

Plato's Dream

PLATO was a great dreamer, as many others have been since his time. He dreamed that mankind were formerly double; and that, as a punishment for their crimes, they were divided into male and female.

He undertook to prove that there can be no more than five perfect worlds, because there are but five regular mathematical bodies. His Republic was one of his principal dreams. He dreamed, moreover, that watching arises from sleep, and sleep from watching; and that a person who should attempt to look at an eclipse, otherwise than in a pail of water, would surely lose his sight. Dreams were, at that time, in great repute.

Here follows one of his dreams, which is not one of the least interesting. He thought that the great Demiurgos, the eternal geometer, having peopled the immensity of space with innumerable globes, was willing to make a trial of the knowledge of the genii who had been witnesses of his works. He gave to each of them a small portion of matter to arrange, nearly in the same manner as Phidias and Zeuxis would have given their scholars a statue to carve, or a picture to paint, if we may be allowed to compare small things to great.

Demogorgon had for his lot the lump of mould, which we call the Earth; and having formed it, such as it now appears, he thought he had executed a masterpiece. He imagined he had silenced Envy herself, and

expected to receive the highest panegyrics, even from his brethren: but how great was his surprise, when, at his next appearing among them, they received him with a general hiss.

One among them, more satirical than the rest, accosted him thus:

"Truly you have performed mighty feats! you have divided your world into two parts; and, to prevent the one from having communication with the other, you have carefully placed a vast collection of waters between the two hemispheres. The inhabitants must perish with cold under both your poles, and be scorched to death under the equator. You have, in your great prudence, formed immense deserts of sand, so that all who travel over them may die with hunger and thirst. I have no fault to find with your cows, your sheep, your cocks, and your hens; but can never be reconciled to your serpents and your spiders. Your onions and your artichokes are very good things, but I cannot conceive what induced you to scatter such a heap of poisonous plants over the face of the earth, unless it was to poison its inhabitants. Moreover, if I am not mistaken, you have created about thirty different kinds of monkeys, a still greater number of dogs, and only four or five species of the human race. It is true, indeed, you have bestowed on the latter of these animals a faculty by you called Reason; but, in truth, this same reason is a very ridiculous thing, and borders

very near upon folly. Besides, you do not seem to have shown any very great regard to this two-legged creature, seeing you have left him with so few means of defense; subjected him to so many disorders, and provided him with so few remedies; and formed him with such a multitude of passions, and so small a portion of wisdom or prudence to resist them. You certainly was not willing that there should remain any great number of these animals on the earth at once; for, without reckoning the dangers to which you have exposed them, you have so ordered matters that, taking every day through the year, the small pox will regularly carry off the tenth part of the species, and sister maladies will taint the springs of life in the nine remaining parts; and then, as if this was not sufficient, you have so disposed things, that one-half of those who survive will be occupied in going to law with each other, or cutting one another's throats.

"Now, they must be under infinite obligations to you, and it must be owned you have executed a masterpiece."

Demogorgon blushed. He was sensible there was much moral and physical evil in this affair; but still he insisted there was more good than ill in it.

"It is an easy matter to find fault, good folks," said the genii; "but do you imagine it is so easy to form an animal, who, having the gift of reason and free-will, shall not sometimes abuse his liberty? Do you think that, in rearing between nine and ten thousand different plants, it is so easy to prevent some few from having noxious qualities? Do you suppose that, with a certain quantity of water,

sand, and mud, you could make a globe that should have neither seas nor deserts?"

"As for you, my sneering friend, I think you have just finished the planet Jupiter. Let us see now what figure you make with your great belts, and your long nights, with four moons to enlighten them. Let us examine your worlds, and see whether the inhabitants you have made are exempt from follies or diseases."

Accordingly the genii fell to examining the planet Jupiter, when the laugh went strongly against the laughter. The serious genii who had made the planet Saturn, did not escape without his share of the censure, and his brother operators, the makers of Mars, Mercury, and Venus, had each in his turn some reproaches to undergo.

Several large volumes, and a great number of pamphlets, were written on this occasion; smart sayings and witty repartees flew about on all sides; they railed against and ridiculed each other; and, in short, the disputes were carried on with all the warmth of party heat, when the eternal Demiurgos thus imposed silence on them all:

"In your several performances there is both good and bad, because, you have a great share of understanding, but at the same time fall short of perfection. Your works will not endure above an hundred millions of years, after which you will acquire more knowledge, and perform much better. It belongs to me alone to create things perfect and immortal."

This was the doctrine Plato taught his disciples. One of them, when he had finished his harangue, cried out, "*And so you then awoke?*"