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III. Plato - Fenelon.

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of state were necessary to your greatness: I was great in myself, great in the energy and powers of my mind, great in the superiority and *sovereignty* of my soul over all other men.

DIALOGUE III.

PLATO—FENELON.

PLATO.

WELCOME to Elyfium, O thou, the most pure, the most gentle, the most refined disciple of philosophy that the world, in modern times, has produced! Sage Fenelon, welcome!—I need not name myself to you. Our souls by sympathy must know one another.

FENELON.

I know you to be Plato, the most amiable of all the disciples of Socrates, and the philosopher of all antiquity whom I most desired to resemble.

PLATO.

Homer and Orpheus are impatient to see you in that region of these happy fields, which their shades inhabit. They both acknowledge you to be a great poet, though you have written no verses. And they are now busy in composing for you unfading wreaths of all the finest and sweetest Elyfian flowers. But I will lead you from them to the sacred grove of Philosophy, on the highest hill of Elyfium, where the air is most pure and most serene. I will conduct you to the fountain of Wisdom, in which you will see, as in your own writings, the fair image of Virtue perpetually reflected. It will raise in you more love than was felt by Narcissus, when he contemplated the beauty of his own face in the unruffled spring. But you shall

shall not pine, as he did, for a shadow. The goddess herself will affectionately meet your embraces and mingle with your soul.

F E N E L O N.

I find you retain the allegorical and poetical style, of which you were so fond in many of your writings. Mine also run sometimes into poetry, particularly in my *Telemachus*, which I meant to make a kind of epic composition. But I dare not rank myself among the great poets, nor pretend to any equality in oratory with you, the most eloquent of philosophers, on whose lips the Attic bees distilled all their honey.

P L A T O.

The French language is not so harmonious as the Greek: yet you have given a sweetness to it, which equally charms the ear and heart. When one reads your compositions, one thinks that one hears Apollo's lyre, strung by the hands of the Graces, and tuned by the Muses. The idea of a *perfect king*, which you have exhibited in your *Telemachus*, far excels, in my own judgement, my imaginary *republic*. Your *Dialogues* breathe the pure spirit of virtue, of unaffected good sense, of just criticism, of fine taste. They are in general as superior to your countryman Fontenelle's, as reason is to false wit, or truth to affectation. The greatest fault of them, I think, is, that some are too short.

F E N E L O N.

It has been objected to them, and I am sensible of it myself, that most of them are too full of *common-place morals*. But I wrote them for the instruction of a young prince: and one cannot too forcibly imprint on the minds of those who are born to empire the most simple truths: because, as they grow up, the flattery of a court will try to disguise and conceal from them those truths, and to eradicate from their hearts the love of their duty, if it has not taken there a very deep root.

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P L A T O.

P L A T O.

It is indeed the peculiar misfortune of princes, that they are often instructed with great care in the refinements of policy, and not taught the first principles of moral obligations, or taught so superficially, that the virtuous man is soon lost in the corrupt politician. But the lessons of virtue you gave your royal pupil are so graced by the charms of your eloquence, that the oldest and wisest men may attend to them with pleasure. All your writings are embellished with a sublime and agreeable imagination, which gives elegance to simplicity, and dignity to the most vulgar and obvious truths. I have heard, indeed, that your countrymen are less sensible of the beauty of your genius and style than any of their neighbours. What has so much depraved their taste?

F E N E L O N.

That which depraved the taste of the Romans after the age of Augustus; an immoderate love of *wit*, of *paradox*, of *refinement*. The works of their writers, like the faces of their women, must be painted and adorned with artificial embellishments to attract their regards. And thus the natural beauty of both is lost. But it is no wonder if few of them esteem my Telemachus; as the maxims I have principally inculcated there are thought by many inconsistent with the grandeur of their monarchy, and with the splendor of a refined and opulent nation. They seem generally to be falling into opinions, that the chief end of society is to procure the pleasures of luxury; that a nice and elegant taste of voluptuous enjoyments is the perfection of merit; and that a king, who is gallant, magnificent, liberal, who builds a fine palace, who furnishes it well with good statues and pictures, who encourages the fine arts, and makes them subservient to every modish vice, who has a restless ambition, a perfidious policy, and a spirit of conquest, is better for them than a Numa, or a Marcus Aurelius. Whereas to
check

check the excesses of luxury, those excesses I mean which enfeeble the spirit of a nation; to ease the people, as much as is possible, of the burthen of taxes; to give them the blessings of peace and tranquillity, when they can be obtained without injury or dishonour; to make them frugal, and hardy, and masculine in the temper of their bodies and minds, that they may be the fitter for war whenever it does come upon them; but above all to watch diligently over their morals, and discourage whatever may defile or corrupt them, is the great business of government, and ought to be in all circumstances the principal object of a wise legislature. Unquestionably *that is the happiest country which has most virtue in it*: and to the eye of sober reason the poorest Swiss canton is a much nobler state than the kingdom of France, if it has more liberty, better morals, a more settled tranquillity, more moderation in prosperity, and more firmness in danger.

P L A T O.

Your notions are just; and if your country rejects them, she will not long hold the rank of the first nation in Europe. Her declension is begun, her ruin approaches. For, omitting all other arguments, can a state be well served, when the raising of an opulent fortune in its service, and making a splendid use of that fortune, is a distinction more envied than any which arises from integrity in office, or public spirit in government? can that spirit, which is the parent of national greatness, continue vigorous and diffusive, where the desire of wealth, for the sake of a luxury which wealth alone can support, and an ambition aspiring, not to glory, but to profit, are the predominant passions? If it exists in a king, or a minister of state, how will either of them find, among a people so disposed, the necessary instruments to execute his great designs; or rather, what obstruction will he not find from the continual opposition of private interest to public? But if, on the contrary, a court inclines to tyranny, what a facility will be given by these dispositions to that evil purpose!

purpose! how will men, with minds relaxed by the enervating ease and softness of luxury, have vigour to oppose it! will not most of them lean to servitude, *as their natural state*, as that in which the extravagant and insatiable cravings of their artificial wants may best be gratified at the charge of a bountiful master, or by the spoils of an enslaved and ruined people? when all sense of public virtue is thus destroyed, will not fraud, corruption, and avarice, or the opposite workings of court-factions to bring disgrace on each other, ruin armies and fleets without the help of an enemy, and give up the independence of the nation to foreigners, after having betrayed its liberties to a king? All these mischiefs you saw attendant on that luxury, which some modern philosophers account (as I am informed) the highest good to a state! Time will shew that their doctrines are pernicious to society, pernicious to government; and that your's, tempered and moderated, so as to render them more practicable in the present circumstances of your country, are wise, salutary, and deserving of the general thanks of mankind. But, lest you should think, from the praise I have given you, that flattery can find a place in Elysium, allow me to lament, with the tender sorrow of a friend, that a man so superior to all other follies could give into the *reveries* of a madame Guyon, a distracted enthusiast. How strange was it to see *the two great lights of France*, you and the bishop of Meaux, engaged in a controversy, whether a *madwoman* was a *heretic*, or a *saint*!

F E N E L O N.

I confess my own weakness, and the ridiculousness of the dispute. But did not your warm imagination carry you also into some *reveries* about *divine love*, in which you talked unintelligibly, even to yourself?

P L A T O.

I *felt* something more than I was able to *express*.

F E N E-

I had my *feelings* too, as fine and as lively as your's. But we should both have done better to have avoided those subjects, in which *sentiment* took the place of *reason*.

DIALOGUE IV.

Mr. ADDISON — Dr. SWIFT.

DR. SWIFT.

SURELY, Addison, Fortune was exceedingly inclined to play the fool (a humour her ladyship, as well as most other ladies of very great quality, is frequently in) when she made you a *minister of state*, and me a *divine*!

ADDISON.

I must confess we were both of us out of our elements. But you don't mean to insinuate, that all would have been right, if our destinies had been reversed?

SWIFT.

Yes, I do.—You would have made an excellent bishop; and I should have governed Great Britain, as I did Ireland, with an absolute sway, while I talked of nothing but liberty, property, and so forth.

ADDISON.

You governed the mob of Ireland; but I never understood that you governed the kingdom. A nation and a mob are very different things.

SWIFT.

Ay; so you fellows that have no genius for politics may suppose. But there are times when, by scatonably putting himself at the head of the mob, an able man may get to the head