

A

PREFATORY DISCOURSE

CONCERNING

THE TRUE WAY OR METHOD OF ATTAINING

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

SECTION I.

That divine things are to be understood rather by a spiritual sensation than a verbal description, or mere speculation. Sin and wickedness prejudicial to true knowledge. That purity of heart and life, as also an ingenuous freedom of judgment, are the best grounds and preparations for the entertainment of truth.

IT hath been long since well observed, that every art and science hath some certain principles upon which the whole frame and body of it must depend; and he that will fully acquaint himself with the mysteries thereof, must come furnished with some *præcognita*, or *προλήψεις*, that I may speak in the language of the Stoics. Were I indeed to define divinity, I should rather call it a *divine life*, than a *divine science*; it being something rather to be understood by a spiritual sensation, than by any verbal description, as all things of sense and life are best known by sentient and vital faculties; *γνώσις ἐκάστων δι' ὁμοίτητος γίνεται*, as the Greek Philosopher hath well observed¹—every thing is best known by that which bears a just resemblance and analogy with it: and therefore the Scripture

¹ Plotin. Enn. 1. 8. 1.

is wont to set forth a good life as the prolepsis and fundamental principle of divine science; ‘Wisdom hath builded her house, and hewn out her seven pillars¹’; but ‘the fear of the Lord is **רֵאשִׁית הַחֵכְמָה**—the beginning of wisdom²’—the foundation of the whole fabric.

We shall therefore, as a prolegomenon or preface to what we shall afterward discourse upon the heads of divinity, speak something of this *true method of knowing*, which is not so much by notions as actions; as religion itself consists not so much in words as in things. They are not always the best skilled in divinity, that are the most studied in those pandects, into which it is sometimes digested, or that have erected the greatest monopolies of art and science. He that is most practical in divine things, hath the purest and sincerest knowledge of them, and not he that is most dogmatical. Divinity indeed is a true efflux from the eternal light, which, like the sunbeams, does not only enlighten, but heat and enliven; and therefore our Saviour hath, in His beatitudes, connected purity of heart with the beatifical vision. And as the eye cannot behold the sun, *ἡλιοειδής μὴ γινόμενος*³,—unless it be sunlike, and hath the form and resemblance of the sun drawn in it; so neither can the soul of man behold God, *θεοειδής μὴ γινομένη*⁴,—unless it be Godlike, hath God formed in it, and be made partaker of the divine nature. And the apostle St. Paul, when he would lay open the right way of attaining to divine truth, saith, that ‘knowledge puffeth up,’ but it is ‘love that edifieth⁵.’ The knowledge of divinity that appears in systems and models is but a poor wan light; but the powerful energy of divine knowledge displays itself in purified souls: here we shall

¹ Prov. ix. 1.

² Ibid. ver. 10.

³ Plotin. Enn. I. 6. 9.

⁴ The context of the passage in which the words *ἡλιοειδής μὴ γινόμενος* occur

seems to have furnished the above phrase,
 —οὐδὲ τὸ καλὸν ἂν ἴδοι ψυχὴ, μὴ καλὴ
 γινομένη. Γενέσθω δὴ πρῶτον θεοειδής πᾶς
 . . . εἰ μέλλει θεάσασθαι θεόν.

⁵ 1 Cor. viii. 1.

of attaining Divine Knowledge.

3

find the true *πεδῖον ἀληθείας*, as the ancient philosophy speaks,—‘the land of truth’.

To seek our divinity merely in books and writings, is to seek the living among the dead: we do but in vain seek God many times in these, where His truth too often is not so much enshrined as entombed:—no; *intra te quære Deum*, seek for God within thine own soul; He is best discerned *νοερά ἐπαφῆ*, as Plotinus phraseth it,—by an intellectual touch of Him²—we must ‘see with our eyes, and hear with our ears, and our hands must handle the word of life³,’ that I may express it in St. John’s words. Ἔστι καὶ ψυχῆς αἴσθησις τῆς—*the soul itself hath its sense, as well as the body*: and therefore David, when he would teach us how to know what the divine goodness is, calls not for speculation but sensation: ‘Taste and see how good the Lord is⁴.’ That is not the best and truest knowledge of God which is wrought out by the labour and sweat of the brain, but that which is kindled within us by a heavenly warmth in our hearts. As, in the natural body, it is the heart that sends up good blood and warm spirits into the head, whereby it is best enabled to perform its several functions; so that which enables us to know and understand aright in the things of God, must be a living principle of holiness within us. When the tree of knowledge is not planted by the tree of life, and sucks not up sap from thence, it may as well be fruitful with evil as with good, and bring forth bitter fruit as well as sweet. If we would indeed have our knowledge thrive and flourish, we must water the tender plants of it with holiness. When

¹ Plotin. Enn. I. 3. 4 and VI. 7. 13. The author had probably in his mind the following curious passage from the *Axioclus* (incert. auct.) τὰ δὲ πρότυλα τῆς εἰς Πλούτωνος ὁδοῦ σιδηροῖς κλειθροῖς καὶ κλεισὶν ὠχύρωται. ταῦτα δὲ ἀνοίξαντα ποταμὸς Ἀχέρων ἐκδέχεται, μεθ’ ὃν Κωκυτός, οὗς χροῖ πορθμύσαντας ἀχθῆναι ἐπὶ Μίνω

καὶ Παδάμανθον, δὲ κλήζεται πεδῖον ἀληθείας.—*Axioclus*, 371 B. Cf. Plat. Phædrus 248 B.

² Probably the *idea*, but not the *words* of Plotinus. Cf. *Τὶς οὖν ἐκάστη ἀρετὴ τῷ τοιοῦτῳ; ἡ σοφία μὲν ἐν θεωρίᾳ ὧν νοῦς ἔχει νοῦς δὲ τῇ ἐπαφῇ*.—Enn. I. 2. 6.

³ I John i. 1. ⁴ Psal. xxxiv. 8.

Zoroaster's scholars asked him what they should do to get winged souls, such as might soar aloft in the bright beams of divine truth, he bids them bathe themselves in the waters of life: they asking what they were, he tells them, the four cardinal virtues, which are the four rivers of paradise. It is but a thin, airy, knowledge that is got by mere speculation, which is ushered in by syllogisms and demonstrations; but that which springs forth from true goodness, is *θειότερόν τι πάσης ἀποδείξεως*, as Origen speaks—it brings such a divine light into the soul, as is more clear and convincing than any demonstration. The reason why, notwithstanding all our acute reasons and subtile disputes, truth prevails no more in the world, is, we so often disjoin truth and true goodness, which in themselves can never be disunited; they grow both from the same root, and live in one another. We may, like those in Plato's deep pit¹, with their faces bended downwards, converse with sounds and shadows, but not with the life and substance of truth, while our souls remain defiled with any vice or lusts. These are the black Lethe lake which drench the souls of men: he that wants true virtue, in heaven's logic, 'is blind, and cannot see afar off'². Those filthy mists that arise from impure and terrene minds, like an atmosphere, perpetually encompass them, that they cannot see that sun of divine truth that shines about them, but never shines into any unpurged souls; the darkness comprehends it not, the foolish man understands it not. All the light and knowledge that may seem sometimes to rise up in unhallowed minds, is but like those fuliginous flames that rise up from our culinary fire, that are soon quenched in their own smoke; or like those foolish fires that fetch their birth from terrene exudations, that do but hop up and down, and flit to and fro upon the surface of this earth, where they were first brought forth; and serve not so

¹ Plat. De Repub. 514 A.

² 2 Peter i. 9.

much to enlighten, as to delude us; not to direct the wandering traveller into his way, but to lead him farther out of it. While we lodge any filthy vice in us, this will be perpetually twisting up itself into the thread of our finest-spun speculations; it will be continually climbing up into the τὸ Ἡγεμονικόν—the hegemonical powers of the soul, into the bed of reason, and defile it: like the wanton ivy twisting itself about the oak, it will twine about our judgments and understandings, till it hath sucked out the life and spirit of them. I cannot think such black oblivion should possess the minds of some, as to make them question that truth which to good men shines as bright as the sun at noon-day, had they not foully defiled their own souls with some hellish vice or other, how fairly soever it may be they may dissemble it. There is a benumbing spirit, a congealing vapour that ariseth from sin and vice, that will stupify the senses of the soul; as the naturalists say there is from the torpedo, that smites the senses of those that approach it. This is that venomous *solanum*—that deadly nightshade that infuses its cold poison into the understandings of men.

Such as men themselves are, such will God Himself seem to be. It is the maxim of most wicked men, that the Deity is some way or other like themselves; their souls do more than whisper it, though their lips speak it not; and though their tongues be silent, yet their lives cry it upon the house-tops, and in the public streets. That idea which men generally have of God is nothing else but the picture of their own complexion: that archetypal notion of Him which hath the supremacy in their minds, is none else but such a one as hath been shaped out according to some pattern of themselves; though they may so clothe and disguise this idol of their own, when they carry it about in a pompous procession to expose it to the view of the world, that it may seem very beautiful, and indeed anything else

rather than what it is. Most men (though it may be they themselves take no great notice of it) like that dissembling monk,—*aliter sentire in scholis, aliter in musæis*—are of a different judgment in the schools from what they are in the retirements of their private closets. There is a double head, as well as a double heart. Men's corrupt hearts will not suffer their notions and conceptions of divine things to be cast into that form, into which a higher reason, which may sometimes work within them, would put them.

I would not be thought, all this while, to banish the belief of all innate notions of divine truth: but these are too often smothered, or tainted with a deep dye of men's filthy lusts. It is but *lux sepulta in opaca materia*—light buried and stifled in some dark body, from whence all those coloured, or rather discoloured, notions and apprehensions of divine things are begotten. Though these common notions may be very busy sometimes in the vegetation of divine knowledge; yet the corrupt vices of men may so clog, disturb, and overrule them, (as the naturalists say this unruly and masterless matter doth the natural forms in the formation of living creatures,) that they may produce nothing but monsters, miserably distorted and misshapen. This kind of science, as Plotinus speaks¹, 'associating too familiarly with matter, and receiving and imbibing it into itself, changeth its shape by this incestuous mixture.' At best, while any inward lust is harboured in the minds of men, it will so weaken them, that they can never bring forth any masculine or generous knowledge; as Ælian observes of the stork, that if the night-owl chanceth to sit upon her eggs, they become presently as it were *ὑπηνέμια*, and all incubation is ren-

¹ τῷ ἄλικῳ πολλῶ συνοῦσα, καὶ εἰς ξατο κράσει τῇ πρὸς τὸ χεῖρον.—Plotin. αὐτὴν εἰσδεξαμένη, εἶδος ἔτερον ἡλλά- 1. 6. 5.

of attaining Divine Knowledge.

7

dered impotent and ineffectual¹. Sin and lust are always of a hungry nature, and suck up all those vital affections of men's souls, which should feed and nourish their understandings.

What are all our most sublime speculations of the Deity, that are not impregnated with true goodness, but insipid things that have no taste nor life in them, that do but swell, like empty froth, in the souls of men! They do not feed men's souls, but only puff them up, and fill them with pride, arrogance, contempt, and tyranny towards those that cannot well understand their subtile curiosities: as those philosophers that Cicero complains of in his times, *qui disciplinam suam ostentationem scientiæ, non legem vitæ, putabant*—who made their knowledge only matter of ostentation, to venditate and set off themselves, but never caring to square and govern their lives by it². Such as these do but, spider-like, take a great deal of pains to spin a worthless web out of their own bowels, which will not keep them warm. These indeed are those silly souls that are 'ever learning, but never come to the knowledge of the truth³.' They may, with Pharaoh's lean kine, eat up and devour all tongues and sciences, and yet, when they have done, still remain lean and ill-favoured as they were at first. Jejune and barren speculations may be hovering and fluttering up and down about divinity, but they cannot settle or fix themselves upon it: they unfold the plicatures of truth's garment, but they cannot behold the lovely face of it. There are hidden mysteries in divine truth,

¹ The precise term employed by Ælian is not *ὑπηνέμια* (*ovæ irrita*.... *quæ hypenemia Græci vocant*. Plin. I. x. cap. 58) but *ἀνεμαία*. The passage referred to is as follows: *Οἱ πελαργοὶ λυμαιομένως αὐτῶν τὰ ψὰ τὰς νυκτερίδας ἀμύνονται πάνυ σοφῶς. Αἱ μὲν γὰρ προσασφάμεναι μόνον ἀνεμαία ἐργάζονται καὶ ἀγνοα αὐτά.*—Ælian. *de Nat. Animal.* Lib. I. 37. Plato employs the same

technical term in the course of a philosophical argument: *φέρει δὴ αὐτὸ κοινῆ σκεψώμεθα, γόνιμον ἢ ἀνεμαίων τυγχάνει δν.*—*Theæt.* 151 E.

² *Quotus enim quisque philosophorum invenitur, qui sit ita moratus, ita animo ac vita constitutus, ut ratio postulat? qui disciplinam suam non ostentationem scientiæ, sed legem vitæ putet?*—Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* II. 4. ³ 2 Tim. iii. 7.

wrapt up one within another, which cannot be discerned but by divine ‘Epoptists.’

We must not think we have then attained to the right knowledge of truth, when we have broken through the outward shell of words and phrases that house it up; or when, by a logical analysis, we have found out the dependencies and coherencies of them one with another; or when, like stout champions of it, having well guarded it with the invincible strength of our demonstration, we dare stand out in the face of the world, and challenge the field of all those that would pretend to be our rivals.

We have many grave and reverend idolaters that worship truth only in the image of their own wits; that could never adore it so much as they may seem to do, were it anything else but such a form of belief as their own wandering speculations had at last met together in; were it not that they find their own image and superscription upon it.

There is a knowing of ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’—as it is in a Christ-like nature, as it is in that sweet, mild, humble, and loving spirit of Jesus, which spreads itself, like a morning sun, upon the souls of good men, full of light and life. It profits little to know Christ Himself after the flesh; but He gives His Spirit to good men, that searcheth the deep things of God. There is an inward beauty, life, and loveliness in divine truth, which cannot be known but then when it is digested into life and practice. The Greek philosopher could tell those high-soaring Gnostics that thought themselves no less than *Jovis alites*; that could (as he speaks in the Comedy) *ἀεροβατεῖν καὶ περιφρονεῖν τὸν ἥλιον*¹, and cried out so much, ‘look upon God²,’ that ‘without virtue and real goodness God is but a name,’ a dry and empty notion³. The profane sort of

¹ ἀεροβατῶ καὶ περιφρονῶ τὸν ἥλιον.—Aristoph. *Nub.* 225.

² βλέπε πρὸς θεόν.—Plot. *Enn.* 11.9.15.

³ ἀνευ δὲ ἀρετῆς ἀληθινῆς θεὸς λεγόμενος ὄνομά ἐστιν.—Plot. *ibid.*

of attaining Divine Knowledge.

9

men, like those old Gentile Greeks, may make many ruptures in the walls of God's temple, and break into the holy ground, but yet may find God no more there than they did.

Divine truth is better understood, as it unfolds itself in the purity of men's hearts and lives, than in all those subtle niceties into which curious wits may lay it forth. And therefore our Saviour, who is the great master of it, would not, while He was here on earth, draw it up into any system or body, nor would His disciples after Him; He would not lay it out to us in any canons or articles of belief, not being indeed so careful to stock and enrich the world with opinions and notions, as with true piety, and a Godlike pattern of purity, as the best way to thrive in all spiritual understanding. His main scope was to promote a holy life, as the best and most compendious way to a right belief. He hangs all true acquaintance with divinity upon the doing God's will: 'If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God¹.' This is that alone which will make us, as St. Peter tells us, 'that we shall not be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour².' There is an inward sweetness and deliciousness in divine truth, which no sensual mind can taste or relish: this is that *ψυχικὸς ἀνήρ*—that natural man that savours not the things of God. Corrupt passions and terrene affections are apt, of their own nature, to disturb all serene thoughts, to precipitate our judgments, and warp our understandings. It was a good maxim of the old Jewish writers: 'the Holy Spirit dwells not in terrene and earthly passions³.' Divinity is

¹ John vii. 17.

² 2 Pet. i. 8.

³ רוח הקודש לא שרה בעצב ולא בכעס:
 An equable and cheerful frame of mind, as well as a pious disposition, are frequently mentioned by the ancient Jewish writers as necessary in order that the רוח הקודש

'Spiritus Sanctus' or the שכינה 'Præsentia Divina' (Shechinah) may dwell with any one. Expressions similar to the above occur not unfrequently in the Talmud, e. g. Gem. Shabbath, cap. II. fol. 31 a. Thus, too, indulgence in angry feelings is said by them to deprive, for the time, the

not so well perceived by a subtile wit, ὡςπερ αἰσθήσει κεκαθαμένῃ—‘as by a purified sense,’—as Plotinus phraseth it.

Neither was the ancient philosophy unacquainted with this way and method of attaining to the knowledge of divine things; and therefore Aristotle himself thought a young man unfit to meddle with the grave precepts of morality, till the heat and violent precipitancy of his youthful affections were cooled and moderated¹. And it is observed of Pythagoras, that he had several ways to try the capacity of his scholars, and to prove the sedateness and moral temper of their minds, before he would entrust them with the sublimer mysteries of his philosophy². The Platonists were herein so wary and solicitous, that they thought the minds of men could never be purged enough from those earthly dregs of sense and passion, in which they were so much steeped, before they could be capable of their divine metaphysics³: and therefore they so much

wise man of his wisdom, and the prophet of his gift of prophecy.—Gem. Pesachim, cap. vi. fol. 67 a. (Vide Discourse on Prophecy, cap. viii.) So, on the contrary, they maintain that a holy life, and devotion to sacred study will secure the Divine Presence. In the Mishna Massech. Avoth, cap. iii. § 6, it is said that the Shechinah dwells with ten persons met together for the study of the laws. Again, the same is said (§ 2) with reference to two persons met together for such study. (Cf. S. Matth. xviii. 19, 20.) We must be careful not to confound the Jewish idea attached to the expression רוח הקודש ‘Spiritus Sanctus,’ with the Christian meaning of the term. By many Jewish writers, though not by all, the term is understood as denoting precisely the same as the שכינה ‘Præsentia Divina.’—Vid. Buxtorf, Lex-Rabbin. s. v. שכינה. Col. 2395–2397.

¹ (Διὸ) τῆς πολιτικῆς οὐκ ἔστιν οικείος ἀκροατῆς ὁ νέος. . . . Ἐπι δὲ τοῖς πάθεσιν ἀκολουθητικὸς ὢν ματαίως ἀκούσεται καὶ ἀνωφελῶς, ἐπειδὴ τὸ τέλος ἔστιν οὐ γινώσις ἀλλὰ πράξις.—Eth. Nicom. i. 1.

² It is curious that the first test to which Pythagoras subjected his disciples was the *physiognomical*. Hence, a science which as yet finds less favour with us than with the Germans, has at least the authority of antiquity in the Greek philosopher. For the definition of Gellius is explicit enough to identify the Pythagorean with the modern physiognomy: ‘Jam a principio adolescentes, qui sese ad discendum obtulerant, ἐφυσιογνωμόνει. Id verbum significat, mores naturasque hominum conjectatione quadam de oris et vultus ingenio deque totius corporis filo atque habitu sciscitari.’—Gell. *N. A.* i. 9.

When admitted as scholars, their novitiate was passed in the practice of self-denial in matters of appetite and corporal indulgence in general: they were exercised in abstruse enquiries and speculations, and, if the accounts are to be believed, in the ordeal of silence for a term of years.—Jambl. *De Pyth. Vit.* 68.

³ ΞΕ. Ἄλλὰ μὴν τὸ γε διαλεκτικὸν οὐκ ἄλλω δώσει, ὡς ἐγώμηναι, πλὴν τῷ καθαρῶς τε καὶ δικαίως φιλοσοφοῦντι.—Plat. *Sophist.* 253 E.