CHARMIDES.
INTRODUCTION.

The subject of the Charmides is Temperance or σωφροσύνη, a peculiarly Greek notion, which may also be rendered Moderation¹, Modesty, Discretion, Wisdom, without completely exhausting by all these terms the various associations of the word. It may be described as 'mens sana in corpore sano,' the harmony or due proportion of the higher and lower elements of human nature which 'makes a man his own master,' according to the definition of the Republic. In the accompanying translation the word has been rendered in different places either Temperance or Wisdom, as the connexion seemed to require: for in the philosophy of Plato σωφροσύνη still retains an intellectual element (as Socrates also is said to have identified σωφροσύνη with σοφία: Xen. Mem. iii. 9, 4), and is not yet relegated to the sphere of moral virtue, as in the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle (iii. 10).

The beautiful youth, Charmides, who is also the most temperate of human beings, is asked by Socrates, 'What is Temperance?' He answers characteristically, (1) 'Quietness.' 'But temperance is a fine and noble thing; and quietness in many or most cases is not so fine a thing as quickness.' He tries again and says (2) that temperance is modesty. But this again is set aside by a sophistical application of Homer: for temperance is good as well as noble, and Homer has declared that 'modesty is not good for a needy man.' (3) Once more Charmides makes the attempt. This time he gives a definition which he has heard, and of which he insinuates that Critias is the author: 'Temperance is doing one's own business.' But the artisan who makes another man's shoes may be temperate, and yet he is not doing his own business. How is this riddle to be explained?

¹ Cp. Cic. Tusc. iii. 8, 16 'σωφροσύνη, quam soleo equidem tum temperantium tum moderationem appellare nonnunquam etiam modestiam:' foll.
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Critias, who takes the place of Charmides, distinguishes in his answer between ‘making’ and ‘doing,’ and with the help of a misapplied quotation from Hesiod assigns to the words ‘doing’ and ‘work’ an exclusively good sense: temperance is doing one’s own business;—(4) is doing good.

Still an element of knowledge is wanting which Critias is readily induced to admit at the suggestion of Socrates; and, in the spirit of Socrates and of Greek life generally, proposes as a fifth definition, (5) Temperance is self-knowledge. But all sciences have a subject: number is the subject of arithmetic, health of medicine—what is the subject of temperance or wisdom? The answer is that (6) Temperance is the knowledge of what a man knows and of what he does not know. But this is contrary to analogy; there is no vision of vision, but only of visible things; no love of loves, but only of beautiful things; how then can there be a knowledge of knowledge? That which is older, heavier, lighter, is older, heavier, and lighter than something else, not than itself, and this seems to be true of all relative notions—the object of relation is outside of them; at any rate they can only have relation to themselves in the form of that object. Whether there are any such cases of reflex relation or not, and whether that sort of knowledge which we term Temperance is of this reflex nature, has yet to be determined by the great metaphysician. But even if knowledge can know itself, how does the knowledge of what we know imply the knowledge of what we do not know? Besides this, knowledge is an abstraction only, and will not inform us of any particular subject, such as medicine, building, and the like. It may tell us that we or other men know something, but can never tell what we know.

But admitting further that there is such a knowledge of what we know and do not know, which would supply a rule and measure of all things, still there would be no good in this. For temperance is a good, and the knowledge which temperance gives must be of a kind which will do us good. But this universal knowledge does not tend to our happiness or good: the only kind of knowledge which brings happiness is the knowledge of good and evil. To this Critias replies that the science or knowledge of good and evil, and all the other sciences, are regulated by the higher science or knowledge of knowledge. Socrates replies by again dividing the abstract from the concrete, and asks how this knowledge conduces to happiness in the same definite way that medicine conduces to health.
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And now, after making all these concessions, which are really inadmissible, we are still as far as ever from ascertaining the nature of temperance, which Charmides has already discovered, and had therefore better rest in the knowledge that the more temperate he is the happier he will be, and not trouble himself with the speculations of Socrates.

In this Dialogue may be noted (1) the Greek ideal of beauty and goodness, the vision of the fair soul in the fair body, realized in the beautiful Charmides; (2) The true conception of medicine as a science of the whole as well as the parts, and of the mind as well as the body, which is playfully intimated in the story of the Thracian; (3) The tendency of the age to verbal distinctions, which here, as in the Protagoras and Cratylus, are ascribed to the ingenuity of Prodicus; also the interpretations or rather parodies of Homer and Hesiod, which are eminently characteristic of Plato and of his age; (4) The germ of an ethical principle contained in the notion that temperance is ‘doing one’s own business,’ which in the Republic (such is the shifting character of the Platonic philosophy) is given as the definition, not of temperance, but of justice; (5) The beginnings of logic and metaphysics implied in the two questions, whether there can be a science of science? and whether the knowledge of what you know is the same as the knowledge of what you do not know? also in the distinction between ‘what you know,’ and ‘that you know,’ ἄ οὐκεται and οὐκ οἶδα; here arises the first conception of an absolute self-determined science (the claims of which, however, are set aside by Socrates); as well as the first suggestion of the difficulty of the abstract and concrete, and one of the earliest anticipations of the relation of subject and object, and of the subjective element in knowledge; (6) The conception of a science of good and evil also first occurs here, and may be regarded as an anticipation of the Philebus and Republic, as well as of moral philosophy in later ages.

The dramatic interest of the Dialogue chiefly centres in the youth Charmides, with whom Socrates talks in the kindly spirit of an elder. Some contrast appears to be intended between his youthful simplicity and ingenuousness and the dialectical and rhetorical arts of Critias, who is the grown-up man of the world, not without a tincture of philosophy. But neither in this nor in any other of the dialogues of Plato is that most hated of Athenians displayed in his true character. He is simply a cultivated person who, like his kinsman Plato, is ennobled by the connection of his family with Solon (cp. Tim. 20, 21), and had
been the follower, if not the disciple, both of Socrates and of the Sophists. In the argument he is not unfair; if allowance is made for a slight rhetorical tendency, and for some desire to save his reputation with the company; in some respects he is nearer the truth than Socrates. Nothing in his language or behaviour is unbecoming the guardian of the beautiful Charmides. His love of reputation, which is characteristically Greek, contrasts with the utter absence of this quality and profession of ignorance on the part of Socrates.

The definitions of temperance proceed in regular order from the popular to the philosophical. The first two are simple enough and partially true, like the first thoughts of an intelligent youth; the third, which is a real contribution to ethical philosophy, is perverted by the ingenuity of Socrates, and hardly rescued by an equal perversion on the part of Critias. The remaining definitions have a higher aim, which is to introduce the element of knowledge, and at last to unite good and truth in a single science. But the time has not yet arrived for the realization of this vision of metaphysical philosophy; and such a science when brought nearer to us in the Philebus and the Republic will not be called by the name of σοφρονίς. Hence we see with surprise that Plato, who in his other writings identifies good and knowledge, here opposes them, and asks, almost in the spirit of Aristotle, how can there be a knowledge of knowledge, and even if attainable, how can such a knowledge be of any use?

The relations of knowledge and virtue are again brought forward in the companion Dialogues of the Lysis and Laches; and also in the Protagoras and Euthydemus. The opposition of abstract and particular knowledge in this Dialogue may be compared with a similar opposition of ideas and phenomena which occurs in the Introduction to the Parmenides, but seems rather to belong to a later stage of the philosophy of Plato.
CHARMIDES, OR TEMPERANCE.

PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUE.

SOCRATES, who is the narrator.      CHARMIDES.
CHAEREPHON.                       CRITIAS.

SCENE:—The Palaestra of Taureas, which is near the Porch of the King Archon.

Steph. 153 YESTERDAY evening I returned from the army at Potidaea, and having been a good while away, I thought that I would go and look at my old haunts. So I went into the palaestra of Taureas, which is over against the temple adjoining the porch of the King Archon, and there I found a number of persons, most of whom I knew, but not all. My visit was unexpected, and no sooner did they see me entering than they saluted me from afar on all sides; and Chaerophon, who is a kind of madman, started up and ran to me, seizing my hand, and saying, How did you escape, Socrates?—(I should explain that an engagement had taken place at Potidaea not long before we came away, the news of which had only just reached Athens.)

You see, I replied, that here I am.

There was a report, he said, that the engagement was very severe, and that many of our acquaintance had fallen.

That, I replied, was not far from the truth.
I suppose, he said, that you were present.
I was.

Then sit down, and tell us the whole story, which as yet we have only heard imperfectly.

I took the place which he assigned to me, by the side of Critias
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the son of Callaeschrus, and when I had saluted him and the rest of the company, I told them the news from the army, and answered their several enquiries.

Then, when there had been enough of this, I, in my turn, began to make enquiries about matters at home—about the present state of philosophy, and about the youth. I asked whether any of them were remarkable for beauty or sense, or both. Critias, glancing at the door, invited my attention to some 154 youths who were coming in, and talking noisily to one another, followed by a crowd. Of the beauties, Socrates, he said, I fancy that you will soon be able to form a judgment. For those who are just entering are the advanced guard of the great beauty of the day, and he is likely to be not far off himself.

Who is he, I said; and who is his father?

Charmides, he replied, is his name; he is my cousin, and the son of my uncle Glacon: I rather think that you know him, although he was not grown up at the time of your departure.

Certainly, I know him, I said, for he was remarkable even then when he was still a child, and now I should imagine that he must be almost a young man.

You will see, he said, in a moment what progress he has made and what he is like. He had scarcely said the word, when Charmides entered.

Now you know, my friend, that I cannot measure anything, and of the beautiful, I am simply such a measure as a white line is of chalk; for almost all young persons are alike beautiful in my eyes. But at that moment, when I saw him coming in, I must admit that I was quite astonished at his beauty and stature; all the world seemed to be enamoured of him; amazement and confusion reigned when he entered; and a troop of lovers followed him. That grown-up men like ourselves should have been affected in this way was not surprising, but I observed that there was the same feeling among the boys; all of them, down to the very least child, turned and looked at him as if he had been a statue.

Chaerophon called me and said: What do you think of him, Socrates? Has he not a beautiful face?

That he has, indeed, I said.

But you would think nothing of his face, he replied, if you could see his naked form: he is absolutely perfect.
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And to this they all agreed.
By Heracles, I said, there never was such a paragon, if he has only one other slight addition.
What is that? said Critias.
If he has a noble soul; and being of your house, Critias, he may be expected to have this.
He is as fair and good within, as he is without, replied Critias.
Shall we ask him then, I said, to show us, not his body, but his soul, naked and undisguised? he is just of an age at which he will like to talk.

That he will, said Critias, and I can tell you that he is a philosopher already, and also a considerable poet, not in his own opinion only, but in that of others.

That, my dear Critias, I replied, is a distinction which has long been in your family, and is inherited by you from Solon. But why don’t you call him, and show him to us? for even if he were younger than he is, there could be no impropriety in his talking to us in the presence of you, who are his guardian and cousin.

Very well, he said; then I will call him; and turning to the attendant, he said, Call Charmides, and tell him that I want him to come and see a physician about the illness of which he spoke to me the day before yesterday. Then again addressing me, he added: He has been complaining lately of having a headache when he rises in the morning: now why should you not make believe to him that you know a cure for the headache?

There will be no difficulty about that, I said, if he comes.
He will be sure to come, he replied.

He came as he was bidden, and sat down between Critias and me. Great amusement was occasioned by every one pushing with might and main at his neighbour in order to make a place for him next to them, until at the two ends of the row one had to get up and the other was rolled over sideways. Now I, my friend, was beginning to feel awkward; my former bold belief in my powers of conversing with him had vanished. And when Critias told him that I was the person who had the cure, he looked at me in such an indescribable manner, and was about to ask a question; and then all the people in the palaestra crowded about
us, and, O rare! I caught a sight of the inwards of his garment, and took the flame. Then I could no longer contain myself. I thought how well Cydias understood the nature of love, when, in speaking of a fair youth, he warns some one ‘not to bring the fawn in the sight of the lion lest he devour him,’ for I felt that I had been overcome by a sort of wild-beast appetite. But I controlled myself, and when he asked me if I knew the cure of the headache, I answered, but with an effort, that I did know.

And what is it? he said.

I replied that it was a kind of leaf, which required to be accompanied by a charm, and if a person would repeat the charm at the same time that he used the cure, he would be made whole; but that without the charm the leaf would be of no avail.

Then I will write out the charm from your dictation, he said. With my good will? I said, or without my good will?

With your good will, Socrates, he said, laughing.

Very good, I said; and are you quite sure that you know my name?

I ought to know you, he replied, for there is a great deal said about you among my companions; and I remember when I was a child seeing you in company with my cousin Critias.

That is very good of you, I said; and will make me more at home with you in explaining the nature of the charm; I was thinking that I might have a difficulty about this. For the charm will do more, Charmides, than only cure the headache. I dare say that you may have heard eminent physicians say to a patient who comes to them with bad eyes, that they cannot cure his eyes by themselves, but that if his eyes are to be cured, his head must be treated; and then again they say that to think of curing the head alone, and not the rest of the body also, is the height of folly. And arguing in this way they apply their methods to the whole body, and try to treat and heal the whole and the part together. Did you ever observe that this is what they say?

Yes, he said.

And they are right, and you would agree with them?

Yes, he said, certainly I should.

His approving answers reassured me, and I began by degrees to regain confidence, and the vital heat returned. Such, Charmides,
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I said, is the nature of the charm. Now I learnt it when serving with the army of one of the physicians of the Thracian king, Zamolxis. He was one of those who are said to give immortality. This Thracian told me that the Greek physicians are quite right in these notions of theirs, which I was mentioning, as far as they go; but Zamolxis, he added, our king, who is also a god, says further, 'that as you ought not to attempt to cure the eyes without the head, or the head without the eyes, so neither ought you to attempt to cure the body without the soul; and this,' he said, 'is the reason why the cure of many diseases is unknown to the physicians of Hellas, because they are ignorant of the whole, which ought to be studied also; for the part can never be well unless the whole is well.' For all good and evil, whether in the body or in human nature, originates, as he declared, in the soul, and overflows from thence, as from the head into the eyes. And therefore if the head and the body are to be well, you must begin by curing the soul; that is the first thing. And the cure, my dear youth, has to be effected by the use of certain charms, and these charms are fair words; and by them temperance is implanted in the soul, and where temperance is, there health is speedily imparted, not only to the head, but to the whole body. And he who taught me the cure and the charm added a special direction; 'Let no one,' he said, 'persuade you to cure the head, until he has first given you his soul to be cured by the charm. For this,' he said, 'is the great error of our day in the treatment of the human body, that physicians separate the soul from the body.' And he added with emphasis, at the same time making me swear to his words, 'let no one, however rich, or noble, or fair, persuade you to give him the cure, without the charm.' Now I have sworn, and I must keep my oath, and therefore if you will allow me to apply the Thracian charm first to your soul, as the stranger directed, I will afterwards proceed to apply the cure to your head. But if not, I do not know what I am to do with you, my dear Charmides.

Critias, when he heard this, said: The headache will be an unexpected benefit to my young relation, if the pain in his head compels him to improve his mind: and I can tell you, Socrates, that Charmides is not only pre-eminent in beauty among his equals, but also in that quality which is given by the charm; and this, as you say, is temperance, is it not?