
A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

Forgive my verbosity, if I have been too long. The affair itself demanded a much more extended narration; but I was unwilling to be too loquacious. Farewell, my dear Leonard. Written at Constance, May the thirtieth, the day on which this Jerome made expiation for his heresy. Continue to love me; farewell.

ARTICLE IV.

NEW PLATONISM.

A translation of the 15th Book of Constant Du Polythéisme Romain.

The last sect of which the history of ancient Philosophy makes mention, sought to satisfy the desire of the human mind for unity, without rejecting the reminiscences of Polytheism. It was the last effort of the human mind not to reject all that it had believed, while it attained at the same time what it had need of believing. This sect has been unfairly judged by the most opposite parties. The Christians have decried them as the defenders of Polytheism; while the unbelievers of modern times, seeing in them enthusiasts and fanatics, have taken occasion from them to declaim against enthusiasm and fanaticism. We agree with Christians, that the New Platonists had the misfortune to defend some of the forms of a religion, not susceptible of being defended; and with unbelievers, that they threw themselves into a system of exaltation and ecstasy which made them visionaries. But neither of the above parties has sufficiently examined how far the mistakes and excesses of this sect were the natural result of their situation and an inevitable error of the human mind, at a time when the absence of all belief had abandoned it to the agitation and pain of a religious sentiment condemned to vagueness, and blindly seeking a form in which it might rest. Both parties, who have judged it, have constantly considered this sect with reference to what existed before it, and not as the effect of a universal tendency towards something which was about to exist. It has been reproached with obstinately maintaining, by

fects,—his sleeping rugs, cloak, boots, cap, and other things,—were brought forth out of the prison, and committed to the fire; after which the dust and ashes that remained were carried away in a cart and thrown into the Rhine.

means of unintelligible abstractions, a fallen religion, without its being considered that the progress of knowledge had pushed it upon the extreme frontier of this religion, where it met enemies, who agreeing with it, without knowing it, in more than one point, would not understand it, and it was forced to combat with the arms it had in hand.

II. A complete exposition of the New Platonism is not within the plan of our work, any more than that of the preceding philosophers. And it would be peculiarly difficult; for the partisans of this system, founded upon the most abstract metaphysics, and nevertheless, having for an end to bring back man to the most exalted religious enthusiasm, were obliged, in order to reach this end, by so unsuitable a method, to fall into frequent sophisms, too near to excessive subtleties, and to change, without giving any warning of it, the expressions always equivocal, which they employed. To follow out all these things would lead us to subtleties which few persons of the present day would be disposed to go into, even for the purpose of refuting them.

We shall then only relate those hypotheses of the New Platonism which are indispensable to show how they composed a religion; that is to say, those which show that this philosophy was an effort to reëstablish the communication between heaven and earth which seemed to be interrupted; and to bring man again near to the Divinity from whom he found himself separated, by the downfall of the public belief.

As we have followed the ancient philosophers of Greece in all the steps they made to go from Religion; so we will follow the New Platonists in all those which they made to return to it.

III. The elements of the New Platonism were, first, the principal dogmas of the sacerdotal religion, viz. the principle of emanation, the fall of man, demonology; second, abstractions, the most difficult to be seized, of the Greek philosophy; and, third, an absolute belief in all the marvels of astrology, divination and magic.

The union of these three apparently incompatible elements, had already been tried by the New Pythagoreans. Abstraction had conducted them to Pantheism, for they admitted only one substance which they called God, and which, at the origin of the world, being divided into matter and form, had ceased to exist by itself. However, their passion for the marvellous took possession of this Pantheism, by supposing that the Divinity, so transformed, was, as it were, in a chrysalis state, and developed himself under

a thousand successive appearances. This hypothesis opened a vast field to magic, and those supernatural operations which influence the series of divine metamorphoses. The New Pythagoreans were soon tired with the abstract part of their doctrine; and, giving themselves up exclusively to the marvellous portion, they finished with being only vulgar sorcerers, who founded their individual, isolated practices upon almost no theory. The New Platonists, on the other hand, sought a *theory* for these practices. They tried to remain faithful to the marvellous and metaphysical at once, and to combine them with each other. The end certainly was chimerical, but it was the only one, which, at that epoch, the human mind could admit; the only one which could inspire in it any interest, or awaken it from its apathy. When man experiences an imperious want, moral or physical, no philosophy which speaks to anything but this want can be listened to. We do not mean that the New Platonists, having felt this want, had adopted this truth, as a means of success; they experienced this want, like all of their age, and in good faith, undertook to satisfy it.

IV. The tendency to the marvellous, to ecstasy, to supernatural communications, and everything which characterizes, in so remarkable a manner, the new Platonism, has been, in our days, attributed to a philosophy represented as peculiar to the East long before the epoch in which it was spread in the Roman Empire, and which penetrated the latter only by the mixture of nations, and the knowledge that the Greeks had thereby acquired of the dogmas of that part of the world.[1] This question is very important; for, if it were proved that this system had been transported entire from abroad, to the Greeks inhabiting Alexandria, it would not be a necessary progress of ideas, but the course of the human mind would seem disturbed by a purely accidental circumstance.

Doubtless all the elements of a pure Platonism, such as we find them in Plotinus, in Porphyry, and Jamblichus, are to be met with in the oriental philosophies and religions; we see in these emanations, the immobility and impassibility of the first principle, the hierarchy of spirits, means of human communication with spirits, and among these means, ecstasy, fasts, macerations; but we have in the former part of this work demonstrated, that these things are spread through all religions subject to priests, and were known to the Greeks a long time before the confusion of all opin-

[1] Opinion of Brucker and Mosheim.

ions in the great Empire. We found traces of them in the first founders of the Ionian School. Pythagoras was instructed in them. Plato, although he presents them only as allegories or traditions, sufficiently indicates that he would have had no repugnance to adopting them. The mysteries, also, revealed to the initiated the fall of souls and their return to the Divinity. The Greeks therefore had opportunity, very early, to give themselves up to that enthusiastic system; but their national *belief*, still in its strength, and their philosophy, which followed an entirely opposite direction, held them back. It was not till after this belief was overthrown, and this philosophy fallen into Epicurism and skepticism, that the human mind in its poverty (misère), seized with avidity all the sacerdotal dogmas which presented themselves, and composed this system out of them.

Every dogma, therefore, of the new Platonism, goes back to an anterior epoch, and belongs to a foreign religion; but the combination of these dogmas, the action of reducing to a philosophical principle all that is borrowed of the marvellous, of recurring to dialectics to excite enthusiasm, of having, in fine, instead of pretending to impose silence upon reasoning, in order to recommend belief, declared reasoning the basis of belief and the means of the supernatural; all this is what characterizes peculiarly the New Platonists, or rather the age of which this sect was only an expression or organ. And because it characterizes the age, it merits a serious attention. There is not here a religion which comes, with miracles, to tread reason under foot, and to order it to renounce itself; it is Reason, which again demands a belief, Reason trained without interruption during 800 years, (for from Thales to Plotinus there had been no break in the march of the Grecian philosophy). And this exercised Reason, after having employed the most subtile dialectics to destroy all the ancient dogmas, made use of these dialectics, its only instrument, to reconstruct new dogmas.

V. If we ask what were the principal wants of the mind and soul at this epoch, we shall find among the most imperious, first, that desire of absolute unity of which we spoke just now; secondly, the desire of an excessive abstraction, a remnant of the habit of philosophizing; thirdly, the desire of the most refined spirituality, (for souls were excited against doctrines which represented intelligence as a fortuitous and transient product of combinations of matter); lastly, the desire of the marvellous, which should furnish new means of communicating with the Divinity,

in the place of those that the ancient worship had offered, and in which most confidence had been placed. The New Platonists undertook to satisfy these different desires or necessities of the epoch.

VI. Plotinus gave the New Platonism the most regular and complete form. Many of his disciples considered him as the true founder of their sect and named their doctrine from Plotinus.[1] His works alone, of all these philosophers, have been preserved entire. We take him then for the representative of this epoch of philosophy, as we took Plutarch for the representative of the preceding epoch, and we shall indicate his predecessors, only when we shall be obliged to do so, in order to remark some important difference between him and them.

Plotinus was born in Egypt, towards the commencement of the third century of our era.[2] The place of his birth is not precisely known. He concealed whatever related to it, *being ashamed*, as he said, *of his body*. After having frequented many philosophical schools, without having been satisfied with any, he fell into an absolute discouragement and melancholy. He afterwards assigned supernatural causes to this disposition, but it was the effect of the general condition in which the human race saw itself plunged. Its degradation, its privation of hopes, the misfortune of the world, (in the time of the wicked Roman emperors,) the absence of heaven, oppressed minds, even without their being aware of it. What proves this is, that this sadness, this oppression, were reproduced at the same epoch in almost all the men who still preserved some moral strength or intellectual force. Some wished to fly into the desert, others threw far from them the burden of life; and why had their life become so insupportable?[3] Many of them were in opulence. Almost all could count upon places and honor; they all lived in the midst of a refined civilization, in the bosom of luxury, surrounded with all which rendered existence easy, and which diversified pleasure. But they had lost the two great interests without which all is empty, dead, and without charm, religion and liberty.

Plotinus believed himself born again, when he heard the first lessons of Ammonius, who had risen by his talents and eloquence from the most abject state, for he had been a street por-

[1] Proclus, in Theol.

[2] Under the reign of Septimus Severus.

[3] Porphyry mentions himself as having taken this resolution. It was Plotinus who prevented him.

ter. Ammonius taught a philosophy composed of Greek opinions and Jewish, Oriental and Egyptian dogmas. He claimed supernatural inspiration. Ecstasy seized him in the midst of his lessons, and the respect and confidence of his auditors were without bounds.

It is no matter what judgment we pass upon Ammonius. Whether he was a knave or enthusiast is indifferent, but it is remarkable that philosophy, which had labored with so much zeal to destroy religion, and which was so proudly applauded for having succeeded, was reduced to put on the appearances of a religion in order to be heard.

After having attended the lessons of Ammonius for eleven years, Plotinus resolved to go into the East, to contemplate for himself that wisdom and those prodigies of the Magi and the Brahmins of which his master boasted to his auditors.

The further particulars of his life do not concern us. It is pretended that, on his return from these lands, which were interrupted by the bad success of the army of Gordian, (in whose train he had gone), he obtained of the emperor Gallienus, a ruined city of Campania, on which to found a republic upon the model of Plato's, but that the ministers of the prince were frightened at this apparent resurrection of republican forms, and put obstacles in his way. They might have been reassured; the time when such projects are formed is never the time in which they can succeed. All the talent of Plato could not have given a real life to a State, whose members wanted the two elements necessary to its existence, individual energy and political liberty. Despotism had nothing to fear from a republic permitted by a successor of Caligula and Domitian!

The works of Plotinus are formed of his responses to the questions of his disciples. Hence result numerous gaps, frequent repetitions and much incoherence.

These defects and the exaltation of this philosophy, have made him fall into a great discredit with the moderns. But these very errors which we shall do enough to set forth, seem to us of a vivid interest, when we consider them under their true point of view, that is to say, as the proofs of a religious sentiment reborn of its ashes, by the necessity of our nature. Plotinus had studied the works of all the ancient philosophers. He transformed some fragments into a regular whole, and whatever is our opinion of his starting point, of his route, or of his end, we cannot, when we study him, refuse to acknowledge in him, *that* of which in

truth most of those who have judged him are destitute,—viz., a great force of meditation, many original thoughts and an extreme subtilty of view.

VII. No philosophy was more strongly imprinted with the idea of UNITY than the New Platonism. Plotinus not only recognized but one first principle, but he would grant to no being an individual and separate existence, different from this unity.

What he called the primitive intelligence was an emanation of the first principle; but this emanation made only one and the same being with that from which it emanated. In this primitive intelligence were contained the forms of all things; forms produced by the action of this intelligence upon itself; but these different forms were so connected with each other, and all with the primitive intelligence, that no separation could in reality have place. This intelligence was the image of the universe, the prototype of all species, of all kinds, of all individuals. Particular souls, races, generations, forces of nature, were only forms of it, and as the primitive intelligence, in emanating from the first principle, was not separated from it, so the forms which emanated from this intelligence did not really go out of it, or take an existence apart. This intelligence contained all forms, as a soul possesses multiplied acquirements, without being itself a multiple being.

The idea that all particular souls emanated from the supreme intelligence, or from the soul of the world, was already received in Stoicism and the Old Platonism. But Plotinus pushed it much further than those sects had done. They recognized a multiplicity and numerical difference of souls. Plotinus declares all multiplicity, all numerical difference, irreconcilable with the indivisible nature of the soul of the world; and across much logomachy and unintelligible subtilty, he wishes to prove, and he concludes, that all particular souls make one with the great soul, not only as its parts, (this word implying a division which cannot take place,) but as the same substance, the same being, the same nature. He returns upon himself in a thousand ways. The multiplicity of beings which exist in the universal intelligence imply no point of separation, he says, but a simple difference in the qualities. These beings form only one like so many thoughts, which exist together, without injuring the unity of the thinking being; as the force employed to carry a burden, although the burden is composed of objects of different kinds, is only one and the same force; as a luminous body, which spreads its light upon a

thousand other bodies, without this light ceasing to be one and the same; as a sound heard by many, an object perceived by many, without the sound or the object being multiplied; as a seal and many impressions, a race and many individuals. We designedly repeat all these comparisons, which are all defective, because their multitude and their very defects (vices) prove the desire of unity that tormented Plato, the characteristic desire of the age of the New Platonists.

VIII. To this necessity of unity, was joined that of an excessive abstraction, the heritage of eight centuries of argumentation and sophisms. Minds were given up to the practice of magic; but they were accustomed to philosophical formulas in theory. Prodigies were necessary to persuade them, but subtleties, if they began to reason. Plotinus himself said that the soul was united to God by dialectics, and one of his successors pretended to demonstrate theology by mathematics.

The New Platonists therefore did homage to the taste of their age, in going back to the first principle of all things, and in endeavoring to conceive it in as abstract a manner as possible.

The cause of the universe, said Plotinus, must be perfectly simple. To discover its nature it is sufficient to take from all beings all the qualities which distinguish them, and to see what remains when this is done. Animals, although mutually at war, have this in common, that they are all comprised in the category of animate beings. It is the same of inanimate beings, which, however diverse, are united in the opposite category. In continuing this operation, the mind comes to a single point,—in which all beings resemble each other. This point is existence; existence is then the first being, the first principle!

We feel, without indicating it, the fundamental viciousness of this reasoning. It is not true that in taking away all the differences which exist among partial beings, we arrive at a real notion. This point, in which all beings resemble each other, is not the first being, but only the quality, the common condition of all beings. The personification of this quality, of this condition, is an arbitrary act of the understanding, a creation which it permits itself without being authorized to do so, in order to have some personages that it can make move at its will.

The human mind, when it meditates, loves abstraction. Abstraction delivers it from the chaos which results from the confusion of appearances and the variety of phenomena; it classes its notions according to a regular symmetry, an ideal order, and

it often takes the satisfaction which this order inspires, for the feeling of the reality of its conceptions. Thus some of the more ancient philosophers made first principles of space, emptiness, the unknown. The same gratuitous personifications are found at the beginning and at the end of the Greek philosophy; but it is no less an error for being eight centuries old. Plotinus is also obliged, in order to arrive at his result, imperceptibly to falsify his terminology. He first went up towards a simple and general notion, that of existence. In substituting for the word *existence* the denomination *being*, he had given to this notion a reality. By calling the first being *principle*, he had transformed a fact into a cause; he at last personified this cause, by designating it as God.

IX. The same necessity of abstraction which obliged Plotinus to make an abstract notion of his God, or of his first principle, to which he could give an apparent existence only by successively denaturalizing each one of the expressions that he employed, pursues him in his ulterior definition of this first being.

No quality, said he, can be attributed to God, without his becoming a mere combination of qualities. He has no substance, nor life, nor movement, nor activity, nor feeling, nor knowledge, nor thought.[1] He is above all these things, because they all imply duplicity. In activity there is the active subject and the passive object; in feeling, the subject which feels and the object which is felt; in knowledge, the subject which knows and the object known; in thought, the subject which thinks and the object upon which thought is exercised. The first principle gives to beings emanating from it, all these qualities, without having them.

He is eternal, for if he had begun, the cause which produced him would have existed before him, and then this cause would have been the first principle. He is immutable, for he could change only from existence to nothingness. He is perfect, for the perfection of a being is to unite all that constitutes him what he is; he has no faculty, every faculty supposing in a being a tendency to become what he is not, a tendency incompatible with the simplicity and immutability of the first principle.

[1] Elsewhere, the necessity of putting his god into animated relations with men, dictates to him the contrary assertion. From the general perfection of the first principle, results, he says, that he must possess all particular perfections. His life is one with it, then he must be endowed with it, (Ennead. III. 7. 2. But if we would unravel all the contradictions of Plotinus we should fill many volumes.

This definition recalls, on the one hand, the Supreme Divinity of the sacerdotal religions, that Divinity without notion, apathetic, without qualities, without affections; their nothingness (néant) placed in a cloud at the summit of their celestial hierarchy; on the other hand, it recalls the first cause of many Greek philosophers, no less despoiled of every attribute and composed of accumulated negations. The first principle of Plotinus reminds us of the two sources whence it was drawn.—It is at once the God of Aristotle, the unknown of Anaximander, the Zervan Akerene of the Persians, and the primitive night of the Egyptian priesthood.

X. Most of the philosophers after Anaxagoras and before Plotinus, had recognized two substances. Those who had denied this division, had declared for matter. Plato had attributed to matter a real existence, since he had accused it of all the vices which the Divine wisdom could not correct. And Alcinoüs, a New Platonist, preceding Plotinus, considered it a mass without form, existing by itself. But the necessity of spirituality had increased in proportion as the materialistic doctrines had become more gross and revolting, and man experienced more repugnance for the degradation that they had wished to make him undergo.

Plotinus then found himself placed between the hypotheses necessary to his system of emanation, with its further suppositions, and this necessity of spirituality.

At first, he appeared to recognize matter as a substance. Bodies, said he, are formed of a first matter; for when the fire became air, if there had not been a first matter, upon which this transformation was exercised, the fire would have commenced by annihilating itself, and the air would afterwards be produced from nothing. But there is only a change of forms, the subject remains the same; matter is this subject, which form can only modify. It is clear that in this definition, borrowed from Aristotle, matter is something real.

But, after having recognized it for such, Plotinus annihilates it anew. Form is, according to him, the true substance, the veritable force, the veritable being. Bodies, without form, do not really exist; form creates and fashions them. Souls are no longer in bodies; bodies are in souls. Matter has no quality, nor extent, nor thickness, nor warmth, nor cold, nor lightness, nor heaviness. If it had a quality, form would be obliged to submit to it, and thus find itself dependent upon it. Matter then is nothing by itself, but it has the faculty of becoming something, and this faculty exists not as something which is, but as something which

can be. Such a faculty, attributed to a matter defined in this way, is a contradiction in terms; and it is by the aid of this contradiction that Plotinus believes that he arrives at spiritualizing matter, merely in preserving a denomination which is useful to him, whenever he would treat the phenomena and appearances which strike our senses.

It is not the object here to unravel the errors of a defective and almost forgotten metaphysics; the labor would be useless or puerile; but it is curious to show with what force human nature reacts against philosophers who would place the soul of man in the number of the fortuitous and transient phenomena of the physical world. Epicurus seemed to have triumphed over all the theories of spirituality and immateriality, and behold we see minds of great force and profound sagacity accumulate subtleties to resuscitate these theories.

When we see men remain obstinately attached to certain opinions, it does not follow, that because they defend these opinions by sophisms, they ought to be disdained. On the contrary, it follows, that they have need of these opinions, and that they defend them as they can, because they do not know how to defend them better.

XII. One would have supposed that after having annihilated matter a second time, Plotinus would not have known how to continue his romance upon the intellectual, celestial, and sensible union of different souls with bodies; but the sacrifice that he had made of matter to spirituality is, so to say, *by parenthesis*, he loses sight of what he has just affirmed and pursues his career.

Particular souls are contained in the soul of the universe; but they conceive the desire of becoming independent and separating from it. This desire itself separates them, and this separation corrupts them. They seek an exterior object; this object is matter, and thus they precipitate themselves into bodies.

Nothing is more contradictory than this series of suppositions, (which was drawn from the mysteries, and which also recalls the Indian metaphysics,) to all assertions of those that preceded Plotinus, but in order to advance, this philosophy was necessarily obliged to abandon its first basis.

We remark here that this hypothesis of the fall of souls had already appeared in the philosophy of Plato; but this age of the disciple of Socrates had not the same religious wants as the age of Plotinus. A positive worship still existed, which could menace and persecute. Nothing which tended to bring philosophy

and religion together could be adopted then; on the contrary, at the epoch of the new Platonists, the world thirsted for a religion, and hypotheses which Plato's successors had hardly deigned to consider, were seized on with enthusiasm.

XIII. Having once arrived at the fall of souls, Plotinus found it easy to deliver himself to that *penchant* for the marvellous, which characterized his age and himself. Souls, fallen into bodies, sought to rise from this fall. It is manifest that the imagination, launched upon this stream, would refine forever upon the means of reünion.

Souls, said Plotinus, approach the Divinity by contemplation and ecstasy. He himself had succeeded, four times in his life, to identify himself with the Supreme Being by this mysterious contemplation, which delivers man, he adds, from all ideas, all notions, all sensations foreign to the object which he contemplates. He feels himself transported into an atmosphere of light, because God is nothing else than the purest light. He is plunged into a profound repose and enjoys a boundless felicity.

It is not necessary for us to pause to discuss this theory of the reünion of the soul with the Divinity, because it is literally the same as that we have already remarked upon among the sacerdotal religions, especially of India.

But it is curious and necessary to remark upon the prodigious growth of the marvellous thus introduced into the new Platonism. Our readers will recall the fact, that up to the epoch when Polytheism was totally discredited, we have seen the marvellous constantly diminishing; we shall now trace it continually increasing in this new philosophy,—a proof that the human mind was returning upon its steps and forcing itself to remount the heights that it had taken so much pains and pleasure in descending.

Maximus of Tyre, anterior to Plotinus, had positively declared that man upon the earth could not come to the contemplation of the Divinity. Plotinus pretended to attain to it by ecstasy, but he understood by this word only a mysterious self-recollection, an effort of the soul to elevate itself, by a progressive simplification of all its ideas, to the most abstract notion that it could conceive. He had probably borrowed this subtlety from Aristotle, who said man could become like God *by speculation*. The disciples of Plotinus left their master very far behind them. Ecstasy was, with them, no longer an interior state of the soul, but a means of subjecting it to exterior forces, of corresponding with invisible beings, and of resting on their protection. Porphyry and

especially Jamblichus, combined with the return of souls towards the Divinity from which they are separated, the demonology of which we have already spoken in treating the sacerdotal religions, but to which we must now return, to indicate the use the New Platonists made of it.

XIV. Plato, transporting oriental ideas into Greek philosophy, had reörganized invisible beings whom he had named demons. He places them in the stars, whose courses he supposed they directed; men, he said, owed homage to them as superior beings. He also peopled the air with demons who presided over sublunary things, who were the tutelary geniuses of men, and to whom was confided the administration of the terrestrial world. But Plato did not admit any possibility of establishing, by rites, invocations, or prayers, a communication, at once habitual and miraculous, between these demons and the human race.

Alcinoüs had added to the hypothesis of Plato some details upon the number of these supernatural essences. Instead of merely filling the air with them, he had introduced them into all the elements, nor could he believe, he said, that any part of the universe was desert. Instead of considering them as withdrawing themselves necessarily from the regards of mortals, he had supposed that they were visible, or at least that they were able to manifest themselves visibly. Finally, he had admitted communications between them and man, not yet individual and particular, but general and regulated by fixed laws.

Maximus of Tyre had gone further. He composed a hierarchy of these demons, which descended by a graduated scale, from heaven to the earth, and since it was always necessary that reasoning should come to the support of marvellous hypotheses, he founded his upon analogy. He said there was no break in the chain of beings. From man to inanimate beings, the interval would be immense; animals served as intermedial. From man to God the interval must be still greater, and it was filled up with demons.

Finally, Plotinus determined of what substance these demons were formed, in what they differed from the Divinity, and in what they differed from men. More material than the first, more immaterial than the second, they participated equally of the divine and the mortal nature. Each man had a demon for protector, for tutelary genius; but there was not, in any of these suppositions, a motive for worship, or a road opened into the invisible world.

Porphyry first overleaped the barrier, within which his predeces-

sors had remained. After having added new developments to the celestial hierarchy, by more positive distinctions between the different classes of invisible beings, he divided them into good and bad. The first warned men by dreams, prophecies, apparitions; the second sought to make themselves pass for gods, in order to obtain adorations and offerings. They prepared philters; they procured power and honors; but their benefits were deceptive and short; and some were pleased with bloody sacrifices, because they were nourished with the steam of the blood of the victims!

We here see clearly the germ of the religion that the New Platonism was going presently to teach. However, Porphyry still hesitated. Restrained by the example of his master, he indicated no other or more positive means of communicating with divine natures, than the ecstasy already recommended by Plotinus. But we see that he is carried beyond this boundary, and his hesitation dictates to him the most contradictory propositions. Now the rites of magic (théurgie) seem to him fatal and sacrilegious; now he recognizes in them a utility which he nevertheless bounds to the relations of man with the objects which surround him in this world; and he believed them efficacious only to procure terrestrial and transient good.

The last step was made by Jamblichus; he transferred to beneficent beings what Porphyry had said of bad genii. He taught that, by words, sacrifices, and other ceremonies, they were to be engaged and even constrained to appear to us and fulfil our wishes. Dating from Jamblichus, magic (théurgie) became a regular worship and the New Platonism a positive religion. The progress of the thing is manifest. Plotinus does not speak of theurgy. Porphyry expresses himself on the subject with diffidence and uncertainty. Jamblichus professes it openly. By the aid of this theurgy, he elevates himself into the air, his vestments change color at his will, he invokes invisible spirits, and makes them appear under forms which he prescribes to them! Sopater enchained the winds! Sosistratus appeared at the same hour in many places at once! Synesius interpreted dreams with such certainty, that every man thirty years old, who did not comprehend their significance seemed to him plunged in stupidity and ignorance! Proclus dissipated or raised storms, made it rain, arrested earthquakes, commanded the infernal gods! Minerva called him to Athens; Apollo conducted him; Æsculapius embraced his knees and cured him of a malady. He delivered At-

tica from the pestilence; he appeared in the midst of his disciples with his head encircled with a brilliant halo; and whenever a question embarrassed him, he consulted the divine wisdom, which presided, unperceived, over his teaching, and dictated to him lessons.

Here we shall again demand what could have plunged the human race into this excess of credulity and blindness? The men who gave themselves up to these extravagant theories, and superstitious practices, and put boundless faith in these pretended prodigies, consumed their days in reading the wisest and most profound sages of antiquity. One of their oracles was Aristotle, whose severe reason seemed to have armed logic against all the wanderings of an unregulated imagination. They studied attentively the works of the Epicureans and Skeptics,—to refute them, it is true, but so as to be penetrated with their arguments, and nourished with their doubts. How was it that incredulity, lately so contagious, no longer found access to any mind? How did it happen that all preservatives against it were powerless? It was because there was an irresistible necessity of satisfying by new communications with heaven that want of the soul, which was no longer satisfied by the discredited religion.

XV. Astrology was introduced into the New Platonism at the same time with Theology; it even preceded it, for Plotinus shows that he is imbued with all the opinions of the sacerdotal nations upon learning the future by the observations of the stars. But who would believe it? it is to its first principle, to this abstract notion, not to be seized by the understanding, that he attaches Astrology! He would prove it by metaphysical subtleties.

. The soul of the world, he says, may not receive sensations from abroad, for it includes everything which exists. But it must have interior sensations, for it knows everything which passes within itself. Consequently this soul of the world and the souls of the stars, which make only one with it, have a complete knowledge of all things, and foresee the accidents which attend men. As we may read, he says, in the looks of men, their dispositions, and the actions they meditate; so it is equally possible to read, in certain parts of the universe, the events that are coming. The stars are these prophetic parts of nature. We may see here very distinctly, the double movement of the minds of Plotinus' time,—their habits of abstraction and their avidity of belief.

XVI. If we proposed to give a complete picture of the New Platonism, we should have to speak of many dogmas drawn from

the Egyptian, Indian and Persian doctrine. Among these dogmas, the trinity of Plotinus, a little different from that of Plato, would have occupied an important place. But we wish only to speak of what is necessary to show that this philosophy unites all the characteristics of a religion properly so called; and what has been said is enough for this purpose.

The New Platonism established mysterious connections between heaven and earth. It admitted a reciprocal action of the Divinity upon man, and of man upon the Divinity, although the latter was expressed only tacitly, as it always ought to be; for if our hopes have need of believing that we can act upon the gods, our respect has not less need of believing that these gods are impassible. He prescribed, in fine, modes of adoration of a kind more pure and elevated than the sacrifices in use among the vulgar Polytheists, but which tended to the same end and were dictated by the same aspiration of the soul.

Between the gross notion of offerings, which seduce the gods and the sublime notion of the adoration which pleases them and assimilates men to the divine nature, there is only one difference; it is this; in the first case, men wish to leave the gods to their own will, while, in the second case, men wish to bend themselves to the will of the gods. In both cases it is an effort for harmony between the divine and human, and the difference arises only from the difference in the state of knowledge, that is from *the epoch*.

The new system of religion had—or appeared to have many advantages. It brought together, by means of the names employed to designate the demons or subaltern gods, the belief formerly professed, and the reminiscences of which were associated in many minds with ideas of piety, hope and confidence, that they no longer possessed, but which they regretted, and envied passed ages which had possessed them.

It also contrasted in nothing with notions to which all polytheistic nations were accustomed from time immemorial.

The idea that man could come, in this life, to the contemplation of the Divinity, was not new, although it had put on successively different forms. The first Greeks conceived it in the most material sense, admitting the apposition of gods to warriors, divines and heroes. The priests of Egypt boasted of an habitual communication with the Divinity;—the recompense of initiation into the mysteries, was the enjoyment of the presence and of the light of the divine nature.

It was not difficult for the New Platonists to find in Pythagoras and Plato confirmation of their doctrine. What these philosophers had said upon the necessity of repulsing exterior distractions and impressions on the senses, in order to enter deeply into profound meditations, the new philosophers applied to ecstasy.

Their doctrine, therefore, was equally conformed to the precepts of the philosophy and the reminiscences of the religion of the Greeks.

The New Platonism was favorable to morality. In the midst of its enthusiasm, it pointed out virtue as a preparation necessary to ecstasy. Ecstasy was the end; virtue the means. Moreover this system seemed to be seized upon or admitted the more easily, that, at this epoch of history, the real world had become uninhabitable for souls not entirely degraded. It offered them a refuge in an ideal world, where they found again that of which they were deprived upon earth. In fine, the New Platonism satisfied, as we have seen, many of the principal wants which the human race then experienced, viz. that of abstraction—that of spirituality—that of the marvellous. It appeared therefore perfectly adapted to the epoch in which it appeared.

XVII. The advantages of the New Platonism procured for it some successes, which seemed to promise a complete and durable triumph. No system ever exacted more enthusiasm from its birth to its fall. Hardly had Plotinus commenced teaching, than he was surrounded by auditors who considered him as a divine man. Rich families appointed him tutor of their sons; pleaders implored his arbitration; women followed him in his retreats and renounced the delights of the capital of Egypt to hasten to the sexagenarian philosopher in solitude. His disciples, taking in a literal sense his maxims of detaching themselves from terrestrial things, abandoned their property, to lead a life purely contemplative. One of them, Rogatian, prætor at Rome, left his house, freed his slaves, gave up all his offices, and wishing no longer to have a fixed habitation, demanded of his friends a shelter each day. Ædesus, disciple of Jamblichus, having formed the project of passing his life in an inaccessible retreat of Cappadocia, a crowd of young people followed him thither, surrounded his house, and after having tried to soften him by their prayers and groans, threatened to tear him to pieces, if he persisted in burying in a desert so much celestial light. Eustathius, disciple of Ædesus, hesitating to go into Greece, the Greeks addressed public prayers to the gods, that they might induce such a man to honor their

country with his presence. Proheresius, in his lessons, so charmed his auditors, that they prostrated themselves before him, to kiss his feet and hands.

We cannot consider the philosophy of an epoch, of which we remark such symptoms, the cause of that disposition of minds, but rather as one of its effects. Even if it is pretended that there was in this enthusiasm something factitious, we must recognize that it was the effort of a corrupt generation (but painfully affected by its own corruption), to raise itself to enthusiasm. No interested motive dictated these exaggerated demonstrations. It was not at the feet of power, that it prostrated itself; and if it did not feel everything it pretended to feel, it attested by these prostrations the desire that it had of experiencing such sensations. It sought to disguise to itself its impotence, to deceive itself concerning its own fall; a manifest proof that this impotence and fall were not its natural state, but an accident, a misfortune against nature.

XVIII. In view of this universal enthusiasm, of which we have just cited the proofs, it is doubtless astonishing that the new Platonism has had only an incomplete and transient success. This was because, notwithstanding its efforts, it only imperfectly satisfied the tendency towards unity. It offered, indeed, to the mind, a philosophic unity; but the soul did not find in it the religious unity of which it had need.

Because Plotinus spoke of an abstraction, he did not arrive at theism, which could have been made the foundation of a religion, but to Pantheism on which could be founded only a philosophy.

He himself recognizes this in different places. Everything appears, says he, to be at bottom only a single substance, which has differences and divisions, only in our conceptions. We perceive only some parts of it, out of which, through ignorance and our want of power to embrace the whole, we make real beings.

The New Platonists, however, approach theism manifestly in their expressions. The one God, or rather the Supreme Being, says Jamblichus, has many names, according to the different functions he exercises. As Creator of all things, we call him Ammon; as having finished and made them perfect, we call him Phthas; as the author of all that is beautiful and useful, we call him Osiris. But, notwithstanding this formal profession of faith in the first principle of all things, by the New Platonism, in this only really existing being, this universal soul, containing all souls (but being only a single indivisible soul) this matter created by form, and one

with it, and all the other subtilties of this philosophy for maintaining its absolute and complete unity, too strongly approach Pantheism not to end by falling into it; the only difference was in the spirit of the epoch. This Pantheism had conducted Xenophanes to incredulity: it conducted the New Platonists to enthusiasm; but this enthusiasm could only be individual and momentary. Pantheism is not compatible with a public worship, with a popular religion except when it insinuates itself in the train of this religion and in the secret doctrine of the priests. This is what we have seen in India. But when it shows itself openly, in the moment a religion is to be reconstructed, it becomes an obstacle to the establishment of all belief, that no subtilty can surmount.

There must be a God separate from man, in order that the latter may invoke him with confidence. There must be a God separate from the universe, in order that the mind may not confound this God with the necessary rules and mechanical forces of nature, and that the religious sentiment may find, in the object of its adoration, the elements which it demands, hope, respect and love.

The attempt of the New Platonists to render to man a religion by metaphysics was therefore chimerical and illusory. It was vicious at the basis. The subaltern gods, and all the hierarchy of demons, by which this sect believed itself to reänimate Pantheism, and give life to the emanations of its first abstract and inconceivable notion, could not take root in this arid soil. It was like endeavoring to make the branches of a withered tree grow green.

In fact this connection, that the New Platonists wished to establish, between their doctrine and the ancient Polytheism, far from being useful to the kind of religion that they taught, discredited it all the more, both because it was built upon ruined foundations, and because it was composed of fantastic interpretations of the ancient fables. The recollections of Philosophy and of Polytheism alike injured the New Platonism: the former, because they made it approach Pantheism; the latter, because they made it approach Polytheism.