns, here the rapes, there the wanderings, the hidings, and banishments, and servitutes, are not of the gods, but are the sufferings and vicissitudes of daemons, converted into legends on account of the superiority and power of these beings, and neither has Aeschylus said,

‘Apollo pure, from heaven a banished god;’

nor the Admetus of Sophocles,

‘My consort made him labor at the mill.’

But the farthest of all from the truth wander the theologians of Delphi, in believing that the battle took place there between the god and serpent for possession of the Oracle; and in allowing historians and poets to tell the tale, when contending for the prize in the theaters, as though purposely bearing witness against their own proceedings at the most sacred rites. But when Philip (for the historian was present) expressed his surprise at this statement, and inquired upon what deities he supposed the actors in the theater declaimed? ‘upon those,’ replied he, ‘that belong to this Oracle, into whose mysteries the city lately initiated all the Greeks dwelling beyond Pylae, and marched out as far as Tempe. For the nest of faggots that is built up here around the threshing floor every tenth year is not a memorial of the subterraneous lurking hole of the Serpent, but of the habitation of some tyrant or king. The procession also made to it in silence along the road called ‘Doloneia,’ in which they conduct, with lighted torches and in a zigzag course, the virgin with both parents living, and having set fire to the nest, and overturning the table, they fly without looking back, through the gates of the Temple; and finally, the wanderings up and down, and the servitude of the boy, as also the rites of purification at Tempe, all raise a suspicion of some great crime or atrocity thereby implied. For it is utterly ridiculous to suppose, my good friend, that Apollo after slaying the reptile, fled away to the other end of Greece, seeking after purification, and caused a few pitchers to be poured over him, and did all the other things people do when they wish to propitiate and end the wrath of the daemons
whom they call ‘Alastors’ and ‘avengers of blood,’ as if they were following up the recollections of some never to-be-forgotten and antique atrocities. As for the tale I have heard long ago about the ‘Flight,’ and the ‘Change of place,’ it is terribly absurd and marvellous, but if it contains some portion of truth, let us not think it was something trifling and commonplace that was done with respect to the Oracle in those ancient times. But that I may not appear to be as Empedocles says, ‘to be fitting the heads of one set of fables to another set, and not to follow one path in my discourse,’ permit me to put the proper end to the first discussion, for now we are arrived at it; and let me be bold enough to say, as many have already done, that together with the extinction of the daemons appointed to preside over oracles and places of prophecy, this sort of thing does likewise come to an end, and lose their force when the spirits aforesaid either flee from or change the place, and then, after a long interval, when they return, the places give out a sound like organs when those that play thereon are present and stand over them.”

XVI. When Cleombrotus had finished thus, Heracleon said: “There is no one present of such as be profane, uninitiated, and holding opinions about the gods, un congenial with your own; but yet, my dear Philip, we must take heed to ourselves, lest we unconsciously assume absurd, and very extravagant hypotheses to support the argument.” “Well said,” replied Philip, “but, what is it in the opinions expressed by Cleombrotus, that particularly displeases you?” “The remark,” replied Heracleon, “that it is not the gods (whom it is right to relieve—keep distinct—from matters pertaining to earth), but daemons subserving to them, seems to me a reasonable postulate enough; but to take these daemons, all but bodily, out of the verses of Empedocles, and impute to these some daemons’ sins committed, calamities endured, wanderings imposed by heaven, and finally to suppose in their case deaths, as if they were mere men, seems to me too bold and uncivilized a theory.” Hereupon, Cleombrotus inquired of Philip, who and whence the young man was that had just spoken, and having learnt his name and country answered: “We do not, Heracleon, conceal from ourselves that we are fallen into a strange line of argument; but in the case of great subjects, it is not possible, without making use of great assumptions, to arrive at an end consistent with our expectation. But you yourself do not perceive that you are retracting what you concede, for you allow there are daemons; but by your claiming that there are none bad, nor yet subject to mortality, you no longer keep your daemons; for in what respect do they differ from gods, if in regard to essence they possess immortality, and in regard to virtue, freedom from passion and immunity from sin.”
XVII. Thereupon, whilst Heracleon was considering something with himself in silence, Cleombrotus continued, “Nay, but not only Empedocles has bequeathed to us evil daemons that be evil by nature, but Plato, too, has done the same, as well as Xenocrates and Chrysippus; besides, Democritus, when he prays that ‘he may meet with auspicious idola’ (apparitions), shows plainly that he knows of others that have morose and mischievous dispositions and inclinations. But with respect to the mortality of beings of the kind, I have heard a tale from a man who is neither a fool nor an idle talker—from that Aemilian the rhetorician, whom some of you know well; Epitherses was his father, a townsman of mine, and a teacher of grammar. This man (the latter) said, that once upon a time he made a voyage to Italy, and embarked on board a ship conveying merchandise and several passengers. When it was now evening, off the Echinad Islands, the wind dropped, and the ship, carried by the current, was come near P axi; most of the passengers were awake, and many were still drinking, after having had supper. All of a sudden, a voice was heard from the Isle of P axi, of some one calling ‘Thamus’ with so loud a cry as to fill them with amazement. This Thamus was an Egyptian pilot, known by name to many of those on board. Called twice, he kept silence; but on the third summons he replied to the caller, and the latter, raising yet higher his voice, said, ‘When thou comest over against Palodes, announce that the great Pan is dead.’ All, upon hearing this, said Epitherses, were filled with consternation, and debated with themselves whether it were better to do as ordered, or not to make themselves too busy, and to let it alone. So Thamus decided that if there should be a wind he would sail past and hold his tongue; but should there fall a calm and smooth sea off the island, he would proclaim what he had heard. When, therefore, they were come over against Palodes, there being neither wind nor swell of sea, Thamus, looking out from the stern, called out to the land what he had heard, namely, ‘That the great Pan is dead;’ and hardly had he finished speaking than there was a mighty cry, not of one, but of many voices mingled together in wondrous manner. And inasmuch as many persons were then present, the story got spread about in Rome, and Thamus was sent for by Tiberi us Caesar; and Tiberius gave so much credence to the tale that he made inquiry and research concerning this Pan; and that the learned men about him, who were numerous, conjectured he was the one that was born from Hermes and Penelope.”

Now, Philip found amongst those present witnesses to the truth of the story, who had heard it from the aged Aemilian.

XVIII. Demetrius said, that of the islands lying round Britain, there were
many desert, and scattered about, some of which were named after daemons and heroes; and that he, for the purpose of inquiry and investigation, sailed, by the emperor’s order, to that which lay nearest of the desert isles, which had but a few inhabitants, and those religious men, and held sacred by the Britons. Just after his landing, there occurred a great tumult in the air, and many meteors, and blasts of wind burst down, and whirlwinds descended. But when it was calm again, the islanders said, that the extinction had taken place of some one of the superior powers, for as (said they) a lamp when burning does no harm, but being put out is noxious to many people, in like manner great souls, when first kindled, are benignant and harmless, whilst their going out and dissolution, often, as in the present case, stirs up stormy winds, and aerial tumults; nay, often infects the air with pestilential tendencies. In that region also, they said, Saturn was confined in one of the islands by Briareus, and lay asleep; for that his slumber had been artfully produced in order to chain him, and round about him were many daemons for his guards and servants.”

XIX. Then Cleombrotus, taking him up, said: “I, too, have something of the same sort to narrate, and it suffices for the supposition, that there is nothing that is contrary to, or prevents these things being so constituted. And yet the Stoics, we know, hold the same opinion that you mention, not only as regards the daemons, but also of the gods, so numerous as they be; they keep One as the Eternal and Incorruptible, but believe that the others are both born and die. As for the jeers and scoffs of the Epicureans, we must by no means be afraid of them, for such (weapons) they employ against Divine Providence, also making it out to be a fable. But we say their own ignorance is a fable that has, amongst so many worlds, not one that is guided by Divine order, but all of them spontaneously created and put together. But if we must laugh in matter of philosophy, we ought to laugh at their spectra, which, being both dumb, blind, and lifeless, where do they remain during infinite periods of time? making their appearance, and roaming about everywhere—spectra thrown off, partly from persons yet living, partly from those long ago reduced to ashes, or mouldered into dust, whilst their inventors drag bubbles and shadows into the domains of Natural History, and go into a rage if any one says there are daemons, not only by nature, but by report, and that they possess the power of preserving themselves and lasting for an immense time.”

XX. After these things had been said, Ammonius went on: “Theophrastus seems to me to have given sentence rightly, for what objection is there to accepting a sentiment at once noble and in the highest degree
philosophical. Rejecting as it does many of things possible, yet not capable of being proved, it ignores them entirely; and being accepted as a rule, will involve many consequences, both impossible and without any shadow of reality. The only thing, however, that I have heard Epicureans advancing against the daemons introduced by Empedocles—‘that it is not conceivable that being wicked and liable to error, they should be at the same time happy and longlived, inasmuch as wickedness involves the idea of blindness, and a liability to fall into things destructive’—is a silly argument. For, according to this way of reasoning, Epicurus is made out worse than Hippias the sophist, and Metrodorus than Alexis the comedian, for the latter lived twice as long as Metrodorus, and the former above one-third longer than Epicurus. Besides, we say that virtue is a strong and vice a weak thing, not in reference to any durability or dissolution of body; for amongst animals we observe many that be dull and stupid, and again, others that be lascivious and untameable, live longer lives than the intelligent and sagacious kinds. Hence, they do not well to make God’s eternity result from the guarding against and repulsion of the causes of destruction; because the freedom from passion and from corruptibility must necessarily exist in the nature of the Blessed One, and stand in need of no exertion on his part. But, perhaps, to talk of people behind their backs is not very polite; and therefore Cleombrotus, who lately dropped the word about the ‘flight and migration of daemons,’ has a right to resume the subject.”

XXI. Then Cleombrotus: “I shall be surprised if it does not strike you as even stranger than what has already been advanced by me; and yet it appears to be connected with Natural History, and Plato even has allowed its possibility—not that he has stated it directly, but from a vague supposition, and throwing out an enigmatical hint in a cautious manner—but, nevertheless, a great outcry was made against it by the other philosophers, and seeing that a bowl of mingled fables and facts is set before us, and, possibly, some one amongst our kinder listeners, as though he had met with foreign coins, will put these same stories to the touchstone. I do not scruple to present you with the narrative of a man, a barbarian, whom I hardly found out after long wanderings, and paying heavily for information, who made his appearance once every year among the tribes living round the Red Sea, and spent the rest of his time in company with the pastoral nymphs, and with the daemons, as he asserted, and with whom I obtained a conference and friendly reception. He was the handsomest of all men to look at, lived ever free from all disease, eating once a month the fruit of a certain herb that was like a drug and bitter to taste. He understood several languages, but to me he chiefly spake Doric,
not far removed from poetry. Whilst he was speaking, perfume filled the air, from his mouth sending forth the sweetest smell. His other learning and recollections continued with him the whole time; but as regards prophecy he was inspired but for one day in each year, at which time he went down to the sea and delivered his predictions, and nobles and secretaries of different princes flocked to hear him, and then sailed away. His inspiration he ascribed to daemons. He talked with much pleasure about Delphi; as for the things related concerning Dodona, and the rites performed there he was ignorant of none; he said they all were the mighty workings of daemons, and the same respecting the Python, and that the slayer of the Python did not suffer an exile of nine years, or to the distance of Tempe; but that being expelled thence he went into another world, and there abode for the revolutions of nine Great Years, until at length having become pure, and really ‘bright’ ("phoibos") he returned, and received possession of the Oracle, which had in the meanwhile been taken care of by Themis. Of the same nature was the story of Typhon; and the affair of the Titans was only the fights of daemons against daemons, succeeded by the fleeing away of the vanquished; or else the punishment taken by a god upon such as had offended in the same way that Typhon is said to have sinned against Osiris, and Saturn against Uranus; of both of whom the honors have consequently become tarnished; or else these legends refer to such as have completely migrated to another world; since I learn that the Solymi, neighbors of the Lyceans, pay the highest honors to Saturn; but when, after killing their chiefs, Arsilas, Dryos, and Trosobeos, he fled away, and migrated somewhere or other, (for I cannot tell you this), he is neglected, and the Lycians call Arsilas and his companions hard-hearted gods, and utter solemn imprecations upon this crime, both in public and in private. Many like instances to these you can extract out of religious legends. And if we designate daemons by the customary names of the gods, there is nothing to be surprised at in our so doing (said the stranger), since to whatever god each daemon is assigned, and from whom he derives his power and privileges, after this one he is wont to be called. For amongst ourselves one man is ‘Dius,’ another ‘Athenaeus,’ another ‘Apollonius’ or ‘Dionysius’ or ‘Hermaeus,’ but only some few are by accident properly so entitled, the most part have taken possession of the names of gods far from appropriately, in fact quite the reverse.”

XXII. And when Cleombrotus had done speaking, his story appeared to all a strange one. But on Heracleon’s asking whereabouts in Plato these things are to be found, and in what way he had afforded a foundation for the argument, Cleombrotus replied: “You do well to remind me; for Plato from the first acknowledged the plurality of worlds, but with respect to their
precise number he remained in doubt: and though as far as five he conceded the probability, to humor such as supposed one world for each element—yet he confined himself to a single one. And this appears to be peculiar to Plato, for the others were terribly alarmed at the notion of a plurality, as though when they did not limit the number to one, but went farther, an indefinite and perplexing infinity would take them up." “But,” said I, “did the stranger decide about the plurality of worlds in the same way as does Plato, at what time you were in his company, or did you fail to put the question to him?” “I was not likely,” replied Cleombrotus, “not to be an inquisitive and glad hearer of his opinion upon this subject, above all others, when he gave me the occasion, and showed himself so well disposed. He told me, in fact, that there were neither an infinite number of worlds, nor a single one, nor yet five, but one hundred and eighty-three, arranged in the form of a triangle, each side of which contains sixty worlds. Of the remaining three, one is placed at each angle; and those in line touch each other, revolving gently as if in a dance. The area within this triangle is the common hearth of them all, and is named the ‘Plain of Truth,’ in which the reason, the forms, and the pattern of all things that have been, and that shall be, are stored up not to be disturbed; and as eternity dwells around them, from thence Time, like a stream from a fountain, flows down upon the worlds. The sight and contemplation of these things is vouchsafed to the souls of men, once in every ten thousand years: that is, if they shall have lived a virtuous life. The best of our initiatory rites here below are the dreamy shadow of that spectacle, and of that rite; and the words used therein are ingeniously devised for the purpose of reminding us of the beauties of that place—or else are used to no purpose at all. All this did I hear him reciting exactly as though he were so doing at some ceremony, or rite of initiation, without offering any evidence or proof of his statements.”

XXIII. Then I, addressing Demetrius, said: “How do the words of the suitors run, when they are wondering at Ulysses whilst handling the bow?” and when Demetrius had repeated them, I continued: “The very same thing it occurs to me to say with respect to this stranger. Supposing he were really some seeker after, and pillager of creeds and legends of all sorts; one much versed in books of religion; no foreigner at all, but a Greek by birth, and well-stocked with Grecian learning? The number of his worlds betrays him, that being neither Egyptian nor Indian, but Dorian, and coming out of Sicily, and the property of a man of Himera, by name Petron. The treatise of that philosopher I have not read, nor indeed know whether it be still extant. But Hippys of Rhegium, whom Phaneas of Eresos quotes, bears witness that this notion and tale belongs to Petron, that is, about
there being one hundred and eighty-three worlds, all touching one another in a row; but what this ‘touching one another in a row’ means, he neither explains, nor adduces anything plausible in its support.” Demetrius taking me up replied: “What plausible argument can be found in matters of the sort, where not even Plato would say anything reasonable or probable when he commenced the subject.” Then Heracleon: “But again, we hear you grammarians referring your notions to Homer, as though he divided the Universe into Five Worlds; viz., Heaven, Water, Air, Earth, Olympus: of which, two he leaves in common; Earth, belonging to all that is below; Olympus to all that is above; and the three in the middle are assigned unto the three gods. In this way, then, Plato appears to connect the first and most beautiful forms and patterns of bodies with the divisions of the Universe, and calls them Five Worlds—viz., that of Earth, that of Water, that of Air, that of Fire, and last, that which envelopes them all—namely, that of the Twelve-sided figure, which is widely diffused and versatile, by which supposition, forsooth, he has invented a figure the most appropriate and congenial to the revolutions and the movements of souls.” Thereupon Demetrius: “Why do we meddle with Homer in the present case? we have had quite enough of fables. But Plato is very far from calling the five varieties of the universe Five Worlds—in which he is at war with those that suppose an infinity of Worlds: in fact he says thus much—“that he is of opinion this world is One, the sole production of God, and satisfying Him; being generated whole, perfect, and self-sufficient out of the entire Bodily element.” Whence one may well be surprised how he, after having told the truth, has furnished others with the grounds of a notion equally improbable and irrational. For the very fact of not retaining one single world involves somehow the hypothesis of the Infinity of worlds; whilst to make them a definite number, just so many, neither more nor less than Five, is exceedingly strange, and remote from all probability—unless you have anything to say to the contrary,” he added, looking at me. “It seems then,” replied I, “that so we have thrown aside the question about Oracles as entirely concluded, and are taking up another quite as extensive.” “Not throwing aside the former question,” answered Demetrius, “but not passing over the present one that equally claims our attention, for we will not dwell upon it, but only sketch it out sufficiently to examine its probability, and then pass on to the original subject of discussion.”

XXIV. “In the first place then (said I) the objections to supposing an infinity of worlds do not preclude our supposing there is more than one, for it is possible for prophecy and foreknowledge to exist in several worlds at once, and Chance comes into the question very slightly; whilst the greatest part of, and those the most important things, are susceptible of birth and of
change, neither of which does infinity by its nature admit of. In the next place, it is more consistent with reason to suppose the world neither to be the sole production of God, nor yet an empty one. For as He is perfectly good, and in no one virtue wanting, least of all in what concerns justice and love (for these are the most beautiful of virtues and the best befitting the Godhead), and as God has nothing in vain, or not to be put to use, then consequently must exist other Powers and worlds outside of this, to whom he extends his communicative virtues. For it is not upon Himself, nor upon a portion of Himself, that the exercise of His justice, of his benevolence, or of his goodness, is directed, but upon others; wherefore it is not probable that He is without a friend, and without a neighbor, nor that this world tosses about unsocially in a void infinity; since we observe that Nature also envelops things one by one, as it were in vessels, or in the shells of seeds. For there is nothing in the number of things that be, neither is there a Common Reason, (or what receives such designation,) that is not of its own nature something acting in common with something else. Now the world is not predicated as ‘common,’ but it effects whatever it is capable of, through difference between individual parts; having itself been created such as it is, homogeneous and of one species. And if in Nature a single man, or a single horse has not been produced, nor yet a single star, god, or daemon—what objection is there to Nature’s containing more worlds than One? For he that says there is a single earth overlooks what is self-evident—the circumstance of similar parts; for we divide the Earth into parts of the same name, and the Sea in like manner, whereas a part of the world is not a world, for the world is made up out of different parts.

XXV. “And again, the thing that some people especially fear, and therefore use up the whole of Matter upon a single world, in order that nothing may be left outside and either by its impact or its concussions may disturb the constitution of this—there is no good cause for such apprehension. For if there be a plurality of worlds, and each one has individually had allotted to it an existence and materials possessing both measure and limitation, there is nothing left irregular or disorderly, like a superfluity, to dash against it from external space. For the Reason presiding over each world, being master of the accumulated Matter, will allow nothing out of course or running wild, to impinge upon another; nor yet any such accident from another world upon itself, by reason that Nature does not admit of an unlimited and infinite plurality, nor yet an irrational and irregular movement. And even if any emanation is carried from one set down to another, it must be congenial, agreeable, and mixing with them all in amicable fashion, like the rays and union of the several stars: whilst they must be delighted themselves in benevolently contemplating each other; whilst to numerous
and good deities presiding over each, they afford the means of intercourse and hospitality. Nothing of all this is impossible, or romantic, or inconceivable, unless in truth some people will regard it with suspicion, after Aristotle’s fashion, because it involves the idea of natural causes. For as he says: ‘In the case of bodies, when each one has its own place, it is a necessary consequence that the Earth tends from all parts towards the center, and the Water in the same way, because by its weight it sinks under the lighter particles.’ If, then, there be several worlds, it will come to pass that the Earth will be placed frequently above the Fire and the Air, and as frequently below them; and Water and Air will be similarly treated; in some positions they will be in their natural places, in others in unnatural, which supposition being impossible (as he believes) there must be neither two nor several worlds, but this single One, composed out of all existence, and filled according to Nature, as is best suited to the varieties of bodies going to its composition.

XXVI. “But this theory, too, is advanced more as a matter of probability than of certainty. View the matter,” said I, “my dear Demetrius, in this manner: of bodies, some have a motion towards the center, and downwards, as Aristotle says, some from the center and upwards, others round the center and in a circle; at what point does he assume his center? Not certainly in the vacuum, for there is no vacuum according to him; for where a vacuum is, it admits of no middle point, neither does it of first or last, for these are limits, but the infinite is also unlimited. And if anyone should endeavor to prove that it is set in motion by Reason, although it be infinite, what is the difference in the movements of solid bodies, as compared with this? For neither does any force of the bodies exist in the vacuum, nor do the bodies possess any predisposition or property that tends towards the center, and converges towards this point from every quarter. But yet it is impossible to conceive [the tendency] of bodies inanimate towards a place incorporeal, and unaffected by them; nor how a forward motion by them is produced, or a preponderating influence exerted by the other. The alternative then remains, that ‘center’ is used not in the sense of locality, but of body. For as this world possesses a single unity and constitution, made up out of many and dissimilar bodies, these differences necessarily produce the motions of the several parts towards each other; since it is evident that the several parts when rearranged in their essences, will at the same time change their places also; since their repulsion from the center will distribute in a circle the matter that raises itself upwards; whereas their mixing together and condensations press the same matter down, and impel it together towards the center.
XXVII. “Upon which subjects it is not necessary to expend more words; for if one should assume that the Creator is the author of these liabilities and changes, this cause will confine each world within itself; for each world contains an earth and a sea; each, also, possesses a center and properties and changeabilities of component parts, and a nature, and a power that keeps in place and preserves each one. For that which is external—whether it be nothing at all, or whether it be an unlimited vacuum—does not afford a center, as already stated. And if there be several worlds, in each one there exists a center of its own; so that there is a movement of some bodies towards it, of others from it, and of others around it, in what manner they themselves determine. But he who demands that in the case of several centers, weights should tend down to a single center only, differs not at all from one that should demand that in the case of several men their blood should all flow together in a single vein from all parts; and that the brains of all should be enveloped in one and the same membrane, because he thinks it hard that of things corporeal and physical the solid parts should not occupy one and the same place, and the liquid parts another! For the latter would be absurd in his conception; and equally so the man who makes a fuss if things collectively employ their own parts, which have their natural position and order inherent in each of them; for it were utterly absurd should any one assert that there is a world . . . containing in itself the moon, just as though a man should carry his brain in his heels and his heart in his temples. But that in supposing several worlds distinct from each other, you define and divide their parts in conformity with the whole, this is not an absurdity: for in each of them the earth, the sea, the sky, will remain, after its nature, in its fitting place; also, each one of the worlds has its above, its below, its roundabout center, not with reference to any other world, or to what is external, but contained in itself, and with reference to itself.

XXVIII. “The case they put of ‘the stone outside of the world,’ does not easily present an idea either of immobility or of motion; for how will it remain motionless, being possessed of weight, or how will it move towards the world, like other weights, if it neither is a part thereof, nor yet constitutionally subordinate to its nature? And as for that (nature) which is presented, and contained within another world, there were no need to discuss, how it is that it does not pass over netherwards, detaching itself from the mass by reason of its weight,—when we consider the nature and tension of the bonds whereby each of the parts is kept together. Since, if we admit the ideas of above and below, not with reference to the world itself, but as external to it, we fall into the same difficulties with Epicurus, when he makes all his ‘atoms’ move towards the place under his feet, just
as though the vacuum had any feet at all, or infinity allowed one to conceive the ideas of *above* and *below* within itself. For which reason we have cause to wonder at Chrysippus, or rather, indeed, to be at a loss to know what possessed him when he supposed that the world is fixed in the center, and that its essence having taken possession of this middle place from all eternity, has principally worked it up for the object of stability, and as it were, for incorruptibility. For this very thing he asserts in his Fourth Book ‘Upon Possibilities,’ where he is dreaming absurdly about a ‘center of infinity,’ and still more preposterously ascribing the efficient cause of the perpetuity of the world to the ‘center that has no beginning’—and this, too, when he has declared in other places, and frequently also, ‘that existence is both regulated and kept together by motions either tending towards the center thereof, or away from the center.’

XXIX. “And again, who will be frightened by the objections of the stoics, when they ask how will a single Fate and a single Providence stand, or how will there not be several Jupiters and several Joves if there be a plurality of worlds? In the first place, then, if the notion of there being several Jupiters and Joves be absurd, surely those ideas of their own are much more absurd: for suns, and moons, and Apollos, and Dianas, and Neptunes they suppose in infinite numbers in their infinite revolutions of worlds. Secondly, what absolute necessity is there for there being several Jupiters, if there be a plurality of worlds; and not one Ruler and Director of the Whole to each—a God possessing Reason and Intelligence, in the same way as He that is with us, entitled Lord and Father of all? Or what objection is there to all these worlds being subject to the Fate and the Providence of Jupiter, and that He should superintend and direct them in turn, implanting in each and every one of them, final causes, and germs, and reasons of all things that come to pass therein? For, is not one body here below often made up out of several separate bodies—for example, a popular assembly, an army, a chorus—to each individual of whom belongs the faculty of living, of thinking, and of learning, as Chrysippus believes; whilst that in the whole universe the worlds, whether fifty or one hundred in number, should obey or follow a single Reason, and be administered under one government, is a thing impossible! But yet such a constitution as this is exactly adapted to the Divine character. For we ought not to imagine gods like queen-bees, never stirring from home, nor yet imprison them by fencing them round with matter, or rather fencing them in *along* with matter, as people do when they make out the gods to be *influences of the atmosphere*; and when they invent powers of Water and of Fire mixed up in the substance, and beget them along with the world; and, again, burn them up along with it, as not being removable or free agents, like charioteers, or pilots: but just as
images are nailed up and soldered down in spite of themselves, so do they make them out locked up in the corporeal nature, and riveted down thereto, partners with it even so far as its entire destruction and transformation.

XXX. “But that opinion, I think, is the more respectable and dignified, namely, that the gods, being immortal and independent, in the same way as the Tyndaridae come to the aid of tempest-tossed mariners, and calm the sea in spite of itself and the swift blasts of the winds, not that they themselves go on board the ship, or are partakers in the peril, but show themselves up aloft, and save it from destruction—by like manner that the world is put under gods, a different one to each, who are attracted by the pleasure of the spectacle, and assist Nature in the direction of them respectively. For Homer’s Jove turns his eyes, no very great distance, from Troy to the parts of Thrace and the wandering tribes around the Danube; but the True One enjoys beautiful and congenial changes of sights in numerous worlds; He does not behold an infinite vacuum, nor contemplates Himself in solitary grandeur (as some do hold) and nothing else besides; but looks down upon the many operations of gods and men, the motions and courses of the stars, as they run in their appointed cycles. For the Godhead is no enemy to changes—on the contrary, He delighteth greatly therein, to judge from the alternations and revolutions of the visible phenomena of the heavens. Now, Infinity is entirely without judgment, and without reasoning; far from admitting the idea of God, it presents in every direction the operations of accident and self-will. But in a definite host and number of worlds, Superintendence and Providence of that which has invested itself with one body, and has been bound close to that one, and which transforms and models the same in infinite ways, strikes me at least as presenting no very unseemly or hardly conceivable idea.”

XXXI. Having spoken thus much I stopped; but Philip, after a short interval, replied: “Whether the truth about these matters be so, or of a different sort, I will not take upon myself to decide. But if we remove the Deity out of a single world, why do we suppose Him the Creator of five only; and what is the argument for this restriction in their number—a thing, I ween, I should be better pleased to learn than what was the meaning of the dedication of the golden E in this temple? for it (the number) clearly is neither triangular nor square, nor perfect nor cubical, or presenting any other curiosity of the sort for such as love and admire speculations of that kind; and the getting at it from the number of the Elements, which I myself lately hinted at, is in every way beset with difficulties, and holds out no gleam of any probability to draw us on to assert that it is likely when five bodies with equal angles,
equal sides, and containing equal areas, are generated in matter, as a thing of course just so many worlds must result from them.”

XXXII. “And in fact,” replied I, “Theodorus of Soli seems to me to have followed out the subject in the right way, when he is explaining the ‘Mathematics’ of Plato: he argues in this way: ‘The pyramid, eight-sided figure, twenty-sided, and twelve-sided, which Plato proposes, are indeed beautiful things for the symmetry of proportions and equality; neither is it left in the power of Nature to produce, compose, or fit together any other figure better than, or equal to them. At any rate, all of them have not got one and the same constitution, neither have they a similar origin, for the most slender and simplest figure of all is the Pyramid; the greatest, and made up of the most parts, is the twelve-sided; of the remaining two, the twenty-sided is twice as great as the eight-sided figure in the number of the triangles it contains. Consequently, it is impossible they derive their origin from one and the same matter; for the small and thin and more simple in construction must necessarily be the first to obey whatever puts in motion and moulds the matter, and be perfected, and get the start of the more solid and more composite bodies, amongst which, displaying also a more laborious construction, is the eight-sided one. It follows from this, that the only first form is the Pyramid, but none of the rest, inasmuch as they are inferior to it in the nature of their generation.’ There is, therefore, a remedy for this difficulty—that is, the division and separation of matter into Five worlds—one where to place the Pyramid (for that Plato assumes for the first), another for the Octahedron, a third for the Icosahedron. The rest will derive their generation from the pre-existent element in each, according to the correspondence of their particles, there being a transition of all into all, as Plato himself hints, as he is going through nearly all the particulars: but we prefer to prove the thing expeditiously. Since Air, when Fire is extinguished, retires, and when rarefied again gives out Fire from itself, we must look for the cause of these properties and vicissitudes in each element. The element of Fire is the Pyramid, made up out of the four-and-twenty primitive triangles; that of Air is the Octahedron, made up out of eight-and-forty of the same. One element, therefore, of Air results from two of Fire, mixed together and united; that of Air being analyzed is divided into two components of Fire, but being condensed and compressed into itself it goes off into the form of water. So that in all cases, the pre-existent thing readily supplies an origin from chance to the others; and not merely is there one First element, but since a different one possesses in a different system an initiative influence, provocative to generation, the identity of name is maintained by the whole.”
XXXIII. Then Ammonius: “This theory has indeed been worked out by Theodorus with equal courage and perseverance: yet I should not be surprised if he will be discovered to employ assumptions that are subversive of each other. For he assumes that the combination did not take place with all the five at once, but that the most subtile, and what was put together with the least amount of labor, presented itself first for birth. Next, he lays down as a necessary consequence of this, and not as contradicting it, that matter did not provide all things with the more subtile and simple principle; but that, in some cases, the weighty and composite elements were the first to come forward in the birth out of matter. Besides this, after five primitive substances have been assumed, and on the strength of this assumption, the worlds being declared to be of that same number, he employs the argument of probability with reference to four only of them, and withdraws the Cube, as is done in the game of counters, because it is not disposed by its nature to change into them, nor yet to allow them to change into itself—because, truly, all triangles are not of the same nature, for in the former figures the half-triangle in all is supposed empty; whereas in the latter the isosceles triangle, being peculiar to this figure alone, makes no inclination, or unifying conjunction with that empty space. If, therefore, there being five worlds and five bodies (elements), that part has the precedence of birth in which the Cube was first generated, there will be nothing left for the rest; because there is nothing of theirs into which the Cube is naturally disposed to change. And I say nothing about the circumstance that they make the element of the so-called Dodecahedron to be something else, and not the Scalene triangle out of which Plato composes his Pyramid, Octahedron, and Icosahedron. “For that very reason,” added Ammonius laughing, “you must either solve these questions; or else advance something of your own with respect to the common difficulty.”

XXXIV. Then I: “I have nothing to say that is more plausible, at least at the moment, but still it is better to submit to an examination of one’s own opinion, than that of another’s. I therefore say again, as I said at starting, that if we suppose the existence of two Natures,—the one Sensible in birth and destruction, subject to change and to be moved in different directions; the other Intelligible, ever remaining the same in the same course—it is strange that the Intelligible part should be divided and have variety in itself, and that we should be angry and scold if one does not leave the corporeal and passive part be one, concordant with and converging towards its own self, but divide and disperse the same. For things permanent and divine must surely cling faster to themselves, and shrink as far as possible from all severance and separation of parts, but even with these the power of the
one laying hold of something greater than itself, produces in things intelligible, the dissimilarities that exist as to cause and form, of the divisions in locality; whence Plato, in opposition to such as make out the All to be One, declares that which is to be both the Same and Different, and over all, Motion and Rest. There being then these five figures, it were to be wondered at, if of the five corporeal elements each one had been produced as a copy and image of each quality—not, indeed, pure and unmixed, but participating as far as possible in each power each in its turn. For the Cube is palpably the proper emblem of Rest; on account of the security and firmness of the superficies: and of the Pyramid everybody will recognize the fiery and movable character in the slenderness of its sides, and the acuteness of its angles; the nature of the dodecahedron, being comprehensive of the other figures, may be supposed an image of ‘That which is’ with reference to the corporeal part: whilst of the remaining two, the Icosahedron has got for its share the figure of the ‘Different,’ and the Octahedron the figure of the ‘Same.’ On this account, he has represented in one form Air, which holds together all existence; and on the other side, Water, which turns into the most numerous kinds of qualities by reason of its intermixture. If, therefore, Nature demands an equilibrium in all things, it is probable that the worlds are neither more nor less than their patterns, in order that each may have for each a rule of government and of power, just as it has got in the constitutions of bodies?

XXXV. “Not but that these several divisions are a consolation to him that wonders why we divide the Nature existing in births and changes, into so great a number of species. Examine the case attentively in company with me: and observe how that of the highest Powers (I mean the One, and the undefined Two) that which is the element of all deformity and disorder is denominated ‘infinity,’ whereas the nature of the One that limits and checks the empty, undefined, irrational nature of infinity, renders it capable of form, and will produce it in some way or another obedient to, and susceptible of the consequent division into categories as regards the objects of intellect, and the Principles themselves make their first appearance with reference to Number: or rather Number is by no manner of means plurality, unless considered as a form of Matter, that arises out of the unlimited nature of the Infinite, and is subdivided in one place into more, in another, into fewer parts: for then each of the pluralities becomes Number, when it is defined by the One. But if the One be removed: then again the unlimited Two will confuse and make the All inharmonious, unlimited, and immeasurable. For since “Species” is not a doing away with Matter, but only a form and ordering of the subject-matter, it is a necessary consequence that both the Principles also should exist in Number, out of
which Principles spring the greatest difference and inequality. For the undefined Principle is creator of the even; the better Principle of the odd numbers. The first of the even numbers is the Two, the first of the odd the Three, from the addition of which springs the Five—a number by composition common to both, but by its power, odd. For it was a necessary consequence of the intelligible and the Corporeal being measured out into several parts, by reason of the necessity implanted in their nature for variance, that neither the first should be even, nor the first odd but the third, made up out of them, so that it springs from both Principles—from that which creates the even, and that which creates the odd; since it was not possible for the one to be separated from the other, for either of them has the nature and power of a Principle, and when both are doubled, the Better One prevailed over the indefiniteness that divided the Corporeal part, and stood still, and because Matter was cut asunder between the two, this Principle placed the unit in the middle, and did not allow the Universe to be distributed into two parts, but the result was a plurality of worlds by means of the variance and the difference of the indefinite part. This plurality was rendered an uneven number by the power of the latter and of the Definite part, but such unevenness it was not allowed to overpass because the Better principle possesses a more extensive nature. For if the One were unmixed and pure, Matter would not have admitted of any separation at all; but since it is parted by the loosening property of the Two, it has admitted of dissection and division into parts; and stood still at this point, the even number being overpowered by the uneven.

XXVI. “For this reason it was the custom with the ancients to call reckoning ‘counting by fives;’ and I am of opinion that ‘all things’ (’panta’) were so named from ‘five’ (’pente’) by analogy; because, forsooth, the Five was up out of the first numbers: for the other numbers when multiplied with others produce a number different from themselves; whereas the Five, if it be taken an even number of times, makes the Ten perfect; and if taken an uneven number of times, it reproduces itself. But if, for the reason that the Five was composed out of the two first squares, namely, Unity and Four, for it is the first that being of equal value with the two preceding it composes the most beautiful of right-angled triangles; and it first produces the sesquilateral proportion. All this, perhaps, has not much to do with the subject before us; but the other is more so, viz., what is by its own nature the division of number; and the fact that Nature does divide most things of the sort in this manner. Also in ourselves are five senses, and members of the soul—the physical, the sensitive, the appetitive, the irascible, and the rational; and five fingers of each hand; and the most fecundating semen is
divided into five parts; for no woman is recorded to have brought forth more than five children at the same birth. Also the Egyptians fable that Rhea brought forth five gods, thus hinting at the creation of the five worlds out of one matter; and in the universe the earth's circumference has five zones; and the sky is divided into five cycles—two arctic, two tropic, and the equinoctial in the middle; five also have been made the revolutions of the planets, for the Sun, Mercury, and Jupiter, keep in the same course. Harmonious also is the constitution of the world, in exactly the same manner as all musical composition amongst ourselves is divided into the arrangement of the five tetrachords,—the highest, the middle, the united, the separated, and the bass. Tunes also have five intervals—\textit{diesis}, semitone, tone, tone and a half, double tone. Thus doth Nature appear to take more delight in making all things run in fives, than she does in making them spherical—as Aristotle used to say.

XXXVII. "Why, then (somebody may ask), did Plato refer the number of the Five Worlds to the five geometrical figures, by saying 'that the Deity employed the \textit{fifth constitution} upon the Universe, when he mapped out that universe'—and then by suggesting that question about the number of worlds, as to whether it is in reality proper to hold that they be one or five, he evidently thinks that the notion arises from that circumstance. If, then, we must bring forward \textit{probability} as an argument against that notion of his—if you reflect that of the differences of those bodies and figures the necessary consequence is a habit of variation, as he himself teaches when he is proving that whatever is subdivided, or composite, does, along with the alteration of the essence, also change the form. For if Fire be produced from Air, in consequence of the Octahedron being dissolved, and split up into pyramids; or on the contrary, Air out of Fire, when it is driven together and compressed into the Octahedron—it is not possible for it to remain where it was at first, but it flies and is borne along into another place, forcing its way and struggling with all that oppose and check its course. But the case is better illustrated by a comparison: those using the various instruments for the winnowing of wheat observe that the elements shaking the material, and that are shaken by the same, always approach like to like into another position . . . until the whole is put in order. In the same way, Matter being then in that condition in which it is probable the universe would be, where the Deity is absent, the first five Qualities, having tendencies of their own, were carried asunder; not entirely so, however, nor were they clearly separated, for the reason that when all things were mixed up together, those that were overpowered followed the stronger, in spite of their natural tendency. For which reason, in fact, they (these five Qualities) produced portions and intervals in like number for the
different species of bodies that moved asunder in different directions—one, not of pure Fire, but of fiery nature; another, not of unmixed Aether, but aethereal; another, not of Earth pure and simple, but earthy; and above all, Air associated with Water, because, as already mentioned, it had gone off impregnated with elements of different sorts. For it was not the Deity who parted and distributed the Essence, but after it had separated itself and was moving asunder in such varieties of disorder, He took it in hand, arranged and fitted it together, by the rule of analogy and the golden mean: in the next place, He having set Reason, like a deputy and guard in each province, He created as many worlds as are the kinds of the primal substances. Let thus much be conceded in Plato’s favor, for Ammonius’s sake; but for my part I will not affirm positively respecting the number of worlds, that they are exactly so many as this; but yet I consider the opinion that has been advanced of their being more than one, not indeed infinite, but limited in number, to be more agreeable to analogy than any of the rest; when I consider the natural tendency to dispersion and subdivision of Matter, whilst it is not suffered by Reason to move in one direction only, nor yet in an infinite number of ways. But here, if anywhere, let us remember the Academy, and divest ourselves of too much confidence, and reserve certainty, as in a slippery place, for the argument about their infinity.”

XXXVIII. On my saying this, Demetrius replied: “Rightly does Lamprias advise, for—

‘The gods in form are many, not in thought,’

as Euripides says: but they trip us up in facts, when we are so bold as to give our opinions on such great matters, as though we knew all about them: but we must bring back the discussion, as the same person says, to the original subject. For the assertion that the Oracles are lying idle and dumb, because the daemons have migrated or deceased, just as workmen leave their tools, starts another yet more important inquiry into the cause and power, whereby they render prophets and prophetesses possessed with inspiration, and capable of seeing visions. For it is not possible to lay the blame on their desertion as the cause why the Oracles are dumb, without first explaining in what way the daemons, when they do preside at them, and are present, render these same Oracles active and able to speak.” Ammonius, taking up the word: “Do you think, then, that the daemons are anything else but spirits that go up and down, as Hesiod says, ‘clothed in mist?’ For it seems to me that whatever difference one man exhibits, as compared with another who is acting either tragedy or comedy, just the same difference will a spirit that has taken possession of
the body exhibit with respect to ordinary life. It is, therefore, neither absurd
nor strange if spirits encountering spirits do create in them visions of the
Future; just as we ourselves signify to each other, not by voice alone, but
also by writing; nay, often also by a touch, or by a look, many things of what
has happened, and also tell beforehand many of what are about to happen
by the same means. And if you, my Ammonius, say nothing to the contrary,
for a rumor lately reached us of your having talked at length on the subject
with your hosts at Lebadia, nothing of which did our informant exactly
remember.” “Do not wonder at it,” answered I; “for many doings and
occupations intervening, in consequence of there being an oracle and a
sacrifice going on, rendered our discourses desultory, and full of
interruptions.” “But now,” replied Ammonius, “you have got hearers quite at
liberty, and anxious partly to inquire, partly to learn, all cavilling and
contradiction being put out of the way, and full indulgence and freedom, as
you see, granted to the discussion.”

XXXIX. When all the rest joined in this demand, I, after a short pause,
continued: “In truth, Ammonius, by an odd coincidence, ‘twas yourself that
supplied the starting-point and introduction to those discourses of mine.
For whether daemons be spirits separated from the body, or never united
to one, according to you and the divine Hesiod, being

> Pure dwellers upon earth, keepers of mortals,

why shall we deprive souls in the body of that power by which the
daemons are naturally enabled to foreknow and foretell future events? For
that any new power or faculty is superadded to souls after they have left
the body, which they did not previously possess, is by no means probable:
but that they possess, indeed, those powers originally, but have them in
inferior degree, whilst united with the body, some being imperceptible and
latent, others feeble and obscure, in a similar way to things seen through a
mist, or in moving water, inactive, and slow, and standing in need of much
curing, and recovery of what is their own, and removal and clearing away of
what obscures them—all this is probable enough. For just as the Sun doth
not become bright, when he bursts through the clouds, but is so
perpetually, yet he appears to us, when in a mist, dull and obscure, in like
manner the soul doth not acquire the prophetic power, when it passes out
of the body, as out of a cloud, but possesses it even now, though it is
dimmed by its mixture and confusion with the body. We ought not to
wonder or disbelieve this, when we observe, if nothing else, the faculty of
the Soul which is the converse of Foreknowledge, that is what we call the
Memory: how great an operation doth it perform in preserving and storing
up things gone by, or rather, things that are! For of things past, none is or
subsists, but all things are born and die together—both actions, and words, and passions—whilst Time, like a mighty river, sweeps them by, one by one; but this faculty of the Soul, laying hold upon them, I know not how, invests things not present with visible form and existence! For, truly, the oracle given to the Thessalians respecting Anna, promises

"To the deaf hearing, to the blind their sight."

But the Memory is to us the hearing of deaf actions, and the seeing of blind. No wonder, then, as I have said, if that which holds tight the things that be no more, should anticipate many of those that do not yet exist; for these belong more peculiarly to it, and for these it has a natural sympathy, inasmuch as it stretches itself out, and pushes forward towards the Future, but disengages itself from things that be past and come to an end, except so far as the remembering of them goes.

XL. “Souls therefore possessing this faculty inherent in their nature, though obscured, and hardly showing itself, do nevertheless put forth blossom, and recover this power—in dreams often, on the point of death, some few—either that the body becomes purified, or assumes a new temperament on these occasions, or else that the reasoning and thinking parts of the soul are unbound and released from the irrational and visionary condition of the Present, and turn towards the Future. For it is not so, as Euripides says:

"'He's the best prophet that can guess the best,'

but such a one is a man that has his wits about him, and follows the intelligent part of his soul as it guides him on his way, with a show of probability. For the prophetic part, like a tablet unwritten on, senseless, and indefinite of itself, but capable of receiving visionary impressions and forebodings, grasps the Future without any consideration, at the moment when it is first departing out of the Present. It makes the same escape from the Present by means of the temperament and condition of the body when in a state of change, which we call inspiration. Now the body doth frequently of its own accord acquire this predisposition; and the earth sends forth springs of water productive of various effects upon mankind—some being productive of delirium, and disease, and death; and others that are good, benignant, and salubrious, as they prove by experience to such as frequent them. But the prophetic stream or blast is the most godlike and most holy, whether it be taken in with the air or drawn from the liquid fountain; for when it unites itself with the body it engenders in the soul a temperament altogether unusual and strange, the peculiar nature of
which it is difficult to explain clearly, although history in many places affords us means for a conjecture. That by means of its heat and diffusion it opens certain passages suited to admit impressions of the Future is probable enough, just as when wine gets up into the head it brings about other effects, and unlocks words stored up in memory and forgotten. Also the Bacchic frenzy and madness itself possesses much of the prophetic spirit, when the soul, becoming heated and full of fire, shakes off the caution that human prudence lays upon it, and thereby frequently turns aside and puts out the fire of inspiration.

XLI. “At the same time one may, not without reason, suppose that dryness coming on together with heat, subtilizes the spirit, and renders it more ethereal and pure: because the soul itself is dry, according to Heraclitus. For moisture not only dulls the sight and hearing, but when it touches mirrors takes away from them reflection; and the brightness and the light descend from the air. On the other hand, again, that through a certain sudden cooling and condensation of spirit, as is the case in the tempering of iron, that the prophetic portion of the soul is both augmented and rendered keener, is a thing by no means impossible. And again, just as tin being melted together with it constringes and solidifies copper, naturally soft and porous, and renders it brighter and cleaner, in like manner the prophetic vapor, it is not improbable, having a certain sympathy and affinity to the soul, fills up the soft parts thereof, and cements and keeps them together. For different substances are congenial and have affinity to others, just as bean-flour is supposed to assist the dye of the murex, and natron that of the kermes, when mixed therewith: ‘some of the blue crocus is mingled with flax,’ and as Empedocles hath said. But with respect to the Cydnus, and the consecrated sword of Apollo at Tarsus, we have heard you, Demetrius, telling how that only the Cydnus cleanses that steel, and no other river cleanses that sword. At Olympia also, the ashes for the Altar they knead up, and bring to consistency, by pouring over them water out of the Alpheus, but if they wet these same ashes with any other water they are not able to solidify and cement the ashes.

XLII. “It is therefore not to be wondered at if, although Earth sends up numerous streams, these [at Delphi] alone should dispose the soul to ecstasy, and to conceive visions of future events. And the voice of Fame likewise indisputably tallies with my argument, for the story goes that the power residing in the place first became manifest after a certain shepherd had accidentally tumbled into the well, and afterwards began to utter words that were inspired, which his neighbors at first laughed at, but when many things the fellow had foretold actually came about, then they were filled
with wonder. And the best historians of Delphi keep up the memory of his name, and call him Coretas. But it seems to me that the soul acquires this tendency and inclination to dissolve into the prophetic spirit, for the same reason as the sight does with respect to the light, because the latter has a natural sympathy for it. For though the eye possesses the power of vision, there is no employment of it without the light; similarly the prophetic faculty of the soul, like the eye, stands in need of something of its own nature to assist in grasping objects, and to sharpen its force. For which cause, most of the ancients supposed Apollo to be the same with the Sun, and they that understood and admired the beautiful and ingenious comparison, guessed that what body is to soul, sight to mind, light to truth—the same is the Sun to the nature of Apollo; his offspring, and his child, perpetually born of ‘Him that is,’ perpetually reflecting the author of its being; for it kindles, promotes, and stimulates the power of vision of the sense, just as he does the prophetic faculty of the soul.

XLIII. “Those, however, that supposed him one and the same god with the Sun, did with good reason dedicate the Oracle to Apollo and the Earth conjointly: for they believed that the Sun generated in the Earth the disposition and temperament out of which she sends forth the prophetic vapor. Earth herself, ‘sure foundation of all things,’ as Hesiod with far more sagacity than our philosophers hath called her, we hold to be everlasting and imperishable: but of the powers belonging to her, it is probable that in one place deceases happen, in another new births; elsewhere, migrations and influxes from different quarters, and that such revolutions come round no less frequently in the whole course of time, as we may conjecture from natural phenomena. For in the case of lakes, rivers, and yet more, of hot springs, there have occurred in some places failures, and wastings away, and in others, as it were, a flight and, self-interment: and on the other hand, their re-appearance in the same places as before, or their welling forth in the same neighborhood. Also of mines, entire failures have happened in recent times, as for instance of the silver mines in Attica, and of the copper ore in Euboea, out of which the cold-hammered sword-blades used to be wrought, as Aeschylus says—

“‘Taking his self-sharpened Eubean blade;’

and in the case of the quarry at Carystus, ‘tis no long time since it ceased to produce soft and thread-like veins of stone: for I believe some of you have seen towels and nets, and hair-cauls made thereof, which would not burn, but as many as became dirty from use, they threw into the fire, and got them back again bright and transparent; but now it has disappeared and scarcely fibres or hairs, as it were, of the substance, run about in the
XLIV. “And of all these effects the followers of Aristotle make out the Exhalation to be the author in the interior of the earth. Simultaneously with which exhalation it is a necessary consequence that effects of the kind must come to an end, change their places, and on the other hand be revivified once more. In fact, we must hold the same opinion with respect to oracular inspirations, inasmuch as they have not an everlasting, or undecaying power, but one that is subject to vicissitudes. For it is probable that excessive rains extinguish these exhalations; or that by the falling of thunder-bolts they are destroyed; or, above all, when the earth is affected by a trembling, and suffers settlements and jumbling together of her parts, in her inmost depths, that the said exhalations shift their place, or are put out entirely, just as in this place they say it [the oracular power] did not continue after the great earth-quake, which also overthrew the whole city. And at Orchomenos they relate that a pestilence prevailing, many people perished, and the Oracle of Tiresias came to an end altogether, and remains idle and silent to this day. And if the same fate has befallen those in Cilicia, as we hear is the case, nobody will give us more authentic news of it than yourself, Demetrius.”

XLV. Then Demetrius: “I know not the present state of things: for, as you are are aware, I have now been away from home a very long time. But when I was there the Oracle of Mopsus still flourished, as well as that of Amphilochus. But I have a very wonderful event to tell, which happened during my visit to the Oracle of Mopsus. The governor of Cilicia, being skeptical in religious matters, disbelieving them, I fancy, out of wantonness, for he was an extremely insolent and wicked man, and had about him a set of Epicureans who after their fine fashion and their ‘natural science’ principles, made sport of all things of the kind, as they themselves openly profess; he sent his freedman, furnishing him as a spy going into the enemy’s camp, with a sealed letter, in which the inquiry was written, nobody knowing the contents. The fellow therefore having passed the night, as is the rule, within the sanctuary, and having slept there, related to us next morning the following dream. He dreamed that a man of handsome appearance stood over him and shouted ‘A black one!’ and nothing more, but immediately retired. This seemed to us absurd, and occasioned great perplexity; the governor, however, was astounded at it, and making a gesture of adoration and opening the letter, showed written therein the question: Whether shall I sacrifice to thee a white or a black bull? so that the Epicureans were put to the rout, and he himself performed the sacrifice, and ever after held Mopsus in respect.”
XLVI. Demetrius having spoken thus much, ceased: but I, wishing to place, as it were, a crowning stone on the discussion, turned my eyes upon Philip and Ammonius, who were sitting together: they seemed to me to be wanting to say something, but they checked themselves again. At last Ammonius: “Philip has got something to say about the story just told, for he believes, as do many others, and I myself, that Apollo is no other god, but the same with the Sun: but my difficulty is a greater one, and concerning greater matters. At first, we went aside, I know not how, in the discussion, and transferred with all due respect the oracular office from the gods to the daemons; but now we seem to me to be pushing these latter gentlemen themselves from thence, out of the oracle and off the Tripod; when we resolve the final cause of prophecy, or rather its very essence and power, into blasts and vapors and exhalations. For the above mentioned ‘temperatures’ and ‘heatings’ and ‘temperings,’ the more they draw away our belief from the interposition of the Deity, suggest such an idea of the Final Cause as Euripides makes his Cyclops entertain:—

“For will she, nill she, dame Necessity
Makes the grass grow, that feeds my sheep so fat.’

Except that he says he does not sacrifice to the gods but to himself and ‘his belly, that greatest of deities,’ whereas we both offer sacrifice and make prayers at the Oracles, for what purpose, pray, if it is only winds that excite the prophetic power in them; or else some kind of temperature of the air or wind, that sets the same in motion? and what is the meaning of the presentation of the victims, and the fact of them not being acceptable unless the beast become all of a tremble from the top of the brow downwards, and stagger, when the libation is poured upon it. For it is not sufficient that it shake its head, as in the case of all other sacrifices, but the motion and quivering must spread over all its limbs, accompanied with a tremulous sound; for whenever this does not take place, they say the Oracle is not at work, and do not bring in the Pythoness. And yet, if they supposed the chief cause to have nothing to do with either god or daemon, it would be reasonable for them to act and to think in this way: but according to your notions, it is not reasonable; for the exhalation, whether the victim do tremble or not, being there permanently will produce the inspiration, and that not merely in the Pythoness, but in any ordinary person. For which reason it is absurd to employ one woman only for the purpose of the Oracles, and to give her trouble by keeping her all her life through, chaste and pure. For that Coretos, who, the Delphians say, first gave notice of the property residing in the place by tumbling into it, did not, I fancy, differ in any way from the other goatherds and shepherds—that is, indeed, if this be not an allegory, or an empty fiction, as I myself esteem it.
But when I reflect of what great service to the Greeks this Oracle hath been the author, both in wars and in the founding of cities, also on occasions of pestilence and seasons of barrenness, I think it hard to assign both the discovery and the final cause not to God and to Providence, but to accident and natural means. On these points," added he, "my dear Lamprias, I wish to discourse—will you have patience with me?" "Yes, certainly," replied Philip, "and so will all of those present—for the subject interests the whole of us."

XLVII. Then I in reply to him: "It has not only angered, but filled me with confusion, that I should be thought by you, and so numerous and respectable a company as you are, to have (in spite of my years), made out a fine story by plausible arguments, in order to destroy or upset any of the sound and religious notions entertained with respect to the Deity. I will therefore make my defense against the charge, and bring forward Plato for a witness and advocate in my cause; since that philosopher has censured Anaxagoras of old, seeing that he went too much into natural causes, and was always tracing out and hunting after what was necessarily accomplished by the properties of bodies, so that he neglected the higher causes, final and efficient, of the effect and of the agent. He (Plato) was the first, or did the most, of the philosophers, to investigate both points, assigning to the Deity the origin of the things that are constituted according to reason; without, however, depriving Matter of the efficient causes necessary for that which is done; for he discerned that all the world of sense was regularly arranged, but was not unmixed or pure, but receives its origin from Matter impregnated by Reason. And consider in the case of artificers: for example here at hand, the celebrated base and stand for the vase which Herodotus calls the ‘Crater holder,’ that has for natural efficient causes fire and iron, and above all the tempering of the metal by means of fire and water, without which there was no means for the work to be done. But the yet more valid cause that set these two in motion, and kept them incessantly at work, did Art and Reason furnish to the undertaking, and again the creator and artist of these pictures and figures around us, has inscribed himself ‘Polygnotus of Thasos, son of Aglaophon, has painted the sacking of the citadel of Ilium’—as he is seen to have written. But without the aid of paints ground up together and dissolved into each other, there was no possibility for this work to have got its arrangement and visible form. Does then the person who wishes to trace out the material cause, by inquiring and explaining what effects and changes ochre produces when mixed with Sinope, or Melean white with lamp-black—does he thereby detract from the fame of Polygnotus? And he that tells about the hardening and the softening of iron, how that when deprived of rigidity
by means of fire it spreads itself and yields to those who are beating it out, and bringing it into form, and having been thrown into pure water, by reason of the tenderness and liquidity produced on it by the fire, it becomes impregnated with cold, and acquires the elasticity and the density that Homer calls ‘the strength of iron’—does he the less on that score wholly reserve to the artificer the cause of the production of the work? I, truly, do not think so. Again, there are some who investigate the properties of remedial agents, and yet do not subvert the science of medicine. In the same way, certainly, when Plato makes out that we see by means of the light resident in the eye being mingled with the light of the Sun, and that we hear by means of the repercussion of the air, does not disprove that we were born capable of seeing and of hearing by design and by providence.

XLVIII. “And universally, as I say, existence having two efficient causes, the very ancient theologians and poets chose to pay attention only to the higher one of the two, applying to all subjects in common that invocation:—

“‘Jove first, Jove last, all things spring out of Jove,’

for they had not yet got as far as ‘necessary’ and ‘physical causes.’ But the more modern, and those styling themselves ‘natural philosophers,’ on the contrary, stray away from the superior cause, and place the whole theory of sensation in elements, conditions of elements, collisions, and interminglings of bodies. For which cause the reasoning on both sides is deficient in an essential part, for the one set ignore or omit the agent and the author; the others, the means, and the materials. Now he who was the first to handle both these points in a lucid manner, and who took into the account besides Him that makes according to Reason, and puts into motion, the necessarily subject and passive element, will clear us also of all suspicion and blame. For we do not make prophecy to be without God and without Reason, by assigning to it the human soul for the material, but the inspiring breath or exhalation, for the instrument as it were, or the thing that makes it give out a sound. For in the first place it is Earth that breeds these exhalations, but He who imparts to Earth the faculty for tempering and for changing, namely, the Sun, is, according to the belief of our fathers, a god to us. In the next place, as we have daemons, as it were, for presidents, ministers, and guardians, of this said natural constitution, who occasionally let it down, like a musical instrument, and again tighten it up, by diminishing its over-great ecstatic and maddening property, and tempering the excitement so as to be unproductive of pain or injury to such as experience it—we must not be thought to be doing anything unreasonable or impossible.
XLIX. “For when we offer the preliminary sacrifice, and put garlands and pour libations upon the victim, we are not doing anything opposed to this view of the matter. For the priests and holy men say that they offer up the victim, pour the libation, and observe its movement and trembling for no other purpose than to discover whether the god is then performing his functions, because it is necessary that the thing to be sacrificed should be perfect both in body and soul, unblemished, and uncorrupted. Indications of this in the case of the body, it is not very difficult to discover; but the soul they test by putting upon the bulls barley-meal, and upon the he-goats vetches: for the beast that eats not thereof they judge not to be sound. For the she-goat cold water is the test—because the animal is not of a nature insensible to such sprinkling, and not disposed to tremble at it. But whether it be certain that the quivering of the victim be a sign of its being lawful to consult the Oracle, and its not quivering of the reverse, I do not perceive what objection results therefrom against my argument, because every power acts better or worse according to the season ordained for it by Nature; consequently when the season varies, it is but reasonable the Deity should give us warning of the fact..

L. As for the Exhalation itself, I do not think it is constantly in the same condition, but that it is liable to fallings off, and on the other hand, to augmentations of force: and for the fact which I adduce as proof, I have the testimony of many visitors, and of all the people that minister to the Oracle. For the hall in which they make those who consult the god sit down, is filled, not frequently nor regularly, but at uncertain intervals, with a sweet smell, and a breath, like the most delicious and costly perfumes, in consequence of the sanctuary sending forth vapors as from a fountain: for it is probable that it is excited from time to time, either by heat, or some accidental compression. But if this does not seem to you credible, at least you will allow that the Pythoness herself has the part of her soul which is affected by the exhalation in different states and dispositions at different times, and does not always preserve the same temperament like an unchangeable harmony. For many infirmities and disturbances, to her own knowledge, and many more that be unperceived, seize upon her body, and pervade her soul, filled with which it is better she should not enter there; neither ought they (the priests) in that state to present her to the god when she is not perfectly pure, just as though she were some musical instrument, well finished indeed, and well sounding, but yet liable to be affected, and to get out of tune. For neither does wine always produce intoxication in the same manner, nor the fife, excitement, but at one time the same persons rave and rage more, at another time less, as the temperament in them varies. But especially does the imaginative part of
the soul show itself to be mastered by the body, and to sympathize with its changes; as is apparent in the case of dreams. For sometimes we are involved in numerous and infinitely varied visions, whilst at other times, on the contrary, we have complete freedom and peace from anything of the sort, and we know that Cleon here, one of the people from Daulia, declares that in all the many years he has lived, he has never had a single dream. And of those of former times the same thing is told respecting Thrasymeredes the Heraean. The cause is the temperament of the body: for that of the atrabilious is very subject to dreams, and to visions, even though dreaming true seems to be their especial privilege: because turning themselves in their fancies to many things at many times, like those shooting often, they sometimes hit the mark.

LI. “When, therefore, the prophetic and imaginative faculty is in a state that harmonizes with the assimilation of the vapor, like that of a medicine, inspiration must necessarily follow; just as, that not being the case, it must either not take place at all, or else be delirious, not genuine, and full of confusion—as we know happened in the case of the Pythoness lately deceased. For consulters of the Oracle having arrived from abroad, the victim is said to have withstood the preliminary agitations without feeling, and without motion; and when the priests in their zeal substituted others, and still persevered, with difficulty did it become tremulous and staggering about, to give the necessary sign. What, pray, happened with respect to the Pythoness? She descended into the place of the Oracle against her will, and in a bad humor; and directly upon the very first answers, she manifested by the harsh sound of her voice that she was not repeating the dictation of the god: like to a ship drifting before the gale, she was filled with an incoherent and evil inspiration. At last being completely driven out of her senses, and rushing with a shriek to the entrance, she threw herself on the ground; so that not only the consulters took to flight in terror, but even the interpreter Nicander, and such of the holy men as were present. After a little while, however, they went in again, and picked her up—she was insane, and only survived for a few days. This is the reason why they keep the body of the Pythoness pure from all sexual intercourse, and her life clear from all mixture and contact with and conversation of strangers: and also before consultation, observe the above-mentioned signs: for they believe that it is clearly understood by the god whether she has the proper frame of body and disposition, so as to receive the inspiration without injury. For the power of the vapor does not affect all persons indiscriminately, nor yet the same persons always in the same way, but as above said, it supplies an incentive and cause to such as be suitably disposed to feel it, and undergo the change. The power is in reality due to
a god, and to a daemon, yet it is not exempt from cessation, imperishable, undecaying, or capable of lasting to all eternity of time—by which all things between Earth and Moon are worn out, according to our theory. Some there be who hold that even things above that sphere do not hold out to all eternity and infinity, but are subject to violent revolutions and renewals.

LII. “These subjects I exhort both you and myself to examine frequently; inasmuch as they present many holds for objections, and grounds for the opposite opinion; which time does not allow us to enumerate at length. So they must lie over, as also the question Philip raised about the Sun and Apollo.”