



IAMBlichus ON THE MYSTERIES

TAYLOR, in his Introduction to *Iamblichus on the Mysteries*, tells us that he believes that the work will be of value to two classes of persons, the lovers of antiquity and the lovers of ancient philosophy and religion. It will be valuable to the first because of the mass of information it contains, derived from the wise men of the Chaldeans, the prophets of the Egyptians, the dogmas of the Assyrians, and the ancient pillars of Hermes. Says Taylor :

It will be valuable to the student of philosophy and religion because of the doctrines contained in it, some of

which originated from the Hermaic pillars, were known by Pythagoras and Plato, and were the sources of their philosophy; others are so profoundly theological, and unfold the mysteries of ancient religion with an admirable conciseness of diction, and an inimitable vigor and elegance of conception. To which may be added, that it is the most copious, the clearest, and the most satisfactory defence extant of genuine ancient theology.

Iamblichus commences with an Epistle written by Porphyry to the Prophet Anebo. This Epistle consists of a number of questions upon certain theological mysteries and an expression of Porphyry's doubts and difficulties concerning them. It has been commented upon as strange that Porphyry, who ranks so highly among the Platonists, and who was denominated by them 'The Philosopher,' should have been so ignorant of the higher truths as he appears in his epistle to Anebo.

But Taylor thinks:

His ignorance however is probably only apparent, and may have been assumed for the purpose of obtaining a more perfect and copious solution of the doubts proposed in his epistle than he would otherwise have received. But at the same time that this is admitted, it must also be observed that he was inferior in theological science to Iamblichus, who so greatly excelled in knowledge of this kind, that he was not surpassed by any one, and was equalled by few. Hence he was denominated by all succeeding Platonists *the divine*, in the same manner as Plato, 'to whom' as the Emperor Julian remarks, 'he was posterior in time only, but not in genius.'

The Epistle of Porphyry is addressed "to the Egyptian Anebo," but the answer is given by another than Anebo, and is prefixed thus:

The answer of the preceptor Abammon to the Epistle of Porphyry to Anebo, and a solution of the doubts contained in it.

An anonymous Greek writer proves that this answer was written by the divine Iamblichus, who assumes the person of a certain Egyptian of the name of Abammon.

Iamblichus, in answering, takes first the dogmas peculiar to the Assyrians, then gives his own opinions, and in support collects quotations from the various ancients, and also from what he speaks of as:

...those particulars which were comprehended by the ancients in one treatise, and pertain to the whole knowledge of divine natures.

He informs his correspondent that if any philosophic enquiry is proposed, he will discuss it according to the ancient pillars of Hermes, from which Plato and Pythagoras constituted their philosophy. Also he says:

But such things as exhibit foreign enquiries, or which are contradictory and contentious, we shall assist mildly and aptly, or we shall demonstrate their absurdity.

Questions which proceed conformably to common conceptions, he will endeavor to discuss clearly; those which require experience of divine operations for an accurate knowledge of them will be explained as far as words alone will allow. Those full of intellectual theory will be developed with a view to the purification of the soul, for, he says:

It is possible for you and those who resemble you to be conducted by intellect to the essence of being.

Points which become known by a reasoning process will have perfect demonstration. Theological questions will be theologically answered, theurgic ones theurgically, philosophic ones philosophically. Those which extend to first causes will be followed up conformably to first principles. Those pertaining to morals according to the ethical mode.

And in a similar manner, we shall examine other things methodically and appropriately. Let us therefore betake ourselves to your enquiries.

Porphyry commences by saying "it must be granted that there are Gods;" and goes on to inquire as to their nature, wherein they differ and the causes of distinction; wherein Gods differ from demons;¹ how some of the Gods

¹ With regard to this matter, Plotinus says: "Let us understand how we distinguish Gods from demons . . . for we often call demons Gods. We say and believe, then, that the race of the Gods is impassive, but to demons we attribute passions, and we say that they are everlasting but lower in degree than the Gods and nearer to us, holding a position midway between the Gods and our own race. And again, in the sensible world, they who dwell as far (downward) as the moon, the visible Gods, are secondary Gods, inferior and conformed to those intelligible Gods, being suspended from them as the radiance round every star."

(From *Plotinus on Love*, W. C. Ward, *Theosophical Review*, August 1901.)

are beneficent and others malific; what is the relationship between the Gods that have a body in the heavens and the incorporeal Gods. Porphyry asks also how the presence of a God or an angel, or archangel, may be known, and what are the indications; what is effected by the foreknowledge of future events; what is the nature of knowledge obtained in dreams, and why in dream we do not see so clearly as when awake; what value to place on the prophecies of what we should call seers or clairvoyants or diviners; what is the cause of what he calls 'divine mania'; the mode of operation of divination by incantations, imagination, through gazing at light, water, and various kinds of investigation. In addition to these questions, Porphyry also states many doubts, and gives what he considers an explanation of various phenomena, doubtless with the object of getting a fuller reply and explanation.

Having given the gist of Porphyry's questions, doubts, difficulties and proffered suggestions, I turn to the answers of Iamblichus, and as it is not possible to follow out fully the arguments to each point, it will be better to offer a kind of analysis of what he has said, for I can thus give some idea of the Theurgic method, or School. Theurgy was magic, and its mysteries were based on the theories of which this is an attempt at summarisation; it will thus be seen how the basis of the Mysteries explained by Iamblichus coincides with the basis of the Mysteries which Theosophy has come to bring once more into the world.

First, according to these Mysteries there is:

The ONE—the Unmanifest prior to all, abiding in the solitude of His own Unity... For neither is the intelligible connected with Him, nor anything else. From this ONE, arises the SUPREME GOD (the first Logos) who is the self-begotten, is Father alone, and is the Good, the fountain of all things, and the root of the first intelligible forms.

From Him springs the ideal universe—the Universal Mind.

For from Him entity and essence are derived; and hence also, He is denominated the principle of intelligibles.

Iamblichus tells us that this is the teaching of the Egyptian Mysteries, as taught by Hermes. From this Universal Mind to which belong the incorporeal Gods, comes the World Soul, to which belong:

The divine intellectual forms which are present with the visible bodies of the Gods.

This shows the connexion between the Unmanifest, the Manifesting and the Not-yet-manifest, Porphyry having enquired as to this connexion. Says Iamblichus:

The order of all the Gods is profoundly united, and the first and second genera of them, and all the multitude which is spontaneously produced about them, are con-subsistent in unity, and also everything which is in them is one--hence the beginnings, middles and ends in them are con-subsistent according to the ONE itself; so that in these, it is not proper to enquire, whence the ONE accedes to all of them. For the very existence in them, whatever it may be, is this ONE, of their nature...all of them possess in each other the communion of an indissoluble connexion.

Also Iamblichus expounds the teaching of the Mysteries with regard to the various orders of super-human Beings, down to Man, who according to the law is allied to them by nature, and is capable of knowing them. The Mysteries gave this knowledge, and brought about the realisation of the union which existed between Man and the whole Hierarchy above him. Iamblichus in the same answer concerning this connexion speaks of "the progression from, and the regression of, all things to the ONE," and he tells Porphyry how the higher Beings may be reached and invoked in order to elevate and purify. He says:

The illumination which takes place through invocations is spontaneously visible and self-perfect; is very remote from all downward attraction; proceeds into visibility through divine energy and perfection, and as much surpasses our voluntary motion as the divine will of THE GOOD transcends a deliberately chosen life. Through this Will, the Gods, being benevolent and propitious, impart their life to theurgists in unenvying abundance, calling upwards their souls to themselves, and accustoming them, while they are yet in body, to be separated from bodies, and to be led round to their eternal and intelligible principle. For the Soul, in contemplating

blessed spectacles, acquires another life, and energises according to another energy Such names of the Gods also as are adapted to sacred concerns and other divine symbols, are able, as they are of an elevating nature, to connect invocations with the Gods themselves.

Here then, is the teaching in the Mysteries as to the nature and use of prayer, invocation and meditation.

We learn also that the soul has :

A twofold life, one being in conjunction with the body, but the other separate from all body when we are awake we employ for the most part the life which is common with the body, except when we separate ourselves entirely from it by pure intellectual energies. But when we are asleep we are perfectly liberated, as it were, from certain surrounding bonds, and use a life separate from generation.

We learn that it is necessary for the soul to be able consciously to separate itself from the body,

That thus it may unite itself with the Gods, by its intellectual and divine part, and learn the genuine principles of knowledge, and the truths of the intelligible world.

Knowledge thus gained can be used for great purposes, *i.e.*, for the benefit of mankind.

Iamblichus then goes on to speak of the stages by which Man goes back to his source—the Supreme. He says that when the Gods appear (when the soul realises its union with them) the soul receives

A liberation from the passions and participates in divine love.

Thus man gradually realises his divinity and reaches towards the culminating point of the Mysteries—the point when the Initiate becomes a God. This can be either by union with a Divine Being outside himself, or by the realisation of the Divine Self within him. This is the stage known as ecstasy, when the gross body was in trance and the soul being free could effect its union with the Supreme. Plotinus says that this state cannot be permanent in earth-life until our union with God is final.

In earth-life it is but a flash Man can cease to become Man, and become God; but man cannot be God and Man at the same time.

It follows that, as Iamblichus says:

It is requisite to consider how to be liberated from these bonds (the bonds which keep the soul from union with God).

And he tells how Proclus taught that the one salvation of the soul was to return to her intellectual form, and thus escape from the circle of generation, from abundant wanderings, and reach true Being.

Which life those that are initiated by Orpheus in the mysteries of Bacchus and Proserpine, pray that they may obtain.

This state was reached by the practice of the purificatory virtues, which were necessary for the Greater Mysteries, and concerned the purifying of the subtle bodies in which the soul works when out of the gross body.

There is an interesting explanation of some of the symbology of the Egyptians, in answer to Porphyry's question as to

The meaning of those mystic narrations which say that a certain divinity is unfolded into light from mire, that he is seated above the lotus, that he sails in a ship, and that he changes his form every hour, according to the signs of the Zodiac.

Iamblichus says:

They (the Egyptians) imitating the nature of the universe, and the fabricating energy of the Gods, exhibit certain images through symbols of mystic, occult and invisible intellections, just as nature, after a certain manner, expresses invisible reasons (or productive powers) through visible forms. But the fabricative energy of the Gods delineates the truth of forms through visible images. Hence the Egyptians, perceiving that all superior natures rejoice in the similitude to them of inferior beings, and thus wishing to fill the latter with good, through the greatest possible imitation of the former, very properly exhibit a mode of theologising adapted to the mystic doctrine contained in the symbols.

He then gives an explanation of the symbology cited.

The last part of the book—Section IX—contains answers to several questions and doubts of Porphyry regarding the Science of Astrology, into which it is not

possible to go in detail in a paper like this, but a study of them will be well repaid.

Iamblichus ends by shortly summing up what is the true end of the study of and partaking in the Mysteries. He says:

In the first place, it possesses a power of purifying the soul, much more perfect than the power which purifies the body; afterwards it causes a co-aptation of the reasoning power to the participation and vision of THE GOOD, and a liberation from everything of a contrary nature; and in the last place produces a union with the Gods, who are the givers of every good.

ANNIE LEWTON

WITHOUT TWO WINGS NO FLIGHT!

Heart of the West

and

Head of the East

Be born in us!

Hills of the East

and

Seas of the West

Take shape in us!

Flower of the Pool

and

Rose of the Clay

Grow deep in us!

M. H. CHARLES