

Plato
The Republic

BOOK X.

Many things pleased me in the order of our State, but there was nothing which I liked better than the regulation about poetry. The division of the soul throws a new light on our exclusion of imitation. I do not mind telling you in confidence that all poetry is an outrage on the understanding, unless the hearers have that balm of knowledge which heals error. I have loved Homer ever since I was a boy, and even now he appears to me to be the great master of tragic poetry. But much as I love the man, I love truth more, and therefore I must speak out: and first of all, will you explain what is imitation, for really I do not understand? 'How likely then that I should understand!' That might very well be, for the duller often sees better than the keener eye. 'True, but in your presence I can hardly venture to say what I think.' Then suppose that we begin in our old fashion, with the doctrine of universals. Let us assume the existence of beds and tables. There is one idea of a bed, or of a table, which the maker of each had in his mind when making them; he did not make the ideas of beds and tables, but he made beds and tables according to the ideas. And is there not a maker of the works of all workmen, who makes not only vessels but plants and animals, himself, the earth and heaven, and things in heaven and under the earth? He makes the Gods also. 'He must be a wizard indeed!' But do you not see that there is a sense in which you could do the same? You have only to take a mirror, and catch the reflection of the sun, and the earth, or anything else—there now you have made them. 'Yes, but only in appearance.' Exactly so; and the painter is such a creator as you are with the mirror, and he is even more unreal than the carpenter; although neither the carpenter nor any other artist can be supposed to make the absolute bed. 'Not if philosophers may be believed.' Nor need we wonder that his bed has but an imperfect relation to the truth. Reflect:—Here are three beds; one in nature, which is made by God; another, which is made by the carpenter; and the third, by the painter. God only made one, nor could he have made more than one; for if there had been two, there would always have been a third—more absolute and abstract than either, under which they would have been included. We may therefore conceive God to be the natural maker of the bed, and in a lower sense the carpenter is also the maker; but the painter is rather the imitator of what the other two make; he has to do with a creation which is thrice removed from reality. And the tragic poet is an imitator, and, like every other imitator, is thrice removed from the king and from the truth. The painter imitates not the original bed, but the bed made by the carpenter. And this, without being really different, appears to be different, and has many points of view, of which only one is caught by the painter, who represents everything because he represents a piece of everything, and that piece an image. And he can paint any other artist, although he knows nothing of their arts; and this with sufficient skill to deceive children or simple people. Suppose now that somebody came to us and told us, how he had met a man who knew all that everybody knows, and better than anybody:—should we not infer

him to be a simpleton who, having no discernment of truth and falsehood, had met with a wizard or enchanter, whom he fancied to be all-wise? And when we hear persons saying that Homer and the tragedians know all the arts and all the virtues, must we not infer that they are under a similar delusion? they do not see that the poets are imitators, and that their creations are only imitations. 'Very true.' But if a person could create as well as imitate, he would rather leave some permanent work and not an imitation only; he would rather be the receiver than the giver of praise? 'Yes, for then he would have more honour and advantage.'

Let us now interrogate Homer and the poets. Friend Homer, say I to him, I am not going to ask you about medicine, or any art to which your poems incidentally refer, but about their main subjects—war, military tactics, politics. If you are only twice and not thrice removed from the truth—not an imitator or an image-maker, please to inform us what good you have ever done to mankind? Is there any city which professes to have received laws from you, as Sicily and Italy have from Charondas, Sparta from Lycurgus, Athens from Solon? Or was any war ever carried on by your counsels? or is any invention attributed to you, as there is to Thales and Anacharsis? Or is there any Homeric way of life, such as the Pythagorean was, in which you instructed men, and which is called after you? 'No, indeed; and Creophylus (Flesh-child) was even more unfortunate in his breeding than he was in his name, if, as tradition says, Homer in his lifetime was allowed by him and his other friends to starve.' Yes, but could this ever have happened if Homer had really been the educator of Hellas? Would he not have had many devoted followers? If Protagoras and Prodicus can persuade their contemporaries that no one can manage house or State without them, is it likely that Homer and Hesiod would have been allowed to go about as beggars—I mean if they had really been able to do the world any good?— would not men have compelled them to stay where they were, or have followed them about in order to get education? But they did not; and therefore we may infer that Homer and all the poets are only imitators, who do but imitate the appearances of things. For as a painter by a knowledge of figure and colour can paint a cobbler without any practice in cobbling, so the poet can delineate any art in the colours of language, and give harmony and rhythm to the cobbler and also to the general; and you know how mere narration, when deprived of the ornaments of metre, is like a face which has lost the beauty of youth and never had any other. Once more, the imitator has no knowledge of reality, but only of appearance. The painter paints, and the artificer makes a bridle and reins, but neither understands the use of them—the knowledge of this is confined to the horseman; and so of other things. Thus we have three arts: one of use, another of invention, a third of imitation; and the user furnishes the rule to the two others. The flute-player will know the good and bad flute, and the maker will put faith in him; but the imitator will neither know nor have faith— neither science nor true opinion can be ascribed to him. Imitation, then, is devoid of

knowledge, being only a kind of play or sport, and the tragic and epic poets are imitators in the highest degree.

And now let us enquire, what is the faculty in man which answers to imitation. Allow me to explain my meaning: Objects are differently seen when in the water and when out of the water, when near and when at a distance; and the painter or juggler makes use of this variation to impose upon us. And the art of measuring and weighing and calculating comes in to save our bewildered minds from the power of appearance; for, as we were saying, two contrary opinions of the same about the same and at the same time, cannot both of them be true. But which of them is true is determined by the art of calculation; and this is allied to the better faculty in the soul, as the arts of imitation are to the worse. And the same holds of the ear as well as of the eye, of poetry as well as painting. The imitation is of actions voluntary or involuntary, in which there is an expectation of a good or bad result, and present experience of pleasure and pain. But is a man in harmony with himself when he is the subject of these conflicting influences? Is there not rather a contradiction in him? Let me further ask, whether he is more likely to control sorrow when he is alone or when he is in company. 'In the latter case.' Feeling would lead him to indulge his sorrow, but reason and law control him and enjoin patience; since he cannot know whether his affliction is good or evil, and no human thing is of any great consequence, while sorrow is certainly a hindrance to good counsel. For when we stumble, we should not, like children, make an uproar; we should take the measures which reason prescribes, not raising a lament, but finding a cure. And the better part of us is ready to follow reason, while the irrational principle is full of sorrow and distraction at the recollection of our troubles. Unfortunately, however, this latter furnishes the chief materials of the imitative arts. Whereas reason is ever in repose and cannot easily be displayed, especially to a mixed multitude who have no experience of her. Thus the poet is like the painter in two ways: first he paints an inferior degree of truth, and secondly, he is concerned with an inferior part of the soul. He indulges the feelings, while he enfeebles the reason; and we refuse to allow him to have authority over the mind of man; for he has no measure of greater and less, and is a maker of images and very far gone from truth.

But we have not yet mentioned the heaviest count in the indictment—the power which poetry has of injuriously exciting the feelings. When we hear some passage in which a hero laments his sufferings at tedious length, you know that we sympathize with him and praise the poet; and yet in our own sorrows such an exhibition of feeling is regarded as effeminate and unmanly (Ion). Now, ought a man to feel pleasure in seeing another do what he hates and abominates in himself? Is he not giving way to a sentiment which in his own case he would control?—he is off his guard because the sorrow is another's; and he thinks that he may indulge his feelings without disgrace, and will be the gainer by the pleasure. But the

inevitable consequence is that he who begins by weeping at the sorrows of others, will end by weeping at his own. The same is true of comedy,—you may often laugh at buffoonery which you would be ashamed to utter, and the love of coarse merriment on the stage will at last turn you into a buffoon at home. Poetry feeds and waters the passions and desires; she lets them rule instead of ruling them. And therefore, when we hear the encomiasts of Homer affirming that he is the educator of Hellas, and that all life should be regulated by his precepts, we may allow the excellence of their intentions, and agree with them in thinking Homer a great poet and tragedian. But we shall continue to prohibit all poetry which goes beyond hymns to the Gods and praises of famous men. Not pleasure and pain, but law and reason shall rule in our State.

These are our grounds for expelling poetry; but lest she should charge us with discourtesy, let us also make an apology to her. We will remind her that there is an ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy, of which there are many traces in the writings of the poets, such as the saying of ‘the she-dog, yelping at her mistress,’ and ‘the philosophers who are ready to circumvent Zeus,’ and ‘the philosophers who are paupers.’ Nevertheless we bear her no ill-will, and will gladly allow her to return upon condition that she makes a defence of herself in verse; and her supporters who are not poets may speak in prose. We confess her charms; but if she cannot show that she is useful as well as delightful, like rational lovers, we must renounce our love, though endeared to us by early associations. Having come to years of discretion, we know that poetry is not truth, and that a man should be careful how he introduces her to that state or constitution which he himself is; for there is a mighty issue at stake—no less than the good or evil of a human soul. And it is not worth while to forsake justice and virtue for the attractions of poetry, any more than for the sake of honour or wealth. ‘I agree with you.’

And yet the rewards of virtue are greater far than I have described. ‘And can we conceive things greater still?’ Not, perhaps, in this brief span of life: but should an immortal being care about anything short of eternity? ‘I do not understand what you mean?’ Do you not know that the soul is immortal? ‘Surely you are not prepared to prove that?’ Indeed I am. ‘Then let me hear this argument, of which you make so light.’

You would admit that everything has an element of good and of evil. In all things there is an inherent corruption; and if this cannot destroy them, nothing else will. The soul too has her own corrupting principles, which are injustice, intemperance, cowardice, and the like. But none of these destroy the soul in the same sense that disease destroys the body. The soul may be full of all iniquities, but is not, by reason of them, brought any nearer to death. Nothing which was not destroyed from within ever perished by external affection of evil. The body, which is one thing, cannot be destroyed by food, which is another, unless the badness of the food is

communicated to the body. Neither can the soul, which is one thing, be corrupted by the body, which is another, unless she herself is infected. And as no bodily evil can infect the soul, neither can any bodily evil, whether disease or violence, or any other destroy the soul, unless it can be shown to render her unholy and unjust. But no one will ever prove that the souls of men become more unjust when they die. If a person has the audacity to say the contrary, the answer is—Then why do criminals require the hand of the executioner, and not die of themselves? ‘Truly,’ he said, ‘injustice would not be very terrible if it brought a cessation of evil; but I rather believe that the injustice which murders others may tend to quicken and stimulate the life of the unjust.’ You are quite right. If sin which is her own natural and inherent evil cannot destroy the soul, hardly will anything else destroy her. But the soul which cannot be destroyed either by internal or external evil must be immortal and everlasting. And if this be true, souls will always exist in the same number. They cannot diminish, because they cannot be destroyed; nor yet increase, for the increase of the immortal must come from something mortal, and so all would end in immortality. Neither is the soul variable and diverse; for that which is immortal must be of the fairest and simplest composition. If we would conceive her truly, and so behold justice and injustice in their own nature, she must be viewed by the light of reason pure as at birth, or as she is reflected in philosophy when holding converse with the divine and immortal and eternal. In her present condition we see her only like the sea-god Glaucus, bruised and maimed in the sea which is the world, and covered with shells and stones which are incrustated upon her from the entertainments of earth.

Thus far, as the argument required, we have said nothing of the rewards and honours which the poets attribute to justice; we have contented ourselves with showing that justice in herself is best for the soul in herself, even if a man should put on a Gyges’ ring and have the helmet of Hades too. And now you shall repay me what you borrowed; and I will enumerate the rewards of justice in life and after death. I granted, for the sake of argument, as you will remember, that evil might perhaps escape the knowledge of Gods and men, although this was really impossible. And since I have shown that justice has reality, you must grant me also that she has the palm of appearance. In the first place, the just man is known to the Gods, and he is therefore the friend of the Gods, and he will receive at their hands every good, always excepting such evil as is the necessary consequence of former sins. All things end in good to him, either in life or after death, even what appears to be evil; for the Gods have a care of him who desires to be in their likeness. And what shall we say of men? Is not honesty the best policy? The clever rogue makes a great start at first, but breaks down before he reaches the goal, and slinks away in dishonour; whereas the true runner perseveres to the end, and receives the prize. And you must allow me to repeat all the blessings which you attributed to the fortunate unjust—they bear rule in the city, they marry and give in

marriage to whom they will; and the evils which you attributed to the unfortunate just, do really fall in the end on the unjust, although, as you implied, their sufferings are better veiled in silence.

But all the blessings of this present life are as nothing when compared with those which await good men after death. 'I should like to hear about them.' Come, then, and I will tell you the story of Er, the son of Armenius, a valiant man. He was supposed to have died in battle, but ten days afterwards his body was found untouched by corruption and sent home for burial. On the twelfth day he was placed on the funeral pyre and there he came to life again, and told what he had seen in the world below. He said that his soul went with a great company to a place, in which there were two chasms near together in the earth beneath, and two corresponding chasms in the heaven above. And there were judges sitting in the intermediate space, bidding the just ascend by the heavenly way on the right hand, having the seal of their judgment set upon them before, while the unjust, having the seal behind, were bidden to descend by the way on the left hand. Him they told to look and listen, as he was to be their messenger to men from the world below. And he beheld and saw the souls departing after judgment at either chasm; some who came from earth, were worn and travel-stained; others, who came from heaven, were clean and bright. They seemed glad to meet and rest awhile in the meadow; here they discoursed with one another of what they had seen in the other world. Those who came from earth wept at the remembrance of their sorrows, but the spirits from above spoke of glorious sights and heavenly bliss. He said that for every evil deed they were punished tenfold—now the journey was of a thousand years' duration, because the life of man was reckoned as a hundred years—and the rewards of virtue were in the same proportion. He added something hardly worth repeating about infants dying almost as soon as they were born. Of parricides and other murderers he had tortures still more terrible to narrate. He was present when one of the spirits asked— Where is Ardiaeus the Great? (This Ardiaeus was a cruel tyrant, who had murdered his father, and his elder brother, a thousand years before.) Another spirit answered, 'He comes not hither, and will never come. And I myself,' he added, 'actually saw this terrible sight. At the entrance of the chasm, as we were about to reascend, Ardiaeus appeared, and some other sinners—most of whom had been tyrants, but not all—and just as they fancied that they were returning to life, the chasm gave a roar, and then wild, fiery-looking men who knew the meaning of the sound, seized him and several others, and bound them hand and foot and threw them down, and dragged them along at the side of the road, lacerating them and carding them like wool, and explaining to the passers-by, that they were going to be cast into hell.' The greatest terror of the pilgrims ascending was lest they should hear the voice, and when there was silence one by one they passed up with joy. To these sufferings there were corresponding delights.

On the eighth day the souls of the pilgrims resumed their journey, and in four days came to a spot whence they looked down upon a line of light, in colour like a rainbow, only brighter and clearer. One day more brought them to the place, and they saw that this was the column of light which binds together the whole universe. The ends of the column were fastened to heaven, and from them hung the distaff of Necessity, on which all the heavenly bodies turned—the hook and spindle were of adamant, and the whorl of a mixed substance. The whorl was in form like a number of boxes fitting into one another with their edges turned upwards, making together a single whorl which was pierced by the spindle. The outermost had the rim broadest, and the inner whorls were smaller and smaller, and had their rims narrower. The largest (the fixed stars) was spangled—the seventh (the sun) was brightest—the eighth (the moon) shone by the light of the seventh—the second and fifth (Saturn and Mercury) were most like one another and yellower than the eighth—the third (Jupiter) had the whitest light—the fourth (Mars) was red—the sixth (Venus) was in whiteness second. The whole had one motion, but while this was revolving in one direction the seven inner circles were moving in the opposite, with various degrees of swiftness and slowness. The spindle turned on the knees of Necessity, and a Siren stood hymning upon each circle, while Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos, the daughters of Necessity, sat on thrones at equal intervals, singing of past, present, and future, responsive to the music of the Sirens; Clotho from time to time guiding the outer circle with a touch of her right hand; Atropos with her left hand touching and guiding the inner circles; Lachesis in turn putting forth her hand from time to time to guide both of them. On their arrival the pilgrims went to Lachesis, and there was an interpreter who arranged them, and taking from her knees lots, and samples of lives, got up into a pulpit and said: ‘Mortal souls, hear the words of Lachesis, the daughter of Necessity. A new period of mortal life has begun, and you may choose what divinity you please; the responsibility of choosing is with you—God is blameless.’ After speaking thus, he cast the lots among them and each one took up the lot which fell near him. He then placed on the ground before them the samples of lives, many more than the souls present; and there were all sorts of lives, of men and of animals. There were tyrannies ending in misery and exile, and lives of men and women famous for their different qualities; and also mixed lives, made up of wealth and poverty, sickness and health. Here, Glaucon, is the great risk of human life, and therefore the whole of education should be directed to the acquisition of such a knowledge as will teach a man to refuse the evil and choose the good. He should know all the combinations which occur in life—of beauty with poverty or with wealth,— of knowledge with external goods,—and at last choose with reference to the nature of the soul, regarding that only as the better life which makes men better, and leaving the rest. And a man must take with him an iron sense of truth and right into the world below, that there too he may remain undazzled by wealth or the allurements of evil, and be determined to avoid the extremes

and choose the mean. For this, as the messenger reported the interpreter to have said, is the true happiness of man; and any one, as he proclaimed, may, if he choose with understanding, have a good lot, even though he come last. 'Let not the first be careless in his choice, nor the last despair.' He spoke; and when he had spoken, he who had drawn the first lot chose a tyranny: he did not see that he was fated to devour his own children—and when he discovered his mistake, he wept and beat his breast, blaming chance and the Gods and anybody rather than himself. He was one of those who had come from heaven, and in his previous life had been a citizen of a well-ordered State, but he had only habit and no philosophy. Like many another, he made a bad choice, because he had no experience of life; whereas those who came from earth and had seen trouble were not in such a hurry to choose. But if a man had followed philosophy while upon earth, and had been moderately fortunate in his lot, he might not only be happy here, but his pilgrimage both from and to this world would be smooth and heavenly. Nothing was more curious than the spectacle of the choice, at once sad and laughable and wonderful; most of the souls only seeking to avoid their own condition in a previous life. He saw the soul of Orpheus changing into a swan because he would not be born of a woman; there was Thamyras becoming a nightingale; musical birds, like the swan, choosing to be men; the twentieth soul, which was that of Ajax, preferring the life of a lion to that of a man, in remembrance of the injustice which was done to him in the judgment of the arms; and Agamemnon, from a like enmity to human nature, passing into an eagle. About the middle was the soul of Atalanta choosing the honours of an athlete, and next to her Epeus taking the nature of a workwoman; among the last was Thersites, who was changing himself into a monkey. Thither, the last of all, came Odysseus, and sought the lot of a private man, which lay neglected and despised, and when he found it he went away rejoicing, and said that if he had been first instead of last, his choice would have been the same. Men, too, were seen passing into animals, and wild and tame animals changing into one another.

When all the souls had chosen they went to Lachesis, who sent with each of them their genius or attendant to fulfil their lot. He first of all brought them under the hand of Clotho, and drew them within the revolution of the spindle impelled by her hand; from her they were carried to Atropos, who made the threads irreversible; whence, without turning round, they passed beneath the throne of Necessity; and when they had all passed, they moved on in scorching heat to the plain of Forgetfulness and rested at evening by the river Unmindful, whose water could not be retained in any vessel; of this they had all to drink a certain quantity—some of them drank more than was required, and he who drank forgot all things. Er himself was prevented from drinking. When they had gone to rest, about the middle of the night there were thunderstorms and earthquakes, and suddenly they were all driven divers ways, shooting like stars to their birth. Concerning his return to the body, he only knew that awaking

suddenly in the morning he found himself lying on the pyre.

Thus, Glaucon, the tale has been saved, and will be our salvation, if we believe that the soul is immortal, and hold fast to the heavenly way of Justice and Knowledge. So shall we pass undefiled over the river of Forgetfulness, and be dear to ourselves and to the Gods, and have a crown of reward and happiness both in this world and also in the millennial pilgrimage of the other.

The Tenth Book of the Republic of Plato falls into two divisions: first, resuming an old thread which has been interrupted, Socrates assails the poets, who, now that the nature of the soul has been analyzed, are seen to be very far gone from the truth; and secondly, having shown the reality of the happiness of the just, he demands that appearance shall be restored to him, and then proceeds to prove the immortality of the soul. The argument, as in the *Phaedo* and *Gorgias*, is supplemented by the vision of a future life.

Why Plato, who was himself a poet, and whose dialogues are poems and dramas, should have been hostile to the poets as a class, and especially to the dramatic poets; why he should not have seen that truth may be embodied in verse as well as in prose, and that there are some indefinable lights and shadows of human life which can only be expressed in poetry—some elements of imagination which always entwine with reason; why he should have supposed epic verse to be inseparably associated with the impurities of the old Hellenic mythology; why he should try Homer and Hesiod by the unfair and prosaic test of utility,—are questions which have always been debated amongst students of Plato. Though unable to give a complete answer to them, we may show—first, that his views arose naturally out of the circumstances of his age; and secondly, we may elicit the truth as well as the error which is contained in them.

He is the enemy of the poets because poetry was declining in his own lifetime, and a theatrocracy, as he says in the *Laws*, had taken the place of an intellectual aristocracy. Euripides exhibited the last phase of the tragic drama, and in him Plato saw the friend and apologist of tyrants, and the Sophist of tragedy. The old comedy was almost extinct; the new had not yet arisen. Dramatic and lyric poetry, like every other branch of Greek literature, was falling under the power of rhetoric. There was no 'second or third' to Aeschylus and Sophocles in the generation which followed them. Aristophanes, in one of his later comedies (*Frogs*), speaks of 'thousands of tragedy-making prattlers,' whose attempts at poetry he compares to the chirping of swallows; 'their garrulity went far beyond Euripides,'—'they appeared once upon the stage, and there was an end of them.' To a man of genius who had a real appreciation of the godlike Aeschylus and the noble and gentle Sophocles, though disagreeing with some parts of their 'theology' (*Rep.*), these 'minor poets' must have been contemptible and intolerable. There is no feeling stronger in the dialogues of Plato than a

sense of the decline and decay both in literature and in politics which marked his own age. Nor can he have been expected to look with favour on the licence of Aristophanes, now at the end of his career, who had begun by satirizing Socrates in the *Clouds*, and in a similar spirit forty years afterwards had satirized the founders of ideal commonwealths in his *Eccleziastusae*, or *Female Parliament* (*Laws*).

There were other reasons for the antagonism of Plato to poetry. The profession of an actor was regarded by him as a degradation of human nature, for 'one man in his life' cannot 'play many parts;' the characters which the actor performs seem to destroy his own character, and to leave nothing which can be truly called himself. Neither can any man live his life and act it. The actor is the slave of his art, not the master of it. Taking this view Plato is more decided in his expulsion of the dramatic than of the epic poets, though he must have known that the Greek tragedians afforded noble lessons and examples of virtue and patriotism, to which nothing in Homer can be compared. But great dramatic or even great rhetorical power is hardly consistent with firmness or strength of mind, and dramatic talent is often incidentally associated with a weak or dissolute character.

In the Tenth Book Plato introduces a new series of objections. First, he says that the poet or painter is an imitator, and in the third degree removed from the truth. His creations are not tested by rule and measure; they are only appearances. In modern times we should say that art is not merely imitation, but rather the expression of the ideal in forms of sense. Even adopting the humble image of Plato, from which his argument derives a colour, we should maintain that the artist may ennoble the bed which he paints by the folds of the drapery, or by the feeling of home which he introduces; and there have been modern painters who have imparted such an ideal interest to a blacksmith's or a carpenter's shop. The eye or mind which feels as well as sees can give dignity and pathos to a ruined mill, or a straw-built shed (Rembrandt), to the hull of a vessel 'going to its last home' (Turner). Still more would this apply to the greatest works of art, which seem to be the visible embodiment of the divine. Had Plato been asked whether the Zeus or Athene of Pheidias was the imitation of an imitation only, would he not have been compelled to admit that something more was to be found in them than in the form of any mortal; and that the rule of proportion to which they conformed was 'higher far than any geometry or arithmetic could express?' (Statesman.)

Again, Plato objects to the imitative arts that they express the emotional rather than the rational part of human nature. He does not admit Aristotle's theory, that tragedy or other serious imitations are a purgation of the passions by pity and fear; to him they appear only to afford the opportunity of indulging them. Yet we must acknowledge that we may sometimes cure disordered emotions by giving expression to them; and

that they often gain strength when pent up within our own breast. It is not every indulgence of the feelings which is to be condemned. For there may be a gratification of the higher as well as of the lower—thoughts which are too deep or too sad to be expressed by ourselves, may find an utterance in the words of poets. Every one would acknowledge that there have been times when they were consoled and elevated by beautiful music or by the sublimity of architecture or by the peacefulness of nature. Plato has himself admitted, in the earlier part of the Republic, that the arts might have the effect of harmonizing as well as of enervating the mind; but in the Tenth Book he regards them through a Stoic or Puritan medium. He asks only ‘What good have they done?’ and is not satisfied with the reply, that ‘They have given innocent pleasure to mankind.’

He tells us that he rejoices in the banishment of the poets, since he has found by the analysis of the soul that they are concerned with the inferior faculties. He means to say that the higher faculties have to do with universals, the lower with particulars of sense. The poets are on a level with their own age, but not on a level with Socrates and Plato; and he was well aware that Homer and Hesiod could not be made a rule of life by any process of legitimate interpretation; his ironical use of them is in fact a denial of their authority; he saw, too, that the poets were not critics—as he says in the Apology, ‘Any one was a better interpreter of their writings than they were themselves. He himself ceased to be a poet when he became a disciple of Socrates; though, as he tells us of Solon, ‘he might have been one of the greatest of them, if he had not been deterred by other pursuits’ (Tim.) Thus from many points of view there is an antagonism between Plato and the poets, which was foreshadowed to him in the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry. The poets, as he says in the Protagoras, were the Sophists of their day; and his dislike of the one class is reflected on the other. He regards them both as the enemies of reasoning and abstraction, though in the case of Euripides more with reference to his immoral sentiments about tyrants and the like. For Plato is the prophet who ‘came into the world to convince men’—first of the fallibility of sense and opinion, and secondly of the reality of abstract ideas. Whatever strangeness there may be in modern times in opposing philosophy to poetry, which to us seem to have so many elements in common, the strangeness will disappear if we conceive of poetry as allied to sense, and of philosophy as equivalent to thought and abstraction. Unfortunately the very word ‘idea,’ which to Plato is expressive of the most real of all things, is associated in our minds with an element of subjectiveness and unreality. We may note also how he differs from Aristotle who declares poetry to be truer than history, for the opposite reason, because it is concerned with universals, not like history, with particulars (Poet).

The things which are seen are opposed in Scripture to the things which are unseen—they are equally opposed in Plato to universals and ideas. To him

all particulars appear to be floating about in a world of sense; they have a taint of error or even of evil. There is no difficulty in seeing that this is an illusion; for there is no more error or variation in an individual man, horse, bed, etc., than in the class man, horse, bed, etc.; nor is the truth which is displayed in individual instances less certain than that which is conveyed through the medium of ideas. But Plato, who is deeply impressed with the real importance of universals as instruments of thought, attributes to them an essential truth which is imaginary and unreal; for universals may be often false and particulars true. Had he attained to any clear conception of the individual, which is the synthesis of the universal and the particular; or had he been able to distinguish between opinion and sensation, which the ambiguity of the words (Greek) and the like, tended to confuse, he would not have denied truth to the particulars of sense.

But the poets are also the representatives of falsehood and feigning in all departments of life and knowledge, like the sophists and rhetoricians of the Gorgias and Phaedrus; they are the false priests, false prophets, lying spirits, enchanters of the world. There is another count put into the indictment against them by Plato, that they are the friends of the tyrant, and bask in the sunshine of his patronage. Despotism in all ages has had an apparatus of false ideas and false teachers at its service—in the history of Modern Europe as well as of Greece and Rome. For no government of men depends solely upon force; without some corruption of literature and morals—some appeal to the imagination of the masses—some pretence to the favour of heaven—some element of good giving power to evil, tyranny, even for a short time, cannot be maintained. The Greek tyrants were not insensible to the importance of awakening in their cause a Pseudo-Hellenic feeling; they were proud of successes at the Olympic games; they were not devoid of the love of literature and art. Plato is thinking in the first instance of Greek poets who had graced the courts of Dionysius or Archelaus: and the old spirit of freedom is roused within him at their prostitution of the Tragic Muse in the praises of tyranny. But his prophetic eye extends beyond them to the false teachers of other ages who are the creatures of the government under which they live. He compares the corruption of his contemporaries with the idea of a perfect society, and gathers up into one mass of evil the evils and errors of mankind; to him they are personified in the rhetoricians, sophists, poets, rulers who deceive and govern the world.

A further objection which Plato makes to poetry and the imitative arts is that they excite the emotions. Here the modern reader will be disposed to introduce a distinction which appears to have escaped him. For the emotions are neither bad nor good in themselves, and are not most likely to be controlled by the attempt to eradicate them, but by the moderate indulgence of them. And the vocation of art is to present thought in the form of feeling, to enlist the feelings on the side of reason, to inspire even

for a moment courage or resignation; perhaps to suggest a sense of infinity and eternity in a way which mere language is incapable of attaining. True, the same power which in the purer age of art embodies gods and heroes only, may be made to express the voluptuous image of a Corinthian courtesan. But this only shows that art, like other outward things, may be turned to good and also to evil, and is not more closely connected with the higher than with the lower part of the soul. All imitative art is subject to certain limitations, and therefore necessarily partakes of the nature of a compromise. Something of ideal truth is sacrificed for the sake of the representation, and something in the exactness of the representation is sacrificed to the ideal. Still, works of art have a permanent element; they idealize and detain the passing thought, and are the intermediates between sense and ideas.

In the present stage of the human mind, poetry and other forms of fiction may certainly be regarded as a good. But we can also imagine the existence of an age in which a severer conception of truth has either banished or transformed them. At any rate we must admit that they hold a different place at different periods of the world's history. In the infancy of mankind, poetry, with the exception of proverbs, is the whole of literature, and the only instrument of intellectual culture; in modern times she is the shadow or echo of her former self, and appears to have a precarious existence. Milton in his day doubted whether an epic poem was any longer possible. At the same time we must remember, that what Plato would have called the charms of poetry have been partly transferred to prose; he himself (Statesman) admits rhetoric to be the handmaiden of Politics, and proposes to find in the strain of law (Laws) a substitute for the old poets. Among ourselves the creative power seems often to be growing weaker, and scientific fact to be more engrossing and overpowering to the mind than formerly. The illusion of the feelings commonly called love, has hitherto been the inspiring influence of modern poetry and romance, and has exercised a humanizing if not a strengthening influence on the world. But may not the stimulus which love has given to fancy be some day exhausted? The modern English novel which is the most popular of all forms of reading is not more than a century or two old: will the tale of love a hundred years hence, after so many thousand variations of the same theme, be still received with unabated interest?

Art cannot claim to be on a level with philosophy or religion, and may often corrupt them. It is possible to conceive a mental state in which all artistic representations are regarded as a false and imperfect expression, either of the religious ideal or of the philosophical ideal. The fairest forms may be revolting in certain moods of mind, as is proved by the fact that the Mahometans, and many sects of Christians, have renounced the use of pictures and images. The beginning of a great religion, whether Christian or Gentile, has not been 'wood or stone,' but a spirit moving in the hearts of men. The disciples have met in a large upper room or in 'holes and

caves of the earth'; in the second or third generation, they have had mosques, temples, churches, monasteries. And the revival or reform of religions, like the first revelation of them, has come from within and has generally disregarded external ceremonies and accompaniments.

But poetry and art may also be the expression of the highest truth and the purest sentiment. Plato himself seems to waver between two opposite views —when, as in the third Book, he insists that youth should be brought up amid wholesome imagery; and again in Book X, when he banishes the poets from his Republic. Admitting that the arts, which some of us almost deify, have fallen short of their higher aim, we must admit on the other hand that to banish imagination wholly would be suicidal as well as impossible. For nature too is a form of art; and a breath of the fresh air or a single glance at the varying landscape would in an instant revive and reillumine the extinguished spark of poetry in the human breast. In the lower stages of civilization imagination more than reason distinguishes man from the animals; and to banish art would be to banish thought, to banish language, to banish the expression of all truth. No religion is wholly devoid of external forms; even the Mahometan who renounces the use of pictures and images has a temple in which he worships the Most High, as solemn and beautiful as any Greek or Christian building. Feeling too and thought are not really opposed; for he who thinks must feel before he can execute. And the highest thoughts, when they become familiarized to us, are always tending to pass into the form of feeling.

Plato does not seriously intend to expel poets from life and society. But he feels strongly the unreality of their writings; he is protesting against the degeneracy of poetry in his own day as we might protest against the want of serious purpose in modern fiction, against the unseemliness or extravagance of some of our poets or novelists, against the time-serving of preachers or public writers, against the regardlessness of truth which to the eye of the philosopher seems to characterize the greater part of the world. For we too have reason to complain that our poets and novelists 'paint inferior truth' and 'are concerned with the inferior part of the soul'; that the readers of them become what they read and are injuriously affected by them. And we look in vain for that healthy atmosphere of which Plato speaks,—'the beauty which meets the sense like a breeze and imperceptibly draws the soul, even in childhood, into harmony with the beauty of reason.'

For there might be a poetry which would be the hymn of divine perfection, the harmony of goodness and truth among men: a strain which should renew the youth of the world, and bring back the ages in which the poet was man's only teacher and best friend,—which would find materials in the living present as well as in the romance of the past, and might subdue to the fairest forms of speech and verse the intractable materials of modern civilisation,—which might elicit the simple principles, or, as Plato

would have called them, the essential forms, of truth and justice out of the variety of opinion and the complexity of modern society,—which would preserve all the good of each generation and leave the bad unsung,—which should be based not on vain longings or faint imaginings, but on a clear insight into the nature of man. Then the tale of love might begin again in poetry or prose, two in one, united in the pursuit of knowledge, or the service of God and man; and feelings of love might still be the incentive to great thoughts and heroic deeds as in the days of Dante or Petrarch; and many types of manly and womanly beauty might appear among us, rising above the ordinary level of humanity, and many lives which were like poems (Laws), be not only written, but lived by us. A few such strains have been heard among men in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, whom Plato quotes, not, as Homer is quoted by him, in irony, but with deep and serious approval,—in the poetry of Milton and Wordsworth, and in passages of other English poets,—first and above all in the Hebrew prophets and psalmists. Shakespeare has taught us how great men should speak and act; he has drawn characters of a wonderful purity and depth; he has ennobled the human mind, but, like Homer (Rep.), he ‘has left no way of life.’ The next greatest poet of modern times, Goethe, is concerned with ‘a lower degree of truth’; he paints the world as a stage on which ‘all the men and women are merely players’; he cultivates life as an art, but he furnishes no ideals of truth and action. The poet may rebel against any attempt to set limits to his fancy; and he may argue truly that moralizing in verse is not poetry. Possibly, like Mephistopheles in Faust, he may retaliate on his adversaries. But the philosopher will still be justified in asking, ‘How may the heavenly gift of poesy be devoted to the good of mankind?’

Returning to Plato, we may observe that a similar mixture of truth and error appears in other parts of the argument. He is aware of the absurdity of mankind framing their whole lives according to Homer; just as in the Phaedrus he intimates the absurdity of interpreting mythology upon rational principles; both these were the modern tendencies of his own age, which he deservedly ridicules. On the other hand, his argument that Homer, if he had been able to teach mankind anything worth knowing, would not have been allowed by them to go about begging as a rhapsodist, is both false and contrary to the spirit of Plato (Rep.). It may be compared with those other paradoxes of the Gorgias, that ‘No statesman was ever unjustly put to death by the city of which he was the head’; and that ‘No Sophist was ever defrauded by his pupils’ (Gorg.)...

The argument for immortality seems to rest on the absolute dualism of soul and body. Admitting the existence of the soul, we know of no force which is able to put an end to her. Vice is her own proper evil; and if she cannot be destroyed by that, she cannot be destroyed by any other. Yet Plato has acknowledged that the soul may be so overgrown by the incrustations of earth as to lose her original form; and in the Timaeus he

recognizes more strongly than in the Republic the influence which the body has over the mind, denying even the voluntariness of human actions, on the ground that they proceed from physical states (Tim.). In the Republic, as elsewhere, he wavers between the original soul which has to be restored, and the character which is developed by training and education...

The vision of another world is ascribed to Er, the son of Armenius, who is said by Clement of Alexandria to have been Zoroaster. The tale has certainly an oriental character, and may be compared with the pilgrimages of the soul in the Zend Avesta (Haug, Avesta). But no trace of acquaintance with Zoroaster is found elsewhere in Plato's writings, and there is no reason for giving him the name of Er the Pamphylian. The philosophy of Heracleitus cannot be shown to be borrowed from Zoroaster, and still less the myths of Plato.

The local arrangement of the vision is less distinct than that of the Phaedrus and Phaedo. Astronomy is mingled with symbolism and mythology; the great sphere of heaven is represented under the symbol of a cylinder or box, containing the seven orbits of the planets and the fixed stars; this is suspended from an axis or spindle which turns on the knees of Necessity; the revolutions of the seven orbits contained in the cylinder are guided by the fates, and their harmonious motion produces the music of the spheres. Through the innermost or eighth of these, which is the moon, is passed the spindle; but it is doubtful whether this is the continuation of the column of light, from which the pilgrims contemplate the heavens; the words of Plato imply that they are connected, but not the same. The column itself is clearly not of adamant. The spindle (which is of adamant) is fastened to the ends of the chains which extend to the middle of the column of light—this column is said to hold together the heaven; but whether it hangs from the spindle, or is at right angles to it, is not explained. The cylinder containing the orbits of the stars is almost as much a symbol as the figure of Necessity turning the spindle;—for the outermost rim is the sphere of the fixed stars, and nothing is said about the intervals of space which divide the paths of the stars in the heavens. The description is both a picture and an orrery, and therefore is necessarily inconsistent with itself. The column of light is not the Milky Way—which is neither straight, nor like a rainbow—but the imaginary axis of the earth. This is compared to the rainbow in respect not of form but of colour, and not to the undergirders of a trireme, but to the straight rope running from prow to stern in which the undergirders meet.

The orrery or picture of the heavens given in the Republic differs in its mode of representation from the circles of the same and of the other in the Timaeus. In both the fixed stars are distinguished from the planets, and they move in orbits without them, although in an opposite direction: in the Republic as in the Timaeus they are all moving round the axis of the

world. But we are not certain that in the former they are moving round the earth. No distinct mention is made in the Republic of the circles of the same and other; although both in the Timaeus and in the Republic the motion of the fixed stars is supposed to coincide with the motion of the whole. The relative thickness of the rims is perhaps designed to express the relative distances of the planets. Plato probably intended to represent the earth, from which Er and his companions are viewing the heavens, as stationary in place; but whether or not herself revolving, unless this is implied in the revolution of the axis, is uncertain (Timaeus). The spectator may be supposed to look at the heavenly bodies, either from above or below. The earth is a sort of earth and heaven in one, like the heaven of the Phaedrus, on the back of which the spectator goes out to take a peep at the stars and is borne round in the revolution. There is no distinction between the equator and the ecliptic. But Plato is no doubt led to imagine that the planets have an opposite motion to that of the fixed stars, in order to account for their appearances in the heavens. In the description of the meadow, and the retribution of the good and evil after death, there are traces of Homer.

The description of the axis as a spindle, and of the heavenly bodies as forming a whole, partly arises out of the attempt to connect the motions of the heavenly bodies with the mythological image of the web, or weaving of the Fates. The giving of the lots, the weaving of them, and the making of them irreversible, which are ascribed to the three Fates—Lachesis, Clotho, Atropos, are obviously derived from their names. The element of chance in human life is indicated by the order of the lots. But chance, however adverse, may be overcome by the wisdom of man, if he knows how to choose aright; there is a worse enemy to man than chance; this enemy is himself. He who was moderately fortunate in the number of the lot—even the very last comer—might have a good life if he chose with wisdom. And as Plato does not like to make an assertion which is unproven, he more than confirms this statement a few sentences afterwards by the example of Odysseus, who chose last. But the virtue which is founded on habit is not sufficient to enable a man to choose; he must add to virtue knowledge, if he is to act rightly when placed in new circumstances. The routine of good actions and good habits is an inferior sort of goodness; and, as Coleridge says, ‘Common sense is intolerable which is not based on metaphysics,’ so Plato would have said, ‘Habit is worthless which is not based upon philosophy.’

The freedom of the will to refuse the evil and to choose the good is distinctly asserted. ‘Virtue is free, and as a man honours or dishonours her he will have more or less of her.’ The life of man is ‘rounded’ by necessity; there are circumstances prior to birth which affect him (Pol.). But within the walls of necessity there is an open space in which he is his own master, and can study for himself the effects which the variously compounded gifts of nature or fortune have upon the soul, and act accordingly. All men

cannot have the first choice in everything. But the lot of all men is good enough, if they choose wisely and will live diligently.

The verisimilitude which is given to the pilgrimage of a thousand years, by the intimation that Ardiaeus had lived a thousand years before; the coincidence of Er coming to life on the twelfth day after he was supposed to have been dead with the seven days which the pilgrims passed in the meadow, and the four days during which they journeyed to the column of light; the precision with which the soul is mentioned who chose the twentieth lot; the passing remarks that there was no definite character among the souls, and that the souls which had chosen ill blamed any one rather than themselves; or that some of the souls drank more than was necessary of the waters of Forgetfulness, while Er himself was hindered from drinking; the desire of Odysseus to rest at last, unlike the conception of him in Dante and Tennyson; the feigned ignorance of how Er returned to the body, when the other souls went shooting like stars to their birth,—add greatly to the probability of the narrative. They are such touches of nature as the art of Defoe might have introduced when he wished to win credibility for marvels and apparitions.

