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Edited by Lilian Winstanley

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EDMUND SPENSER

THE FOWRE HYMNES

Edited by

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PREFACE.

THIS edition of Spenser's *Fowre Hymnes* is intended mainly for the use of students and, since it has not been possible to assume in all cases a knowledge of the original languages, the writer has employed Jowett's translations of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* and has made either translations or summaries of the passages quoted from Ficino's *Commentarium in Convivium* and Bruno's *De gl' Heroici Furori*. Though the work is intended primarily for students it is hoped that the Introduction may prove of some use to Spenserian scholars generally; so far as the editor knows the influence of the *Heroici Furori* on Spenser has not been suggested before and that of the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* and of Ficino is worked out much more fully than can be found elsewhere.

Students who wish to pursue the subject in Spenser's contemporaries are referred to Mr Harrison's excellent monograph on *Platonism in English Poetry*.

L. WINSTANLEY.

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INTRODUCTION.

I.

SPENSER AND PLATO.

IN estimating the place of the *Fowre Hymnes* in Spenser's work it is important to bear in mind that they represent in its clearest form that Platonism which was, throughout his life, one of his chief inspirations. No English poet, with the possible exception of Shelley, has ever had a mind so perfectly adapted to understanding what was best and most characteristic in the philosophy of Plato, and certainly none has ever owed him a greater debt. In the case of Spenser natural disposition and circumstances combined to awaken interest in Plato.

Philosophy for the Middle Ages had been almost summed up in the name of Aristotle, and Platonism survived in a second rate form mainly through its influence on Boethius but, even thus diluted, it is plainly to be recognised in Dante and Petrarch. At the Renaissance the study of Plato became one of the chief aims of the revival of learning, and the Italian humanists, among all their services, performed none greater than that of re-introducing him to the mind of Europe. A Greek scholar from Constantinople—Gemistus Plethon—lectured on Plato, in Florence, in the year 1438.

Platonism had been strangely transformed by its passage through the Neo-Platonism of Alexandria and through the

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superstitious Middle Ages. As taught in Florence it was from the beginning an elaborate and complex system, much more dogmatic than in Plato himself, and containing many ideas for which he provides no warrant. The lectures of Gemistus Plethon were essentially uncritical, but they ensured the spread of Platonism in Italy: Bessarion of Trebizond, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola took up the task. Marsilio Ficino became head of the Platonist Academy at Florence; he translated Plato into Latin and wrote commentaries on him, one of which, that on the *Symposium* ("Commentarium in Convivium") will be frequently referred to in the following pages. He also translated several of the Neo-Platonists. The teachings of Plato were intermixed and confused with the mysticism of Philo and Plotinus, and with ideas derived from the Jewish Cabala, and even from Indian and Egyptian sources. Among Spenser's own contemporaries was Giordano Bruno who owed much to the Neo-Platonists, and who certainly in various ways influenced Spenser himself. The study was taken up rapidly all over the Continent: Plato was studied not only for himself and for his own value, but his popularity became associated with the reforming movement of the day; scholastic Catholicism had adopted Aristotle as its philosopher and had given his works an authority second only to that of the Scriptures themselves. The Reformers in setting up Platonism were founding a rival system and helping to break the chains of the old scholastic theology.

Accordingly we find the Huguenot Ramus introducing Platonism into the University of Paris and find it advancing swiftly in the German Universities. It was by no accident of association that Cambridge represented for sixteenth century England both the most ardent spirit of the Reformation and the most zealous study of Plato. When Spenser proceeded to Cambridge in 1569, the religious enthusiasm in the University was almost wholly Puritan in tone and certainly all that was intellectual in the University was Platonist; the identification of Cambridge with Platonism lasted, in fact, for well over a century.

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Spenser, keenly intellectual and deeply religious, felt fully the influence of both movements; the combined influence of Puritanism and Platonism is evident from his earliest work to his latest. They appear together in *The Shepherds Calender*, they are plain, more or less, in every part of *The Faerie Queene*, and throughout the minor poems: indeed they may be said to mutually help and illustrate each other: Spenser's Puritanism saved him from seizing upon those pagan and sensuous elements in classical literature which proved a pitfall to so many of his contemporaries; it made him blind to the more dangerous aspects of Platonism and helped to concentrate his attention on that which is noblest and most characteristic in Plato—his ethical genius; on the other hand Spenser's Platonism preserved him from the, artistically at any rate, no less dangerous pitfalls of Puritanism; it helped to preserve him from mental narrowness by showing him the best possible examples of freedom and flexibility of mind and taught him what, as a poet, it was most essential he should know—that beauty is not only consistent with moral earnestness but may be made to contribute to it in the most powerful way. There is, as Mr Pater has remarked, “a certain asceticism amid all the varied opulence of sense, of speech and fancy natural to Plato's genius”; it is precisely in this union of opulence, and of sense and fancy with an inward asceticism, that the resemblance to Spenser is most close.

There are, of course, certain sides of Plato's genius which have no parallel in Spenser. All those many dialogues which are concerned with definitions of general terms, with inductive reasoning, and which prepare the way for formal logic, all these of necessity offered little of which the poetic talent could lay hold. Again Spenser has no means, at least he does not contrive any means, for representing the rich variety of opinion in Plato; Plato frequently represents in the same dialogue the most widely different opinions but without arbitrating among them; his speakers advance views mutually inconsistent and the author declines to pronounce definitely on any one; hence the best dialogues, though strewn with suggestive ideas, are

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free from dogma and give the effect of extreme flexibility of mind. This effect Spenser does not attempt to render in his poetry and, even where he follows Plato most closely, it is always with a certain difference. This imitation is nowhere closer than in the *Fowre Hymnes* where his theories of the nature of love and beauty are, in all essentials, taken from the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*; yet he can only make his explanations consistent by sacrificing a large part of the Platonic dialogues and by buttressing up what remains with conceptions taken from the Italian Platonists; in the process the dramatic life and variety of the originals are inevitably lost; the total result, though in a sense more consistent, is less subtle, less ingenious and less profound.

We may sum up this side of the matter by saying that the subtler sides of Platonism and its complexity and variety Spenser can hardly attempt to render.

Other sides of Plato's genius were in a quite special way akin. Plato has at once a firm grip on the realities of the visible world, an intense delight in beauty of form and colour, and also a happy realisation of the unseen world which is, to him, just as vivid a reality as the material one. Like Plato, Spenser is both spiritual and sensuous, delighting in abstractions, but perceiving them so vividly that he is able to clothe and make them real. Plato also has a genius for allegory; many of the most striking passages in his works are allegories and they are nearly all of deep moral import; it is unnecessary to do more than point out how closely related this is to the essential genius of *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser has taken no actual allegory from his master but he has certainly been encouraged in his natural adherence to the form. And it may be shown that even Spenser's limitations, as regards his conception of poetry, have in some way their warrant from Plato. In the *Republic* (Bks II. and III.) Plato represents Socrates as condemning all poets who do not make instruction the direct aim of their work, who tell unedifying fables of the gods or represent heroes as acting in an unbecoming manner; Socrates even blames Homer for showing unrestrained grief in Achilles.

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That Plato's was a view always to be reckoned with we can see from Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, where Sidney considers at length the fact that poets were banished from the *Republic*, and shows that it applies only to such as do not aim at moral instruction; Sidney insists upon poetic justice: the virtuous must always be rewarded, and the bad punished, otherwise there is not sufficient incentive to be good and he naïvely represents poetry as being much more excellent than history because history must sometimes show the bad prosperous and thus discourage moral behaviour. It is this view of literature and the function of poetry, founded essentially on Plato's teaching, which is worked out through the whole of *The Faerie Queene*; the aim is entirely moral, the heroes are never permitted to do unbecoming actions without being well punished for them and poetic justice is always satisfied. It is probable that Plato would not have interpreted an ethical aim quite so narrowly but, at any rate, this is what both Sidney and Spenser thought he meant.

It might also be observed that, besides other similarities, Spenser resembles Plato in the art of narrative as such. Plato is, when he chooses, the most excellent teller of tales with infinite charm and vivacity and true dramatic power; and Spenser, in this, as in so many things, is like but on a lower scale.

Again, Plato has an intense enthusiasm for certain special virtues, such as Temperance and Justice, and has also a tendency to make them incarnate in particular persons; as Pater points out Charmides is Temperance, and Socrates is Righteousness. Here also Spenser offers the closest parallel; his knights all incarnate some special virtue, Guyon is Temperance, Artegall is Justice, Britomart is Chastity; it is true that, though Spenser can invent types, he cannot endow them with the same vivid reality and interest, there is no figure which stands out in his pages quite like the figure of Charmides, to say nothing of Socrates. Finally, we may point out that Plato was a great lover, ardent to the utmost possible degree, yet fond also of seeking out the philosophical bases of the passion

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and seeking perpetually for its ethical value as an inspiration and a formative element in character.

We have only, of course, to make the comparison between them to see how immense the intellectual superiority of Plato is. Spenser cannot draw characters as real. Amid all his allegories Spenser has none at once so profoundly significant and so imaginative as the allegory of the cave in the *Republic*, or as the allegory of the winged horses and the charioteer in the *Phaedrus*. Plato's narrative of Atlantis is as romantic as any of Spenser's tales but it is much more realistic and plausible in every detail, and Spenser has nothing so daintily and unforgettably charming as the fable of the grasshoppers in the *Phaedrus*.

Still, with all these native resemblances, it is not surprising that the influence of Plato should appear almost everywhere in Spenser's work, continually recurring and repeating itself. The first two of the *Fowre Hymnes*¹ were probably written during Spenser's residence in Cambridge. Immediately after this period was composed *The Shepherds Calender*, where one eclogue at least (the October one) shows the same conception of love as in the *Hymnes*.

Throughout *The Faerie Queene* the influence of Plato is strongly manifest but especially in the first two books where it underlies the whole conception of virtue. One of the fundamental thoughts of Platonism, as explained in the *Phaedrus* and elsewhere, is that it is possible by the practice of virtue so to train and instruct the soul that it becomes conscious of wisdom and truth as visible things, and can conceive them in their native beauty as they really are. This is the state of mind which Spenser understands as Holiness and which forms the subject of the first book. It is possible that the character of Una is meant to represent the Platonic wisdom (*σοφία* or *ἀρετή*); throughout the many trials of the journey the face of Una is veiled from the Red Cross Knight and not until the end, when his soul is purified and his great conflict over, is she unveiled to him in her native loveliness. It is noticeable that, though the beauty of Una is great, it is not described as a physical beauty

¹ See note on p. lxxii.

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but mainly by virtue of its effects. Again and again the presence of her heavenly wisdom is dwelt upon. Thus she teaches the fauns and satyrs who hang joyfully on her words and Sir Satyrane marvels at her wisdom

“He wondred at her wisdome hevenly rare,
 Whose like in womens witt he never knew.”

(I. vi. 31.)

It is she who guides the Red Cross Knight to the House of Holiness where he is to become disciplined and learn true wisdom. There are also many incidental references. One of the loveliest passages in the *Symposium* is rendered by Spenser into immortal beauty.

“The noble hart that harbours vertuous thought,
 And is with childe of glorious great intent,
 Can never rest, untill it forth have brought
 Th’ eternal brood of glorie excellent.”

(I. v. 1.)

One of the most interesting passages in the account of the Giant Despair (Canto ix.) is taken from Plato’s *Phaedo*. In the *Phaedo* Socrates argues that, though death is better than life, it is still not permissible to commit suicide because man is, as it were, a possession of the gods and may not leave the post to which they have appointed him. So the Red Cross Knight argues in answer to Despair :

“The terme of life is limited,
 Ne may a man prolong, nor shorten it ;
 The souldier may not move from watchfull sted
 Nor leave his stand untill his Captaine bed.”

(I. ix. 41.)

The whole account of the contemplative life in the House of Holiness owes much to Plato. It is essentially the life of Plato’s ideal man—the philosopher.

Throughout the book the conception of virtue is a Platonic one. In the *Republic* Plato shows how virtue is partly due to a good natural disposition, partly to discipline which forms habit, and partly to the good pleasure of heaven or unmerited grace. This is true of all Spenser’s heroes but perhaps especially of the Red Cross Knight ; the natural disposition is excellent but, if grace for a moment leaves him, he is involved in all

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manner of hardships and he needs the stern discipline of the House of Holiness. Virtue, as taught by his example, does not consist in any obedience to outward rules, but is a condition of the soul, and one virtue involves practically all the others.

In the second book the correspondence is still closer. The main part of the plan, as Spenser himself states has been taken from Aristotle's *Ethics*, but the scheme is everywhere expanded and illuminated by Platonism.

In the *Timaeus*, the *Republic*, and elsewhere, Plato divides the soul into three principles: one rational and two irrational. The irrational principles are spirit or anger (*θυμός*) and sensuality and Temperance is the harmony resulting in the mind when the rational spirit rules. (*Republic* Bk iv.)

In the second book Guyon is the ideal of Temperance, the palmer who serves as his guide, continually helping and admonishing, represents the rational principle and, being such and nothing more, is shown in a somewhat dry and impersonal light. The first six cantos, when taken as a whole, show Guyon tempted by the first irrational principle anger and the later six cantos show him tempted by the second irrational principle—lust or passion.

In the *Laches* Plato had shown that the virtues are inseparably connected. Thus Socrates rejects, one after another, the definitions of Courage given by *Laches*, shows that courage may not only mean endurance in battle, but also the endurance of pain and reproach; it is a certain wise strength of mind, the reasonable fortitude of a man who foresees what is coming and is very different from mere fury like that of a wild beast; the man who has such a knowledge of good and evil as is necessary for real courage must have in addition temperance and justice and all the other virtues. This is the case with Spenser's Guyon: he is full of courage but it is reasoned and careful courage, sharply distinguished from the mere animal spirit of Pyrochles and Cymochles; it includes fortitude as is shown by the adventures in the Cave of Mammon and Acrasia's bower and it is the inspiring spirit without which the virtue of Temperance could not exist.

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The number of allusions in the second book is very large. The regality of reason is dwelt upon and the misery of the man who permits it to be ruled by his baser part.

“Behold the ymage of mortalitie,
 And feeble nature cloth’d with fleshly tyre.
 When raging passion with fierce tyranny
 Robs reason of her dew regalitie,
 And makes it servaunt to her basest part,
 The strong it weakens with infirmitie,
 And with bold fury armes the weakest hart;
 The strong through pleasure soonest falles, the weake through
 smart.”

(II. i. 57.)

In the account of Guyon’s visit to the Cave of Mammon and the lower world we see that Spenser cannot make even incidental reference to the hemlock without recollecting its connection with the death of Socrates.

“Cicuta bad
 With which th’ unjust Atheniens made to dy
 Wise Socrates; who, thereof quaffing glad,
 Pour’d out his life and last Philosophy
 To the fayre Critias, his dearest Belamy.”

(II. vii. 42.)

The essential spirit of the scene is seized though the reference is quite inaccurate, as the mention of Critias shows, and proves, as do many other quotations, that Spenser quotes from memory.

The description of the House of Temperance, in which dwells Alma or the soul, contains several passages borrowed from the *Timaeus*. At the end of the same canto the wisdom of the sages who inhabit it is compared to the wisdom of Socrates

“whom Greece, the Nourse of all good arts,
 By Phoebus doome the wisest thought alive.”

(II. ix. 48.)

In the siege that is conducted against the House of Temperance by its foes, the teaching of the *Republic* is plainly present to Spenser’s mind; strong affections, that is passions,

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are ever struggling against the reason and aiming at bringing the soul into captivity but there is no life so miserable as that which is subject to their tyranny ; in the body in which Alma or the soul reigns rightly all the parts are held in due subjection.

In the third book of *The Faerie Queene* the Platonic influence is no less manifest. If Spenser had followed Aristotle strictly he ought to have considered Chastity as a part of Temperance ; if he had followed the mediaeval ideal he would have rendered it as a strict asceticism ; but instead he is wholly Platonic.

Chastity, as exhibited in Britomart, is essentially the noble love of the *Phaedrus* ; it has nothing ascetic about it, it is glowing and passionate, even tortured with its passion, but it has at the same time a noble restraint, it is incapable of baseness, it is a love inspired by and dwelling upon one image, despising all allurements and impelled to heroic achievements. The struggle of Chastity is against the mean and ignoble love, as typified in the enchanter Busirane, full of sensuousness and cruelty.

There are many direct allusions. Britomart explains to the Red Cross Knight how all her heart is set, as according to the *Symposium*, the heart of the noble lover always is, upon the desire for honour.

“ All my delight on deedes of armes is sett,
To hunt out perilles and adventures hard,
By sea, by land, where so they may be mett,
Onely for honour and for high regard,
Without respect of richesse or reward¹. ” (III. ii. 7.)

Again Spenser describes the love which is his theme almost exactly as he describes it in the second of the *Fowre Hymnes*.

“ Most sacred fire that burnest mightily
In living brests, ykindled first above
Eamongst th' eternall spheres and lamping sky,
And thence pour'd into men, which men call Love,
.....that sweete fit that doth true beautie love,
And chooseth vertue for his dearest Dame,
Whence spring all noble deedes and never dying fame². ”
(III. iii. 1.)

¹ *Hymn* 1., ll. 224—231.

² *Ib.* ll. 63—70 and 217—224.

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It is this love, Spenser explains, by which the eternal decrees of Providence are brought about. In the fifth canto Spenser makes the same contrast between the two types of love as is made by Plato in the *Symposium* and by himself in the second *Hymn*; in base minds the only effect of love is to stir up sensual desire and make them waste their time in sloth and idleness, but in noble minds it kindles the highest aspirations.

“Ne suffereth it uncomely idlenesse
 In his free thought to build her sluggish nest,
 Ne suffereth it thought of ungentlenesse
 Ever to creep into his noble brest;
 But to the highest and the worthiest
 Lifteth it up that els would lowly fall¹,”

(III. v. 2.)

Spenser may be said to have used up the noblest part of his ethics in the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*. In the first two he represents the Platonic conception of virtue as being essentially the health and harmony of the soul, the perfect balance of all the faculties and his first two heroes illustrate it in full.

In the third book Spenser deals with the Platonic conception of love and makes it incarnate in the person of Britomart. It is noticeable that she is never tempted as the heroes of the first two books are, all in her is perfectly noble, but at the same time there is a restlessness and fever in her which they do not possess.

In the later books Spenser, having exhausted his main Platonic inspiration, had much less assured guidance and hence, in part at any rate, the inferiority of these books in ethical value and their comparative lack of cohesion. His plan was to exhibit each virtue in turn; but he was met by the dilemma which Socrates states so eloquently in the *Laches* that each virtue seems unable to exist without the active co-operation of all the rest; thus he was almost compelled either to repeat the full portraits given in the earlier books or else, in achieving

¹ *Hymn* 1., ll. 175—182.

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variety, to descend to a lower level and the latter is the alternative he chooses.

In the fourth book his conception of friendship is curiously weak and unsatisfying; the noble and enthusiastic feeling which represents friendship in Plato he had already embodied in the person of Britomart, and it is significant that though Britomart is not nominally the centre of the fourth book, yet her figure continues to attract the main interest to itself.

In the Introduction Spenser shows at the outset his confusion of mind by speaking, not of the friendship which is nominally his theme, but directly of love.

“For it of honor and all vertue is
 The roote, and brings forth glorious floures of fame,
 That crowne true lovers with immortal bliss,
 The meed of them that love, and do not live amisse.

Which who so list looke backe to former ages,
 And call to count the things that then were donne,
 Shall find that all the workes of those wise sages,
 And brave exploits which great Heroës wonne,
 In love were either ended or begunne:
 Witnessse the father of Philosophie,
 Which to his Critias, shaded oft from sunne,
 Of love full manie lessons did apply,
 The which these Stoicke censours cannot well deny¹.”

(IV. I, 2.)

The reference in the last paragraph seems to be to the *Phaedrus* but, if so, it is quoted with singular inaccuracy.

Britomart is the embodiment of noble beauty, not only physical but of the mind and soul and, wherever she appears, she inspires a feeling of awe akin to worship. In her fight with the unknown Artegall he strikes her helmet and shears a portion of it away; her face appears in such beauty that he is overwhelmed with astonishment and delight; when he raises his arm to strike her he finds himself bewitched so

¹ *Hymn* I., ll. 218—224 and 232—238.

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that he cannot; his sword and his hand are incapable of injuring a beauty so great.

“And he himselve, long gazing thereupon,
 At last fell humbly down upon his knee,
 And of his wonder made religion,
 Weening some heavenly goddesse he did see,
 Or else unweeting what it else might bee;
Whilst trembling horror did his sense assayle,
 And make ech' member quake and manly heart to quayle¹.”
 (IV. vi. 22.)

From that moment Artegall is filled with love; but his reverence for Britomart restrains the expression of it. In the imagery of the *Phaedrus* Spenser represents his restraint as making his emotions more furious.

“Whereby the passion grew more fierce and faine,
 Like to a stubborne steede whom strong hand would restraine.”

In the eighth canto of the same book Spenser explains how one of the best characteristics of the golden age was the innocence of the love experienced during its reign but, after it passed away, love and beauty were both put to shame and beauty, which was the image of the Creator, became degraded. (IV. viii. 32.)

In the beginning of another canto Spenser weighs the advantages of family affection, love and friendship; he declares that natural affection is soon overcome by “Cupid’s greater flame” but faithful friendship surpasses them both and, in this case at any rate, it is evident that Spenser means by friendship the enthusiastic rapture of Plato.

“But faithfull friendship doth them both suppress,
 And them with maystring discipline doth tame,
 Through thoughts aspyring to eternall fame:
 For as the soul doth rule the earthly masse,
 And all the service of the body frame,
 So love of soule doth love of bodie passe².”
 (IV. ix. 2.)

¹ *Hymn* I., ll. 113–119.

² *Hymn* II., ll. 169–182.

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In the tenth canto when Scudamour describes his winning of Amoret he tells of the gardens of Venus where there are many pairs of friends; he describes their affection as it is described in the speech of Phaëdrus in the *Symposium*.

“lovers lincked in true harts consent,
 Which loved not as these for like intent,
 But on chaste vertue grounded their desire
 Farre from all fraud or fayned blandishment;
 Which, in their spirits kindling zealous fire,
 Brave thoughts and noble deedes did evermore inspire.

Such were great Hercules and Hyllus deare
 Stout Theseus and Pirithous his feare,
 Pylades and Orestes by his side;.....
 All these, and all that ever had bene tyde
 In bands of friendship, there did live for ever,
 Whose lives although decay'd, yet loves decayed never¹.”

(*IV. x. 26, 27.*)

The episode of the false Florimell is an allegory embodying Platonic thought; Florimell is true beauty, beauty not only of body but of mind and soul; the false Florimell is an exact resemblance so far as outward form is concerned but, when she is confronted with the true beauty, she dissolves away and becomes nothing.

In the fifth book the Platonic influence is much less than in the preceding ones. Plato's fullest definitions of Justice are given in the *Republic*, which is, in fact, one long argument on the nature of Justice as revealed in the individual and in the state. Justice in the individual consists in the harmony of the whole nature when the reasoning principle governs and the passions are properly subservient, while Justice in the state consists in the proper arrangement of all its parts when every class has its function and fulfils it. (*Bk IV.*)

Spenser was precluded by his scheme from accepting either of these definitions; the first is almost indistinguishable from

¹ Compare *Hymn 1.*, ll. 232—238.

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the Temperance which he had already described in the person of Guyon; the second would have involved making Justice a social virtue and he did not mean to treat of the social virtues until he came to the second (unattempted) twelve books of *The Faerie Queene*.

The fifth book, as it stands, is a somewhat unsatisfying compromise between the two. Artegall, like the typical knight errant, goes about executing justice in the sense that he punishes evil doers and avenges wrong, but he also takes part in international affairs in the expedition to aid Belgé, etc.

Yet his fate is in some respects akin to that of the truly just man described in the *Republic*; Glaucon says that the truly just man will often be the prey of doubt and misunderstanding; he will seem to others to be different from what he is and will be assailed with all kinds of slander and evil report. So Spenser represents his Artegall on the return from his great victory as assailed by the hags Envy and Detraction.

In the sixth book Spenser's aim becomes less definitely moral; he forgets his severity of purpose and allows himself to dally at ease in the "delightful land of Faery"; there is not much Platonic influence but it occurs here and there in the love making of Calidore and Pastorella. Pastorella, in her beauty and simplicity, enchants him into contemplation:

"So stood he still long gazing thereupon,
 Ne any will had thence to move away.....
 And sate there still untill the flying day
 Was farre forth spent, discoursing diversly
 Of sundry things as fell, to worke delay."

In Spenser's minor poems Platonic influence is shown almost entirely in his conception of love.

In the *Teares of the Muses* both Terpsichore and Erato express the same idea as that in the *Hymnes*.

"Such high concept of that celestial fire,
 The base-born brood of blindnes cannot gesse,
 Ne ever dare their dunghill thoughts aspire
 Unto so lottie pitch of perfectnesse¹."

¹ See *Hymn* 1., ll. 169—175.

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In *Colin Clout's Come Home Againe* Spenser contrasts the love of the courtiers, which is all frivolity and folly, with the true type; the courtiers continually speak of love, "all their talk and study is of it," every man must bear the badge of some gay mistress and no man among them is esteemed "Unless, he swim in love up to the eares"; but they do not interpret love as shepherds (*i.e.* poets) interpret it; they profane his mighty mysteries and serve him in evil fashion.

The true nature of love is explained to be the underlying principle of all creation :

"Of loves perfection perfectly to speake,
Or of his nature rightly to define,
Indeed (said Colin) passeth reasons reach,
And needs his priest t' expresse his powre divine,
For long before the world he was ybore¹,
And bred above in Venus bosome deare :
For by his powre the world was made of yore,
And all that therein wondrous doth appeare.
For how should else things so far from attone,
And so great enemies as of them bee,
Be ever drawne together into one
And taught in such accordance to agree?
Through him the cold began to covet heat,
And water fire; the light to mount on hie
And th' heavie downe to peize; the hungry t' eat,
So, being former foes, they wexed friends,
And gan by litle learne to love each other :

.²
But man, that had the sparke of reasons might
More then the rest to rule his passion
Chose for his love the fairest in his sight
Like as himselfe was fairest by creation :
For beautie is the bayt which with delight
Doth man allure for to enlarge his kind;
Beautie, the burning lamp of heavens light³,
Darting her beames into each feeble mynd."

¹ See *Hymn* 1., ll. 50—56. ² See *Hymn* 1., ll. 57—91.

³ See *Hymn* 1., ll. 106—119.

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In the *Epithalamium* there is the same preference for the inward beauty of mind and spirit over the outward beauty. He praises in the highest terms the physical loveliness of his bride.

“But if ye saw that which no eyes can see,
 The inward beauty of her lively spright
 Garnisht with heavenly guifts of high degree,
 Much more then would ye wonder at that sight—
 There vertue raynes as Queene in royal throne,
 And giveth lawes alone,
 The which the base affections doe obay,
 And yeeld theyr services unto her will¹.”

Spenser's *Sonnets* again are full of the influence of Plato and this helps to make amends for what might otherwise be a want of interest in them; they have not, like those of Shakespeare and Sidney, an enthralling story to tell; there is very little narrative, what there is consists of only the ordinary alternations of a lover's hopes and fears and many of the sonnets are almost purely imitative and follow the usual Petrarchan convention though with a style so perfect as almost to rival that of Petrarch himself.

The greater number of his finest ideas and expressions are suggested by Plato. The poet dwells throughout on the exaltation of his love, its purity, the rapture and inspiration he derives from it. He explains how it kindles light in his soul:

“The soverayne beauty which I doo admyre,
 Witnessse the world how worthy to be prayzed!
 The light whereof hath kindled heavenly fyre
 In my fraile spirit, by her from basenesse rayسد.”
 (*Sonnet 3.*)

He goes on to explain that she has made him incapable now of regarding anything impure, but he stands in amazement at the sight of her celestial beauty; astonishment arrests his pen and makes dumb his lips. He consoles himself for her delay by remembering that it is only the base loves which are easily

¹ See *Hymn II.*, ll. 183—189.

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won ; the true and noble love cannot be achieved by anything except labour and perseverance but, when once achieved, it is constant.

His beloved is full of divine fire, her beauty is heavenly, it renews the whole of nature and calms the storm of passion.

“ More then most faire, full of the living fire,
 Kindled above unto the Maker neere;.....
 Through your bright beams doth not the blinded guest
 Shoot out his darts to base affections wound ;
 But Angels come to lead fraile mindes to rest
 In chaste desires, on heavenly beauty bound,
 You frame my thoughts and fashion me within.”

(*Sonnet 8.*)

He dwells on her physical perfections but repeats and emphasises the idea that her mind is fairer still.

“But that which fairest is but few behold,
 Her mind adornd with vertues manifold.”

(*Sonnet 15.*)

Her beauty allures the gaze of all but awakens reverence and represses all base desires.

“She to her love doth lookers eyes allure ;
 And, with sterne countenance, back again doth chace
 Their looser lookes that stir up lustes impure¹.”

(*Sonnet 21.*)

His eyes are so filled with the glory of her beauty that they cannot brook the sight of anything beside ; all the magnificence of the world is vain and its splendours appear as shadows.

“ Yet are mine eyes so filled with the store
 Of that faire sight, that nothing else they brooke,
 But lothe the things which they did like before,
 And can no more endure on them to looke.
 All this world's glory seemeth vayne to me,
 And all their showes but shadowes, saving she².”

(*Sonnet 35.*)

¹ See *Hymn 11.*, ll. 162—168. ² See *Hymn 1.*, ll. 204—210.

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She is the image of the Maker's beauty, divinely wrought and all but exciting worship.

“The glorious image of the Maker's beautie
 My soverayne saint, the Idoll of my thought,
 Dare not henceforth, above the bounds of dewtie,
 T'accuse of pride or rashly blame for ought.
 For being, as she is, divinely wrought,.....
 Such heavenly formes ought rather worshipt be
 Then dare be lov'd by men of meane degree.”

(*Sonnet 61.*)

Spenser is haunted by Plato's image of the wings of soul; he recounts how when his spirit spreads its wings it becomes clogged with mortality but the sovereign beauty of his lady resembles heaven's light and restores his soul to its true sphere.

“Oft, when my spirit doth spred her bolder wings,
 In mind to mount up to the purest sky;
 It down is weighd with thought of earthly things,
 And clogd with burden of mortality;
 Where, when that soverayne beauty it doth spy,
 Resembling heavens glory in her light,
 Drawne with sweet pleasures bayt, it back doth fly
 And unto heaven forgets her former flight¹.”

(*Sonnet 72.*)

He returns again, and yet again, to the comparison between the inward and outward beauty, the former being the more admirable and also the image of the divine.

“Men call you fayre, and you doe credit it,
 For that your selfe ye dayly such doe see:
 But the true fayre, that is the gentle wit
 And vertuous mind, is much more praysed of me
that is true beautie: that doth argue you
 To be divine, and borne of heavenly seed;
 Deriv'd from that fayre Spirit, from whom al true
 And perfect beauty did at first proceed².”

(*Sonnet 79.*)

¹ See *Hymn 1.*, ll. 168–182. ² See *Hymn 11.*, ll. 112–119.

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He sees nothing but the image of the heavenly ray as revealed in her, the true idea and type of beauty in itself, in contemplation of her he supports and sustains his soul.

“Ne ought I see, though in the clearest day,
 When others gaze upon theyr shadowes vaine,
 But th’only image of that heavenly ray
 Whereof some glance doth in mine eie remayne.
 Of which beholding the Idaea playne,
 Through contemplation of my purest part,
 With light thereof I doe my selfe sustayne,
 And thereon feed my love-affamisht hart¹.”

(*Sonnet 87.*)

II.

THE INFLUENCE OF PLATO ON THE “FOWRE HYMNES.”

As will have been perceived from the foregoing brief survey the influence of Plato on Spenser is a very profound one. It provides him with a continual inspiration and moulds the whole of his general conception of virtue as well as a lofty theory of love. It is in this theory of love that the influence of Plato is most immediately and persistently shown, and the theory itself is expressed most clearly and definitely in the *Fowre Hymnes*. They were not published until the year 1596, but, as Spenser himself explains in the Introduction, two of them had been written much earlier. The *Hymnes* of Love and Beauty “too much pleased those of like age and disposition,” and, since the number of copies distributed made it impossible for the poet to call them in, he determined to amend them and, “by way of retraction, to reforme them, making, in stead of those two *Hymnes* of earthly or naturall love and beautie, two others of heavenly and celestiall.”

So in the *Hymne of Heavenly Love* Spenser laments

“Many lewd layes (ah! woe is me the more!)
 In praise of that mad fit which fooles call love,
 I have in th’ heat of youth made heretofore.”

¹ See *Hymn 11.*, ll. 210—235.

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The accusation of lewdness certainly could not be brought against the first two hymns as they stand, but it is possible that Spenser altered them or else that he is referring to other love poetry.

The theory of love and beauty expressed in all four is taken mainly from the erotic dialogues of Plato—the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. Spenser harmonises the different views expressed in them as far as he can, and omits what he has no place for though occasionally, it must be admitted, he is led into inconsistencies.

The speech of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* is one clear and consistent whole, but the speakers in the *Symposium* express different points of view which are not in all respects easy to reconcile; Spenser takes something from almost every one, blending and harmonising in his own way. He also borrows freely from the Italian Platonists, at times to explain Plato, sometimes to amplify and occasionally to introduce totally fresh matter; he relies on them most in the two later hymns—those on Heavenly Love and Heavenly Beauty—where Plato, naturally, could supply less of a model.

The student will probably find that the simplest way of studying the *Hymnes* is to take first those portions which are due to the direct influence of Plato and then consider those which may be traced to the Italian Platonists.

In the *Phaedrus* love is explained in its relation to beauty and as being essentially the excitement produced by the sight of beauty; this explanation involves reference to two of Plato's favourite doctrines—that of recollection and that of ideas.

The doctrine of recollection is developed most fully in the *Meno*: the soul of man has undergone many incarnations; it is always passing from one body to another, in its different stages of existence, and especially in the upper world, it has seen and learnt all things but, when it comes upon earth, the body obscures and darkens it, and it forgets the greater part of its knowledge. It is capable, however, of recollecting all that it has known and it does so mainly by association; when it clearly knows or perceives one thing then it is reminded of

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many others. Socrates proves his point by the case of the slave who is led to demonstrate a difficult problem in geometry.

In the *Parmenides* Plato develops the doctrine of ideas: all objects of sense are fleeting and changeable but everything that we can see has its eternal idea or prototype; thus, removed from the material world of birth and death and change, there is another world of pure and perfect forms, imperceptible to the earthly senses, and which, for dwellers in this world, can be apprehended by reason alone; each single form is in itself pure and unchangeable and eternal; each one answers to some visible object and all visible objects are what they are, possessed of form and qualities, only because they share in the divine essence of their corresponding ideas.

In the *Phaedrus* Socrates begins his praise of love by saying that, like the gift of prophecy and the gift of poetic song, it is a divine madness.

The soul is immortal; when fully winged it soars upward and is the ruler of the universe but the imperfect soul loses its feathers and, settling on the ground, receives an earthly frame. The wing is intended to soar aloft and carry the soul to the upper region where the gods dwell. Beauty, wisdom and goodness are all divine things and nourish the wing of the soul: τὸ δὲ θεῖον καλόν, σοφόν, ἀγαθόν, καὶ πᾶν ὅτι τοιοῦτον· τούτοις δὴ τρέφεται τε καὶ αὔξεται μάλιστα γὰρ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς πτέρωμα¹.

When fed upon evil, foulness and the like the wing wastes away: αἰσχρῶ δὲ καὶ κακῶ καὶ τοῖς ἐναντίοις φθίνει τε καὶ διόλλυται.

Those souls which have sufficient strength can follow the gods and enter the heaven of heavens; reaching this the divine intelligence rejoices to behold reality, it gazes upon truth and is inspired and made happy by the sight: in its course it beholds justice and temperance and true knowledge, not in the form of created things but as they really are. καθορᾶ μὲν αὐτὴν δίκαιοσύνην, καθορᾶ δὲ σωφροσύνην, καθορᾶ δὲ ἐπιστήμην².

¹ *Phaedrus* 246.

² *Ib.* 247. See also notes pp. 54, 69.