

A TRACT OF PLUTARCH ON THE ADVANTAGE TO BE DERIVED BY A MAN FROM HIS ENEMY.

BECAUSE I see, Cornelius, that thou hast chosen for thyself to walk in meekness, so that, whilst thou art helping the common affairs, thou in thy own person shewest hardness to no man; and again because, as the writers say, there is not to be found in the land of Crete any wild beast, but no community of men is to be found, even in modern times, free from envy and jealousy and strife, which are the springs of enmity: yet how often friendship is wont to produce on the other side enmity, as also Chilon the wise pointed out! For when he was told that a certain man had no enemy, he answered and said 'and therefore no friend.' For he was persuaded that it was right for a man to know how the affairs of enemies stand; and it was not in vain that Xenophon said that 'it is the mark of a wise man that he knows how to profit by his enemies.'

For lo! to them of old time it was enough if only they were not hurt by wild beasts, and this single consideration was the end in view in their fight against them: but those who came after and learned their use, took advantage of their bodies for food, and of their hair for clothing; and for healing, too, they took matter from them; they armed themselves with their claws, and covered themselves with their hides; so that in consequence of this

it is to be feared that when the beasts have disappeared from our life, our own life may become as that of the beasts, in which resources will not be found, though wildness may be.

Now since for most men it suffices that their enemies do them no damage, but Xenophon, on the other hand, said that they are very profitable to the wise man (and on this point one must not doubt); we will examine how this advantage is to be found. For the examination of it is needful for us, who cannot live without enemies. For the gardener cannot change every tree for the better, nor again is it easy for the hunter to tame all beasts; yet they understand how by certain means to derive profit from wild things: and we may see the planter deriving advantage from fruitless trees, and the hunter from wild beasts. The waters of the sea are salt and very bitter, but they grow fish at all parts of their depths and conduct merchants on their waves. Fire, again, burns him who comes near to it, but it shews light and diffuses warmth, and is the means for all handicrafts that know how to use it. See if the enemy be not like to these in that while in one direction a man approaches him warily, in others he fulfils our need and is profitable. And we may see many things which, while they are antagonistic to us and hurt us, are in other respects useful to us. How many have fallen into bodily sickness, and their sickness has humbled them and restrained them from evil! How many have fallen on toil, and the toil has given strength and hardness to their members; others have been deprived of their country and their fortunes, and they have made use of both losses as food for the journey, and they became to them the means of rest and of useful occupation, as in the case of Diogenes and Crates. Zeno, when he heard that the ship, which had been sent by him to sea, had been wrecked, answered

and said: 'It is well for me, so that I may turn to philosophy.' For as those animals whose stomachs are sound, if they eat snails or scorpions, digest them; and as others feed on pebbles and clay, and through the warmth of their stomachs, digest them; but those, whose stomach is weak, become ill even if they get sustenance of bread and wine; in the same way the fools are wont even by friendship to get damage, while the wise profit by enmity, making good use of it.

For lo! that which is considered the most difficult, is for the discriminating the most profitable; it is this; he (the enemy) searches out thy ways of living and does not sleep from examining thy steps and trying to find a cause against thee, while he turns hither and thither; therefore watchfulness does not hurt thee, but recalls thee to useful behaviour. For the enemy does not make his inquisition carelessly; for his gaze enters, as it were, through the walls of thy house, and his spy pierces the stones of thy dwelling, yea! he plunders the very mind of thy friends, and through thy neighbours he spies out thy works and gets thy secrets from the midst of thy beloved by gifts which he offers them. For people are very often, through carelessness, in the habit of not noticing even the death of their friends: but enemies enquire even about the things that they see in their dreams. And if illness come upon a man, or if he takes a loan or has a quarrel with his wife, his enemies perceive it before his friends. But especially their glance keeps to the failings of their foes, and from all quarters they search them out. And as the vultures by scent are gathered on carcases, while they do not at all perceive sound bodies; so also enemies come down and gather on evil ways and dead deeds, and draw near to them and tear them. And this is profitable; yea! beloved, it is great profit, that we become watchful over our ways and examine

our persons and do nothing carelessly and say nothing thoughtlessly, but that we be blameless in all our steps, for herein the danger lies. By chastising our passions and warning our thoughts he increases in us the study to live soberly and without reproof. For as towns against which war is raised by their neighbours and against which armies advance, are constantly weaned from their evil customs and are governed according to law instead of being in revolution, thus also many are reprov'd by reason of enmity: they become awake and watchful and are not ready to do anything lightly, and by and by they learn not to fail again and they adorn themselves with virtue and are alarmed even at blame. For every thing, in which the enemies rejoice, if it comes to their heart, holds them back from them and their deeds¹. We see also those who play on the lyre, that when one of them plays by himself in the theatre, he often employs his art carelessly: but when he goes down to the contest against the other players, his fellows, then he not only recalls his mind from wandering, but he awakens and strengthens also the strings of his lyre and puts them in good order for the contest. Thus also must he who is conscious that he is going down into the battle with his enemies in order to conquer them by his prowess or that they may conquer him, watch especially over himself and like that player on the lyre see to himself and his deeds.

For this also is a mark of evil that a man is more ashamed when he sins before his enemies than before his friends: as also a wise man signifies; for when it was said to him that the affairs of the Romans must be in safety, since they had subdued and conquered their enemies, he answered and said: Now there is great danger since

¹ The Syriac is not clear.

there is not left them any before whom they might be ashamed. But understand, dear friend, the word which Diogenes said, which is very wise and helpful. For when he was asked by someone how to avenge himself on his enemies, he answered and said to him: Thus canst thou avenge thyself, by becoming good and honest. For if they feel grieved when they see the horses of those against whom they have hatred to be praised, or his dogs or his garden, what will they do when the man himself is praised and when everybody declares his righteousness and sobriety and wisdom and the care over his ways, in that he gathers fruit from the deep furrows of his mind whence spring all the thoughts that are full of righteousness? And another wise man has said that the enemies are brought to silence, not merely as such, nor all of them, but according as they see that their enemies are sober and good and merciful towards them. For these virtues are a bridle to their tongues, and shut their mouths and direct them to quietness. And thou, therefore, if thou wishest to do harm to thy enemy, do not call him voluptuous or a liar or an impertinent fellow, but shew thyself in thy own person the contrary of it, and be cautious and true and merciful and righteous towards every man. But if thou art also provoked to blame him, be thyself far from the blame which thou layest upon him: enter into thy mind, and examine thy deeds¹, lest thou hear from these that thou art a physician whilst thou art full of sores. If also thou callest him a fool, do thou thyself add and win wisdom; if a coward, multiply thou courage; and if thou callest him voluptuous, buffet thou the lusts that are in thy own mind. For there is nothing which is more hateful and distressing, than a reproach which falls back on him that sent it; and as

¹ Did he read *περισκόπει τὰ σὰ ἔργα* instead of *τὰ σαθρά*?

weak eyes are hurt by light, that falls on a place and is reflected upon them, so also a blame, when it reflects from without a truth on him that has uttered it, he who sent it forth is vexed thereby. And Plato, when he saw men that were vile, was wont to say as he turned away from them: 'Lest I myself were to become so.' He, therefore, who reproaches his neighbour, when he turns to him and sees himself, as in an example, is himself also helped by the reproach which he cast, though it is [otherwise] very damaging. But most men laugh when they see a man who, while he is bald or hump-backed, reproaches others with those faults. But many fools reproach others with what turns back on themselves. Leo, however, when he was called blind by one who had a hump, answered and said to him: Thou reproachest me with a bodily defect, but thou bearest thy defects upon thy shoulders. Therefore do not call thy neighbour an adulterer, while thou thyself art sensual; nor licentious, while thou art impertinent. Domitius wished to reproach Crassus, who, when an animal died that he had kept in a cage, had wept about it; but Crassus said to him: 'That I might not be like thyself; thou hast buried three wives that thou hast had, and hast not wept for one of them.' But this is not required, that a man be ready for slandering and daring and raising his voice, but that, while he reproaches, he does not give opportunity that the reproach be sent back to himself. For this also God demands from any who wishes to reproach his neighbour, that he first examine himself, lest while he says what pleases him, he should hear what does not rejoice him, and lest his ears should unwillingly perceive what his mouth has sent forth willingly.

This, therefore, is the advantage of the man that reproaches his enemies: but there is also another advan-

tage to be found, in that a man be reproached by his enemies. Therefore rightly Antisthenes said: He whose object is that he be famous in his conduct, has need either of true friends or of mighty enemies, inasmuch as they, by chastising him when he has sinned and by reproaching him, turn him away from that which is foul. But because the voice of love is feeble¹ and cannot reprehend with a full mouth, but is ready for sweet words: it is necessary therefore that we should hear the truth from our enemies. For like as Telephus, who had no physician, brought the sore of his complaint under the lance of his enemy, so must he who has no friend to reprehend him, tolerate the reprehension of his enemies, when they reprehend and unveil his vices, looking on the healing that he gets, and not on the mind that is working him ill. For like the man whom from hatred some one wished to kill, and struck him with the sword on a tumour, and thus, through this stroke, as through an incision, the tumour was opened and he saved from death; so often from anger or from enmity a reproach is uttered, and a pain, that is hidden or covered in the soul, is made whole. But most people, when they are reproached, do not look whether the reproach be true or not, but they look for some other word by which he who reproaches them may be reproached: after the fashion of athletes, who go down to fight, who do not at all wipe away what is thrown upon them, but turn and throw again; thus also do these defile each other with reproaches in their fight with one another. But we ought, when we are reproached by our enemies, if it is a true word, to keep our soul from it and not leave the sore that was shewn to us: but, if it be not true, we must seek the cause from which this reproach was taken: but we must

¹ *Lit.* extinguished.

fear and be cautious, in case we have transgressed or done something like or similar to what was said: a thing which happened also to that king of Argos; for the hair of the locks of his head, and a lazy manner of walking, brought upon him a foul suspicion. Again there came upon Pompeius from a certain cause a similar reproach, though he was far from lasciviousness. Moreover Crassus was reproached on account of a virgin. For, because he wished to buy from her a parcel of ground, he was obliged to write to her and to honour her. And for Postumia inordinate laughter and freedom of speech gained the reproach of licentiousness, so that she was accused of adultery: but she was found innocent. The judge, however, warned her and told her not to use words at all that are foreign to modesty. Themistocles, too, though he was pure, and no traitor of the town, fell into a suspicion of treachery because he constantly received letters from his friend Pausanias. When therefore a word is spoken that is not true, we must not, because it is a false rumour, despise and contemn it, but we must search and see, whether in our speech or in our deeds, or in those who are attached to us, there be found anything that is like the rumour. We must avoid and flee from it.

For if to most people the losses that befell them increased their knowledge, as also Merope said: 'misfortunes have taken from me my friends and have taught me caution': what hinders us from setting up for ourselves constantly a teacher, free of charge, and learning from him what is hidden in our own mind? For the enemy perceives many things, of which the friend is not conscious. For, as Plato said, he who loves is blind as regards seeing the faults of his friends. But hatred, while his glance is keen, has also his mouth open. Hieron when he quarrelled with his enemy was reproached by him for the foulness

of the smell of his mouth. Then, when he came to his house, he answered and said to his wife: neither hast thou told me the defect that is upon me.' But she, because she had not had intercourse with another man, and was innocent, answered and said to him: 'as for me, I believed that such was the smell of the mouth of all men.' Thus it is easy to learn known faults and secret faults first from enemies, before we learn them from friends and lovers.

And without this it is not possible for us to restrain our tongue and gain, without much exercise, that great part of the righteousness which a man must have in order to subdue his passions which love noise and talkativeness which are the cause of quarrelsomeness and enmity. For if it happens that our tongue trespasses with a word: it flies like a bird from our nests; and from the mouth of a man who is not practised in subduing his anger there often fly words¹, and from his weakness and carelessness and impertinence he stumbles. But Plato said that of the lightest word people must pay damages both to God and man. But silence not only, as the physicians say, keeps from thirst, but also from reprehensions and rebukes. There is nothing more honourable than that a man when he is reproached by his enemy should keep silence. For if thou art silent towards him, it is much more easy for thee to endure thy wife, if she speaks ill of thee: and the brother, too, and the friend, thou canst tolerate when they reproach thee. And, further, thou dost endure without anger thy father and thy mother, even when they beat thee. For Isocrates (sic!) took a hard and passionate wife in order that it might be easy for him to bear with strangers, having been exercised by her in patience. It is, however, much

¹ Remark the idiomatic expression **تخلم تخلم**.

better that a man should be exercised by his enemies, and practised by their reproaches and their railing, and that he restrain his anger and do not suffer it to arise when reviling provokes it.

Meekness, therefore, and patience, we must thus shew towards enemies, but [also we must shew] simplicity and sweetness and goodness, even more than towards friends. For it is not so much a great thing, if we do good to our friend, as it is a shameful thing, if we do it not. But as regards one's enemy, if a man forbears vengeance, when it was easy for him to avenge, this is a mark of goodness: but if he weeps over his fall and stretches out his hand towards his need and shews kindly care with goodwill towards his children or towards his relatives, when he sees them in need: who would not love such an one and praise his peacefulness and his goodness, whose heart he sees to be made as of iron and diamond! When Caesar ordered to re-erect the statues of Pompeius his enemy, that had been thrown down, a wise man answered and said: Those statues thou hast re-erected, but thine own thou hast fastened. Therefore we must neither spare praise nor honour, if it is due to any one who is our enemy. For he is more praised who praises his enemy, and through this there is room that his reproof be believed, when he reproves, as of one who does not hate the man, but repudiates his deeds. And what is the best of all, is that it is observed concerning him that he is very far from envying the valor of his friends, because he often praised his enemies. For through this he shews, that still less is he becoming envious, because his friends succeed. And lo! what study can be better than this, that a man should gain the mind that eradicates envy and jealousy from his soul? For like as those who are accustomed to war are possessed by the passion of