

THE FIRST ORATION OF PLUTARCH CONCERNING
THE FORTUNE OR VIRTUE OF ALEXANDER
THE GREAT.

1. THIS is the oration of Fortune, asserting and challenging Alexander to be her masterpiece, and hers alone. In contradiction to which it behooves us to say something on the behalf of philosophy, or rather in the defence of Alexander himself, who cannot choose but spurn away the very thought of having received his empire as a gift at the hands of Fortune, knowing that it was so dearly bought with the price of his lost blood and many wounds, and that in gaining it,

Full many a bloody day
In toilsome fight he spent,
And many a wakeful night
In battle's management; *

and all this in opposition to armies almost irresistible, numberless nations, rivers before impassable, and rocks impenetrable; choosing, however, for his chiefest guides and counsellors prudence, endurance, fortitude, and steadiness of mind.

2. And now, methinks, I hear him speaking thus to Fortune, when she signalizes herself with his successes: —

Envy not my virtue, nor go about to detract from my honor. Darius was a fabric of thy own rearing, who of a servant and the king's courier was by thee advanced to be monarch of all Persia. The same was Sardanapalus, who from a comber of purple wool was raised by thee to wear the

royal diadem. But I, subduing as I marched, from Arbela forced my passage even to Susa itself. Cilicia opened me a broad way into Egypt; and the Granicus, o'er which I passed without resistance, trampling under foot the slain carcasses of Mithridates and Spithridates, opened the way into Cilicia. Pamper up thyself, and boast thy kings that never felt a wound nor ever saw a finger bleed; for they were fortunate, it is true, — thy Ochi and thy Artaxerxes, — who were no sooner born but they were by thee established in the throne of Cyrus. But my body carries many marks of Fortune's unkindness, who rather fought against me as an enemy than assisted me as her friend. First, among the Illyrians I was wounded in the head with a stone, and received a blow in the neck with an iron mace. Then, near the Granicus my head was a second time gashed with a barbarian scimitar; at Issus I was run through the thigh with a sword; at Gaza I was shot in the ankle with a dart; and not long after, falling heavy from my saddle, I forced my shoulder out of joint. Among the Maracadartae my shinbone was split with an arrow. The wounds I received in India and my strenuous acts of daring courage will declare the rest. Then among the Assacani I was shot through the shoulder with another arrow. Encountering the Gandridae, my thigh was wounded; and one of the Mallotes drew his bow with that force, that the well-directed arrow made way through my iron armor to lodge itself in my breast; besides the blow in my neck, when the scaling-ladders brake that were set to the walls, and Fortune left me alone, to gratify with the fall of so great a person not a renowned or illustrious enemy, but ignoble and worthless barbarians. So that had not Ptolemy covered me with his shield, and Limnaeus, after he had received a thousand wounds directed at my body, fallen dead before me; or if the Macedonians, breathing nothing but courage and their prince's rescue, had not opened a

timely breach, that barbarous and nameless village might have proved Alexander's tomb.

3. Take the whole expedition together, and what was it but a patient endurance of cold winters and parching droughts; depths of rivers, rocks inaccessible to the winged fowl, amazing sights of strange wild beasts, savage diet, and lastly revolts and treasons of far-controlling potentates. As to what before the expedition befell me, it is well known that all Greece lay gasping and panting under the fatal effects of the Philippic wars. But then the Thebans, raising themselves upon their feet again after so desperate a fall, shook from their arms the dust of Chaeronea; with them also joined the Athenians, reaching forth their helping hands. The treacherous Macedonians, studying nothing but revenge, cast their eyes upon the sons of Aeropus; the Illyrians brake out into an open war; and the Scythians hung in equal balance, seeing their neighbors meditating new revolutions; while Persian gold, liberally scattered among the popular leaders of every city, put all Peloponnesus into motion.

King Philip's treasuries were at that time empty, and besides he was in debt, as Onesicritus relates, two hundred talents. In the midst of so much pressing want and such menacing troubles, a youth but new past the age of childhood durst aspire to the conquest of Babylon and Susa, or rather project in his thoughts supreme dominion over all mankind; and all this, trusting only to the strength of thirty thousand foot and four thousand horse. For so many there were, by the account which Aristobulus gives; by the relation of King Ptolemy, there were five thousand horse; from both which Anaximenes varying musters up the foot to three and forty thousand, and the horse to five thousand five hundred. Now the glorious and magnificent sum which Fortune had raised up to supply the necessities of so great an expedition was no more than seventy talents,

according to Aristobulus ; or, as Duris records it, only thirty days' provision.

4. You will say therefore that Alexander was too rash and daringly inconsiderate, with such a slender support to rush upon so vast an opposition. By no means: for who was ever better fitted than he for splendid enterprises, with all the choicest and most excelling precepts of magnanimity, consideration, wisdom, and virtuous fortitude, with which a philosophical education largely supplied him for his expedition? So that we may properly affirm that he invaded Persia with greater assistance from Aristotle than from his father Philip. As for those who write how Alexander was wont to say that the Iliad and Odyssey had always followed him in his wars, in honor to Homer I believe them. Nevertheless, if any one affirm that the Iliad and Odyssey were admitted of his train merely as the recreation of his wearied thoughts or pastime of his leisure hours, but that philosophical learning, and commentaries concerning contempt of fear, fortitude, temperance, and nobleness of spirit, were the real cabinet provision which he carried along for his personal use, we contemn their assertion. For he was not a person that ever wrote concerning arguments or syllogisms; none of those who observed walks in the Lyceum, or held disputes in the Academy; for they who thus circumscribe philosophy believe it to consist in discoursing, not in action. And yet we find that neither Pythagoras nor Socrates, Arcesilaus nor Carneades, was ever celebrated for his writings, though they were the most approved and esteemed among all the philosophers. Yet no such busy wars as these employed their time in civilizing wild and barbarous kings, in building Grecian cities among rude and unpolished nations, nor in settling government and peace among people that lived without humanity or control of law. They only lived at ease, and surrendered the business and trouble of writing

to the more contentious Sophists. Whence then came it to pass that they were believed to be philosophers? It was either from their sayings, from the lives they led, or from the precepts which they taught. Upon these grounds let us take a prospect of Alexander, and we shall soon find him, by what he said, by what he acted, and by the lessons he taught, to be a great philosopher.

5. And first, if you please, consider that which seems the farthest distant of all from the common received opinion, and compare the disciples of Alexander with the pupils of Plato and Socrates. The latter instructed persons ingenious, such as speak the same speech, well understanding (if nothing else) the Grecian language. But there were many with whom their precepts did not prevail; for men like Critias, Alcibiades, and Cleitophon shook off their doctrine like a bridle, and followed the conduct of their own inclinations.

On the other side, take a view of Alexander's discipline, and you shall see how he taught the Hyrcanians the conveniency of wedlock, introduced husbandry among the Arachosians, persuaded the Sogdians to preserve and cherish — not to kill — their aged parents; the Persians to reverence and honor — not to marry — their mothers. Most admirable philosophy! which induced the Indians to worship the Grecian Deities, and wrought upon the Scythians to bury their deceased friends, not to feed upon their carcasses. We admire the power of Carneades's eloquence, for forcing the Carthaginian Clitomachus, called Asdrubal before, to embrace the Grecian customs. No less we wonder at the prevailing reason of Zeno, by whom the Babylonian Diogenes was charmed into the love of philosophy. Yet no sooner had Alexander subdued Asia, than Homer became an author in high esteem, and the Persian, Susian, and Gedrosian youth sang the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles. Among the Athenians, Socrates, intro-

ducing foreign Deities, was condemned to death at the prosecution of his accusers. But Alexander engaged both Bactria and Caucasus to worship the Grecian Gods, which they had never known before. Lastly, Plato, though he proposed but one single form of a commonwealth, could never persuade any people to make use of it, by reason of the austerity of his government. But Alexander, building above seventy cities among the barbarous nations, and as it were sowing the Grecian customs and constitutions all over Asia, quite weaned them from their former wild and savage manner of living. The laws of Plato here and there a single person may peradventure study, but myriads of people have made and still make use of Alexander's. And they whom Alexander vanquished were more greatly blessed than they who fled his conquests. For these had none to deliver them from their ancient state of misery; the others the victor compelled to better fortune. True therefore was that expression of Themistocles, when he was a fugitive from his native country, and the king entertained him with sumptuous presents, assigning him three stipendiary cities to supply his table, one with bread, a second with wine, a third with all manner of costly viands; Ah! young men, said he, had we not been undone, we had surely been undone. It may, however, be more justly averred of those whom Alexander subdued, had they not been vanquished, they had never been civilized. Egypt had not vaunted her Alexandria, nor Mesopotamia her Seleucia; Sogdiana had not gloried in her Prothasia, nor the Indians boasted their Bucephalia, nor Caucasus its neighboring Grecian city; by the founding of all which barbarism was extinguished and custom changed the worse into better.

If then philosophers assume to themselves their highest applause for cultivating the most fierce and rugged conditions of men, certainly Alexander is to be acknowledged

the chiefest of philosophers, who changed the wild and brutish customs of so many various nations, reducing them to order and government.

6. It is true indeed that the so much admired commonwealth of Zeno, first author of the Stoic sect, aims singly at this, that neither in cities nor in towns we should live under laws distinct one from another, but that we should look upon all men in general to be our fellow-countrymen and citizens, observing one manner of living and one kind of order, like a flock feeding together with equal right in one common pasture. This Zeno wrote, fancying to himself, as in a dream, a certain scheme of civil order, and the image of a philosophical commonwealth. But Alexander made good his words by his deeds; for he did not, as Aristotle advised him, rule the Grecians like a moderate prince and insult over the barbarians like an absolute tyrant; nor did he take particular care of the first as his friends and domestics, and scorn the latter as mere brutes and vegetables; which would have filled his empire with fugitive incendiaries and perfidious tumults. But believing himself sent from Heaven as the common moderator and arbiter of all nations, and subduing those by force whom he could not associate to himself by fair offers, he labored thus, that he might bring all regions, far and near, under the same dominion. And then, as in a festival goblet, mixing lives, manners, customs, wedlock, all together, he ordained that every one should take the whole habitable world for his country, of which his camp and army should be the chief metropolis and garrison; that his friends and kindred should be the good and virtuous, and that the vicious only should be accounted foreigners. Nor would he that Greeks and barbarians should be distinguished by long garments, targets, scimitars, or turbans; but that the Grecians should be known by their virtue and courage, and the barbarians by their vices and their cowardice; and

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