

WISDOM

HUMAN & DIVINE

by

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Wisdom

Human & Divine

Being a comparison of the groping after the truth of the ancient philosophers with the truth as it is revealed in Scripture, in order that the believer may the better appreciate the Word of God.

by

CHARLES H. WELCH

The personal Christ, the end of all philosophy.

Philosophy is mentioned but once in Scripture, only to be set aside as "vain and deceitful" (Col. ii. 8). Philosophers are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles—the "Epicureans and Stoics" (Acts xvii. 18)—but their ignorance is exposed by the apostle, who speaks of the "unknown God" whom they "ignorantly worshipped." To the believer in Christ, philosophy can contribute nothing. All that approximates to truth in philosophy is found without admixture in the Scriptures. Philosophy is a part of the wisdom of this world that comes to nought.

There is, however, a side of the question that is not without a bearing upon us all. The same apostle who exposed the emptiness of philosophy and taught the fulness of Christ, did not adopt towards these ancient philosophers an attitude of

scorn, but rather one of pity. One piece of philosophy that the believer might well learn is that "Truth is one," no matter by whom made known. The apostle has no hesitation in quoting the hymn of the Stoic Cleanthes in Acts xvii. 28, even though that philosopher was born some 300 years before Christ, and was an unbeliever.

The apostle remembers that the Greeks and the Jews are of "one blood"; and teaches that the providence of God towards them was in order that "they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us" (Acts xvii. 26, 27).

We shall realize more fully the bearing of these words upon the Stoic and Epicurean hearers after we have learned something of their peculiar teaching. Speaking to the idolaters at Lystra, the apostle says:—

"He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts xiv. 17).

The second chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, problematic though it be, plainly indicates that the nations of the earth, although without the Law of Moses, were not left without witness. Moreover the apostle writes:—

"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. ii. 14, 15).

"Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?" (Rom. ii. 26).

The testimony of Rom. i. 19—23 is explicit. That which *may be known* of God, apart from Christ and His finished work, had been shown to the nations of the earth. They knew God, but they glorified Him not as God, and degenerated in consequence. It would not, however, be either true or charitable to deny that, in spite of ignorance and darkness, there were still some who, with a desire for truth that puts us to shame, and a seeking that we could well emulate, "felt after" God, if haply they might find Him.

To us the Son of God has come, and with His coming has solved every problem that baffled ancient wisdom. If we could realize the struggles of unenlightened human wisdom, we might perhaps be more grateful for the light of revelation, and for the solution of all mystery "in the face of Jesus Christ."

It is with this object in view that we present an examination of the philosophy of the Ancients, trusting that we shall not only be chastened in spirit as we contrast our attitude to revealed truth with the intense desire of these men of old, but

that, by the very contemplation of their problems, we shall perceive the point in many neglected sayings of inspired Scripture. Speaking of but two out of many examples of ancient wisdom, F. W. Farrar says of the light that they had then, that it was "sufficient to give humility, and patience, and tenderness to an irresponsible Roman Emperor, and freedom and contentment, and imperial magnanimity to a Phrygian slave."

When writing to the Colossians, and warning them of the emptiness of philosophy, the apostle places in contrast the fact that in Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. ii. 8, 9). Here is a truth which, when once perceived, turns all other so called "light" into midnight darkness, and writes folly across the wisdom of the world. We read the word "bodily" here, but how many of us have appreciated its full significance? After we have followed with amazement the speculations and the reasonings of ancient wisdom, to discover that the quest for "God" or the "Absolute" leads at length to a frozen realm of abstract ideas, it is then that we realize with renewed joy and peace that in Christianity all doctrine and all revelation of the Godhead is *personal*. God is seen "in the face of Jesus Christ." The Word was "made flesh." God Who is invisible is made known by Him Who is "the Image of the invisible God":—

"Beware . . . philosophy . . . For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead *bodily*" (Col. ii. 8, 9).

The writer of these words cannot hope to convey to the reader the overwhelming sense of gratitude for the gift of Christ that the contemplation of the use of one Greek word brought to him in this connection. The word is found in Acts xvii. 27. The apostle is speaking of the heathen world left in ignorance and darkness, with only external providential dealings to guide them:—

"That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might FEEL after Him, and find Him" (Acts xvii. 27).

The word occurs again in Luke xxiv. and I John:—

"Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: HANDLE Me and see" (Luke xxiv. 39).

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have HANDLED, of the Word of Life" (1 John i. 1).

To us has been made known the "mystery of godliness, God was manifested in the flesh." The ancient philosophers never dreamed that all their problems would be solved by the condescension of God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In

one sentence the Saviour settled the quest of the ages: "*He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.*"

With the Scriptures before him, the humblest believer knows more than all the philosophers of antiquity. As it has been written concerning even the child at Sunday School:—

" Each little voice in turn
Some glorious truth proclaims,
What sages would have died to learn
Now taught by cottage dames."

Cowper, the writer of the Olney Hymns, and translator of the Iliad and the Odyssey, a man who knew both the truth of the gospel, and the teaching of the philosophers, wrote:—

"Tis revelation satisfies all doubts

* * *

How oft, when Paul has served us with a text,
Has Epictetus, Plato, Tully, preached!
Men that, if now alive, would sit content
And humble learners of a Saviour's worth,
Preach it who might. Such was their love of truth,
Their thirst of knowledge, and their candour too."

We are not going to fall into the error of allowing Plato to preach; what we hope to do in subsequent articles is to compare the "feeling after" of unassisted wisdom, with the "Handle Me and see" of the revelation of God in Christ. If at the end of each article our hearts do not burn within us as we remember, in contrast with the painful gropings of antiquity, how He, the Personal Word, talks to us by the way, our work will have been in vain. We earnestly pray that no reader will fail to appreciate as never before the grace of God manifested to us "in the face of Jesus Christ."

The work of the law written on the heart (Rom. ii. 15)
as exhibited in the writings of two philosophers.

In our opening article, we sought to show that the Scriptures recognise that the ancient world had some knowledge of God, but that to a large extent this knowledge was abandoned. Nevertheless, the providence of God over all His works was so arranged that men should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him—"though He be not far from every one of us." It is not that God has removed Himself from man, but that man, by sin, cannot see or understand. Man needs a Mediator, he needs a Saviour; and the immense difference between all philosophy and the revelation of God finds expression in the Person and Work of Christ. Where the philosopher "felt after" but found not, the believer can say, "Our hands have handled." The One Who has revealed the Father to us has also removed our sin. Philosophy knows neither an atonement nor a redeemer, and must inevitably fail.

Before we go further, let us allow some of these ancient philosophers to speak for themselves, so that we may see just how far they penetrated, and just where they stopped. Let us go back to ancient Egypt, famed for its wisdom. We are told that Solomon's wisdom was such that it excelled "all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kings iv. 30), a comparison that prevents us from unceremoniously setting aside the wisdom of Egypt as superstition or ignorance. When Stephen speaks of Moses, he says that he was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts vii. 22). Moses certainly had much more to learn, and a great deal to unlearn, before he became the meekest man in all the earth and a fit instrument for the Lord to use, but the reference here to the wisdom of Egypt is sufficient to prevent our dismissing it scornfully.

Scattered through the writings of ancient Egypt are a number of "loan words" of Semitic origin, indicating close contact with Hebrew-speaking people and their ideas. For example, the words "a skilful scribe" are *sopher yode*; "mountain" is *har*; "quick" or "apt" is *maher*; "pure gold" is *kethem*, etc. In the British Museum there is a papyrus, numbered 10474, which dates from about the XVIIIth. dynasty, or the close of Israel's sojourn in Egypt. This papyrus contains the teaching of Amen-Em-Ope; and in a land that was so overrun with idols it is surely worthy of note that Amen-Em-Ope speaks of "God." In case some reader may think this mere sentiment on our part, we would remind him that such an eminently godly Hebrew as Joseph found no reason

against a marriage with the daughter of a priest of On (Gen. xli. 50). We do not intend giving many quotations from this papyrus, but the following are so much in line with passages in the Scriptures as to make us wonder how much these early Egyptians knew of the truth. Take as an example the following parallels with passages in the epistle of James:—

“The tongue of man is the rudder of a ship,
But the Universal Lord is the pilot.”

“Be not influenced with fine clothes,
And refuse not him that is in rags.”

“Of a truth thou knowest not the thoughts of God.
Thou canst not realise (?) the morrow” (*Amen-Em-Ope*).

“Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth” (Jas. iii. 4).

“If there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment: and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say to him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye then not partial . . . ?” (Jas. ii. 2—4).

“Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow” (Jas. iv. 13, 14).

We will give three more examples from the same papyrus, in this case parallel with passages in the Book of Proverbs:—

“Charcoal to embers, and wood to fire,
And a contentious man to inflame strife.”

“Better is bread with a happy heart
Than wealth with trouble.”

“Say not, I have no sin,
And be not at pains to (conceal) it.
Move not the scales, and falsify not the weights,
And diminish not the parts of the corn measure” (*Amen-Em-Ope*).

“As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire;
So is a contentious man to kindle strife” (Prov. xxvi. 21).

“Better is a little with the fear of the Lord
Than great treasure and trouble therewith” (Prov. xv. 16).

“Who can say, I have made my heart clean,
I am pure from my sin?
Divers weights and divers measures,
Both of them are alike abomination to the Lord” (Prov. xx. 9, 10).

As we have already remarked, the central doctrine of our faith, the finished work of the Son of God, is entirely absent from the teaching of unenlightened man; but the moral teaching of this ancient Egyptian is, nevertheless, in some respects comparable with the teaching of Solomon or of James.

Coming to the times of the apostle Paul, we have the writings of a slave named Epictetus. The following extracts from his discourses will help us to perceive how far he had traversed the road of “feeling after, if haply he might find.”

"Freedom and slavery are but names, respectively, of virtue and of vice: and both of them depend upon the will. But neither of them has anything to do with those things in which the will has no share. For no one is a slave where the will is free."

"Fortune is an evil bond of the body, vice of the soul; for he is a slave whose body is free, but whose soul is bound, and, on the contrary, he is free whose body is bound, but whose soul is free" (*Epictetus*).

The reader will immediately think of Paul's words to the Corinthians and to the Romans:—

"He that is called in the Lord, being a slave, is the Lord's freeman" (1 Cor. vii. 22).

"When ye were the slaves of sin, ye were free from righteousness But now being made free from sin, and become slaves to God" (Rom. vi. 20, 22).

Epictetus was asked, "Who among men is rich?" to which he replied: "He who suffices for himself." The same truth is expressed in the Book of Proverbs: "A good man shall be satisfied from himself" (Prov. xiv. 14).

Again, when he was asked, "Who is free?" he replied, "The man who masters his own self." This is much the same truth as Solomon expresses in Prov. xvi. 32:—

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; And he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

Epictetus could not have given an answer to the deepest needs of the heart of man, for the liberating truth of redemption forms no part of human philosophy; but the parallel with O.T. morality is very evident.

There is also a remarkable parallel between the advice of Paul to the Corinthians concerning marriage, and that of Epictetus:—

"Since the condition of things is such as it now is, as though we were on the eve of battle, ought not the Cynic to be entirely *without distraction* for the service of God?" (*Epictetus*).

"I suppose, therefore, that this is good for the present distress that ye may attend upon the Lord *without distraction*" (1 Cor. vii. 26, 35).

The same Greek words are used by both writers in the phrase, "*without distraction*."

When Epictetus was asked how a man could grieve his enemy, he replied: "By preparing to act in the noblest way." So the apostle, in Romans, writes:—

"If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. xii. 20).

The following argument used by Epictetus is an interesting parallel with Paul's use of the "Jew inwardly" in Rom. ii.:—

“ When we see a trimmer, we are in the habit of saying, This is no Jew ; he is only acting the part of one ; but when a man takes up the entire condition of a proselyte, thoroughly imbued with Jewish doctrines, then he is in reality as is called a Jew. So, we philosophers too, dipped in a false dye, are Jews in name, but in reality are something else we call ourselves philosophers when we cannot even play the part of men ” (*Epictetus*).

“ He is not a Jew who is one outwardly ; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh : but he is a Jew who is one inwardly : and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men, but of God ” (Rom. ii. 28, 29).

In his description of a true Cynic, Epictetus makes a remark that reminds us somewhat of Paul’s words in Phil. iii. and other places:—

“ Nor must he marry ; marriage is right and honourable in other men, but its entanglements, its expenses, its distractions, would render impossible a life devoted to the service of heaven. Nor will he mingle in the affairs of any commonwealth : his commonwealth is not Athens or Corinth, but mankind.”

We will not pursue these parallels further. If we have removed any existing prejudice, if we have excited the smallest sympathy with these men in their feeling after God, we have accomplished our end. We have no intention of setting up philosophy as a parallel with the faith. It is not and could not be. It lacks the essential ingredients of life and love

found only in the Person and work of the Redeemer. If, however, we feel the smallest shame at our own low standards, as we think of this crippled slave in the Court of Nero, standing so solidly against its wealth and sin, our study will not have been in vain. And as we consider our own privileges, surely we shall turn in thankfulness to Him Who has not left us in our natural darkness, but has been made unto us “ wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption ” (1 Cor. i. 30).

Some extracts from the writings of Seneca.

Before we pass on to review the gropings of men for the truth, in contrast with the glorious light of revelation, we feel

it incumbent upon us to give one more extract from an ancient philosopher, partly to give some idea of what a Stoic philosopher believed, but chiefly to demonstrate the parallels that exist between the writings of Seneca and the Scriptures.

Perhaps a word or two concerning the man himself is called for. Lucius Annæus Seneca was a Stoic philosopher, and the teacher of Nero; and it will surely quicken our interest in him to remember that while he lived amid all the guilt and shame of a Roman Court, fighting a losing battle for clean morals and upright conduct, there lived and died in despised Palestine the Son of God Himself, Who alone could have answered the cry of his soul. Gallio, before whom Paul stood, as recorded in the Acts, was the brother of Seneca, and a man of charm and gentleness, though this is not very evident in the reference concerned.

Most men owe much, either for good or ill, to their mothers. Seneca's mother lived in an age when immorality was not the exception but the rule among her class. To his mother Seneca writes :—

“ You never stained your face with walnut juice or rouge ; you never delighted in dresses indelicately low , your single ornament was a loveliness which no age could destroy ; your special glory was a conspicuous chastity.”

Such words find an approving echo in the instructions of Paul to Timothy, and in the epistles of Peter. And yet they were written at a time when, as recorded by Pliny, Lollia Paulina's second best dress of emeralds and pearls cost 40,000,000 sesterces, or more than £32,000 (Nat. Hist. ix. 35, 36). Tradition has it that Paul and Seneca met, and the letters that passed between them are to be read to this day. Anyone, however, who is acquainted with the character of Paul's epistles, or with the tone of Seneca's writings, could not accept these traditional letters as genuine.

The life story of Seneca is a tale to make angels weep, but we dare not attempt the smallest summary here. We pass on to our primary object, to give extracts from his writings, not so much to show what Stoic philosophy was, as to demonstrate how closely some of his teaching approaches the language of Scripture. Contrary to the custom of his day, Seneca made friends with his slaves, and it is possible that some of his household were believers. From their lips he may have heard echoes of the teaching of the Lord and of the apostle Paul.

In the following extracts from Seneca, we have refrained from printing the parallel Scripture, and have merely given the references. In most cases the parallel is obvious, but where there is any uncertainty, we trust that the reader will not fail to acquaint himself with the passage of Scripture referred to.

Some parallels between Seneca and Scripture.

"The mind, unless it is pure and holy, comprehends not God."	Matt. v. 8.
"A man is a robber even before he stains his hands; for he is already armed to slay, and has the desire to spoil."	Matt. v. 21, 22.
"Cast out whatsoever things rend thy heart: nay, if they could not be extracted otherwise, thou shouldst have plucked out thy heart itself with them."	Matt. v. 29.
"What will the wise man do when he is buffeted? He will do as Cato did when he was smitten on the mouth. He did not burst into a passion, did not avenge himself, did not even forgive it, but denied its having been done."	Matt. v. 39.
"If you imitate the gods, confer benefits even on the unthankful: for the sun rises even on the wicked, and the seas are open to pirates."	Matt. v. 45.
"Avoid a rough exterior and unshorn hair and a carelessly kept beard and professed hatred of money and a bed laid on the ground and whatever else affects ambitious display by a perverse path."	Matt. vi. 16.
"Do ye mark the pimples of others, being covered with countless ulcers? This is as if a man should mock at the moles or warts on the most beautiful persons, when he himself is devoured by a fierce scab."	Matt. vii. 3.
"Expect from others what you have done to another." "Let us so give as we would wish to receive."	Matt. vii. 12.
"Therefore good things cannot spring from evil . . . good does not grow of evil, any more than a fig of an olive tree. The fruit corresponds to the seed."	Matt. vii. 16, 17.
"Not otherwise than some rock standing alone in a shallow sea, which the waves cease not from whichever side they are driven to beat upon, and yet do not stir from its place."	Matt. vii. 25.
"Good men toil, they spend and are spent."	2 Cor. xii. 15.
"What blows do athletes receive in their face, what blows all over their body. Yet they bear all the torture from thirst of glory. Let us also overcome all things, for our reward is not a crown or a palm branch or the trumpeter proclaiming silence for the announcement of our name, but virtue and strength of mind and peace acquired ever after."	1 Cor. ix. 25.
"They consecrate the holy and immortal and inviolable gods in motionless matter of the vilest kind: they clothe them with the forms of men, and beasts and fishes."	Rom. i. 23.

"They are even enamoured of their own ill deeds which is the last ill of all: and then is their wretchedness complete, when shameful things not only delight them but are even approved by them."

Rom. i. 28, 32

"A man is not wise, unless his mind is transfigured into those which he has learnt."

2 Cor. iii. 18

"Gather up and preserve the time."

Eph. v. 16.

"Pertinacious goodness overcomes evil men."

Rom. xii. 21.

"What is man? A cracked vessel which will break at the least fall."

2 Cor. iv. 7.

"That gift is far more welcome which is given with a ready than that which is given with a full hand."

2 Cor. ix. 7.

"Which comes and passes away very quickly, destined to perish in the very using."

Col. ii. 22.

"I confess that the love of our own body is natural to us."

Eph. v. 28, 29.

"I reflect how many exercise their bodies, how few their minds."

1 Tim. iv. 8

"It is a foolish occupation to exercise the muscles of the arms . . . return quickly from the body to the mind, exercise that, night and day."

"How long wilt thou learn? Begin to teach."

Heb. v. 12.

"The whole world is the temple of the immortal gods." "Temples are not built to God of stones piled on high: He must be consecrated in the heart of each man."

Acts xvii. 24.

"God wants not ministers. How so? He Himself ministereth to the human race. He is at hand everywhere and to all men."

Acts xvii. 25.

"God is near thee: He is with thee: He is within."

Acts xvii. 27.

"Thou shalt not form Him of silver and gold: a true likeness of God cannot be moulded of this material."

Acts xvii. 29.

(In the last four scriptures Paul is speaking to Stoic philosophers, and it will be seen that his arguments would not be unfamiliar).

We remarked earlier that Seneca held converse with his slaves. Here are his own words on the subject—remarkable words when we remember the brutal cruelty of the days in which he lived:—

"They are slaves you urge; nay, they are men. They are slaves; nay, they are comrades. They are slaves, nay, they are humble friends. They are slaves; nay, they are fellow-slaves, if you reflect that fortune has the same power over both. Let some of them dine with you, because they are worthy; and others, that they may become worthy."

"He is a slave you say; yet perchance he is free in spirit. He is a slave. Will this harm him? Show me who is not. One is a slave to lust, another to avarice, a third to ambition; all alike to fear."

When one realizes how similar these statements are to the inspired utterances of the apostle Paul, one feels sad to think that, so far as we know, Seneca never heard the gospel of the grace of God. With all the high moral tone of his writings, Seneca lacked one thing, the personal Redeemer, without Whom the highest flights of philosophy but prepare for a greater crash at the last.

Stoicism has no room for the forgiveness of sins :—

“The wise man will be clement and gentle, but he will not feel pity, for only old women and girls will be moved by tears; he will not pardon, for pardon is the remission of a deserved penalty; he will be strictly and inexorably just.”

Seneca knew that pardon was “the remission of the deserved penalty.” What he did not know was John iii. 16, and Rom. iii.

In spite of all his high moral teaching, we find Seneca “bowing in the house of Rimmon.” Endorsing the blasphemous assumptions of the Emperor, we find him using the following terms, true only of God, in a flattering address concerning Claudius: “In him are all things, and he is instead of all things to thee.” And again, compare the awful character of Nero with these words of Seneca, written to him :—

“The gentleness of thy spirit will spread by degrees through the whole body of the Empire, and all things will be formed after thy likeness: health passes from the head to all the members.”

What Seneca needed was Christ. He alone is “instead of all things” to us. He alone is the image and likeness to which one day we shall all be conformed. He alone is Head of the Body, the Church; from Him alone true health passes to all the members. In His sacrificial death is found “the remission of the deserved penalty,” together with “inexorable

justice.” But it was not possible to discover this glorious truth by human wisdom; from first to last it was the gift of God.

The link between Malachi and Matthew.

The failure of human wisdom.

We have endeavoured in the three opening articles of this series to accomplish the following ends :—

(I) To create a deeper appreciation of the revelation of truth given us in Scripture, by comparing its sublime statements with the gropings of the wisest men of all times.

(2) To set before the reader the one great outstanding difference between revealed truth and all systems of philosophy, which is, that Scripture focusses our attention not upon abstractions, but upon the Person of the Son of God. "God manifest in the flesh" answers the inarticulate cry of the ages. We see the glory of the invisible God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The method we have adopted to achieve these ends has been that of giving quotations from one or two writers, and comparing them with Scripture. We trust that the interest of the reader is sufficiently aroused to justify an examination of the history of this quest of unassisted wisdom, so that by comparing their guesses at truth with the clear statements of revelation, we may be moved to greater gratitude to the Lord for the gift of His Word.

As Israel, the custodians of the oracles of God, fell from their high position, and sovereignty was transferred to the Gentiles, as the voice of prophecy ceased, and the centuries

passed between the close of the O.T. and the announcement of the Forerunner, the Gentile world gave birth to a line of men whose wisdom and prowess are still accounted remarkable, and whose influence is still strong and penetrating.

Before the night of darkness was illuminated by "the Dayspring from on high" at the birth of Christ, human wisdom had about three hundred years in which to attempt to discover the cause of all things, to arrive at the answer to the question "What is good?" to solve the problem of good and evil by its own unaided reason. That it hopelessly failed is a fact we must all acknowledge. That it missed the one essential thing that God alone could provide, is the testimony of our faith; but just as the Lord permitted the people of Israel to manifest for all time the utter failure of Law to justify a sinner, so He permitted the Gentile, and particularly the Greek, to manifest the utter failure of human reasoning to find God.

The remedy for the failure of Israel is expressed in the words:—

"For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4).

The remedy for the failure of the Greek is expressed in the words:—

"Christ, in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. ii. 3).

"For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified . . . Christ the power of God (for the Jew), and the wisdom of God (for the Greek) . . . Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness as well as (Gk. *te*) sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. i. 22, 24, 30).

It may be useful to give first a few of the outstanding names of those who, after the close of O.T. revelation, filled the interval up to the opening of the N.T.

HERODOTUS—"The Father of History" (484 B.C.).—He was born a hundred years after the death of Isaiah, and twelve years before the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's dominion. He was contemporary with Daniel, and his history is virtually a history of the world as then known, embellished with many digressions both archæological and geographical. The idea that arrogance and pride surely bring with them the punishment of heaven runs through his whole work, but the one glorious undercurrent of the inspired history of the Bible is wanting. He did not know the blessed promise of the "Seed of the woman," Who should bruise the serpent's head.

SOCRATES—Philosopher (469 B.C.).—He is accredited with the invention of the word "philosopher." He accepted the principle, *Gnothi seauton*, "Know thyself," and held that "the proper study of mankind is man." Where Socrates failed was that he did not know Him "Whom to know is life eternal."

HIPPOCRATES—"The Father of Medicine" (460 B.C.).

PLATO—Philosopher (429 B.C.).—He sought to solve the riddle of the universe by the discovery of the Ultimate Good. His quest was right, but he lost his way, and ended in abstractions. Christ alone makes the Ultimate Good both real and attainable to mortal man. Plato's influence has extended to the present time, and the world of thought will never be free from indebtedness to him—but salvation and life were beyond his ken.

ARISTOTLE—"The Father of Learning" (384 B.C.).—Turning from the Platonic unity of being, Aristotle directed his attention to the variety that is in the world, and as an instrument in this investigation he brought Logic to a very high pitch of completeness. But Logic, however useful in discovering the fallacious, needs revealed truth for its premises, and that revelation Aristotle did not possess. With the Scriptures open before us, we can thankfully use the Syllogism, and discover truth that Aristotle never knew.

ZENO—The Founder of Stoicism (342 B.C.).—At his death a monument was erected to his memory, with the words: "His life corresponded with his precepts."

EPICURUS—The Founder of Epicureanism (340 B.C.).—His motto was: "The greatest good for the entire life." If he had known of the life to come, and had enunciated his motto with that in view, none could find fault. As it was "the entire life" held no certain hope, and without resurrection, Epicureanism degenerated into: "Eat, drink and be merry."

EUCLID—"The Father of Mathematics" (300 B.C.).

CLEANTHES—Philosopher (300 B.C.).—We know him best by a hymn to Zeus, from which the apostle quotes in Acts xvii. 28.

ARCHIMEDES—"The Father of Mechanics" (287 B.C.).—We remember him for his famous discovery in hydrostatics with the exultant cry "Eureka;" for the Archimedian screw, and for his saying, "Give me a lever long enough, and I will move the earth."

HIPPARCHUS—"The Father of Astronomy" (150 B.C.).—He made a catalogue of 1,080 stars, and invented trigonometry.

Such are a few of the outstanding names that contributed to the wisdom of the world during the silent years that followed the close of the O.T. canon. All these men were pre-eminent in their respective subjects, great in thought and of wide-spread influence. They are still admired to-day, and their works underlie much of modern education. Their contribution to the stock of human knowledge can never be estimated, and yet it can all be summed up in the words of another wise man: "Vanity and vexation of spirit."

Without the personal Christ, without deliverance from sin, without acceptance with God, without the blessed hope of resurrection glory, we have the testimony of I Cor. xv. that all is vanity. We do not scorn or despise these ancient seekers. We regard their "feeling after God" with keen sympathy, and we turn afresh to the Word, living and written, and say with even deeper meaning:—

"To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

**The search for the "First Principle" and its result.
"What?" instead of "Who?"**

The aim of philosophy is to reduce complexity to simplicity, and so at length to find the ultimate reality. Had the ancient philosophers known the Book of Ecclesiastes, and weighed some of its findings, they might have been led to perceive the futility of their quest. Had they known the Book of Job, they might have learned how impossible such a quest was. Had they read the Book of Proverbs, they would have discovered what constitutes the beginning of wisdom. These three "Wisdom Books" of the Bible will have to be given a

place in this series, but first of all we must seek a closer acquaintance with the findings of these men of old, so that, by comparison, we may the better appreciate the simplicity, and yet the fulness, of the Word of God.

In our last article, we spoke of Herodotus as the "Father of History," and mentioned five others, who by their pre-eminence were "Fathers" in their respective spheres. It may have been noticed that no one was there described as "The Father of Philosophy." This title belongs to Thales (640—550 B.C.), and was given to him because he seems to have been the first to turn from the mythology and idolatry of his day, and to attempt by investigation to discover the first principle of all things. The words he uses for the first principle of all things are *Tes Toiautes Archē*. The reader will at once think of Gen. i. 1 and John i. 1, both of which use the word "beginning," *archē*. Homer and Hesiod had ascribed to Oceanus and Tethys the origin of all things, but Thales stripped their teaching of its mythology, and announced that Water is the material cause, or first principle of all things. Aristotle summed up the teaching of Thales under three heads:—

- (1) The earth floats on water.
- (2) Water is the material cause of all things.
- (3) All things are full of gods (The magnet, for example, is alive).

One cannot but realise that Thales had stumbled upon the threshold of truth. Peter rebuked the scoffers of his day saying:

"For this they wilfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God" (2 Pet. iii. 5, R.V.).

With this statement agrees the Psalmist, who writes:

“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods” (Psa. xxiv. 1, 2).

“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever To Him that stretched out the earth above the waters” (Psa. cxxxvi. 1, 6).

In Job xxxviii. 6 and 8, and Psa. civ. 3—6, we have allusions to the foundations of the earth and the great deep. Behind the myths of Oceanus and Tethys, and the “first principle” of Thales, lies a truth. That truth the simplest believer may discover by reading Gen. i. 1, 2.

The ancients gave Janus, the double-headed god, the name of Chaos, and in that capacity he was called “The god of gods.” All this was but the truth of Gen. i. 1, 2, mystified and paganised. This present world did arise out of the waters of the great deep, and although Thales failed to reach the sublimely simple revelation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” it may be that he was not much further removed from truth than many a modern exponent of up-to-date philosophy and science. While the words “The magnet is alive” may bring a smile to the face of the scientist, and the words “All things are full of gods” may cause the pious to shudder, let us not forget that modern scientific terms sometimes leave no room for God at all. The “laws of nature” are just as evil in their tendency as the “gods” that they have replaced.

Scripture does not endorse the pantheism of Thales, neither does it endorse the atheism of Science. What we find is that where Thales put “gods,” and Science puts “laws,” revealed truth puts Christ:—

“HE is before all things, and by HIM all things consist” (Col. i. 17).

“Upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. i. 3).

HE, HIM, HIS—not “gods many,” nor godless “laws,” but a living Person.

We, therefore, repeat what was said at the beginning of this series. The revealed truth of Scripture speaks always of a Person, while all systems of Philosophy lead to abstractions. This note we shall strike again and again until its beauty and its glorious sufficiency are to some degree appreciated. The tragedy of the philosophic enquiry which commenced with Thales, and was pursued by his successors, is that it asks, “*What* is the source of all things?” instead of “*Who* is the source of all things?”

Blessed be God, He has revealed to us things hidden from the wise and prudent. We read the answer to the question of Thales in the face of Jesus Christ.

**Anaximander loses his way and finds only an
"Eternal Something."**

When we say that Thales, who began with Creation, started where the Bible starts, the statement is not strictly true. "Creation" implies a Creator, and Thales had no knowledge of such a Creator. He was seeking an answer to the question "What"? instead of the question "Who"? This is quite at variance with the teaching of Scripture. The Bible does not open with Creation but with God. In other words, what Thales vainly sought is revealed in Gen. i. 1, but is nowhere proved.

The witness of Scripture is summed up in Heb. xi. 6:

"He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Just why these two features are brought together here, we must consider after Human Wisdom has been given an opportunity to speak.

The teaching of Thales was soon submitted to criticism, and was set aside by Anaximander, who was born in B.C. 610, twenty years after Thales. Anaximander set aside Water as the primitive ground of things, and looked for something less determinate. He said: "The ground of all things must be without form and boundless." These words are very close to the Hebrew of Gen. i. 2: "without form and void"; and so, while rejecting the Water of Thales (which seemed to look

back to Gen. i. 2), he accepts Chaos in its place. He is supposed to be the first to use the term *Archē*, as "the eternal, infinite, indefinite ground, from which, in order of time, all arises, and unto which all returns." This eternal principle he called "The Infinite," *To apeiron*, though he shrinks from the total emptiness of unbounded space, and speaks of an "unbounded substance" analogous to the *ether*. How Anaximander was unconsciously crying out for the Son of God, the Image of the Invisible, the express Image of His substance, the Word made flesh! Instead of finding Christ, he found a void, and taught that there was an eternal *something* out of which (*ek*), and unto which (*eis*) are all things. What Anaximander would have given his right hand to have discovered is plainly written for our learning in the Holy Scriptures.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! . . . For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. xi. 33-36).

"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things, and we by Him" (1 Cor. viii. 6).

“Who is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of every creature. For by Him were all things created . . . all things were created by Him, and for Him : and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist” (Col. i. 15—17).

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power : for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. iv. 11).

The contexts of these passages refer not only to the material creation, but also to things invisible, to the purpose of the ages, and to the baffling elements that defy human wisdom to explain. All this Anaximander sought, but did not find. He says that things rise and pass away once more :

“As is meet : for they make reparation and satisfaction to one another for their injustice according to the ordering of time.”

These words, being only a brief extract, may not sound very intelligible, but what Anaximander was seeking was an answer to the baffling mystery of the inequality of life's experiences. He endeavours to supply an answer by saying that contraries, such as cold and heat, are but the developments of the undivided elemental infinite substance, and that all will return to this state once more. While this, in a crude way, expresses some recognition of the great cycle of the ages, it fails to see a purpose in it, a personal Will that has planned, a personal power that upholds, and a personal God of love Who attracts and does not repel His creatures. All that Anaximander could offer to mankind was an impersonal unbounded substance, and an ever-recurring cycle of contrary events, which find satisfaction only in their return to chaos. Can any reader, instructed in the purpose of the Ages, knowing the glorious goal of redeeming love and the blessed fact that “Christ is all,” contemplate the dreariness and coldness of Anaximander's Universe, without a feeling of thankfulness for the fact that we are now able to see the Creator and Upholder and Consummator of all things “in the face of Jesus Christ” ? We make no apology for striking this one distinctive note again and again. A personal Creator, instead of a “first cause”; a purpose of the ages, instead of a never-ending cycle of contraries; an Universe that speaks of love, instead of a “boundless substance” called Infinity; these things are ours through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Anaximines: His conception of the "first principle" approaches the Scriptural "Spirit," but fails to reach it.

As the theory of Thales was rejected by Anaximander, so Anaximander's theory was rejected by Anaximines (born B.C. 588). He rejected the water of Thales as being too determinate, and the infinite substance of Anaximander as being too indeterminate, and assumed air to be the *archē*, or ground of all things. This was rather in the nature of a compromise between the two. He conceived the principle of the universe to be "the unlimited, all-embracing, ever-moving air" from which by rarefaction (fire) and condensation (water, earth, etc.) everything else is formed.

To the student of Chemistry, this attempt of Anaximines will be seen to contain more than a wild guess at the truth. Many of the solids and liquids with which we are familiar contain the gaseous elements Oxygen and Nitrogen, which are the principal constituents of the air we breathe; and both these gases can be liquified and solidified. The idea that air in rarefaction causes fire contains an element of truth, for we now know that no combustion is possible without oxygen.

If the modern chemist finds some food for thought in Anaximines' choice of air as the primal substance, the student of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures is equally impressed. We have already turned back to Gen. i. when considering the theory of Thales and the theory of his successor. We do so again for the third time.

Following the description of chaos, we read in Gen. i. 2: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

The word "Spirit" here is the Hebrew *ruach*, which occurs in the following passages:

- "The *breath* of life" (Gen. vi. 17).
- "God made a *wind* to pass over the earth" (Gen. viii. 1).
- "The *blast* of Thy nostrils" (Exod. xv. 8).
- "O remember that my life is *wind*" (Job. vii. 7).
- "By His *Spirit* He hath garnished the heavens" (Job xxvi. 13).
- "All the while my breath is in me, and the *spirit* of God is in my nostrils" (Job xxvii. 3).

These examples are representative of the use of *ruach* throughout the O.T. The N.T. equivalent is *pneuma*, and its usage is similar.

- "The wind (*pneuma*) bloweth where it listeth . . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit (*pneuma*)." (John iii. 8).

God is "Spirit," but "Spirit" defies definition. There are no terms in human language, nor ideas that the mind can conceive that do not limit and confine the reality for which the word "Spirit" stands. Throughout the Scriptures God has used the air, the wind, the breath, as symbols setting forth in figure what it is possible for us to know of the Spirit, which in itself lies beyond our ken.

Diogenes of Apollonia added the idea of Intelligence to Anaximenes' theory of the Air, and with him this school (known as the "Milesian School") came to an end. If these men did not get very far, they did at least break away from the superstition of their times, and went back as far as their limitations would permit to the witness of creation. Somehow they missed their way: and without wishing to be uncharitable, we cannot help feeling that Rom. i. and I Cor. i. indicate the source of their failure.

"Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not AS GOD (This marks the wrong turn that all these philosophers took), neither were THANKFUL (We can only be thankful to a Person; "principles" and "infinite substance" leave us unmoved. No one has ever fallen down and worshipped a mathematical principle or the law of gravity). But they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be WISE (We shall come presently to the Sophists—"The wise"—who were Atheists) they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible MAN" (The Sophists taught that "Man is the measure of the Universe," and so, while scorning the images of wood and stone, created mental images and magnified themselves) (Rom. i. 19—23).

If only they had known! There *is* ONE MAN Who is the measure of the Universe, but He is the Son of God.

It is a relief to turn from the darkness of philosophy to the light of Scripture:

"O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth; Who hast set Thy glory above the heavens When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the Son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels" (Psa. viii 1—5).

If Thales, Anaximander, and their fellows had had this revelation, what a difference it would have made. Yet *we* can read freely of these things, which even David saw only dimly.

"We see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour: that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. ii. 9).

And we also know, that this same One Who stooped lower than the angels for the suffering of death, is the One Who is praised by the Psalmist as the Creator of all:

“Unto the Son He saith . . . Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands” (cf. “The work of Thy fingers” Psa. viii.) (Heb. i. 8—10).

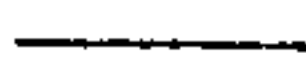
Human wisdom could never penetrate to this depth or scale this height. We bow before the only wise God, and gratefully thank Him for the revelation He has given us of Himself, and His creation, His purposes, and His goal. We glory in the blessed fact that it all pulsates with life and love. There are no cold abstractions. To quote a recent writer:

“The Universe is not a spiritual vacuum, a mathematical abstraction; it is OUR FATHER’S HOUSE OF MANY MANSIONS.”

Human wisdom is cold and lifeless. Divine wisdom breathes the breath of life and love. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift—a Person, and that Person, His beloved, only begotten Son. He is all the Philosophy that we shall ever need.



The “Formless Being” of Xenophanes and the Scriptural revelation of Him Who was “in the form of God.”



The Milesian school of philosophy was succeeded by the Eleatics, founded by Xenophanes and named after Elea, a town in Italy. The system was developed by Parmenides, and owed its completion to Zeno.

The primitive conceptions of Thales and his correctors seem to have produced a somewhat humbler frame of mind in his successors, for Xenophanes is at pains to tell us that philosophy is but “reasonable opinion,” “probability,” and not “certain knowledge.”

“There never was a man, nor will be, who has certain knowledge about the gods, and about all the things of which I speak. Even if he should chance to say the complete truth, yet he himself knows not that it is so.”

Philosophy, therefore, is a self-confessed failure. Nothing but a Divine revelation can supply us with sufficient knowledge to enable any one of us to say regarding these things: “I know.” Let the reader ponder some of the passages of Scripture written, “*that ye may know*,” and let him praise God for the light of His Word.

We must not forget the time at which Xenophanes lived. All around him were men who worshipped gods, whose attributes were those of mortal men, and whose actions were as immoral as those of their worshippers. In his search for "the One," and the dawning consciousness that the one great Cause of all must be infinitely removed from all limitations of time and sense, he not only ridiculed the man-like gods of his day, but threw such doubt upon the external world of sense as practically to annihilate it altogether. Speaking of the gods, he writes:

"If oxen and lions could paint, they would make the pictures of their gods in their likeness. Horses would make them like horses, oxen like oxen."

Xenophanes' witness against graven images and idolatry is remarkable, and would have gladdened the heart of Moses, who wrote, by inspiration of God: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Exod. xx. 4). The irony of his remarks about oxen and lions reminds one of the irony of Isa. xliv. 9—20, where the idolater makes his god out of one part of a tree, and with the rest makes a fire to bake his bread. The Saviour Himself testified concerning the Father: "Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape" (John v. 37).

Xenophanes was unconsciously crying out for the Son of God. Had he known the truth of Phil. ii., that Christ was originally and by right "in the form of God," and that He was the "Image of the invisible God" (Col. i. 15), the empty void in his philosophy would have been filled.

When he spoke of "gods in their likeness," he knew nothing of Gen. i. and its statement concerning the affinity between God and man: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. i. 26).

Xenophanes' objection to anthropomorphic gods may have been justified in his own day and circumstances, but we hope to show later in this series that *Anthropomorphism* (This Figure of Speech is discussed in Vol. XXIV., pages 145—147 and 208—211), is vital to our understanding of God.

Concerning the nature of God, Xenophanes writes:

"There is one God supreme among gods and men, resembling mortals neither in form nor in mind."

He distrusts the evidence of the senses. The external world is but "seeming," and reality belongs only to "the One"—a doctrine very similar to Pantheism.

Xenophanes was very much concerned with *Anthitheses*—“The one and the many,” “The permanent and the changing,” ascribing reality to the one, and denying it to the other. In this he was not altogether wrong as a reference to 2 Cor. iv. 18 will show: “The things which are seen are *temporal*; but the things which are not seen are *age-abiding*.”

Unless it has been forced upon our notice, the idea of distrusting the senses may sound absurd. We well remember a lesson at school that showed how necessary it is to have some standard other than that of our own sense perceptions.

Three pails were placed in the class room, and the scholar first plunged each of his hands at the same time into each of the two pails on either side, one containing ice-cold water, and the other hot water. After a moment or two he lifted his hands and simultaneously plunged them into the central pail, containing ordinary tap water. One hand gave the verdict, “This water is cold”; the other, “This water is hot.” Sense perception, therefore, is misleading. The thermometer has to decide.

Xenophanes’ “God” was simply “pure Being.” Such an abstraction could have no reference to anything finite, and no possible connection with the vicissitudes of existence. Xenophanes had got rid of the “gods” in human form, only to find a cold, shapeless, motionless abstraction, having no resemblance to the “God and Father” Whom we know through Christ.

The Scriptures do not speak of God apart from His relation to man and creation. From Genesis to Revelation, there is no attempt to explain God. He is Spirit, He is invisible, He is immense (immeasurable), He is everywhere always. These things are stated, but not explained, and wherever they are stated, it is only because of some relationship demanded by the context. A few examples will illustrate this.

“He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. xi. 6).

Philosophy would discuss the “being” of God. Genesis assumes His being, and proceeds to His works and ways.

“Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity” (Isa. lvii. 15).

Here, at first sight, is the beginning of a philosophical disquisition on the “Infinite,” but a second glance at the verse shows that it is written to emphasise God’s condescension:

“I dwell in the high and holy place, *with him also* that is of a contrite and humble spirit.”

Another passage that might be quoted is Psa. cxlvii. 5 : "His understanding is infinite." This understanding extends to the number and names of the stars, an understanding that makes the mind reel, but it is introduced into this Psalm much in the same way as the parallel statements in the N.T. concerning the numbering of the hairs of the head, and the sparrow's fall. If the attributes ascribed to God are collected together, it will be found that they do not form a complete whole. They are but the fringe of a mighty subject, and speak of God only as He comes into relation with man. All else is left unexplained.

What Xenophanes did not know was the condescension of this Great and Holy One. He did not realise that He Who created heaven and earth has entered deeply into its progress and its pain—in other words, he had no knowledge as we have of the mystery of godliness: "God manifest in the flesh."

The condescension of the great "I AM."

Moses and Parmenides.

The Eleatic Philosophy which originated with Xenophanes, was systematised by Parmenides, and completed by Zeno. Parmenides was largely concerned with the idea of "being," and opposed this idea to all that is complex and mutable. He maintained that, while the reason led to truth, the senses, which were occupied with impressions received from an ever-changing unreal world, were deceived. His arguments were chiefly directed to proving that reality as a whole cannot change.

"If we consider everything that is, it is clear that it cannot become more than it is, except by the addition of something else; but if we start with literally everything, there is nothing left that can be added to it It follows that the whole cannot change, and that any change in the parts is, therefore, an illusion" (C. E. M. Joad).

In his endeavour to preserve intact the notion of "pure being," he denied the reality of creation. The subject was too immense for the unaided human mind.

The theme is touched upon in the Scriptures in Exodus iii., but only to be set aside for a lower aspect of truth to be revealed in its place. A momentary revelation of the "being" of God is given to Moses, but this is immediately followed by the name whereby the Most High is revealed in the O.T.

Moses enquires what he shall say to the children of Israel when they ask for the name of the God Who had sent him. And the reply comes :

"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM : and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exod. iii. 14).

Here we have expressed what Xenophanes and Parmenides sought for, Absolute Unconditioned Being. But what would a nation of slaves, who had spent their days making bricks, know of "Unconditioned Being"? Such knowledge is too wonderful for us all; it is beyond us. We are so constituted that the unconditioned and the non-existent are, to us, much the same. That which is not bounded by space, and is not conditioned by time, cannot be realised by the human mind. And so the Lord, in the fulness of time, was born of a virgin, and bore the name Immanuel "God with us." More than once He revealed that He was the "I AM" of Exodus iii., but He usually condescended to the conditions imposed by our human limitations and associated the unconditioned I AM with some other title. To us He is not only the "I AM," but we also read :

"I am the good shepherd,"

"I am the door."

"I am the bread of life."

"I am the way."

"I am the light of the world."

These things Philosophy could never have discovered. As we have said so many times already, God's gracious solution of life's enigma is found in the personal Christ.

Returning to Exodus iii., we find that the Lord modifies His original title :

"The Lord God of your fathers . . . hath sent me unto you : this is My Name *unto the age*, and this is My memorial *unto all generations* (Exod. iii. 15).

The timeless "I AM" is replaced by a name that is "unto the age." The Infinite condescends to the limitations of men.

The word "Lord" here is the name "Jehovah," which is made up of parts of the verb "to be." Its composition is unfolded in Rev. i. : "Grace be unto you . . . from *Him which is, and which was, and which is to come*" (Rev. i. 4).

The title "Jehovah" is further explained in Genesis xxi. 33, where the words "The Lord, the everlasting God" are, in the Hebrew, *Jehovah, El Olam*—"Jehovah, God of the age."

It is simple to believe that God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and many other high and wonderful things, but it is the glorious peculiarity of the Christian revelation that it turns our worshipping gaze to a lowly cradle, a virgin's Son, a crucified Redeemer. These things are utterly beyond the power of human wisdom to discover.

The philosophy that denied the pulse of life and the joy and sorrow of a teeming creation, carried within itself its own death sentence, and came to an end with the teaching of Zeno. It would serve no useful purpose to occupy space and time in dealing with his empty dialectics. Some readers may know how, in order to disprove the reality of "things seen," he invented the problem of Achilles and the Tortoise, and sought to disprove the reality of motion. Such jugglings as these led at length to scepticism and sophistry, and failed altogether to meet either the cry of the living, or the dreadful need of the dead. Any attempt to discover God apart from Christ is doomed to failure.

To the despised and afflicted captives in Egypt, a revelation was given (Exod. iii. 14, 15) that would have provided a complete answer to the quest of a generation of philosophers. And yet there will probably be some believers, who will consider that the few minutes required to read and weigh over this simple article are almost a waste of time. May we never need to learn the value of the Word of God by being compelled to do without its light and teaching.

A world of change, without Him, Who changes not.

The philosophy of Heraclitus.

Human wisdom, in its brief course from Thales to Zeno, had ended in mist and darkness. God had been shorn of every personal attribute, and the world had been whittled away into illusion. Without being uncharitable, we feel that across the labours of these wise men might be written the words: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no god." A reaction was inevitable, and found expression in the teaching of Heraclitus (B.C. 535—475).

In the philosophy of Heraclitus, we find the pendulum swinging to the other extreme. He denies the permanent and affirms the changeable. The key-word of his philosophy is "becoming"—a word of great importance in the first chapter of John's Gospel, where we read, if we translate literally: "All things through Him *became*, and without Him not one thing *became* that did *become*" (John i. 3). Heraclitus affirmed the fact of the changing world, but only dimly realised Him "through Whom" it became, and "without Whom" it could not exist. In the fragments of his writings we read:

"The *Logos* existeth from all time, yet mankind are unaware of it, both before they hear it, and while they listen to it."

This a remarkable anticipation of John i. 1—5, and enables us to perceive that, while the Jews had the privilege of the Law and the Prophets, the Greeks, in the interval of Israel's rejection, were being used to prepare the way for the wisdom of God in Christ. We hope to give the place of the *Logos* more definite consideration later.

Centuries before Heraclitus, Solomon, King of Israel, had surveyed the world and observed its incessant change.

“Into the same river no man can enter twice, ever it disperses and collects itself again” (Heraclitus).

“All rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. All things are full of labour: man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing” (Eccles. i, 7, 8).

As a part of the revolt against the teaching of the Eleatic school, Heraclitus asserted that we do not become cognisant of “becoming” or “change” by the exercise of reason, but by the evidence of the senses. Dialectic methods—the methods of formal reasoning as opposed to experiment and observation—were therefore inadmissible. Ecclesiastes, however, had tried the empirical method before him, and has left on record the result: “The eye is not satisfied with *seeing*, nor the ear with *hearing*.” Heraclitus, however, in spite of his insistence upon the senses as opposed to formal reasoning, had to confess that the ears and the eyes were capable of deception, referring probably to the idea that what appears to the senses solid and unchanging is in reality as surely passing as the swiftly flowing river. In this he anticipates modern science with its waves and electrons.

In Ecclesiastes we read:

“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun” (Eccles. i. 9).

Heraclitus speaks of fire as a principle that underlies all “change” or “becoming”; fire that for ever extinguishes itself and again rekindles, an all-consuming, all-transmuting, all-vivifying element. The two processes of extinction and ignition in this fire-power alternate, according to Heraclitus, in perpetual rotation with each other. “In stated periods the world resolves itself into primal fire, in order to re-create itself out of fire again.”

One cannot avoid comparing the teaching of Heraclitus with the testimony of the apostle Peter:

“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men . . . The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. iii. 7—13).

In Heraclitus' teaching, however, there is nothing to be looked for but a "perpetual rotation"; in Peter's teaching, there is a goal and an end in view. Moreover, the whole passage in Peter's epistle is not the *development of a philosophical theory*, but the *fulfilment of a promise*, the promise of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The passage is introduced by the words of the scoffer: "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Pet. iii. 4).

Rotations of never-ending time in the philosophy of Heraclitus are "days" in the teaching of Peter, "the day of the Lord" and "the day of God," days intimately associated with a Person. The personal note constitutes the essential difference between all philosophy at all times, and the testimony of Scripture. The glory of the Word of God is that the fulness of the Godhead is not an abstraction, but dwells "bodily" in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Word of Life has been "seen" and "handled."

We do indeed, with Heraclitus, see a world of change, but, by the grace of God, we also see "Him Who changes not." Philosophy may turn our attention to change and decay, but God alone can illuminate the darkness with the light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

"Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of Thine hands. *They shall perish, but Thou remainest . . . Thou art the same . . .* Jesus Christ, the *same* yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. i. 10—12; xiii. 8).

Empedocles, and the need of a Mediator.

Before dealing with the next step taken by human wisdom in its attempt to discover the nature of ultimate reality and the origin of force and life, let us turn to the fountain of all truth, and read once again with growing wonder the simple facts that two hundred years of intense thought, from Thales to Heraclitus, had failed to discover :

“ In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth became without form and void : and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light ; and there was light ” (Gen. i. 1-3).

These are words of revealed truth that scatter the darkness of human philosophy as the rising sun scatters the mists of night.

“ *In the beginning* ” (Greek : *archē*).—Over and over again we come across this word in the writings of the early philosophers. What is the “ first principle,” the *archē*? According to Thales it must be water. According to Anaximander it cannot be anything so determinate as water ; it must be an unbounded substance like our ether. Then comes Anaximenes, who teaches that it cannot be either, but must be something rarer than water, and yet not so indeterminate as “ infinity ”—it must be *air*. Pythagoras, rejecting all three theories, discovers that number is the *archē*, for mathematical relations are found everywhere.

The Scriptures make two definite statements concerning “ the beginning ” (*archē*) in the New Testament :

- (1) “ *In the beginning* was the Word . . . all things were made by Him ” (John i. 1-3).
- (2) “ These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, *the Beginning of the Creation of God* ” (Rev. iii. 14).

Philosophy missed its way because it knew nothing of the personal element that is one of the chief glories of the true Revelation of God. The beginning of the creation of God is not merely “ time,” but Christ Himself. When, therefore, Genesis i. 1 speaks of “ the beginning,” we must understand not only the beginning of time, but that all creation was created “ in Christ.” The problems of philosophy with regard to the apparent impossibility of absolute unconditioned Being having any point of contact with the passing and changing creation are fully answered in the Person of Christ, “ the Firstborn of all creation.” Later we hope to deal with this teaching more fully ; at present we are still reviewing the wisdom of man.

The subject that seemed to present itself at the juncture in the history of philosophy which we have now reached was the question of the origin of movement, force, change and growth. How was it possible for the "Being" of the Eleatics to have any contact with the "Becoming" of Heraclitus?

Empedocles (B.C. 490—430) assumed the existence of four radical elements, fire, air, water and earth, and set beside inert matter a twofold moving force, likened by him to love and hate, or, as we should say to-day, attraction and repulsion. In this Empedocles seems to have had a glimmering of the truth revealed in Genesis i. There, the moving force is said to be "the Spirit of God," and a very definite process of division follows:

"God divided the light from the darkness Let it divide the waters from the waters Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together in one place" (Gen. i. 4—9).

Empedocles also held that the *knowing* subject, and the *known* object must be of like nature. This we shall find is a valuable truth, but we will reserve comment upon it until this review is concluded.* He was also the first psychologist, and declared God to be "pure spirit without body or members." But he pursued the matter no further. How could he, or any man? He needed Christ the Mediator.

Empedocles seems to have had some idea of the principle of Genesis i. 2, for he taught that at first the four elements existed together, absolutely at one with each other, until gradually "strife" penetrated, breaking up the unity, and so the world of darkness and light, life and death, and the many opposites that belong to everyday experience came into being. The student of Scripture knows that the present world is the battle-ground of the conflict of the ages, that there is a real enemy at work and that not until strife ceases, and righteousness reigns, can true unity or peace be possible. This, however, we rejoice to know, will not be brought about by the working of elementary forces, but by love, the love of the Father, the love of the Son, and the love of the Spirit, involving sacrifice and longsuffering beyond the understanding of the mortal mind.

There is probably not one reader of these lines whose mentality and intellectual powers surpass, or even reach, the level of these men whose findings we have attempted to analyse—yet the simplest of us all is wiser than the whole world of philosophers, if it can truly be said that "we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. ii. 16).



Chance or Intelligence?

The Final Phase.

Democritus and Anaxagoras.

We observed in our last article that Empedocles endeavoured to discover some mediating force that would bring together the "Being" of the Eleatic philosophers with the "Becoming" of Heraclitus. John i. 1—3 supplies this mediating force in the Person of "The Word," Who was "with" God, Who "was" God, and through Whom all "became." This mighty truth, however, was not discoverable by human wisdom, and so we find other attempts to solve the problem.

Democritus (B.C. 460) was the exponent of the atomic theory of the universe, a theory that is still held by chemists and physicists to-day. The atoms of Democritus were uncaused and eternal, and by their falling together and impinging upon one another he supposed the present universe to have been formed. No sufficient reason could be given for the marvellous fitness of things, but only "necessity," or "chance," in contrast with a final Cause. The philosophy of Democritus became, therefore, naturalistic and atheistic, and culminated in the Sophists, of whom we hope to speak later. The great failure in all the systems of philosophy that we have reviewed is that no adequate Cause can be discovered for the world as we see it, and no final goal or purpose.

In contrast with Democritus' theory of blind "chance" we have the system of Anaxagoras, who lived at the same time. Anaxagoras makes an attempt to remove the difficulty by introducing the idea of a "designing intelligence." After two hundred years of intense thought philosophy dimly perceived the possibility of that which is expressed very simply in Genesis i. 1.

Anaxagoras writes:

"All things were together, infinitely numerous, infinitely little; then came the *nous* ('mind' or 'intelligence') and set them in order."

There seems to be some vague realisation here of the chaos and subsequent order of the six days' creation.

Speaking of Anaxagoras and his teaching, Aristotle says:

"When a man said that there was in nature, as in animals, an intelligence, which is the cause of the arrangement and order of the universe, this man alone appeared to have preserved his reason in the midst of the follies of his predecessors."

Anaxagoras, however, fails, for his "nous" is simply a "mover of matter." Socrates complains that in the hope of being brought beyond merely occasional and secondary causes up to final causes, he had applied himself to the study of Anaxagoras, but instead of finding any truly teleological (From *telos*, an "end," "goal," or "purpose") explanation of existence, he had found everywhere only a mechanical one. Anaxagoras had rebelled against the blind "chance" of Democritus, and had substituted "mind," but he had failed to realise that "mind" is possible only to personality, and personality in these matters leads to God. It may seem very obvious to us in the light of revealed truth, but it was not by any means obvious to these ancient philosophers. Let us be indeed thankful as we realise the extreme limitations of human wisdom. These men "felt after" an unknown God, but never found Him.

With Anaxagoras the "realist" systems of Philosophy came to a close. While Anaxagoras himself never took the idea of intelligence to its logical conclusion, he sowed a seed which was later to mature in the philosophy of Socrates and Plato. Meanwhile there was, for a time, an interval of scepticism and materialism. This period, which is represented by the school of the Sophists, we must consider in our next article.

The Sophists.

“Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

With the advent of the Sophists, a great change becomes apparent in the world of thought, and a new principle appears. According to this new point of view, which may be called the principle of subjectivity, things are as they seem to us, and universal truth does not exist. The Sophists seized upon the idea of the “flux and change” of all things which was taught by Heraclitus, to challenge and question all reality. They taught that the individual himself determined what should or should not be true, just and good, and the times in which they lived echoed their doctrine. Self-seeking and party-strife were the characteristics of public life. The axiom of Protagoras: “Man is the measure of the universe” led to a state of affairs comparable to the close of the Book of Judges.

“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg xxi. 25).

When the Sophists spoke of “man” as the “measure,” they were referring to the individual man. As each individual knows only his own sensations, what “seems” good to him “is” good—a doctrine upon which Adam and Eve seem to have acted in the garden of Eden, and which will again be apparent at the close of this age, when, as the Apostle wrote, “men shall be lovers of their own selves . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. iii. 2—4).

The Sophists were sceptics—an attitude partly justified by the widespread corruption among the people which was the natural outcome of the character attributed to their gods and goddesses and traditional heroes. The Greek Sophists were rather like the French illuminati of the eighteenth century, such as Rousseau and Voltaire, whose teaching led

to the great Revolution. Like them, too, they were encyclopædic in range, although their special strength lay more in formal quickness and rhetoric, than in positive knowledge. Hippias boasted that he was always able to say something new on any matter under discussion, and others made it a point to hold serious discourse on the most insignificant objects imaginable. In other words, as the Apostle said of their successors, they were characterised by "a show of wisdom," "words to no profit," and "vain janglings."

PROTAGORAS (B.C. 490), the first of the Sophists, was an agnostic rather than an atheist. He begins his book with the words:

"As for the gods, I am unable to know whether they are, or whether they are not: for there is much that prevents us from knowing these things, as well the obscurity of the subject as the shortness of the life of man."

Having resolved all knowledge down to that which we obtain by the senses, and having made man himself the arbiter of good and evil, the practical outcome could be nothing else than the gratification of the senses. This being granted, and coupled with it the fact that perception and sensation are with countless people countlessly diverse, the result was moral chaos. If "A" said a thing was blue, and "B" that it was green, both were true. According to the Sophists nothing is by nature good or bad; only law makes them so. And we are at liberty to make as many laws as we wish, according to what will be to our advantage.

In contrast with this, let us think for a moment of the statutes and commandments, the laws and precepts given to Israel. No wonder Moses said:

"What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut. iv. 8).

No wonder the Psalmist spoke of his love for the law, and how that it was more to him than fine gold. We are apt to think so much about the condemnation of the law, and the glorious liberty of the gospel, that it is difficult for us to put ourselves in the position of those who lived in the lawless atmosphere created by Sophism.

After Protagoras, the next and most celebrated of the Sophists was GORGIAS (B.C. 483). His work bore the characteristic title, "Of the Non-existent, or of Nature." He argued that (1) nothing exists, or (2) if something does exist, it cannot be known, or (3) if it can be known, it cannot be communicated.

If the reader wonders what sense there can be in the statement that "nothing exists," Gorgias would have explained in terms of origin. Whatever is assumed to exist, he would have said, must either have originated, or not originated. If it originated, this supposes non-existence previously; if it did not originate, it would not exist now. And so, with a grimace, he would have left you on the horns of a dialectic dilemma. The great omission in the scheme was a personal Creator. In the light of this revealed truth, all such speculations become absurd.

The Sophists that succeeded Gorgias became more audacious. Nothing was sacred to them. Laws, observances, customs, all were destroyed. Might was the law of nature, and unrespecting gratification of desire the natural right of the stronger. Restrictive laws were the cunning invention of the weaker.

Some of our readers will recognise the same spirit here as found expression in the teaching of Nietzsche, a German philosopher of the last century. He acclaimed Darwinism and its doctrine of the "survival of the fittest" as the gospel of eternal struggle and triumph of the strong. He attacked pity, humanitarianism and Christianity, and looked forward to the production of "super-men" who would be free from what he called "slave-morality."

All such doctrines are but anticipations of the appalling lawlessness which will characterise the last days. What a solemn issue for the wisdom of this world. Let us not forget that the wisdom of this world, in its ignorance of the hidden wisdom of God, crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. ii. 7, 8).

Let us hold fast to the truth revealed for all time in the words of Proverbs i. 7 :

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Socrates, and Moral Philosophy.

A splendid building, but without sufficient foundation.

We have frequently reiterated in this series the fact that revealed truth differs essentially from every philosophical system, in that it presents all truth concerning both God and man in a Person. Ears have *heard*, eyes have *seen*, hands have *handled* "the Word of Life." In the history of philosophy the "personal" comes into play for the first time in the teaching of Socrates. His system is essentially a biography. In this, so far as method is concerned, Socrates approached more nearly to the Scriptures than any other uninspired thinker. The Scriptures not only teach the *doctrine* of justification by faith, for example, but exhibit it in the life story of Abraham (Romans iv.; James ii., etc.). It was not possible, however, for any merely human being to fill out the measure of truth; this was true of One, and One only—the Son of God.

Socrates was born in B.C. 469. His manner of giving instruction was easy and conversational, and employed the things of common life as examples and illustrations. In this respect his teaching was a great contrast to the "show of wisdom" and high-flown rhetoric of the Sophists. Socrates invented the name "philosopher," or "lover of wisdom," in opposition to the vaunting claim of the "Sophists" to be "The Wise."

The "Socratic method"—the method of teaching by skilful questioning—is proverbial. Socrates was uninterruptedly employed in trying to find the "what" of everything. Aristotle says that the two things which constitute the foundation of science, namely the method of induction, and logical definition, were both due to Socrates. He took up the teaching of the Sophists that each man is the judge of what is right and wrong, but showed that every thinking being has the consciousness that what he holds to be right and good, is not merely so to him, but that it is so also to every rational being. This led to his great enquiry into what constitutes virtue.

"Virtue," said Socrates, "is knowledge, and vice ignorance." The Sophists regarded self-pleasing as an end in life. Socrates taught that rational satisfaction comes only from conduct which accords with the dictates of reason. All men, he argued, seek happiness, and therefore, since virtue is the only true means of happiness, all men would be virtuous, if they only knew what were right. There is a mixture of truth and error in this teaching that is sad. Socrates meant so well, but, alas, he did not allow for the fact that man is fallen, and that reason itself is not necessarily obeyed. However, Socrates was more correct than some have thought when he put together ignorance and vice, and knowledge and virtue. He saw clearly the leaves, the flowers, the fruit that should grow upon the tree, but he failed, as all unaided reason must, to discover the one and only root-hold. Peter, the inspired fisherman, could have taught him that virtue and knowledge and piety are only possible after a mighty change, and the partaking of a new life and power.

"According as HIS DIVINE POWER hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. i. 3).

How Socrates would have embraced this revelation no one but the Judge of the secrets of men knows, but on the surface it would seem to provide the "one thing needful."

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet. i. 4).

Here is a divine power, and a divine nature, both growing out of what the Apostle refers to in the opening verse of the epistle: "like precious faith with us, through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. i. 1). This is indeed the root of all virtue. Having this foundation Peter can go forward with confidence, where Socrates had to limp and halt. "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith *virtue*; and to virtue knowledge" (2 Pet. i. 5). Knowledge and virtue are certainly associated here, but they are "added," and this presupposes a foundation already laid, the foundation of "faith." Peter could say: "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge." Socrates could only point out that virtue is knowledge, without being able to provide the one or the other.

That vice and ignorance go hand in hand is common knowledge. Speaking of the Gentiles, the Apostle writes:

"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the LIFE OF GOD through the *ignorance* that is in them" (Eph. iv. 18).

What Socrates did not know was that ignorance not merely beclouds the reason but alienates from the very "life of God." Again and again we come back to the one great difference between Philosophy and Revelation—the emphasis upon a Person. Peter speaks of "the Divine nature"; Paul speaks of "the life of God," and "the truth in Jesus" (Eph. iv. 21).

Socrates held that no one is willingly wicked. The statement is too sweeping, but it contains an element of truth. Men have always attempted to justify their deeds. There are very few who set out to do wrong, knowing it to be wrong. In most cases an attempt is made to colour the action so that it may appear right. As a particular instance, let the reader consider the reasons given by any nation to justify the declaration of war. Is there on record a single public statement which reads: "We know that our action is prompted by avarice, but we are strong enough to win and that is all that matters?" Nothing but true repentance brings a man to say:

"I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Volumes have been written about Socrates, the man, his message, and his method. It would, however, be quite outside the scope of these articles to attempt to deal with our subject in detail. The details of his philosophy and all that led up to the bowl of hemlock that terminated his life we must leave for the interested reader to look up for himself.

Socrates laid the foundation of moral philosophy and died at the end for the doctrine he held. But neither his teaching nor his death could bring life. Nothing less than the death of the Founder of our faith could make a philosophy of morals anything more than an excellent system of teaching beyond the possibility of practical attainment. As Peter teaches us, we may "add to our faith virtue," but this is not possible until we are Divinely empowered, and made partakers of the Divine nature. In other words, virtue is knowledge, but only if that knowledge is the knowledge of Christ.

"Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. iii. 18).



The successors of Socrates, and their failure.

Socrates founded no school, but left behind the memory of a life that had in some measure exemplified his aim and teaching. As was to be expected, therefore, different men interpreted his life and teaching in various ways, according to their own temperaments and predilections. Three different systems have become historical, the school of the Cynics, the Cyrenaic school, and the Megaric school, represented respectively by Antisthenes, Aristippus, and Euclid.* All these schools, however, were too one-sided in their presentation of the original teaching of Socrates.

. *Antisthenes, and the Cynics.*—The name of this school of philosophy has become a normal English word describing any one who is misanthropic and inclined to sneer at the sincerity or goodness of others. Socrates, with a healthy humanity, despised the soft, the luxurious, and the effeminate, but Antisthenes caricatured his master instead of following him, living coarsely, and dressing in rough and ragged clothing. Socrates, however, made it plain that such a manner of living was not a true interpretation of his doctrine for he said on one occasion to Antisthenes: "I see thy vanity, Antisthenes, peering through the holes of thy cloak." This saying seems to approach the truth to be found in the Sermon on the Mount:

"When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward" (Matt. vi. 16).

The Apostle, in writing to the Colossians, speaks in a similar way of the ineffectiveness of "neglecting the body" (Col. ii. 23).

It may be asked by some of our readers how it was possible that Cynicism could have been the outcome of the teaching of Socrates. The answer is that Antisthenes, like

*Not to be confused with the mathematician of the same name.

Socrates, taught that virtue was the only thing worthy of human effort, but he misinterpreted his master by making virtue consist merely in the negation of desire—the avoidance of evil, indifference to marriage, to one's family, to riches, to honour, and to enjoyment. It was against this vain deceitful philosophy that the Apostle warned the Colossians. He says in effect:

Beware of that specious sanctity, that is the result of mere negations, such as Touch not, Taste not, Handle not.

Cynicism will be one of the characteristics of the close of the age, as well as lawlessness and scepticism as we have already seen :

“Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. iv. 3).

In I Timothy vi. we read :

“The living God, Who giveth us all things richly to enjoy” (1 Tim. vi. 17).

The words “richly to enjoy” would have been like a red rag to a bull in the sight of Antisthenes, but he who “trusts in the living God” has no need to dress in rags to show his crucifixion to the world.

Cynicism as it advanced expressed a greater contempt for propriety and decency. We will not, however, deal with the unmannerly doings and sayings of Diogenes, but turn to the second school, namely, the *Cyrenaic*.

Socrates had taught that virtue *and* happiness together constituted the highest human end, but had not based this view upon any actual moral law, other than the teaching that true happiness was to be found only in the path of virtue. Aristippus, the founder of the *Cyrenaic* school, seized upon this loosely defined happiness, and made it the criterion of what constituted virtue. Pronouncing pleasure as the ultimate good of life, and going probably to an even greater extreme because of the attitude of the Cynics to innocent pleasure, his teaching degenerated into the mere enjoyment of bodily pleasure and sensation. Accordingly all moral limitations were to be disregarded, since they limited pleasure; and nothing was wicked, shameful, or godless, if it procured it. He did advocate justice, since injustice *does not pay* and so does not lead to happiness; and he did counsel self-control, but, failing to take into account the sinful nature of man, his teaching could lead to nothing better than irresponsible lawlessness.

The third school was founded by *Euclid*, who taught that in true Being was found the one Good, and that evil was non-existent. None of these men rightly understood the teaching of Socrates; this was reserved for Plato.

The idea of making "pleasure" a criterion of virtue goes back to the time of Adam:

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was *pleasant* to the eyes" (Gen. iii. 6).

Centuries before the birth of Socrates Ecclesiastes tells us that he had experimented along these same lines:

"I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity" (Eccles. ii. 1).

He tells us that he set out on this quest "till I might see what was that good for the sons of men" (Eccles. ii. 3). Accordingly he pursued pleasure, great works, houses, gardens, possessions, "the peculiar treasure of kings," music and art—"and whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy" (Eccles. ii. 10). Yet his solemn verdict is that all is vanity. Ecclesiastes saw what none of these philosophers seems to have weighed sufficiently, that "the one event" that happens to all robs all earthly pleasure of any true value.

As we pursue the teaching of the book of Ecclesiastes, our eyes are directed onward and upward. The key to the problem lies "there," not "here" (Eccles. iii. 17: v. 8: vii. 18: xii. 13, 14). The Cynic denied all pleasure. The Cyrenaic endorsed it strongly. Ecclesiastes does neither. He sets aside pleasure in chapter ii., but commends it in viii. 15; iii. 12; v. 18; and ix. 7—10. A patient balancing of his findings will, however, show that there is no contradiction. In most chapters "the one event" is in view, and when that is kept in mind, and the world and its ways seen in their true perspective, the innocent pleasures of life are commended.*

Socrates lived out, in measure, his own doctrine, and died a martyr's death; but he was a sinful man and needed a Saviour. His life and death could be nothing more than an example. They could neither bring deliverance from sin, nor give the blessed assurance of victory over the grave. How far Socrates "felt after" the Lord, we cannot say. Happily

all judgment has been committed into the hands of Him Who knew what Tyre and Sidon, and Sodom and Gomorrha *would have done* in more favourable circumstances (Matt. xi. 20—24), and we gladly leave Socrates and all such in His hands. For ourselves, can we ever be too grateful for One Who taught the Truth, Who lived and died for the Truth, and Who by His life and death delivers us from sin, places out feet in the path of virtue, enables us to deny ourselves without cynicism, and to look forward to pleasures at the right hand of God that are for evermore?



Plato, the Idealist.

The zenith of human wisdom is reached in the labours of Plato. Plato's philosophy was founded upon the teaching of Socrates, and his celebrated theory of ideas may be regarded as an attempt to mediate between the two systems of Heraclitus and Parmenides. What was but dimly seen and uncertainly expressed by the master—Socrates, is unfolded and systematised by his disciple. It needed, however, two exponents to give the teaching of Socrates completeness, Plato giving us "idea," and Aristotle "form"—the former being the idealist, and the latter the realist. Plato subjected all previous philosophies to the searching Socratic method of question and answer.

To attempt an outline of Plato's teaching is entirely beyond our ability, time or purpose. In this series of articles we are simply attempting to sketch out as far as possible the history of human wisdom between the close of the O.T. and the birth of Christ, in order to quicken the reader's appreciation of the gift of God, the written and the living Word.

The principle of "right division," which governs all our study of Scripture, is not only a spiritual principle, but obtains also in things which are mental or physical. "Right division" is the rule of all study, all administration, all science; without it we have confusion instead of clarity. Plato speaks of dialectic or logic as the "science of duly conducting discourse, and *duly joining or disjoining the genera of things.*" The word "genus" (plural of genera) indicates a class or kind which includes species having certain attributes in common. Thus the word "dog" represents a genus, whereas "terrier" and "spaniel" stand for particular species—which, while possessing certain characteristic differences, are nevertheless allied, and belong to one class or genus. If we were as wise as Plato, or if we simply heeded the instruction of 2 Timothy ii. 15, we should keep "Kingdom" and "Church" distinct. We should "rightly divide the Word of Truth," and so not only avoid confusion, but widen and deepen our understanding.

There are many features about "The Good" that it was Plato's life work to discover, that approach to the idea of "God," but his idealism would lead away to "Being" rather than to "the Living God." He did not find the "personal God," for He can only be found "in Christ."

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul which Plato taught, has displaced or modified the teaching of Scripture in the case of many believers, and in most denominations. Plato had no revealed statement concerning the nature of the soul, or the difference between soul and spirit. He knew nothing of resurrection, either as a doctrine, or as a blessed fact of history. He did not know the One Who could say: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." He knew nothing of John iii. 16. Christians, however, have had all these advantages, and are truly culpable if they follow the teaching of Plato, and despise the revelation of God.

Morality, in the teaching of Plato, is generally more a matter of the head than of the heart, but it is not merely abstract, as a study of his "Republic" will show. He would have Reason in supreme control, with the heart fortified by courage, and so enabled to choose aright, to resist evil, and if needs be to endure pain, with temperance regulating the appetite, and the whole bound and related by justice. This is a good ideal, but man by nature is under the dominion of sin, and abstract reason cannot control him, nor can he find strength to resist evil and follow good. While Plato's statements may be faultless, they are fruitless, because they are powerless. Man needs a Redeemer, and he needs newness of life, before he can serve in newness of spirit. The failure of the Jew in a more perfect state than Plato's republic, and under a more perfect law than Plato's ethics, is a warning for all time.

We make no apology for the very sparse account we offer of this great philosopher. The very fulness of his teaching renders any such account as this hopelessly inadequate. If we were to deal with one point only and explain what is meant by the "idea" in the Platonic system, it would mean several books, with explanations of terms at every point. Let it suffice that we have not left his labours unrecorded, and that we have no need to spend years of study before we can arrive at the abstract "Good," which was Plato's Ultimate. Let it suffice that we have found all our "Good," and all our "Goal," as we have found all our wisdom, courage and control, in a living Head, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Aristotle, the Realist.

If Plato is the idealist in the Socratic school, Aristotle is the realist. While Plato is literary, Aristotle is scientific and his knowledge encyclopædic. It is not easy to subdivide Aristotle's teaching into sections, but roughly we may say that it falls into three groups, represented by logic, physics, and ethics or morals.

In B.C. 343 Aristotle was called to Macedonia by Philip to undertake the education of his son, then a boy of fourteen. This son was afterwards to be known as Alexander the Great, and is referred to by Daniel the prophet.

Aristotle's *Organon* is the basis upon which his fame as the inventor of deductive logic rests, and it was as a rival to this that Bacon wrote his *Novum Organon*, thus earning the title of the inventor of inductive logic. In ethics, Aristotle opposed the doctrine of the Stoics, arguing that we cannot be indifferent to external goods, or to environment generally. He taught that the true maxim was not negation but subordination.

Aristotle differed from Plato with regard to the immortality of the soul, and approached more closely to the teaching of the Scriptures. Schwegeler's history contains the following summary :

"The soul is related to the body as form to matter ; it is the animating principle. Simply for this reason the soul cannot be thought of without the body : neither can it exist by itself, and with the body it ceases to be."

To appreciate this statement, we must know something of Aristotle's four principles or causes, and the relation of matter to form. Aristotle lays down four principles : the formal, the material, the efficient, and the final. For example, in the case of a house, the building materials are the matter, the idea of the house is the form, **the efficient cause is the builder, and the actual house itself the final cause.**

Moreover, Aristotle makes a distinction between the "soul" and the "spirit." He speaks of the *nous*, the "mind," as being essentially different from the "soul," and unrelated to the lower faculties. "It comes, as being no result of lower processes, from elsewhere into the body, and is equally again separable from it." With which we may compare the words of Ecclesiastes :

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God Who gave it" (Eccles. xii. 7).

The *summum bonum*, or "chief good," according to Aristotle, is happiness, but this happiness is not only a well-being but a well-doing. His definition of happiness is a "perfect activity in a perfect life."

With this we may compare the words of the Apostle in Romans:

"The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God . . . because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. viii. 19—21).

Aristotle felt the burden, and shared the groan of a creation subject to vanity. He realised also that perfect happiness demands perfect liberty, but he did not know the One by Whom this groan shall one day be hushed, and Who even now gives to His believing people the "spirit of adoption" as the glorious pledge of that future "redemption of the body," in which perfect happiness will be realised in a perfect life.

Virtue, according to Aristotle, is the result of frequently repeated moral action; it is a quality won through exercise. We may compare this with the Apostle's words in Hebrews v. 14, where he speaks of those who are "of full age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

It is of course quite impossible in these pages to give any adequate idea of the breadth and wealth of Aristotle's teaching. And yet, with all his wisdom, and with all that he has contributed to the world of thought and research, he did not reach the position attained by the poor unlettered beggar who had seen the Lord and could say: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

There is one thing that is conspicuously absent from the writings of most of these wise men of the earth, and that is the sense of sin. This sense is aroused by the preaching or the reading of the Scriptures, and sends the self-confessed sinner on the quest, not for happiness merely, but for forgiveness and reconciliation, for peace with God and life. Until these things are ours, the matters that occupied the attention of these men of old are but trifles. Important though they may be in themselves, they will take no one beyond the grave, and if there is one lesson we have learnt from Ecclesiastes it is surely that of the paramount importance of the "life to come."

"Granted that there is a life beyond the grave, then though wickedness may sit in the place of judgment (Eccles. iii. 16), and though many inequalities and perplexing mysteries of providence may still baffle us (Eccles. vii. 15; viii. 14, 17), though the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but all have to reckon with time and chance, yet the conclusion of the matter sets all right. It will be our wisdom to fear God, and keep His commandments, for a day of judgment is coming, and if a day of judgment, then a day when the crooked shall be made straight, the inequalities made equal, a day of LIFE from the dead, where vanity and vexation of spirit shall never more intrude, for death and Hades shall be destroyed in the second death, and God shall solve all life's mysteries in the LIFE TO COME"

The Philosophies of New Testament Times.

Stoicism, the Philosophy of Pride.

Epicureanism, the Philosophy of Pleasure.

Scepticism, the Philosophy of Indifference.

Our investigations into the history of philosophy bring us at last into actual contact with the philosophers mentioned in Scripture. Aristotle's successors were the Stoics and the Epicureans, and both of these schools are mentioned in Acts xvii.

Stoicism.

To the Stoic, the proper condition of the mind was expressed by the word apathy; to the Epicurean, by self-contentment; and to the Sceptic, by imperturbability or indifference. All three agreed that the only way to happiness was peace of mind, but they each sought it differently—the peace of apathy, the peace of self-contentment, and the peace of indifference. How the heart rejoices as one thinks of that “peace with God” which the justified believer possesses, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and that “peace of God,” passing all understanding, that keeps the heart and mind through Christ Jesus. What a tremendous change, from the Stoic's peace of apathy to the believer's peace with God on account of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

Zeno, the founder of the Stoics, taught that the real business of all philosophy is human conduct, and had little sympathy with the idealism and dialectic of Plato and his school. The keen interest in logic displayed by the Socratic school was not perpetuated by the Stoics. Indeed, one of them likened logic to the eating of lobsters—much trouble for little meat. This attitude was probably intensified by the abuse of logic among those whose paradoxes prove them to be clever but useless members of society.

“Belonging to an age morally debased and politically oppressed, its founder, Zeno, conceived the idea of liberating himself, and all who were able to follow him, from the degeneracy and slavery of the age, by means of a philosophy which, by purity and strength of moral will, would procure independence from all external things and unruffled inward peace.”

The hymn to Jove, written by the Stoic, Cleanthes, and quoted by Paul on Mars' hill, shows how near at times these men came to the truth.

“Most glorious of the gods, immortal Jove!
 Supreme, on earth beneath, in heaven above!
 Thou great first cause, whose word is Nature's law,
 Before thy throne we mortals bend in awe;
 For we thine offspring are. To man is given—
 To man alone—to lift a voice to heaven.”

To "follow nature" and to "live in agreement with nature" constituted the moral principles of the Stoics, but their attitude must not be confused with that of the Epicureans, who made pleasure their guide and goal. The Stoic interpretation was to "live in agreement with your own rational nature, so far as it is not corrupted and distorted by art, and to exclude every personal end, consequently, the most personal—pleasure." What high ideals—but what poor material on which to work! There is, alas, a "corruption" and "distortion" deeper than that produced by "art," which makes the exhortation to "follow nature" a course that ends only in death. The words of the prophet:

"We have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. liii. 6)

contain truth concerning the nature of sin and the one and only remedy—a remedy that was unknown to Stoic philosophy.

The Apostle's words in Acts xx. 24: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself," would have gained the approval of the Stoic, but he would not have understood the Apostle's motive, which was "Christ and the gospel." The Stoics held that he only is good who is perfectly

good. Their standard, however, was not God's law of righteousness, but "reason and nature." They affirmed that faultless moral action was only possible through the possession of entire virtue, a perfect perception of the good, and a perfect power of realisation. The apostle Paul could have told them, out of his own experience, how deep a gulf there is between "perfect perception" and "perfect power":

"That which I do, I allow not; for that I would, what do I not, but what I hate, that do I *to will* is present with me, but *to perform* that which is good I find not O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 15—24).

F. W. Farrar writes of the Stoics as follows:

"Aiming at the attainment of a complete supremacy, not only over their passions, but even over their circumstances—professing fictitious indifference to every influence of pain or sorrow,

'For there was never yet philosopher

That could endure the toothache patiently' (Shakespeare).

standing proudly alone in their unaided independence and self-asserted strength, the Stoics, with their vaunted apathy, had stretched the power of will until it cracked and shrivelled under the unnatural strain; and this gave to their lives a consciousness of insincerity which, in the worst sort of them, degraded their philosophy into a cloak for every form of ambition and iniquity, and which made the nobler souls among them melancholy with a morbid egotism and an intense despair. In their worst degeneracies Stoicism became the apotheosis of suicide, and Epicureanism the glorification of lust."

Epicureanism.

The watch-word of the Epicureans was pleasure, and morals were all explained in this light. The sailor who risked his life to save a stranger, the martyr who died for his faith, the profligate whose sensuality ruined the lives of others, were all actuated, according to Epicurus, solely by the "pleasure" they received. One can easily see how soon such a philosophy would spread its blight over the community. The Apostle probably had the Epicureans in mind when he spoke of those "whose god is their belly," for Metrodous asserted that everything good has reference to the belly. To demand virtue for its own sake they considered foolishness. According to the Epicurean view, only those who had pleasure as their aim had a real object in life. The Stoics and the Epicureans may be called the exponents of pride and pleasure, and each in their own way were necessarily enemies of the faith.

The Epicureans were materialists. The gods, if they existed, dwelt apart in complete indifference. The universe was but a thing of chance, and as there was no creator, there could be no moral governor, and no day of judgment. The idea of a resurrection was to them ridiculous; and, as the Apostle wrote: "...if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die"—which was exactly what the Epicurean philosophy led to. To the Stoics also the idea of future reward or punishment was intolerable, so that we can appreciate the way in which the Apostle led up to the day of judgment, and the resurrection of the dead, when he spoke to these philosophers on Mars' Hill.

Paul could not have been ignorant of the fact that Socrates also had been arraigned before the Athenian Council at Areopagus on the charge of introducing strange gods, and had pleaded his own cause, as did the Apostle. The opening words of his defence were as follows:

"Ye men of Athens (the same words as were used by the apostle Paul), I know not how you yourselves have been affected by my accusers; but I have well-nigh forgotten myself, so persuasively have they spoken. If you hear me defending myself in the same language that I am wont to use in the market place, where and elsewhere most of you have heard me, let me entreat you not to be surprised, or take it in ill part, for thus it is: now for the first time, at the age of more than seventy years, I appear at the bar of the court."

Socrates did not know the Saviour, or the blessed hope of resurrection, but he said to his judges: "I must obey God rather than you," and died for his teaching and his conscience. It certainly seems that the Apostle, who wrote of the Gentiles who have not the law (Rom. ii.), and of the period of Gentile ignorance that God winked at (Acts xvii.), would not have entertained any harsh views concerning the old philosopher who had stood years before in the same place.

Scepticism.

The one other system of philosophy with which we have to deal is Scepticism. The founder of this school was Pyrrho, who was associated with Alexander the Great. The fundamental doctrine of the Sceptics was the same as that of the Stoics and the Epicureans—namely, that “philosophy shall conduct us to happiness.” The Sceptics held that what things really are, lies beyond the sphere of our knowledge. For all we know, the opposite of every proposition is still possible. In the circumstances, the true line for the philosopher is a complete suspension of judgment. His attitude was: “It is possible, it may perhaps be so, I know nothing for certain”—to which he was careful to add, “Nor do I even know for certain that I know nothing for certain.” In this suspension of judgment, and in this alone, the Sceptic believed that tranquillity was to be found.

Paul, as we have seen, bore his testimony before the Stoics and Epicureans. In the case of the Lord Himself, it was before the Sceptic, Pontius Pilate. When Pilate asked “Thou art a King then?” the Lord answered:

“Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice” (John xviii. 37).

To which Pilate replies: “What is truth?” Pilate did not ask this question in order to obtain an answer. His words were the words of a Sceptic, and were probably spoken with a sneer, and a contemptuous turn of the heel, without waiting for any answer, and believing that no answer was possible.

“And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in Him no fault at all” (John xviii. 38).

Here, before one of the basest products of the philosophy of the ages, stood the living Truth Himself, and yet the Jews combined with the Gentiles to put Him to death, choosing rather Barabbas.

Throughout this series we have but one aim—to do all that we can to impress the reader with the fact that the only true wisdom is the wisdom that comes to us in the living personal Christ. All else is but an unsuccessful groping in the dark. He alone solves the problem of Being and Becoming; of the First Cause and the Last Goal. He Himself is Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Like Asaph, we have vexed our souls in the schools of philosophy, and found no satisfaction or peace until at length we have gone into the sanctuary, and there we have seen the end. In the light of the birth at Bethlehem, the sacrifice of Calvary, and the resurrection from the sealed tomb, we see that which no philosopher could discover, and like Asaph we can say :

“ Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee ” (Psa lxxiii. 25).

It may be our glad task at a future date to draw the reader's attention to the actual philosophy of the Scriptures themselves.

“ The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth ” (1 John ii. 8).

“ We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life ” (1 John v. 20).

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