THAT A PHILOSOPHER OUGHT CHIEFLY TO CONVERSE WITH GREAT MEN.*

1. THE resolution which you have taken to enter into the friendship and familiarity of Sorcanus, that by the frequent opportunities of conversing with him you may cultivate and improve a soil which gives such early promises of a plentiful harvest, is an undertaking which will not only oblige his relations and friends, but redound very much to the advantage of the public; and (notwithstanding the peevish censures of some morose or ignorant people) it is so far from being an argument of an aspiring and vain-glorious temper, that it shows you to be a lover of virtue and good manners, and a zealous promoter of the common interest of mankind.

They themselves are rather to be accused of an indirect but more vehement sort of ambition, who would not upon any terms be found in the company ar so much as be seen to give a civil salute to a person of quality. For how unreasonable would it be to enforce a well-disposed young

* This epistolary discourse was wrote against an ill-bred sort of philosophers who neither would take the charge of education of great persons themselves, nor would suffer others to do it. Tho' the author seems here only to vindicate his friend, it is in truth an apology for himself, who bred up an emperor, and spent most part of his time (to good purpose) in the greatest court in the world. This and several other of his moral discourses seems to be hastily dictated, so that there is no great choice in his words or measure in his periods, or strict method in the whole. However, the treasure of ancient learning and good sense which is to be found in him, as it was frequently made use of by the most eloquent Greek Fathers, so is it sufficient to recommend his works to all lovers of learning and good manners. (K. C.)

Much of this version is a mere paraphrase. (G.)

gentleman, and one who needs the direction of a wise governor, to such complaints as these: "Would that I might change myself from a Pericles or a Cato to a cobbler like Simon or a grammarian like Dionysius, that I might like them have the conversation of such a man as Socrates, enjoy his company, and hear his instructive lessons of morality."

So far, I am sure, was Aristo of Chios from being of their humor, that when he was censured for exposing and prostituting the dignity of philosophy by his freedom to all comers, he answered, that he could wish that Nature had given understanding to wild beasts, that they too might be capable of being his hearers. Shall we then deny that privilege to men of interest and power, which this good man would have communicated (if it had been possible) to the brute beasts? But these men have taken a false notion of philosophy, they make it much like the art of statuary, whose business it is to carve out a lifeless image in the most exact figure and proportions, and then to raise it upon its pedestal, where it is to continue for ever. The true philosophy is of a quite different nature; it is a spring and principle of motion wherever it comes; it makes men active and industrious, it sets every wheel and faculty a going, it stores our minds with axioms and rules by which to make a sound judgment, it determines the will to the choice of what is honorable and just; and it wings all our faculties to the swiftest prosecution of it. It is accompanied with an elevation and nobleness of mind, joined with a coolness and sweetness of behavior, and backed with a becoming assurance and inflexible resolution. And from this diffusiveness of the nature of good it follows, that the best and most accomplished men are inclined to converse with persons of the highest condition. Indeed a physician, if he have any good nature and sense of honor, would be more ready to cure an eye

which is to see and watch for a great many thousands, than that of a private person; how much more then ought a philosopher to form and fashion, to rectify and cure the soul of such a one, who is (if I may so express it) to inform the body politic, — who is to think and understand for so many others, to be in so great measure the rule of reason, the standard of law, and model of behavior, by which all the rest will square and direct their actions? Suppose a man to have a talent at finding out springs and contriving of aqueducts (a piece of skill for which Hercules and other of the ancients are much celebrated in history), surely he could not so satisfactorily employ himself in sinking a well or deriving water to some private seat or contemptible cottage, as in supplying conduits to some fair and populous city, in relieving an army just perishing with thirst, or in refreshing and adorning with fountains and cool streams the beautiful gardens of some glorious monarch. There is a passage of Homer very pertinent to this purpose, in which he calls Minos *Διὸς μεγάλου ὀαριστήν*, which, as Plato interprets it, signifies *the disciple and companion of Jupiter*. For it were beneath his dignity indeed to teach private men, such as care only for a family or indulge their useless speculations; but kings are scholars worthy the tuition of a God, who, when they are well advised, just, good, and magnanimous, never fail to procure the peace and prosperity of all their subjects. The naturalists tell us that the eryngium hath such a property with it, that if one of the flock do but taste it, all the rest will stand stock still in the same place till the shepherd hath taken it out of its mouth. Such quickness of action does it have, pervading and spreading itself over every thing that is near it, as if it were fire. The effects of philosophy, however, are different according to the difference of inclinations in men. If indeed it lights on one who loves a dull and

inactive sort of life, that makes himself the centre and the little conveniences of life the circumference of all his thoughts, such a one does contract the sphere of her activity, so that having only made easy and comfortable the life of a single person, it fails and dies with him; but when it finds a man of a ruling genius, one fitted for conversation and able to grapple with the difficulties of public business, if it once possess him with principles of honesty, honor, and religion, it takes a compendious method, by doing good to one, to oblige a great part of mankind. Such was the effect of the conversation of Anaxagoras with Pericles, of Plato with Dion, and of Pythagoras with the principal statesmen of all Italy. Cato himself took a voyage, when he had the concern of an expedition lying upon him, to see and hear Athenodorus; and Scipio sent for Panaetius, when he was commissioned by the senate "to take a survey alike of the outrages and the good order which were practised in their provinces,"* as Posidonius observes. Now what a pretty sort of return would it have been in Panaetius to send word back, — "If indeed you were in a private capacity, John a Nokes or John a Stiles, that had a mind to get into some obscure corner or cell, to state cases and resolve syllogisms, I should very gladly have accepted your invitation; but now, because you are the son of Paulus Aemilius who was twice consul, and grandson of that Scipio who was surnamed from his conquest of Hannibal and Africa, I cannot with honor hold any conversation with you!"

2. The objections which they bring from the two kinds of discourse, one of which is mental, the other expressed in words or interpretative of the former, are so stale and pedantical, that they are best answered by laughter or silence; and we merely quote the old saying, "I knew

* Odyss. XVII. 487.

this before Theognis was born." However, thus much shall be said, that the end of them both is friendship,— in the first case with ourselves, in the second case with another. For he that hath attained to virtue by the methods of philosophy hath his mind all in tune and good temper; he is not struck with those reproaches of conscience, which cause the acutest sense of pain and are the natural punishments of our follies; but he enjoys (the great prerogative of a good man) to be always easy and in amity with himself.

> No factious lusts reason's just power control,
> Nor kindle civil discord in his soul.

His passion does not stand in defiance to his reason, nor do his reasonings cross and thwart one the other, but he is always consistent with himself. But the very joys of wicked men are tumultuary and confused, like those who dwell in the borders of two great empires at variance, always insecure, and in perpetual alarms; whilst a good man enjoys an uninterrupted peace and serenity of mind, which excels the other not only in duration, but in sense of pleasure too. As for the other sort of discourse, that which consists in expression of itself to others, Pindar says very well, that it was not mercenary in old time, nor indeed is it so now; but by the baseness and ambition of a few it is made use of to serve their poor secular interests. For if the poets represent Venus herself as much offended with those who make a trade and traffic of the passion of love, how much more reasonably may we suppose that Urania and Clio and Calliope have an indignation against those who set learning and philosophy to sale? Certainly the gifts and endowments of the Muses ought to be privileged from such mean considerations.

If indeed some have made fame and reputation one of the ends of their studies, they used it only as an instrument to get friends; since we find by common observation that

men praise only those whom they love. If they sought its own praise, they were as much mistaken as Ixion when he embraced a cloud instead of Juno; for there is nothing so fleeting, so changeable, and so inconstant as popular applause; it is but a pompous shadow, and hath no manner of solidity and duration in it. But a wise man, if he design to engage in business and matters of state, will so far aim at fame and popularity as that he may be better enabled to benefit others; for it is a difficult and very unpleasant task to do good to those who are disaffected to our persons. It is the good opinion men have of us which disposes men to give credit to our doctrine. As light is a greater good to those who see others by it than to those who only are seen, so is honor of a greater benefit to those who behold it than to those whose glory is beheld. But even one who withdraws himself from the noise of the world, who loves privacy and indulges his own thoughts, will show that respect to the good word of the people which Hippolytus did to Venus, — though he abstain from her mysteries, he will pay his devotions at a distance; * but he will not be so cynical and sullen as not to hear with gladness the commendations of virtuous men like himself; he will neither engage himself in a restless pursuit of wealth, interest, or honor, nor will he on the other hand be so rustic and insensible as to refuse them in a moderate degree, when they fairly come in his way; in like manner he will not court and follow handsome and beautiful youth, but will rather choose such as are of a teachable disposition, of a gentle behavior, and lovers of learning. The charms and graces of youth will not make a philosopher shy of their conversation, when the endowments of their minds are answerable to the features of their bodies. The case is the same when greatness of place and fortune concur with a well-disposed mind in the same person; he will not

* Eurip. Hippol. 102.

therefore forbear loving and respecting such a one, nor be afraid of the name of a courtier, nor think it a curse that such attendance and dependence should be his fate.

> They that strive most Dame Venus to eschew
> Do fault as much as they who her pursue.*

The application is easy to the matter in hand.

A philosopher therefore, if he is of a retired humor, will not shun such persons; while one who generously designs his studies for the public advantage will cheerfully embrace their advances of friendship, will not force them after a troublesome manner to hear him, will lay aside his scholastical terms and distinctions, and will rejoice to discourse and pass his time with them when they are willing and disposed.

> 3. I plough the spacious Berecynthian fields,
> Full six days' journey wide,†

says one boastingly in the poet; the same man, if he were as much a lover of mankind as of husbandry, would much rather bestow his pains on such a farm, the fruits of which would serve a great number, than to be always dressing the olive-yard of some cynical malecontent, which, when all was done, would scarce yield oil enough to dress a salad or to supply his lamp in the long winter evenings. Epicurus himself, who places happiness in the profoundest quiet and sluggish inactivity, as the only secure harbor from the storms of this troublesome world, could not but confess that it is both more noble and delightful to do than to receive a kindness;‡ for there is nothing which produces so humane and genuine a sort of pleasure as that of doing good. He who first gave the names to the three Graces well

* From the Veiled Hippolytus of Euripides, Frag. 431.

† From the Niobe of Aeschylus, Frag. 153.

‡ Almost the same words with those of our Saviour, It is more blessed to give than to receive. So that a man can scarcely be a true Epicurean without practising some of the maxims of Christianity.

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