

The wise men of Greece
in a series of dramatic dialogues
J. S. Blackie 1877

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
1. EPISTLE DEDICATORY	vii
2. <u>PYTHAGORAS</u>	1
3. THALES	47
4. XENOPHANES	77
5. HERACLITUS	105
6. EMPEDOCLES	131
7. ANAXAGORAS	195
8. ARISTODEMUS; OR, THE ATHEIST	231
9. ARISTIPPUS; OR, PLEASURE	253
10. THE DEATH OF SOCRATES	275
11. PLATO	315
NOTES	349

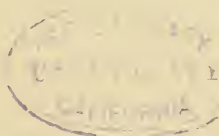
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PYTHAGORAS

ὁ βίος ἀνθρώποις λογισμοῦ κἀριθμοῦ δεῖται πάνυ·
Ζῶμεν ἀριθμῷ καὶ λογισμῷ· ταῦτα γὰρ σώζει βροτούς.

EPICHRMUS.



PYTHAGORAS.

PERSONS.

1. PYTHAGORAS.
2. DIAGORAS, High Priest of Jove in Metapontum.
3. MILO, an Athlete of Crotona, disciple of Pythagoras.
4. Chorus of Maidens.
5. Chorus of Young Men.

SCENE.—*Before the Temple of the Lacinian Hera, on the coast of the Hadriatic, a few miles north of Crotona. The body of the stage is occupied by groups of priests and their attendants, with sacrificial implements ; and a band of matrons. In the foreground a chorus of maidens ; behind, a chorus of young men.*

CHORUS OF MAIDENS.

[Advancing, and forming themselves into a square, rank and file, in the front of the stage.]

STROPHE.

Fell was the force of Titan times,
When Kronos swayed the world with awe ;
Ere Jove lent to the spherul chimes
The sweet accords of ordered law.

Red Heaven on reeking Earth made war,
And hot fire strove with hissing water ;
And life was discord, din, and jar,
Of monstrous births that throve on slaughter.

But when the lawless troop was bound
'Neath sulphurous Ætna's throne sublime,
A kindlier dam the Father found
To nurse the hopeful birth of Time.

The ancient rule of Force and Fraud
He scorned, and choosing for his mate
Wise-counselling Metis, overawed
The strife that rent Earth's crude estate.

ANTISTROPHE.

Then to make fair reform more fair,
A babe, with glory on its face,
The mighty mother Rhea bare,
Stamped by the Fates for queenly place.

And gave it to the shining Hours,
With fostering care to tend it well,
And to the primal watery Powers
Conveyed it, safe from harm to dwell,

In ancient Ocean's sparry dome,
Laved by the stream of sleepless waters,
Where hoary Tethys keeps her home
With troops of twinkling-footed daughters.

And there to maiden grace she grew,
And there the fount beheld with awe
Whence men, and all the Olympian crew,
Their sacred generation draw.

EPODE.

A woman now she stood, a wonder
For stately tread, and blooming pride,
And the strong launcher of the Thunder
Claimed great-eyed Hera for his bride.

Where Thornax on the Argive billow
Looks down, and soft the cuckoo calls,
There the Fates spread the bridal pillow
That thrilled with hope the Olympian halls.

And every god brought gifts of beauty,
To her that slept great Jove beside,
And ancient Earth did loyal duty
With golden apples for the bride.

And the soft couch was curtained grandly
With clouds distilling nectarous dew,
And child-eyed flowers looked forth more blandly,
And the green blade more greenly grew,

When Jove knew Hera's love ; and sweetly
The Muses sound blithe Hymen's hymn ;
While round the hill of cuckoos featly
In tuneful dance the Graces swim.

And thus new seeds of strength were sown
For Him that wields the flashing levin ;
Now firmly stablished stood his throne,
And a new law from Fate was given,

With bliss in store,
That freed from bonds of force and fraud,
By planful wisdom overawed,
All men should crook the loyal knee,
Thou thunder-belted king, to thee,
And great-eyed Hera, Queen of heaven
For evermore.

[*Diagoras advances.*]

DIAGORAS.

'Twas well enacted. I have seldom seen
A seemlier pomp, and worthier of the gods ;
And for the hymn, our Metapontine bard
At the last great Diasia, for an ode
As like to this as tin to silver, reaped
A golden talent. Our light temple bards
Will string a medley of Pelasgian myths,
That have no more coherence than a heap
Of coloured pebbles, spread out by the storm
Upon a windward shore, and with big mouth
Baptize it poetry ! Poets should be wise,
Else with long arms they perch their gods on high
For every fool to scoff at. These loose tales
Some day will eat the heart from all respect,
And leave our holiest shrines like painted toys
For girls to play with. But who comes ? Ho, Milo !

[*Enter Milo.*]

Hail king of wrestlers ! on well-omened day
Well-omened meeting ! 'tis some moons since last

We met at Pisa, when the people hailed thee
Live Hercules, for that your shoulders bore
The heifer through the ring, which then for dinner
You did digest entire !

MILO.

A god-like meal !
I am right glad to see thee. Never yet
Have I beheld Lacinian Hera's feast
So well appointed.

DIAGORAS.

'Twas a four-square work :
All parts did aptly fit, as to a ship
Well-corded tackle when it takes the breeze.

MILO.

The praise is hers, the wise Theano, our
New priestess, a disciple of Pythagoras.

DIAGORAS.

Pythagoras? surely I have known that name,
But not in western seas.

MILO.

He sojourns here
Some twelve moons only.

DIAGORAS.

Travelled whence?

MILO.

From Samos.

DIAGORAS.

I now remember ; once I heard the name
 At Heliopolis from a learned priest,
 Who said he was a subtle-thoughted man,
 And for all sleight of mathematic lore
 Named with the first on Nile.

MILO.

I marvel not ;

He says that mathematic is the porch
 Through which our sense-bound groping intellect
 Into the temple of pure reason passes,
 Where sun-bright gods are throned. 'Tis strange
 to see
 How he will sit, and look, and brood, and think
 His soul out of itself into a square,
 Or circle, or triangle. In my school
 A young athlete once found him with fixed gaze
 Bent o'er the dust, where he had traced a web
 Of inter-crossing figures ; there he sat,
 Motionless as a sphynx in Memphian sands,
 Or Niobe on Sipylus ; when, behold !
 Even as a flash from thunder-pregnant cloud,
 Sudden he starts, and like an uncaged bird
 That flaps free wings, and shrills with ecstasy,
 He cried—*εὕρηκα*—I have found it !

DIAGORAS.

Well,

What did he find ?

MILO.

I know not, nor have wit
For such strange ken. Some quaint equality
Of squares with squares, built on contrarious sides
Of a right-angled triangle ; but he said
To me one day that by this measure he
Would gauge deep hell, and take the girth of
heaven.

DIAGORAS.

These mathematic men have thoughts that march
From sphere to sphere, and measure out the blue
Of infinite space like roods of garden ground,
And talk of suns and stars, as they were lights
From reef to reef in some well-sounded sea ;
But say, how do Crotona's sons affect
The Samian sage ?

MILO.

As tides affect the moon,
Gay flowers the sun, or fish the wavy pool ;
They hold him of their very blood, who changed—
For that he knew our nobler nature—soft
Silk-vested Lydia—we interpret thus—
For our plain Doric use and hardiment
Of manly breeding. There be evil women
Who kill with glances ; but this godlike man
Bears blessing in his look, and all who see
Drink gladness. Like the strength of some blue
mount
Swathed in the smiles of bright-eyed spring, he
stands,

Reaping both love and worship. Old and young
By cheerful magic of wise words he draws,
As Orpheus drew the beasts : nay, even women
He rings about him, eloquent to preach
Philosophy from spindles : everywhere
Love, awed by wonder, like a faithful page,
Follows his favoured footing where he goes.

DIAGORAS.

Who were his parents ?

MILO.

Thereby hangs a doubt.

Some say his sire was of Tyrrhenian stock,
To Lemnos first, and thence to Samos driven ;
Some vaunt him fathered by Apollo ; some
Deem him Apollo's self ; and some declare
He is nor man nor god, but god and man,
Aptly confounded for our double need ;
God for the strength that our ambition claims,
Man for the pity that our frailty craves :
Howbeit the air is rife with buzzing bruits
Of marvel since he came, so vouched that he
Must smother hearing who would bar belief.
'Tis voiced abroad that when he passed the stream
That flows by Sybaris, the floods did lift
Their crests with—*Hail, Pythagoras !* And some
Do swear that on the selfsame day and hour
At Metapontum and Crotona, he
Was seen, two selves, as men report twin suns
Sometimes to sail the welkin. All believe

He hath a golden thigh ; and many tales
Are told of his mysterious communings
With Abaris, an Hyperborean priest,
Who from the frosted Caucasus to Greece
Posted through air upon a golden arrow.
The wild barbarian and the savage beast
His mild word tames. An unkempt Getan youth,
Zamolxis hight, born in a bearskin coat,
He took and taught, and sent with wisdom's claim
To smooth the rude rough-mannered shaggy kerns
That roam on Ister's banks. Nay, even they tell,
A Daunian bear, caught in a hut, he tamed,
Fed it with cakes and acorns, and adjured
To lick sweet blood no more. But most they praise
How, when he preached in the Trincacrian land,
Of righteousness and temperance and truth,
The blood-daubed tyrant of Centauripi,
Pricked in his heart, and plucking out his lusts,
Flung down his sceptre, and his broad domain
Gave free to public use.

DIAGORAS.

'Tis wondrous strange !
Full surely he is wise above the mark
Of wisest men, and by some mystic bond
Holds subject Nature tutored to his will.
But how stands he affected to the gods ?

MILO.

As sons to sires whom sires delight to own.
There is no Greek from Padus to Pachynus

More strict in all religious exercise
That sacred right or use of country claims.

DIAGORAS.

I'm very glad on't ; for 'tis sad, but true,
These wise men are not always wise to know
The gods, true wisdom's root. All Italy tells
How Pherecydes mocked the Olympian Powers,
Boasting, albeit no altar ever knew
Or cake from him, or savoury thigh, his life
Flowed in a stream of fair prosperity,
As smooth as theirs who vowed their hecatombs ;
For which bold blasphemy the Delian god
Scourged him with loathsome foul disease, that all
His festering flesh with live corruption swarmed,
And crept into putrescence.

MILO.

'Tis a tale
Far voiced through all the isles ; but Pherecydes,
Pythagoras says, was a god-fearing man.

DIAGORAS.

Grant it be so ! but where the rings are spread,
A stone fell in the water ; rumour swells
In multiplied additions as it rolls,
In circles ever larger with more lies,
But not from nothing.

MILO.

Rumour hath not yet dared
To fling a shade athwart the pious fame

Of pure Pythagoras, who from fount divine
All truth and goodness draws ; whose virgin soul
Such breath of chastest reverence breathes, that not,
Like others, in light-thoughted talk he names
The names of gods ; but with well pondered phrase,
In solemn protestation only, swears ;
A word, he says, is short and quick, but works
A long result ; therefore look well to words,
And ever swear with prayer upon your lips.

DIAGORAS.

'Tis a most holy man ; hath he then many
Disciples in Crotona ?

MILO.

They are counted
Now not by tens or hundreds ; but not all
Are sworn in bonds of secret brotherhood.

DIAGORAS.

What ? brotherhoods ? and sworn ? at Metapontum
Our archons with a wary eye will watch
Such secret gatherings, where, as in a nest,
Ill-will is fostered, discontent enhanced,
Wild plans of crude ambition hatched, and schemes
Of deep-designing counsel laid, that breed
A state within a state.

MILO.

Of this you need
Fear nothing from Pythagoras ; our guilds

Are peaceful, loyal, reverent, and pure
From fretful taint of sour democracy.

DIAGORAS.

What is their scope, their rule, their discipline?

MILO.

'Tis simply said : He is the supreme head,
And chooses whom he tries, and tries by test
Of eye, that in the outward feature reads
The inner soul. He hath a wondrous gift
To know a true man by the brotherhood
Of truth, which breathes in all who love the truth ;
And having proved their will, capacity,
Courage, and single aim, he leads them through
The fruitful silence of a five years' school
Of pondered preparation, for a life
Of reasoned usefulness, remote from strife
Of hot ambition, and the hunt for gold ;
And having trained their minds by thought, their
wills
By wise subjection to superior will,
He makes them grow in course of kindly acts
Like very brothers, owning him the head
Of their large family. With their common goods
They help each other ; and what human woe
May cry for help, needs but the name of man
To stir the eager promptings of their heart,
And arm their hand with liberal grace to reach
Each poor unfriended sufferer, who receives
Unhired the loyal service of their love.

DIAGORAS.

How many be there of this conclave sworn
Here in Crotona?

MILO.

Some three hundred ; but
Four years of their probation still remain.

DIAGORAS.

Are women of them?

MILO.

Certes ; for he says,
Use not a suppliant or a woman harshly,
Both come from Jove, and wisdom hath no sex.

DIAGORAS.

He speaketh well. In Athens men do use
Women to breed their brats, and spread their
boards,
The slaves, and not the fellows, of their lords.

MILO.

Our Samian hath a just and gentle soul
That hates all masterdom, usurped beyond
The use of nature and the need of life ;
Not women only,—inarticulate brutes,
And the mute denizens of the brackish pools,
Have claimed his care. I guess your worship
knows
The famous marketing he made last week
With the fishermen at Sybaris?

DIAGORAS.

In faith not I.

I have been some weeks absent at the feast
Of Atabyrian Jove in Agrigentum ;
And as a waxen tablet, smooth, unscratched,
My mind lies blank to write your tale upon.

MILO.

Well, thus it was. He sauntered on the beach
This side of Sybaris, where some fishermen
With sweatful strain were pulling in their nets,
And says to them,—“ A goodly draught ye draw,
Brave fellows, here ; and in my mind I know
The exact tale that your stout net involves.”
They laughed, and said,—“ Ha ! if you are a wizard,
And prove your vaunt, we'll do what thing you bid
Within our human reach.” The net was drawn,
And all the fish were counted on the beach ;
Ten score and ten, precise, as he foretold.
Then as they marvelling stood, he bade them fling
The finny gaspers back into the brine
Wholesale ; which, when they did, each bright-scaled
thing
Paddled alert into the wrinkled pool,
No whit the worse ; whereat the sage took forth
Two golden Darics from his belt, and said,
“ Here's payment for your draught : I well have
gained
My wager, and the fishes gain their lives.”
Wherewith he left them ; and the story ran

Through all Crotona, as from glen to glen
The travelling thunder rolls.

DIAGORAS.

Does this tale
Deserve our sober credence?

MILO.

Who were there
Can answer that ; myself can only say
He hath a marvellous gift of casting count,
That overleaps the function of our wit
By Nature's common grant ; and, for his love
To fish and every breathing form that moves
It is a prime point in his discipline
To touch the life of things with holy fear,
Which some do hold so nicely that they brook
No flesh for food, and do repair their bloods
With innocent herbs, sweet milk, and barley cakes.

DIAGORAS.

In Egypt there are sacred beasts that live
More honoured than the king ; and I have heard
On Ganga's banks the twice-born priests withdraw
Their lips from blood, for subtle reasons laid
In their theology.

MILO.

I have heard it said
That in his youth he travelled far beyond
High-cedared Lebanon, and the pastoral bounds

C

Of the men-hating Hebrews, to the banks
Of Indus and Hydaspes, gathering there
Deep-thoughted dogmas, about march of souls
Through masks of changeful bodies.

DIAGORAS.

Even so ;
And 'tis most likely that he spares the brutes,
Fearing to harm some soul of kindred man
That walks in bestial tenement encased,
For castigation of some bestial sin
That shamed his human form.

MILO.

'Tis very like ;
And in the common parley of the town
Himself hath memory of precedent states
In which he walked the earth : some say he was
Euphorbus, son of Panthöus, whose sharp spear
Wounded Patroclus on red Ilium's plain ;
Since when through various shapes of men he
passed
By steps of just ascension, till he scaled
The top of virtue, and now lives a sage.
But these are matters which his wisdom shuns
To fling upon the glass of common minds,
Prone still to mar the image they reflect ;
All things to all men only fools will tell,
Truth profits none but those who use it well ;
So I have heard him oft.

DIAGORAS.

What man is that
With long white robe, and white-dependent beard,
Who with serene and sober gravity
Winds round the rock?

MILO.

Where mean you?

DIAGORAS.

Here below.

MILO.

It is himself.

DIAGORAS.

What self?—Pythagoras?

MILO.

Most surely: up the swallow rock he climbs,
And will be here anon.

DIAGORAS.

He comes this way.

MILO.

Jove speed the chance! now bring your questioning
Before the oracle; henceforth I am dumb.

[*Enter Pythagoras from below.*]

PYTHAGORAS.

How art thou, Milo? Would I were as strong
In all the strength that makes a man a man
As Milo is in muscle!

MILO.

Were I as strong
In all the strength that makes a wise man wise
As now to sinewy grasp and litheness bred,
I'd be more wise than wise Pythagoras.

PYTHAGORAS.

Jove give you grace for many years to live
The Hercules of Crotona, more to earth
Than he in heaven to heaven ! but who's your
friend ?

MILO.

A worthy man, high honoured priest of Jove,
From Metapontum come to grace the feast
Of the Lacinian Hera, sister spouse
To the great god he serves.

PYTHAGORAS.

Hail, honoured sir !

DIAGORAS.

Mine eyes are blest to-day, beholding what,
From the vague witness of the ear, I knew
At priestly Memphis.

PYTHAGORAS.

Wert thou in Egypt ?

DIAGORAS.

The strong desire of wisdom stayed me there
Two years in converse with the learned priests.

PYTHAGORAS.

Would that all Greeks were with your wisdom wise
To learn before they teach ! we are the growth
Of yesterday, and in our green conceit
Deem that, unfathered by an older race,
We from our native Argive glebe upshot
And blossomed into virtue from a seed,
Self-sown, self-watered ! but where sacred Nile
Pours his salubrious flood through fields that heave
With rich vivific slime, old Wisdom sits
On hoary throne, and peers serenely great
Above us pigmies, as a glittering-crowned
Star-neighbouring peak o'erlooks the undulant
downs
That edge the coast with greenness. To be wise
Greece first should know her ignorance.

DIAGORAS.

" We Greeks

Are always children ;" so the high priest said
To me at Heliopolis ; and the word
Came like a goad, and like a nail remains.

PYTHAGORAS.

No word is worth that not in goadwise comes
And pricks to action ; men there be that make
Parade of fluency, and deftly play
With points of speech as jugglers toss their balls ;
A tinkling crew, from whose light-squandered wit
No seed of virtue grows.

DIAGORAS.

When I was young
 Such talkers tickled me ; then all my soul
 Lodged in mine ear, and facile fancy fed
 On twinkling tropes : now, wary-wise, I learn
 From no man who makes market of his wit,
 But from the tree that in ripe season drops
 The fruit of long years of unvaunted growth
 I gather wisdom ; and in chief from thee,
 Whose school of virtue is Crotona's crown,
 Would gladly glean what truth thy ken may deem
 Meet for my learning.

PYTHAGORAS.

We have a sentence famous in our school—
“ Wear not the types of gods upon your ring.”

DIAGORAS.

A pictured parable, and meaning ——?

PYTHAGORAS.

This,
 Show not to all men always all the things
 Most worth the showing.

DIAGORAS.

And the application?

PYTHAGORAS.

This simply—to the vulgar class with whom
 Raw sense usurps ripe reason's seat we teach

Nothing ; but on the unfilmèd eye we pour
Intelligential light ; and to Jove's priest,
Who from the supreme wisdom wisdom draws,
Unsworn, unpledged, Pythagoras may unveil
The golden best of all Pythagoras knows.

DIAGORAS.

Jove make me worthy of your trust ! even now
I talked with Milo of your doctrine pure
And discipline severe, and inly long
From your own lips to imbibe the sage discourse,
As he who scents a fragrant fruit desires
To sip its sweetness.

PYTHAGORAS.

What I can I will
Give to your questioning ; but I make no boast
Of novel dogmas ; I have never forged
Private conceits, nor hugged, for they were mine,
The pretty pets, the bantlings of my brain.
Old truth I preach, from sempiternal source
Of primal inspiration, owned by men
When men lived near the gods ; if I am wise,
I know whence wisdom flows ; the biggest stream
Is but the small fed by the small, and all
By Jove's pure wells were fathered in the sky.

DIAGORAS.

The wise man of Miletus thus declared
The FIRST OF THINGS IS WATER ; I would know
If he spake well in this.

PYTHAGORAS.

Well : but before
His first of causes a diviner first
Gave law to wet and dry, and hot and cold.

DIAGORAS.

What first was that ?

PYTHAGORAS.

NUMBER.

DIAGORAS.

How mean you this ?

PYTHAGORAS.

Hear, and digest : this single word unlocks
The riddle of the world. The world is order ;
Order is numbered multitude, marshalled well
In calculated spaces. See this flower
That spreads its starry coronet to the sun,
Beautiful, golden, in the dainty trim
Of its bright circlet, and the delicate green
Embracement of the cup that bears the crown ;
Each part is numbered, every leaflet cut
With living arithmetic, nice and true,
That shames all skill of craftsman. Count the parts.

DIAGORAS.

Five golden segments in the crown, and ten
Green leaflets in the cup, five large, five small,
With cunning alternation finely set.

PYTHAGORAS.

Count now the stamens that like satellites
Keep circular guard around the central germ.

DIAGORAS.

I've told them twice : I think they number ten.

PYTHAGORAS.

So right ; and thus the number of the plant
Is ten, what else were lawless huddlement,
Chaotic, rude, unknown, unknowable ;
But by the sacred limit of the ten
Now from the waste infinitude redeemed
Into chaste order's ranks, and disciplined
Into the file of beauty.

MILO.

I see this now
For the first time ; what published fools we are,
Looking with open eyes on miracles
From day to day—beneath—above—around,
And seeing—nothing !

PYTHAGORAS.

If but Athena's grace
Would salve our eyes, we'd see a host of gods
In every tumult working to a plan.

DIAGORAS.

I've heard it said that 'neath the stony ribs
Of inorganic rocks there dwells a power

That moulds the obdurate atoms of the flint
Into fine angles, measured most exact
By mathematic rule.

PYTHAGORAS.

And I have walked
In lands where hills in measured platforms rose
Tier upon tier, and every tier was built
Of jointed blocks that fitted each to each
With nice compagination, like the bars
Welded in Vulcan's stithy ; thou canst find
Nowhere in Nature where not number reigns.

DIAGORAS.

When the birds sing in spring, and zephyrs shake
The leafy grove, the rush of warbled sounds
That thrills the bosom of the fragrant air
With the wild gladness of new procreant life,
Seems a most sweet confusion.

PYTHAGORAS.

Least of all
In sounds confusion reigns ; and melody,
Without nice number fitting note to note,
Would shriek like tempest in the tortured ear,
And rend all hearing with discordant bray.

DIAGORAS.

How know you this? What man that measures fields
With chain and rod and mathematic law,
Can tell the inches of the cuckoo's note?

PYTHAGORAS.

The cuckoo's note is a most cunning lute,
And lutes have numbered strings, and oaten pipes
Have numbered stops. Come thou to me to-morrow
In the cool plane-tree walk behind the school,
And I will show thee how the self-same string
With nicely varied tension gently glides
From wave to wave concordant, though the whole
Sweet sequence of brave harmonies that wake
The chambered ear to rapture ; break the law
Of numbered intervals that links the chain
Of just vibrations, and the clashing sounds
With grating din will saw the shrinking ear
Of him that heard in rooted ecstasy,
Till he pray Jove for deafness !

DIAGORAS.

'Tis most strange !

But certes some things be that scorn control
And wanton in confusion. Who hath measured
The cloud, the storm-wind, and the waterfall ?

PYTHAGORAS.

God measures all things ; is himself the measure
Of all that is, hath been, or yet may be.
The headlong waterfall that o'er the cliff
Flings its full-breasted force, and fiercely smites
The grey rocks with its sweeping scourge, and in
The deep brown granite cauldron boils below,
With sleepless whirling eddies, and white foam
Of bubbles bursting still, and still to burst—

This water hath a number, every drop
Atom to atom joined by certain law,
Nice as the notes of melody adjured
From strings by harper's magic. Take that crust
Of curled black lichen creeping o'er the face
Of the red rock ; thou see'st no order there ;
But if some god might point thine eye more keen
To see what now its grosser view ignores,
And thou mightst dive into its heart, and probe
The pulsing alleys of its tissued life,
Then wouldst thou find with fine ecstatic ken
A mustered and a marshalled beauty there,
As perfect as the ordered strategy
Of that proud Memphian conqueror who mapped
The world with battle-fields, and played with lives
As children play with bowls, and made all lands
The chess-board of his vast imperial scheme.
His movements, as they hurried to and fro
Freighted with death, seemed lawless as the rush
Of savage beasts unkennelled ; but full well
He knew the portioned number of his host ;
And with one glance from him, they from afar
Gathered the sundered looseness of their ranks,
And with concentric curious-counted speed
Bore on the station marked for doom, and burst
In calculated thunder. Dost thou see
This small brown hillock ?

DIAGORAS.

Yes ; it is an ant-hill.

MILO.

How deftly they drive on, and whirl about,
Some here, some there, o'er one another's heads !
And some creep into holes, and some creep out,
And some with straws are galloping, and some
With little sticks are hobbling, and some push
A small white roll upon their tiny snouts ;
Incalculable maze ! I marvel much
If evermore they make this motley stir ;
Their reeling makes me dizzy, as the light
Far shimmering o'er the million-pointed wave
Palsies the eye.

PYTHAGORAS.

The palsied eye proclaims
His own defect ; and weak nerves are confounded
Where no confusion is.

DIAGORAS.

Is there none here ?

PYTHAGORAS.

More order than in your weak brain or mine,
Or any brain that harbours human thoughts.
Not less than Memphian pontiffs, nicely trained
To measure the long-centuried march of stars,
Instinct with mathematic skill from Jove,
These puny craftsmen know what number means.

DIAGORAS.

Have they a plan ?

PYTHAGORAS.

Doubt not ; as much as he
Who piled the numbered legions of the bricks
Into the pyramids that sentinel
The seven-mouth'd Nile.

DIAGORAS.

'Tis wondrous strange.

PYTHAGORAS.

Far stranger, if thou knew
The hot heart of that sphered metropolis,
Whereof thou now but seest the outer ports,
And a few hundred peaceful citizens
By our ungracious intrusion frayed.
Not Babylon the mighty, nor the pomp
Of hundred-gated, many-templed Thebes,
Hath streets more orderly. Every lane, I wot,
Is numbered here, and every crossway swept.
This busy people, as their skill may be,
Hath each his portioned task ; some delve and
burrow,
And carve huge tunnels where a passage fails,
And span the void with arches, and some scoop
A drain for water, whose untimely swell
Might flood the colony ; some are sent abroad
To cater stores for winter ; and some pile
The newly plundered grain. Some run, some wait,
Some sweat and serve, some hold a high command,
But each a needful work fulfils, and all
By mystic number's harmony combine
The swarming units to a jointed whole.

MILO.

And in my garden I have marked the bees,
Most cunning engineers, and ordered well.

PYTHAGORAS.

All things are full of cunning ; even fools
Have wisdom for their need ; and multitude
By number grouped, and by discretion used
Is power. Hold thou this faith with grappling-
hooks,

All things in the vast world are done by law,
And law is number, and all numbers are
The thoughts of gods that from deep counsel take
Significant masks to play their pictured parts
Upon the stage of being. Every grain
Of the ribb'd sand is numbered, every whiff
Of every breeze, all fleecy mists that fleck
The blue concave, all bubbles of the brine,
All flies that swarm from hot-fermenting beds
In sweltering summer, every seed that floats
On plummy vans into the bosomed earth ;
All sounds of earth and sky, the chirp of birds,
The roar of lions, and the lisp of babes,
The pealing thunder, and the tinkling rill,
The trumpet-tongued exploits of dинful war,
And the low syllabled breath of fearful prayer,
God speaks their mystic number, and they are.

DIAGORAS.

At Heliopolis an aged priest,
White with the ripe repose of well-spent years,

Oft times at set of sun discoursed to me
Of special virtue in the ordered tale
Of every number, and above the rest
With eloquent loving preference he praised
The sacred trine.

PYTHAGORAS.

Wisely the wise man spake.
There is no number of rare quality
Like THREE ; it is the strong and plastic bond
That bridges two extremes, and nicely shapes
From three a unity, a whole that meets
The claim of reason and the plan of Jove.
For Jove is one ; and, when two stand apart
Without a third to link them, unity
Is lost, and God divided from Himself.
Thus earth and fire, the heavy and the light,
Are bound together by the graded kinds
Of air and water ; as to fire the air,
So to the air the water ; and as air
To water, so is water to gross earth
By just degrees of apt proportion tuned ;
And thus by process of well-blended threes,
And linked gradations cunningly combined,
The sundered many to their primal type
Slide kindly back, and the great world is one.

MILO.

And therefore three libations at a feast
Give perfect thanks ; and in wise Homer's song
By three great deities each hero swears,
Dark-clouded Jove, Athena, and Apollo.

DIAGORAS.

Oft times in pictured Memphian fanes I saw
Three seated gods one common altar grace ;
And the priest said an old thrice-sacred law
Forbade their sundering.

PYTHAGORAS.

Something more than law,
Nature and the necessity of things
Demand the three. On Ganga's sacred banks
The gymnosophists to a triform God
Pray wisely. Three in one, and one in Three,
Strong to create, to save, and to destroy
Eternal Trine of functions that must be,
While the Unlimited and Absolute walks
Self-bounded into Finitude. They are fools
Who deem that aught in holy creed revered
Stands by a law which he who made can mar ;
Jove may not will to do what if he willed
He were not Jove ; a trinity in God
Egypt and Greece, and Ganga's sons adore
By the essential virtue of the Trine ;
Even as in man, in whom a god doth dwell,
Between the naked Thought and harnessed Deed,
To bridge the gap the spoken Word appears,
And through the word full-panoplied the Thought
Goes conquering forth in stable act complete ;
And thought and deed by word are unified,
Being three into one energizing whole,
A trinity in unity of powers
That makes a man a man, the world a world.

D

DIAGORAS.

Thou hast unveiled my sight ; and now I see
Where I saw nought, the office of the THREE ;
And I remember Asclepiades
The wise old leech in Metapontum, skilled
In all the virtues of all herbs that grow,
Said that Demeter gives the nurturing wheat
Fruited from flowers whose number is the three.

PYTHAGORAS.

That any child may learn who in the spring
Looks in the bloom that shoots out from the sheath
By summer's heat unhardened. There you count
Three threads erect, that stand with yellow caps
Like sentinels around the chambered cell,
Where swells the foodful grain.

DIAGORAS.

How wonderful !

PYTHAGORAS.

All things are wonderful ; who wonders not,
Hath eyes and sees not ; wonder is the key
Of knowledge and of worship to the wise ;
And if there be who with unloving hands
Push the rich loveliness of things aside,
Nor bend the knee before the shaping Power
That works in blazing star, and breathing dust,
Poor frosty souls ! if I could strain cold ice
To my warm bosom, I could live with them
In bonds of love ; but let them live alone,

Knowing that nought is worthy to be known,
Nourished by heartless sneers and hollow jests
And worshipping—if worship be for them—
Their little selves !

DIAGORAS.

Would God that all
Our priests in Metapontum with like phrase,
Seasoned their chanted liturgies ; but now
They turn the crazy mill-wheel of old rites
With plashing dribblets, and rehearse their store
Of monstered legends to a gaping throng,
Which makes the prudent scoff ; and much I fear,
Lest with the rank offence of sleepy prayers
And fables moulded when the baby-world
Lay cradled in light dreams, fair Greece be turned
From faith, and live divorced from holy fear
That links men with the gods. Ourselves have
taught
The babbling sophist to bemock the gods ;
Ourselves, who shame divinity with tales
That make chaste maidens blush ; and now our youth
Are trained to slight our worship, and to serve
The gods with sham lip-mumbled prayers, of which
The heart knows nothing. Oft times I have wept
With tears that no man sees, and I make moans
With moans that no man hears, when I revolve,
How, if this rank-sown sceptic seed shall shoot
To natural topping, our fair host of gods
That makes a world a garden good for men,
Well watered and well sunned, shall, by the frost

Of pert-mouthed witlings blasted, shrink and droop,
And blacken into dust, trod under foot
Of aweless men, who in the sun delight
To spy black spots, and make most holy things
A theme for laughter, and a text for sneers.
Of powers they talk, and forces, vortices,
Figures, and spaces, fulness and a void,
Attractions and repulsions, atoms wed
Blindly to atoms, and all blindly borne
Through blank infinitude with fortuitous reel,
Till with a random bump they meet, and from
Their chaos strike out order ; this they teach,
And this they vend for wisdom ; but of Jove
They speak not, by whose counsel all things stand,
Dread thunder-launching lord ; nor of his spouse,
The great-eyed Hera, matronly and proud ;
Nor of Apollo with his blazing darts
Chasing god-hated darkness from the sky ;
Nor of the flashing-eyed Athena, wise
To purchase peace by prompt display of war.
All this must perish, if dear Greece shall stint
Her lovely faith, and barrenly increase
Mere itch of knowledge, leaving to lean eyes,
For the bright smile that warms the face o' the
world,
A bald, disgodded, lightless, loveless grey !

PYTHAGORAS.

Fear not ; the faith that in the hearts of men
Lives now shall live for ever. The Jove that reigns
To-day, eternal as the stable skies

Whose power he wields, sits on unshaken throne.
All things are full of change ; but all the change
Is the new mask of him that changeth never ;
If Zeus might cease to reign, another name
Shall launch the thunderbolt and wheel the spheres ;
Greek or Barbarian, Jove shall still be Jove,
Voiced with Hellenic or Phœnician breath,
His fateful essence with impartial glance
Shoots through the shifting shibboleths of creeds
With multiform acknowledgment, yet one Power,
Who by the heart, not by the tongue, discerns
His worshippers ; names are but minted signs
For needful currency, the thing behind
By thousand symbols symbolled is but one.
Zeus recks not what we call him, how men may
With hoar traditional pomp of custom'd style,
Parade him for their reverence ; he is pleased
With the best form that suits each suppliant's need,
And owns alike the wise man's reasoned hymn,
And the rude savage with his mumbled charm
And neck-strung amulet. And for the tales
That bards with fancy's airy tissue weave,
When men have ceased to hear them and believe,
Jove is well pleased that Time shall ring their knell.

DIAGORAS.

Grant it be so : yet must I fear the hand
That plucks a flower from a well-woven wreath ;
A drunken Hercules may pull down a house
That long shall wait the master-builder's craft
To set its shaken joints. Jove sits secure

In heaven, you say ; 'tis well ; meanwhile below
We rock on seas of doubt, and see old thrones
Start from their roots, by sharp earth-shaking throes
Of fearful change. And if the grey report
Of ancient piety shield our shrines from touch
Of shameless force, and awful reverence shun
To rend the sacred vest that robes a god,
Not shielded by such fear, our archons sit
On the high bench of state. I long have marked
How in this land the bonds of old respect
Are snapt ; and now a green unseasoned brood,
Blown with the bubbling yeast of yesterday,
And spreading broad their fans of mushroom wealth,
Spurn the conditions of their birth, and stretch
Unlicensed hands to snatch the ancestral mace
From ancient honour's gripe. Fair order thus
Is marred in States ; old dignity departs ;
The due gradations of just rank and place
Are levelled ; no man owes respect to man ;
And each man seizes what he knows to hold
By right of might and sleight of juggling phrase ;
For all are free they say, and equal all,
And one as good as t'other.

PYTHAGORAS.

I have known
Enough of men and their unreasoned ways
To deem your fears not causeless. Liberty
Is a strong wine all men would gladly quaff,
But few quaff wisely ; 'tis a gallant ship,
That with full-bellied sail spread to the breeze,

Needs weightier ballast and a wiser helm.
Men are like school-boys wishing to be free
From masters whom, to learn, they must obey ;
The boys are stupid, foolish, what you will,
And still will wish the thing that hurts them still ;
But this remember, if the master be
False to his function, and unlearned to spell,
No one will blame the boys if they rebel.
Take hence your lesson ; you by old descent
The natural heads and helmsmen of the State
Are lawful masters of the school, and sit
On thrones of order ; if you order well
Your States are happy, and your seats are sure ;
Men hate control ; but for the fear of worse
They live content when they are well controlled.
The reins are yours ; and, if some colt shall kick,
Use well the lash, and Jove will help the strong ;
But if you live self-pleasers, being perched
On thrones of honour for the general weal,
And use the people but as sheep to shear
That you may sit in woolly coats, while they
Stand shivering in the blast, then righteous Jove
Will send twin scourges to chastise your sins,
The democrat and despot, this of that
The lawful offspring, both of liberty
The natural growth, where pampered privilege
Rules for itself, and to its work untrue,
Neglects the many and corrupts the few.

DIAGORAS.

Wisely you speak : ourselves the vipers breed
That bite us ; insolence in the few begets

Hate in the many ; hatred breeds revolt ;
Revolt, where all are free to rise and rule,
Breeds anarchy, whose wild chaotic reign
Calls in the despot with strong will to keep
Sharp knives from maddened hands ; and thus we
reel

From vassalage to vassalage, through fits
Of drunken freedom,—glorious for an hour !

PYTHAGORAS.

We are but children practising to walk,
Still, stumbling, still to tempt our feet again.
The gods are patient ; time is long ; and change
Treads on the steps of change, till men shall learn
From mighty heads discrowned and trampled
thrones,

That Wisdom only reigns by right divine,
And where the wise rule, and the fools obey
Not force, but aptly-balanced forces sway ;
And for this end in our sworn brotherhood
We work here in Crotona, training each,
By course of wise obedience disciplined,
To know his betters, and to own their rule ;
Thus each for each, and all for all are trained,
As in the high-wrought quaintly builded ode
Note answers note, and verse to verse responds.

MILO.

Our Greekish ears, I fear, shall sooner hear
The spherul chimes than win this harmony
From the harsh bray of democratic brawls.

PYTHAGORAS.

Milo, all growth is slow ; but Jove hath made
The blustering March to pledge the blooming May ;
The seasons come ; we cannot spur their coming.
And if the Greeks, in wisdom's work the first,
Should lag in polity behind the march
Of some barbarian tanling, cradled now
Behind the Oscan hills, 'tis but a page
In the great lesson-book of Time,—a word
The stammering school-boy cannot spell to-day,
But some day will, when moons that grow from
moons

Bring sweet from sour, and ripeness from the
crude.

The gods give leash enough for human fools
To follow fools, and loss to breed more loss,
Till men by blunder upon blunder piled
Shall choose to cease from faith in multitudes,
Who, weighing wisdom by their blustering breaths,
Fling in the air their smutty caps, and cry
Huzza, to every flatterer ! The crude world
Takes centuries to learn one mellow truth.

DIAGORAS.

And I in this short hour have learned enough
To last me for a life. What sound was that ?

MILO.

It is the chorus of young men which rounds
This festive day with melody. Stand we aside,

While they shall mass their files. You will admire
Theano's skill, as you admired before ;
The youths were trained by her ; the verses drew
Their numbers from her fine harmonious soul.

The chorus of Young Men advances on the platform before the temple, and disposing themselves as in the opening chorus of Maidens, sing as follows :—

STROPHE.

When man first rose from teeming ground
A rude unfinished thing was he,
And looked with blank amaze around
On the strange sky, and land, and sea.

Whether from Egypt's genial mud
When earth was young he crawled to view,
Or Argive Inachus' sacred flood
The big untutored baby knew.

Naked he stood ; to veil his shame
No curious-tissued rag he wore ;
No edged tool he knew to frame,
Or sheltering roof, or barring door.

But in the self-built cavern rude
His lazy length on stony bed
He stretched supine, and all his food
Was mountain berries black and red.

The horn'd and talon'd brood he feared,
The nightly wolves that howl and roam ;

And when the snake his crest upreared,
He slunk into his craven home.

A helpless, shiftless, aimless thing,
With weak, unpractised, blundering brain ;
In woods he owned the lion king,
And the wild bull upon the plain.

ANTISTROPHE.

But when his brain to firmness grew,
And Thought his manly stature gained,
The wildered world its master knew,
Force bowed the neck, and Reason reigned.

The sturdy ox, the snorting steed,
The light-heeled, the slow-gaited brute
He caught, and trained to serve his need
With lustier loins or fleeter foot.

The pointed flint he made his tool,
His sceptre was the bleachèd bone ;
The splintered oak, the twisted wool,
The cleavèd slate his service own.

From sifted sand the twinkling ore
He drew ; with nicely sundering sleight
Black iron's adamantine store
He charmed from stone to arm his might.

And where he came with skilful plan
And reason's mild subduing law,

The dwindled forest fled from man,
The waste a blooming garden saw.

And tents with polished poles were reared,
And pillared domes, and vaulted aisles,
And porch and pictured wall appeared,
And towers, and proud palatial piles, .

EPODE.

And kings with sceptred honour ruled ;
And hostile clans in brawling bred,
By common dangers harshly schooled
Took law from one imperial head.

But most to help the noblest need
Of human thought, Religion grew,
With wingèd hymn, and awful creed,
And myth of various woven hue.

And prophets spake, and oracles
Gave fateful note of coming harm,
And sacred rites and holy spells
Smoothed the guilt-stricken soul's alarm.

And saintly sage and thoughtful seer
On meditation's brooding wings
Sublimely borne, with vision clear
Pierced through the sensuous veil of things.

And through creation's starry girth
With reverent joy and wonder saw

Of things in heaven, and things on earth
The mystic number and the Law.

And heard with raptured ear the chime
Of spheres on spheres that wheel for ever,
The swell and fall of shoreless Time,
The roll of Life's exhaustless river.

And taught man's creeping soul to rise
From stony glebe and dusty sod,
And track with ever new surprise
The flaming footsteps of a god.

Such strength by fate's far-stretching plan
To wise deep-thoughted man was given
By Jove, who rules the Olympian clan
And great-eyed Hera, queen of heaven.

PYTHAGORAS.

Good sirs, adieu ! these vesper notes shall ring
My lullaby to-night. To-morrow morn
Jove give us happy meeting, when the great
Procession crowns the feast !

MILO.

Farewell, good master !

DIAGORAS.

Jove rain great grace on wise Pythagoras !

THALES

Ὁ μὲν οὖν Θαλῆς ὕδωρ εἶναι τὴν ἀρχὴν φησιν, λαβὼν ἴσως τὴν
ὑπόληψιν ἐκ τοῦ πάντων ὁρᾶν τὴν τροφὴν ὑγρὰν οὔσαν, καὶ διὰ τὸ
πάντων τὰ σπέρματα τὴν φύσιν ὑγρὰν ἔχειν, τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ ἀρχὴν τῆς
φύσεως εἶναι τοῖς ὑγροῖς.

ARISTOTLE.

