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XXX. Plato - Diogenes.

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DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD,

equality of the Roman commonwealth, than all the power of its tribunes.

CÆSAR.

I had rather have been thrown down the Tarpeian rock, than have retired, as you did, to the obscurity of a village, after acting the first part on the greatest theatre of the world.

SCIPIO.

An usurper exalted on the highest throne of the universe is not so glorious as I was in that obscure retirement. I hear indeed, that you, Cæsar, have been *deified* by the flattery of some of your successors. But the impartial judgement of history has consecrated my name, and ranks me in the first class of heroes and patriots: whereas the highest praise her records, even under the dominion usurped by your family, have given to you, is, that your courage and talents were equal to the object your ambition aspired to, the empire of the world; and that you exercised a sovereignty unjustly acquired with a magnanimous clemency. But it would have been better for your country, and better for mankind, if you had never existed.



DIALOGUE XXX.

PLATO—DIOGENES.

DIOGENES.

PLATO, stand off.—A true philosopher, as I was, is no company for a courtier of the tyrant of Syracuse. I would avoid you, as one infected with the most noisome of plagues, the plague of slavery.

PLATO.

He, who can mistake a brutal pride and savage indecency of manners for freedom, may naturally think that the being in a

court

court (however virtuous one's conduct, however free one's language there) is slavery. But I was taught by my great master, the incomparable Socrates, that the business of true philosophy is to consult and promote the happiness of society. She must not therefore be confined to a *tub* or a *cell*. Her sphere is in senates, or the cabinets of kings. While your sect is employed in snarling at the great, or buffooning with the vulgar, she is counseling those who govern nations, infusing into their minds humanity, justice, temperance, and the love of true glory, resisting their passions, when they transport them beyond the bounds of virtue, and fortifying their reason by the antidotes she administers against the poison of flattery.

D I O G E N E S.

You mean to have me understand, that you went to the court of the Younger Dionysius, to give him antidotes against the poison of flattery. But I say he sent for you only to sweeten the cup, by mixing it more agreeably, and rendering the flavour more delicate. His vanity was too nice for the nauseous common draught; but your seasoning gave it a relish, which made it go down most delightfully, and intoxicated him more than ever. Oh! there is no flatterer half so dangerous to a prince as a fawning philosopher!

P L A T O.

If you call it fawning, that I did not treat him with such unmannerly rudeness as you did Alexander the Great, when he visited you at Athens, I have nothing to say. But, in truth, I made my company agreeable to him, not for any mean ends which regarded only myself, but that I might be useful both to him and to his people. I endeavoured to give a right turn to his vanity; and know, Diogenes, that whoever will serve mankind, but more especially princes, must compound with their weaknesses, and take as much pains to gain them over to virtue, by an honest and prudent complaisance, as others do to seduce them from it, by a criminal adulation.

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D I O-

DIOGENES.

A little of my sagacity would have shewn you, that, if this was your purpose, your labour was lost in that court. Why did you not go and preach chastity to Lais? A philosopher in a brothel, reading lectures on the beauty of continence and decency, is not a more ridiculous animal, than a philosopher in the cabinet, or at the table of a tyrant, descanting on liberty and public spirit! What effect had the lessons of your famous disciple Aristotle upon Alexander the Great, a prince far more capable of receiving instruction than the Younger Dionysius? did they hinder him from killing his best friend, Clitus, for speaking to him with freedom; or from fancying himself a god, because he was adored by the wretched slaves he had vanquished? When I desired him *not to stand between me and the sun*, I humbled his pride more, and consequently did him more good, than Aristotle had done by all his formal precepts.

P L A T O.

Yet he owed to those precepts, that, notwithstanding his excesses, he appeared not unworthy of the empire of the world. Had the tutor of his youth gone with him into Asia, and continued always at his ear, the authority of that wise and virtuous man might have been able to stop him, even in the riot of conquest, from giving way to those passions which dishonoured his character.

DIOGENES.

If he had gone into Asia, and had not flattered the king as obsequiously as Hæphæstion, he would, like Callisthenes, whom he sent thither as his deputy, have been put to death for high treason. The man who will not flatter, must live independent, as I did, and prefer a tub to a palace.

P L A T O.

Do you pretend, Diogenes, that, because you were never in a court, you never flattered? How did you gain the affection of
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the people of Athens, but by soothing their ruling passion, the desire of hearing their superiors abused? Your cynic railing was to them the most acceptable flattery. This you well understood, and made your court to the vulgar, always envious and malignant, by trying to lower all dignity and confound all order: you made your court, I say, as fervilely, and with as much offence to virtue, as the basest flatterer ever did to the most corrupted prince. But true philosophy will disdain to act either of these parts. Neither in the assemblies of the people, nor in the cabinets of kings, will she obtain favour by fomenting any bad dispositions. If her endeavours to do good prove unsuccessful, she will retire with honour, as an honest physician departs from the house of a patient, whose distemper he finds incurable, or who refuses to take the remedies he prescribes. But if she succeeds; if, like the music of Orpheus, her sweet persuasions can mitigate the ferocity of the multitude, and tame their minds to a due obedience of laws and reverence of magistrates; or if she can form a Timoleon, or a Numa Pompilius, to the government of a state, how meritorious is the work! One king, nay one minister, or counsellor of state, imbued with her precepts, is of more value than all the speculative, retired philosophers, or cynical revilers of princes and magistrates, that ever lived upon earth.

D I O G E N E S.

Don't tell me of the music of Orpheus, and of his taming wild beasts. A wild beast brought to *crouch* and *lick the hand of a master*, is a much viler animal than he was in his natural state of ferocity. You seem to think, that the business of philosophy is to *polish men into slaves*; but I say, it is to teach them to assert, with an untamed and generous spirit, their independence and freedom. You profess to instruct those who want to *ride* their fellow creatures, how to do it with an easy and gentle rein; but I would have them thrown off, and trampled under the

the feet of all their deluded or insulted equals, on whose backs they have mounted. Which of us two is the truest friend to mankind?

PLATO.

According to your notions, all government is destructive to liberty; but I think that no liberty can subsist without government. A state of society is the *natural* state of mankind. They are impelled to it by their wants, their infirmities, their affections. The laws of society are rules of life and action necessary to secure their happiness in that state. Government is the due enforcing of those laws. That government is the best, which does this most effectually, and most equally; and that people is the freest, which is most submissively obedient to such a government.

DIODENES.

Shew me the government which makes no other use of its power than duly to enforce the laws of society, and I will own it is intitled to the most absolute submission from all its subjects.

PLATO.

I cannot shew you perfection in human institutions. It is far more easy to blame them than it is to amend them: much may be wrong in the best: but a good man respects the laws and the magistrates of his country.

DIODENES.

As for the laws of my country, I did so far respect them, as not to philosophise to the prejudice of the first and greatest principle of nature and of wisdom, self-preservation. Though I loved to prate about high matters as well as Socrates, I did not chuse to drink hemlock after his example. But you might as well have bid me *love* an ugly woman, because she was drest up in the gown of *Lais*, as *respect* a fool or a knave, because he was attired in the robe of a magistrate.

PLATO.

P L A T O.

All I desired of you was, not to amuse yourself and the populace by throwing dirt upon the robe of a magistrate, merely because he wore that robe, and you did not.

D I O G E N E S.

A philosopher cannot better display his wisdom, than by throwing contempt on that pageantry, which the ignorant multitude gaze at with a senseless veneration.

P L A T O.

He who tries to make the multitude *venerate nothing*, is more senseless than they. Wise men have endeavoured to excite an awful reverence in the minds of the vulgar for external ceremonies and forms, in order to secure their obedience to religion and government, of which these are the symbols. Can a philosopher desire to defeat that good purpose?

D I O G E N E S.

Yes, if he sees it abused to support the evil purposes of superstition and tyranny.

P L A T O.

May not the abuse be corrected without losing the benefit? is there no difference between *reformation* and *destruction*?

D I O G E N E S.

Half-measures do nothing. He who desires to *reform* must not be afraid to *pull down*.

P L A T O.

I know that you and your sect *are for pulling down every thing that is above your own level*. Pride and envy are the motives that set you all to work. Nor can one wonder that passions, the influence of which is so general, should give you many disciples and many admirers.

D I O.

DIOGENES.

When you have established *your republic*, if you will admit me into it, I promise you to be *there* a most *respectful* subject.

PLATO.

I am conscious, Diogenes, that *my republic* was imaginary, and could never be established. But they shew as little knowledge of what is practicable in politicks, as I did in that book; who suppose that the liberty of any civil society can be maintained by the destruction of order and decency, or promoted by the petulance of unbridled defamation.

DIOGENES.

I never knew any government angry at defamation, when it fell on those who disliked or obstructed its measures. But I well remember, that the thirty tyrants at Athens called opposition to them *the destruction of order and decency*.

PLATO.

Things are not altered by names.

DIOGENES.

No—but names have a strange power to impose on weak understandings. If, when you were in Egypt, you had laughed at the worship of an onion, the priests would have called you an atheist, and the people would have stoned you. But I presume, that, to have the honour of being initiated into the mysteries of that reverend hierarchy, you bowed as low to it as any of their devout disciples. Unfortunately my neck was not so pliant, and therefore I was never initiated into the mysteries either of religion or government, but was feared or hated by all who thought it their interest to make them be respected.

PLATO.

Your vanity found its account in that fear and that hatred. The high priest of a deity, or the ruler of a state, is much
less

less distinguished from the vulgar herd of mankind, than the scoffer at all religion, and the despiser of all dominion.—But let us end our dispute. I feel my folly in continuing to argue with one, who in reasoning does not seek to come at truth, but merely to shew his wit. Adieu, Diogenes; I am going to converse with the shades of Pythagoras, Solon, and Bias.—You may jest with Aristophanes, or rail with Therfites.

D I A L O G U E XXXI.

ARISTIDES.—PHOCION.—DEMOSTHENES.

ARISTIDES.

HOW could it happen, that Athens, after having recovered an equality with Sparta, should be forced to submit to the dominion of Macedon, when she had two such great men as Phocion and Demosthenes at the head of her state?

PHOCION.

It happened because our opinions of her interests in foreign affairs were totally different; which made us act with a constant and pernicious opposition, the one to the other.

ARISTIDES.

I wish to hear from you both (if you will indulge my curiosity) on what principles you could form such contrary judgements concerning points of such moment to the safety of your country, which you equally loved.

DEMOSTHENES.

My principles were the same with your's, Aristides. I laboured to maintain the independence of Athens against the incroaching ambition of Macedon, as you had maintained it against that of Persia. I saw that our own strength was un-

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equal