

www.forgottenbooks.com

Copyright © 2016 FB &c Ltd.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

P729
.Ym

PLOTINUS

BY

G. R. S. MEAD, B.A., M.R.A.S.

LONDON:
THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING SOCIETY,
7, DUKE STREET, ADELPHI, W.C.

INDIA
MADRAS: "THEOSOPHIST" OFFICE, ADYAR
BENARES: THE THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING SOCIETY.

30

[*The following essay was written as a Preface to a new edition of Thomas Taylor's "Select Works of Plotinus," published in the Bohn Libraries.*]

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
FOREWORD	1
THEN AND NOW	6
THE SYSTEM OF PLOTINUS	22
BIBLIOGRAPHY	44

PLOTINUS.

FOREWORD.

In presenting to the public a new edition of Thomas Taylor's *Select Works of Plotinus*, it will not be out of place to show cause for what may be considered by many a somewhat temerous proceeding. What has the present English-reading public to do with Plotinus; what still further has it to do with the translations of Thomas Taylor?

In the following paragraphs, I hope to show that the temper of the public mind of to-day, with regard to the problems of religion and philosophy, is very similar to that of the times of Plotinus. The public interest in the philosophy of mysticism and theosophical speculation has so largely developed during the last twenty years that a demand for books treating of

Neoplatonism and kindred subjects is steadily increasing.

Now of Neoplatonism Plotinus was the coryphæus, if not the founder. What Plato was to Socrates, Plotinus was to his master, Ammonius Saccas. Neither Socrates nor Ammonius committed anything to writing; Plato and Plotinus were the great expounders of the tenets of their respective schools and, as far as we can judge, far transcended their teachers in brilliancy of genius. Therefore, to the student of Neoplatonism, the works of Plotinus are the most indispensable document, and the basis of the whole system. Just as no Platonic philosopher transcended the genius of Plato, so no Neoplatonic philosopher surpassed the genius of Plotinus.

The Enneads of Plotinus are, as Harnack says, "the primary and classical document of Neoplatonism;" of that document there is no translation in the English language. There are complete translations in Latin, French and German, but English scholarship has till now entirely neglected Plotinus, who, so far from being inferior to his great master Plato, was thought to be a reincarnation of his genius

("*Ita ejus similis judicatus est, ut . . . in hoc ille revixisse putandus sit.*"—St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, viii. 12.) A glance at the Bibliography at the end of this essay will show the reader that though French and German scholars have laboured in this field with marked industry and success, English scholarship has left the pioneer work of Thomas Taylor (in the concluding years of the past century and the opening years of the present) entirely unsupported. Taylor devoted upwards of fifty years of unremitting toil to the restoration of Greek philosophy, especially that of Plato and the Neoplatonists. In the midst of great opposition and adverse criticism he laboured on single-handed. As Th. M. Johnson, the editor of *The Platonist* and an enthusiastic admirer of Taylor, says in the preface to his translation of three treatises of Plotinus:

"This wonderful genius and profound philosopher devoted his whole life to the elucidation and propagation of the Platonic philosophy. By his arduous labours modern times became acquainted with many of the works of Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, etc. Since Taylor's time something has been known

of Plotinus, but he is still to many a mere name."

Taylor was a pioneer, and of pioneers we do not demand the building of Government roads. It is true that the perfected scholarship of our own times demands a higher standard of translation than Taylor presents; but what was true of his critics then, is true of his critics to-day: though they may know more Greek, he knew more Plato. The present translation, nevertheless, is quite faithful enough for all ordinary purposes. Taylor was more than a scholar, he was a philosopher in the Platonic sense of the word; and the translations of Taylor are still in great request, and command so high a price in the second-hand market that slender purses cannot procure them. The expense and labour of preparing a complete translation of the Enneads, however, is too great a risk without first testing the public interest by a new edition of the only translation of any size which we possess. A new edition of Taylor's *Select Works of Plotinus* is, therefore, presented to the public in the hope that it may pave the way to a complete translation of the works of the greatest of the

Neoplatonists. That the signs of the times presage an ever growing interest in such subjects, and that it is of great importance to learn what solution one of the most penetrating minds of antiquity had to offer of problems in religion and philosophy that are insistently pressing upon us to-day, will be seen from the following considerations.

THEN AND NOW.

THE early centuries of the Christian era are perhaps the most interesting epoch that can engage the attention of the student of history. The conquests of Rome had opened up communication with the most distant parts of her vast empire, and seemed to the conquerors to have united even the ends of the earth. The thought of the Orient and Occident met, now in conflict, now in friendly embrace, and the chief arena for the enactment of this intellectual drama was at Alexandria. As Vacherot says:

"Alexandria, at the time when Ammonius Saccas began to teach, had become the sanctuary of universal wisdom. The asylum of the old traditions of the East, it was at the same time the birthplace of new doctrines. It was at Alexandria that the school of Philo represented Hellenizing Judaism; it was at Alexandria that the Gnôsis synthesized all the traditions of Syria, of Chaldæa, of Persia,

blended with Judaism, with Christianity, and even with Greek philosophy. The School of the Alexandrian fathers raised Christian thought to a height which it was not to surpass, and which was to strike fear into the heart of the orthodoxy of the Councils. A strong life flowed in the veins of all these schools and vitalized all their discussions. Philo, Basilides, Valentinus, Saint Clement and Origen, opened up for the mind new vistas of thought, and unveiled for it mysteries which the genius of a Plato or an Aristotle had never fathomed " (i. 331).

Indeed, the time was one of great strain, physical, intellectual, and spiritual; it was, as Zeller says, " a time in which the nations had lost their independence, the popular religions their power, the national forms of culture their peculiar stamp, in part, if not wholly; in which the supports of life on its material, as well as on its spiritual side, had been broken asunder, and the great civilizations of the world were impressed with the consciousness of their own downfall, and with the prophetic sense of the approach of a new era; a time in which the longing after a new and

more satisfying form of spiritual being, a fellowship that should embrace all peoples, a form of belief that should bear men over all the misery of the present, and tranquillise the desire of the soul, was universal" (v. 391-392, quoted by Mozley.)

Such was the state of affairs then, and very similar is the condition of things in our own day. It requires no great effort of the imagination for even the most superficial student of the history of these times to see a marked similarity between the general unrest and searching after a new ideal that marked that period of brilliant intellectual development, and the uncertainty and eager curiosity of the public mind in the closing years of the nineteenth century.

The tendency is the same in kind, but not in degree. To-day life is far more intense, thought more active, experience more extended, the need of the solution of the problem more pressing. It is not Rome who has united the nations under her yoke, it is the conquests of physical science that have in truth united the ends of the earth, and built up an arterial and nervous system for our

common mother which she has never previously possessed. It is not the philosophy of Greece and Rome that are meeting together; it is not even the philosophy of the then confined Occident meeting with the somewhat vague and unsystemized ideas of the then Orient; it is the meeting of the great waters, the developed thought and industrious observation of the whole Western world meeting with the old slow stream of the ancient and modern East.

The great impetus that the study of oriental languages has received during the last hundred years, the radical changes that the study of Sanskrit has wrought in the whole domain of philology, have led to the initiation of a science of comparative religion, which is slowly but surely modifying all departments of thought with which it comes in contact. To-day it is not a Marcion who queries the anthenticity of texts, but the "higher criticism" that has once for all struck the death-blow to mere Bible-fetishism. The conflict between religion and science, which for more than two hundred years has raged so fiercely, has produced a generation that longs and searches for a reconciliation.

The pendulum has swung from the extreme of blind and ignorant faith to the extreme of pseudo-scientific materialism and negation; and now swings back again towards faith once more, but faith rationalized by a scientific study of the psychological problems which, after a couple of centuries of denial, once more press upon the notice of the western nations. The pendulum swings back towards belief once more: the phenomena of spiritualism, hypnotism and psychism generally, are compelling investigation, and that investigation forces us to recognize that these factors must be taken into serious account, if we are to trace the sweep of human evolution in all its details and have a right understanding of the history of civilization. The religious factor, which has been either entirely neglected by scientific evolutionists or has remained with an explanation that is at best fantastically inadequate, must be taken into primary account; and with it the psychic nature of man must be profoundly studied, if the problem of religion is to receive any really satisfactory solution.

Thus it is that there is a distinct tendency in the public thought of to-day towards a

modified mysticism. It is a time also when the human heart questions as well the head: the great social problems which cry out for solution (over-population, the sweating system, the slavery of over-competition) breed strikes, socialism, anarchy—in brief, the desire for betterment. Humanitarianism, altruism, fraternity, the idea of a universal religion, of a league of peace, such ideas appear beautiful ideals to the sorely suffering and over-driven men and women of to-day. Yes, the times are very like then and now; and once more the hope that mystic religion has ever held out, is offered. But mysticism is not an unmixed blessing. Psychism dogs its heels; and hence it is that the history of the past shows us that wherever mysticism has arisen, there psychism with its dangers, errors, and insanities has obscured it. Have we not to-day amongst us crowds of phenomenalists, searchers after strange arts, diabolists, symbolists, etc., a renaissance of all that the past tells us to avoid? All these vagaries obscure the true mystic way, and at no time previously do we find the various factors so distinctly at work as in the first centuries of

the Christian era. It was against all these enormities and the wild imaginings that invariably follow, when the strong power of mystic religion is poured into human thought, that Plotinus arose to revive the dialectic of Plato and rescue the realms of pure philosophy from the host of disorderly speculation, while at the same time brilliantly defending the best that mysticism offered. It will, therefore, be of great interest, for those who are inclined to believe in mystical religion in the present day, to consider the views of perhaps the most acute reasoner of the Greek philosophers, who not only combined the Aristotelean and Platonic methods, but also added a refined and pure mysticism of his own which the times of Plato and Aristotle were unable to produce.

The reader will doubtless be anxious to learn what was the attitude of Plotinus to Christianity, and whether the Christian doctrine had any influence on the teachings of the greatest of the Neoplatonists. Much has been written on the influence of Christianity on Neoplatonism, and of Neoplatonism on Christianity, especially by German scholars; but it is safer to avoid all extreme opinions,

and be content with the moderate view of Harnack, that "the influence of Christianity —whether Gnostic or Catholic—on Neoplatonism was at no time very considerable," and with regard to the first teachers of the school entirely unnoticeable. Nevertheless, "since Neoplatonism originated in Alexandria, where Oriental modes of worship were accessible to everyone, and since the Jewish philosophy had also taken its place in the literary circles of Alexandria, we may safely assume that even the earliest of the Neoplatonists possessed an acquaintance with Judaism and Christianity. But if we search Plotinus for evidence of any actual influence of Jewish and Christian phraseology, we search in vain; and the existence of any such influence is all the more unlikely because it is only the later Neoplatonism that offers striking and deep-rooted parallels to Philo and the Gnostics," and Porphyry (c. xvi.) distinctly states that the Gnostics against whom Plotinus wrote were Christians.

And yet there can be no doubt that the strong spiritual life and hope which the teaching of the Christ inspired in the hearts of

his hearers, brought a reality into men's lives that would not be content with the mere envisagement of a cold ideal. Those who were fired with this hope taught that this ideal was realizable, nay, that it had already been realized. With such a fervid spirit of hope and enthusiasm aroused, philosophy had to look to its laurels. And in the words of Mozley, based on Vacherot, "the philosophers were kindled by a sense of rivalry; they felt, present in the world and actually working, a power such as they themselves sought to exercise, moralizing and ordering the hearts of men: and this stirred them to find a parallel power on their own side, and the nearest approach to it, both in character and degree, was found in Plato. To Plato they turned themselves with the fervour of pupils towards an almost unerring master; but they selected from Plato those elements which lay on the same line as that Christian teaching whose power elicited their rivalry."

Nor were the better instructed of the Christian fathers free from a like rivalry with the philosophers; and from this rivalry arose the symbols of the Church and the subtleties of an

Athanasius. Curiously enough in our own days we notice a like rivalry in Christian apologetics in contact with the great eastern religious systems; a number of the most enlightened Christian writers striving to show that Christianity, in its purest and best sense, rises superior to what is best in the Orient. The theory of direct borrowing on either side, however, has to be abandoned; indirect influence is a thing that cannot be denied, but direct plagiarism is unsupported by any evidence that has yet been discovered. As Max Müller says:

"The difficulty of admitting any borrowing on the part of one religion from another is much greater than is commonly supposed, and if it has taken place, there seems to me only one way in which it can be satisfactorily established, namely, by the actual occurrence of foreign words which retain a certain unidiomatic appearance in the language to which they have been transferred. It seems impossible that any religious community should have adopted fundamental principles of religion from another, unless their intercourse was intimate and continuous; in fact, unless they

could freely express their thoughts in a common language. . . .

"Nor should we forget that most religions have a feeling of hostility towards other religions, and that they are not likely to borrow from others which in their most important and fundamental doctrines they consider erroneous." (*Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, London, 1893, pp. 367-369.)

And though Plotinus cannot be said to have borrowed directly either from Christianity or other oriental ideas, nevertheless it is beyond doubt that he was acquainted with them, and that too most intimately. By birth he was an Egyptian of Lycopolis (Sivouth); for eleven years he attended the school of Ammonius at Alexandria; his interest in the systems of the further East was so great, that he joined the expedition of Gordian in order to learn the religio-philosophy of the Persians and Indians; his pupils, Amelius and Porphyry, were filled with oriental teaching, and it was in answer to their questioning that Plotinus wrote the most powerful books of the Enneads. Porphyry, moreover, wrote a long treatise of a very learned nature *Against the Christians*,

so that it cannot have been that the master should have been unacquainted with the views of the pupil. Numenius again was highly esteemed by Plotinus and his school, and this Pythagoreo-Platonic philosopher was saturated with oriental ideas, as Vacherot tells us (i. 318):

"Numenius, a Syrian by origin and living in the Orient, is not less deeply versed in the religious traditions of Syria, Judæa and Persia than in the philosophical doctrines of Greece. He is perfectly familiar with the works of Philo, and his admiration goes so far as to ask whether it is Philo who platonizes, or Plato who philonizes; he dubs Plato the Attic Moses. If the doctrines of Philo have at all influenced the philosophy of Greece, it is owing to Numenius, the father of this Syrian School, out of which Amelius and Porphyry came into Neoplatonism.

"The oriental tendency of the philosopher is shown by the following words of Eusebius: 'It must be that he who treats of the Good, and who has affirmed his doctrine with the witness of Plato, should go even further back and take hold of the doctrines of Pythagoras.

It must be that he should appeal to the most renowned of the nations, and that he should present the rituals, dogmas and institutions which—originally established by the Brâhmans, Jews, Magians and Egyptians—are in agreement with the doctrines of Plato.' (*De Bono*, VIII. vii.)."

We, therefore, find in Plotinus two marked characteristics; the method of stern dialectic on the one hand, and a rational and practical mysticism on the other that reminds us very strongly of the best phase of the yoga-systems of ancient India. As Brandis remarks:

"The endeavour which, as far as we can judge, characterised Plotinus more than any other philosopher of his age was . . . to pave the way to the solution of any question by a careful discussion of the difficulties of the case."

And though the method is somewhat tedious, nevertheless the philosophy of Plotinus is one of remarkable power and symmetry. In the opinion of Mozley:

"There is a real soberness in the mind of its author; the difficulties connected with the divine self-substance and universality, in relation to the individuality of man, though

they cannot be said to be solved, are presented in a manner to which little objection can be taken intellectually, and against which no serious charge of irreverence can be brought."

This is a great admission for a man writing in a dictionary of Christian biography, and the word "serious" might well be omitted from the last line as totally unnecessary, if not supremely ridiculous, when applied to such a man as Plotinus.

The part of the system of our great Neo-platonist that has been and will be the least understood, is that connected with the practice of theurgy, which consummates itself in ecstasy, the Samâdhi of the yoga-art of Indian mystics. For years Plotinus kept secret the teachings of his master Ammonius Saccas, and not till his fellow-pupils Herennius and Origen (not the Church father) broke the compact did he begin to expound the tenets publicly. It is curious to notice that, though this ecstasy was the consummation of the whole system, nowhere does Plotinus enter into any details of the methods by which this supreme state of consciousness is to be reached, and I cannot but think that he still kept silence deliberately on this all-important point.

Ammonius, the master, made such an impression on his times by his great wisdom and knowledge that he was known as the "god-taught" (*θεοδίδακτος*); he was more than a mere eclectic, he himself attained to spiritual insight. The pupil Plotinus also shows all the signs of a student of eastern Râja Yoga, the "kingly art" of the science of the soul. In his attitude to the astrologers, magicians and phenomena-mongers of the time, he shows a thorough contempt for such magic arts, though, if we are to believe Porphyry, his own spiritual power was great. The gods and dæmons and powers were to be commanded and not obeyed. "Those gods of yours must come to me, not I to them." (*ἐκείνους δεῖ πρὸς ἐμὲ ἔρχεσθαι, οὐκ ἐμὲ πρὸς ἐκείνους.*—*Porphyry*, x.)

And, indeed, he ended his life in the way that Yogins in the East are said to pass out of the body. When the hour of death approaches they perform Tapas, or in other words enter into a deep state of contemplation. This was evidently the mode of leaving the world followed by our philosopher, for his last words were: "Now I seek to lead back the self within me to the All-self" (*τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῳ παντὶ θεῖον.*—*Porphyry*, ii.)

Indeed Plotinus, "in so far as we have records of him, was in his personal character one of the purest and most pleasing of all philosophers, ancient or modern" (Mozley). It is, therefore, of great interest for us to learn his opinions on the thought of his own time, and what solution he offered of the problems which are again presented to us, but with even greater insistence, in our own days. We will, therefore, take a glance at the main features of his system.

THE SYSTEM OF PLOTINUS.

THE whole system of Plotinus revolves round the idea of a threefold principle, trichotomy, or trinity, and of pure intuition. In these respects, it bears a remarkable similarity to the great Vedântic system of Indian philosophy. Deity, spirit, soul, body, macrocosmic and microcosmic, and the essential identity of the divine in man with the divine in the universe—the τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον with the τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον, or of the Jîvâtman with the Paramâtman—are the main subjects of his system.

Thus from the point of view of the great universe, we have the One Reality, or the Real, the One, the Good (τὸ ὄν, τὸ ἕν, τὸ ἀγαθόν); this is the All-self of the Upanishads, Brahman or Paramâtman.

Plotinus bestows much labour on the problem of the Absolute, and reaches the only conclusion possible, viz., that it is inexpressible; or in the words of the Upanishads, "the mind falls back from it, unable to reach it." It

must, nevertheless, produce everything out of itself, without suffering any diminution or becoming weaker (VI. viii. 19); essences must flow from it and yet it experiences no change; it is immanent in all existences (IV. iii. 17; VI. xi. 1)—"the self hidden in the heart of all," say the Upanishads; it is the Absolute as result, for as absolutely perfect it must be the goal not the operating cause of all being (VI. ix. 8, 9), as says Brandis; and Harnack dubs the system of Plotinus "dynamic Pantheism," whatever that may mean. But we are in the region of paradox and inexpressibility and so had better hasten on to the first stage of emanation.

First, then, there arises—(how, Plotinus does not say, for that question no man can solve; the primal ways of the One are known to the Omniscient alone)—the Universal Mind, or ideal universe (*νοῦς* or *κόσμος νοητός*); the Îshvara or Lord of the Vedântins. It is by the thought (*λόγος*), of the Universal Mind that the World-Soul (*ψυχὴ τοῦ παντός* or *τῶν ὅλων*) is brought into being. As Tennemann says (§ 207):

"In as much as Intelligence (*νοῦς*) [Univer-

sal Mind] contemplates in Unity that which *is possible*, the latter acquires the character of something determined and limited; and so becomes the *Actual and Real* (ὄν). Consequently, Intelligence is the primal reality, the base of all the rest, and inseparably united to real Being. [This resembles the Sach-Chid-Ânandam of the Vedântins, or Being, Thought, Bliss.] The object contemplated and the thinking subject, are identical; and that which Intelligence thinks, it at the same time *creates*. By always thinking, and always in the same manner, yet continually with new difference, it produces all things [the logos idea]: it is the essence of all imperishable essences: ['the base of all the worlds' of the Upanishads; 'on it all worlds rest']; the sum total of infinite life." (See En. VI. viii. 16; IV. iii. 17; VI. vii. 5, 9; viii. 16; V. i. 4, 6; iii. 5, 7; v. 2; ix. 5; VI. vii. 12, 13. And for an exposition of the logos theory in Plotinus, see Vacherot, i. 317).

We thence pass on to the World-Soul, the Hiranyagarbha (resplendent germ or shining sphere or envelope) of the Upanishads.

"The image and product of the motion-

less nous is the soul, which, according to Plotinus, is, like the nous, immaterial. Its relation to the nous is the same as that of the nous to the One. It stands between the nous and the phenomenal world, is permeated and illuminated by the former, but is also in contact with the latter. The nous is indivisible [the root of monadic individuality; the Sattva of the Buddhist theory of Ekotîbhâva as applied to man]; the soul *may* preserve its unity and remain in the nous, but at the same time it has the power of uniting with the corporeal world, and thus being disintegrated. It therefore occupies an intermediate position. As a single soul (world-soul) it belongs in essence and destination to the intelligible world; but it also embraces innumerable individual souls and these can either submit to be ruled by the nous, or turn aside to the sensual, and lose themselves in the finite" (Harnack).

This is precisely the same idea as that of the Hiranyagarbha, the individual souls arising by a process of differentiation (Panchîkarana, or quintuplication of the primary "elements") from it. Its nature and function are thus sum-

marized by Tennemann (§§ 208, 209) from En. V. i. 6, 7, and vi. 4; VI. ii. 22; and III. viii:

"The Soul (*i.e.*, the *Soul of the World)* is the offspring of Intelligence [νοῦς], and the thought (λόγος) of Intelligence, being itself also productive and creative. It is therefore Intelligence, but with a more obscure vision and less perfect knowledge; inasmuch as it does not itself directly contemplate objects, but through the medium of intelligence, being endowed with an energetic force which carries its perceptions beyond itself. It is not an original but a reflected light, the principle of action and of external Nature. Its proper activity consists in contemplation (θεωρία); and in the production of objects by means of this contemplation. In this manner it produces, in its turn, different classes of souls, and among others the human, the faculties of which have a tendency to elevation or debasement. Its energy of the lowest order, creative, and connected with matter, is Nature (φύσις).

"Nature is a contemplative and creative energy, which gives form to matter (λόγος ποιῶν); for form (εἶδος, μορφή) and thought (λόγος) are one and the same. All that takes

place in the world around us is the work of contemplation."

It is here that the system of Plotinus is somewhat weak; it is true that he has a strong admiration for the beauties of Nature, but in dealing with the problem of matter he scarcely avoids stumbling, and though he criticises the view of certain Gnostic schools which made matter the root of all evil, he does not entirely clear himself from a similar misconception. It is the object of the World-Soul so to pervade the natural world that all its parts shall be in perfect harmony—"but in the actual phenomenal world unity and harmony are replaced by strife and discord; the result is a conflict, a becoming and vanishing, an illusive existence. And the reason for this state of things is that bodies rest on a substratum of matter. Matter is the basework of each (τὸ βάθος ἑκάστου ἡ ὕλη); it is the dark principle, the indeterminate, that which has no qualities, the μὴ ὄν. Destitute of form and idea it is evil; as capable of form it is neutral."

The Vedântins, on the contrary, pair the root of matter (Asat, Prakriti, Mâyâ) with the Universal Mind, and make it of like dignity.

It is by the removal of this primal veil that the great secret of the Self is revealed.

Attempts have been made to trace correspondences between the three first principles of Plotinus and the Christian Trinity: God the Father and the One Absolute, Jesus Christ and the First Intelligence or Universal Mind, and the Holy Spirit and the World-Soul. (Jules Simon, i. 308.)

So much for the macrocosmic side. The microcosmic is necessarily to a large extent interblended with the above, and also views man by means of a trichotomy into spirit (νοῦς), soul (ψυχὴ), and body (σῶμα), by which prism the rays of the primal unity are deflected. This, again, is precisely the same division as that of the Vedântins: viz., Kâranopâdhi, the causal vesture, or spiritual veil or impediment of the Self; Sûkshmopâdhi, the subtle vesture, or psychic veil or impediment, of the Self; and Sthûlopâdhi, the gross vesture or physical body. The remarkable agreement between the view of Plotinus as to the three spheres of existence, or states of consciousness, or hypostases of being, in man and the universe, the one being but a reflection of the

other, and that of Shankarâchârya, the great master of the Advaita Vedântin school of ancient India, may be seen from the following brilliant *résumé* from the point of view of a mystic. It is based on the *Tattvabodha*, or "Awakening to Reality," one of the most remarkable of Shankara's small treatises, so far, unfortunately, not translated into any European language, and is taken from the work of a mystic, entitled *The Dream of Ravan* (a reprint from *The Dublin University Magazine* of 1853, 1854; London, 1895, pp. 211-215).

"Man is represented as a prismatic trinity, veiling and looked through by a primordial unity of light—gross outward body [Sthûlopâdhi—σῶμα]; subtle, internal body or soul [Sûkshmopâdhi—ψυχὴ]; a being neither body nor soul, but absolute self-forgetfulness, called the *cause body* [Kâranopâdhi—νοῦς], because it is the original sin of ignorance of his true nature which precipitates him from the spirit into the life-condition. These three bodies, existing in the waking, dreaming, sleeping states, are all known, witnessed and watched by the spirit which standeth behind

and apart from them, in the unwinking vigilance of ecstasy, or spirit-waking."

The writer then goes on to speak of *four* spheres, but the "innermost" is in reality no sphere, but the state of simplicity or oneness (ἄπλωσις, ἕνωσις). This is the state of ecstasy of Plotinus.

"There are four spheres of existence, one enfolding the other—the inmost sphere of Turiya, in which the individualised spirit lives the ecstatic life; the sphere of transition, or Lethe, in which the spirit, plunged in the ocean of Ajñâna, or total unconsciousness, and utterly forgetting its real self, undergoes a change of gnostic tendency [polarity?]; and from not knowing at all, or absolute unconsciousness, emerges on the hither side of that Lethean boundary to a false or reversed knowledge of things (viparîta jñâna), under the influence of an illusive Prâjña, or belief in, and tendency to, knowledge outward from itself, in which delusion it thoroughly believes, and now endeavours to realise; whereas the true knowledge which it had in the state of Turiya, or the ecstatic life, was all within itself, in which it intuitively knew and experi-

enced all things. And from the sphere of Prâjña, or out-knowing—this struggling to reach and recover outside itself all that it once possessed within itself, and lost—to regain for the lost intuition an objective perception through the senses and understanding—in which the spirit became an intelligence—it merges into the third sphere, which is the sphere of dreams, where it believes in a universe of light and shade, and where all existence is in the way of Âbhâsa, or phantasm. There it imagines itself into the Linga-deha (Psyche), or subtle, semi-material, ethereal soul. . . . . .

"From this subtle personification and phantasmal sphere, in due time, it progresses into the first or outermost sphere, where matter and sense are triumphant, where the universe is believed a solid reality, where all things exist in the mode of Âkâra, or substantial form, and where that which successively forgot itself from spirit into absolute unconsciousness, and awoke on this side of that boundary of oblivion into an intelligence struggling outward, and from this outward struggling intelligence imagined itself into a conscious,

feeling, breathing, nervous soul, prepared for further clothing, now out-realises itself from soul into a body. . . . .

"The first or spiritual state was ecstasy, from ecstasy it forgot itself into deep sleep; from profound sleep it awoke out of unconsciousness, but still within itself, into the internal world of dreams; from dreaming it passed finally into the thoroughly waking state, and the outer world of sense."

These ideas will help us exceedingly in studying our philosopher and in trying to understand what he meant by ecstasy, and why there are three divisions in the morals of Plotinus, and how the metempsychosis in which he believed, was neither for him the caressing of a dream nor the actualising of a metaphor. The most sympathetic notice of the latter tenet is to be found in Jules Simon's *Histoire de l'École d'Alexandrie* (I. 588, *sq.*), based for the most part on En. I. i. 12; II. ix. 6; IV. iii. 9; V. ii. 2; and on Ficinus' commentary, p. 508 of Creuzer's edition.

"There are two degrees of reward; pure souls, whose simplification is not yet accomplished, return to a star [the sidereal region

rather] to live as they were before the fall [into the world of sense] (En. III. iv. 6); souls that are perfectly pure [or simplified] gain union [or at-one-ment] with Deity. But what of retribution? Here comes in the doctrine of metempsychosis, which Plotinus met with everywhere around him, amongst the Egyptians, the Jews, and his forerunners in Neoplatonism [Potamon and Ammonius Saccas]. Does Plato really take the doctrine of metempsychosis seriously, as the *Republic* would have us believe? Does he not speak of it merely to banter contemporary superstition, as seems evident from the *Timæus*? Or is it not rather one of those dreams which Plato loved to fondle, without entirely casting them aside or admitting them, and in which he allowed his imagination to stray when knowledge failed him? Whatever may have been the importance of metempsychosis for Plato, we can hardly suppose that Plotinus did not take it seriously. He rehabilitates all the ironical and strange transformations of the *Timæus* and the myth of Er, the Armenian. Souls that have failed to raise themselves above [the ordinary level of] humanity, but who have

nevertheless respected that characteristic in themselves, are reborn into a human body; those who have only lived a life of sensation, pass into animal bodies, or even, if they have been entirely without energy, if they have lived an entirely vegetative existence, are condemned to live the life of a plant. The exercise of the merely political virtues [the lowest class], which do not deserve rebirth into a human form, bestows the privilege of inhabiting the body of a sociable animal, *πολιτικὸν ζῶον*, for instance, that of a bee; while tyrants and men notorious for their cruelty animate wild beasts.

"Those who have erred through a too great love of music, become singing birds, and too speculative philosophers are transformed into eagles and other birds of soaring flight (En. III. iv. 2). [The *εἰρωνεία*, or ironical vein, of Plato is more than apparent in the above.] A more terrible punishment is reserved for great crimes. Hardened criminals descend to the hells, *ἐν ᾅδου ἐλθόντα* (En. I. viii. 13), and undergo those terrible punishments which Plato sets forth in the *Republic* (Bk. x.). [This reminds us of the Pâtâlas of the Brâhmans and the Avichi of the Buddhists.]

"Even though admitting that this doctrine of metempsychosis is taken literally by Plotinus, we should still have to ask for him as for Plato, whether the human soul really inhabits the body of an animal, and whether it is not reborn only into a human body which reflects the nature of a certain animal by the character of its passions. The commentators of the Alexandrian school sometimes interpreted Plato in this sense. Thus according to Proclus, Plato in the *Phædrus*, condemns the wicked to live as brutes and not to become them, *κατιέναι εἰς βίον θήρειον, καὶ οὐκ εἰς σῶμα θήρειον* (Proclus, *Comm. Tim.*, p. 329). Chalcidius gives the same interpretation, for he distinguishes between the doctrines of Plato and those of Pythagoras and Empedocles, *qui non naturam modò feram, sed etiam formas*. Hermes (*Comm.* of Chalcidius on *Timæus*, ed. Fabric., p. 350) declares in unmistakable terms that a human soul can never return to the body of an animal, and that the will of the gods for ever preserves it from such disgrace (*θεοῦ γὰρ νόμος οὗτος, φυλάσσειν ἀνθρωπίνην φυχὴν ἀπὸ τοσαύτης ὕβρεως*)."

Moreover, Marinus tells us that Proclus,

the last great master of Neoplatonism, "was persuaded that he possessed the soul of Nichomachus, the Pythagorean," and Proclus, in his Commentaries on the *Timæus*, vindicates the tenet, with his usual acuteness, as follows (V. 329):

"It is usual," says he, "to enquire how human souls can descend into brute animals. And some, indeed, think that there are certain similitudes of men to brutes, which they call savage lives; for they by no means think it possible that the rational essence can become the soul of a savage animal. On the contrary, others allow it may be sent into brutes, because all souls are of one and the same kind; so that they may become wolves and panthers, and ichneumons. But true reason, indeed, asserts that the human soul may be lodged in brutes, yet in such a manner, as that it may obtain its own proper life, and that the degraded soul may, as it were, be carried above it and be bound to the baser nature by a propensity and similitude of affection. And that this is the only mode of insinuation, we have proved by a multitude of arguments, in our Commentaries on the *Phædrus*. If, however,

it be requisite to take notice, that this is the opinion of Plato, we add that in his *Republic* he says, that the soul of Thersites assumed an ape, but not the body of an ape : and in the *Phædrus*, that the soul descends into a savage life, but not into a savage body. For life is conjoined with its proper soul. And in this place he says it is changed into a brutal nature. For a brutal nature is not a brutal body but a brutal life." (See *The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*, Taylor's translation; London, 1816; p. 7, Introd.).

To return to the view of Jules Simon, the distinguished Academician concludes his dissertation with the following words :

"These contradictory interpretations have very little interest for the history of the philosophy of Plato ; but we can conclude from the care which the old commentators have taken to tone down the strangeness of the dogma of metempsychosis in Plato, that it was not a literal doctrine with Plotinus."

I would venture to differ somewhat from M. Jules Simon, and to suggest that the contradictory interpretations of commentators and the difficulties of modern criticism on this im-

portant tenet have arisen because sufficient distinction has not been drawn between the spiritual and psychic envelopes of man. The idea of union runs through the whole doctrine, and if the Psyche does not centre itself in the Nous, it risks to pass through the Cycle of Necessity (κύκλος ἀνάγκης). But the Psyche, or soul vesture, is not the real man. The doctrine of metempsychosis, with its twin doctrine of reincarnation, or Punarjanman, is arousing much interest in our times, and it may be possible ere long to reconcile much that appears contradictory in these doctrines, by a more profound study of the psychic and spiritual nature of man than has as yet been attempted in the western world. Speaking of reincarnation, Max Müller goes so far as to say: "It is well-known that this dogma has been accepted by the greatest philosophers of all centuries." (*Three Lectures on the Vedânta Philosophy*, London, 1894, p. 93); and quoting the well-known lines of Wordsworth on "the soul that rises with us, our life's star," he endorses them, and adds tentatively, "that our star in this life is what we made it in a former life, would probably sound strange as

yet to many ears" in the West (p. 67). This brings us to the consideration whether or not Plotinus also put forward the doctrine of Karma which is the complementary doctrine of rebirth. That he did so is evident from the summary of Tennemann (§ 213):

"Everything that takes place is the result of Necessity, and of a principle identified with all its consequences (in this we see the rudiments of Spinozism, and the Theodicée of Leibnitz). All things are connected together by a perpetual dependency; (a system of universal Determinism from which there is only one exception, and that rather apparent than real, of *Unity*). Out of this concatenation of things arise the principles of natural Magic and Divination." (See En. III. ii. 16; IV. iv. 32, 40, 415; VI. vii. 8-10; VII. ii. 3).

Though the doctrine is not sufficiently insisted upon in its moral bearings by Plotinus, and as applied to the theory of rebirth, nevertheless the general idea is there.

This next brings us to speak of the practical ethic of Plotinus, which was based on his trichotomy of man, and reminds us of

the Gnostic division into psychics (ψυχικοὶ) and pneumatics (πνευματικοὶ) and the perfected Christ.

There are, says Jules Simon (i. 562), "three divisions in the ethic of Plotinus: the political virtues necessary for all men, whose sole aim is the negative avoidance of evil; the higher or cathartic virtues (καθάρσεις), which can only be attained to by philosophers, and whose aim is the destruction of the passions and the preparation of the soul for mystic union; and lastly the at-one-ment of the soul with God."

Thus it will be seen that the political virtues pertained to the Soul, the cathartic to the Nous, and the consummation of virtue was the union with the One. It was by the practice of these virtues that the end of true philosophy was to be reached. As Tennemann says (§ 204):

"Plotinus assumes, as his principle, that philosophy can have no place except in proportion as knowledge and the thing known—the Subjective and Objective — are identified. The employment of philosophy is to acquire a knowledge of the Unity, the essence and first principle of all things: and that not mediately by thought and meditation, but by

a more exalted method, by direct intuition (παρουσία), anticipating the progress of reflection." (See En. V. iii. 8, v. 7, *sq.*; VI. ix. 3, 4.)

This is put very clumsily by Tennemann and with a far from careful selection of terms, but the idea is clear enough for the student of mysticism, especially that of the East. Meditation is a means whereby the soul is prepared to receive "flashes" of the supreme wisdom. It is not the gaining of something new, but the regaining of what has been lost, and above all the realization of the ever present Deity. This is precisely the same view as that enshrined in the great logion of the Upanishads, "*That* art *thou*." The divine in man is the divine in the universe, nay is in reality the Divinity in all its fullness. We have to realize the truth by getting rid of the ignorance which hides it from us. It is here that the doctrines of reminiscence (ἀνάμνησις) and ecstasy (ἔκστασις) come in. These are admirably set forth by Jules Simon (i. 549):

"Reminiscence is a natural consequence of the dogma of a past life. The Nous [the spirit or root of individuality] has had no beginning; the man [of the present life] has had a

beginning; the present life is therefore a new situation for the spirit; it has lived elsewhere and under different conditions."

It has lived in higher realms, and therefore (p. 552), "it conceives for the world of intelligibles [τὰ νοητὰ, κόσμος νοητός, the proper habitat of the νοῦς] a powerful love which no longer allows it to turn away its thought. This love [ἔφεσις] is rather a part than a consequence of reminiscence." But ecstasy is the consummation of reminiscence (p. 553). "Ecstasy is not a faculty properly so called, it is a state of the soul, which transforms it in such a way that it then perceives what was previously hidden from it. The state will not be permanent until our union with God is irrevocable; here, in earth life, ecstasy is but a flash. It is a brief respite bestowed by the favour of Deity. [Such flashes are resting places on our long journey, ἀναπαυλαι ἐν χρόνοις.] Man can cease to become man and become God; but man cannot be God and man at the same time."

And that Plotinus was not a mere theorist but did actually attain unto such a state of consciousness is testified to by Porphyry (c. xxiii). Plotinus also treats of this in the last

Book of the Enneads (see also En. V. v. 3), but, as he says, it can hardly be described (*διο καὶ δύσφραστον τὸ θέαμα*). Thus we reach the borderland of philosophy as we understand it. Beyond this region lie the realms of pure mysticism and the great unknown. And if any one can lead us by a safe path to those supernal realms, avoiding the many dangers of the way, and in a manner suited to western needs, Plotinus is a guide that can be highly recommended.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Complete Editions.

Perna (Petrus); Basle, 1580, in-folio. A faulty Greek text, to which the Latin translation of Ficinus (Florence, 1492) was appended. Title: *Plotini Platonici Operum Omnium Philosophicorum Libri LIV.*

Creuzer (Fridericus); Oxford, 1835, 4to, 3 vols. Certainly the best text yet produced, with the translation and commentaries of Ficinus appended; and with additional notes by Wyttenbach, and an apparatus criticus by Moser. It gives all the variæ lectiones from the codices, and is an admirable production. Title: *Plotini Opera Omnia.*

Dübner (F.); Paris, 1855, 8vo. In M. F. Didot's Library of Greek Authors. This is merely a reproduction of Creuzer's text. Title: *Plotiini Enneades.*

Kirchoff (M.); Leipzig (B. G. Teubner), 1856, 8vo. Endeavours to correct the faulty punctuation of Creuzer; abandons Porphyry's order of the Books, and adopts a chronographical order; there are neither notes nor annotations.

Müller (H. F.); Berlin, 1878 (Weidmann), 8vo. Based on Creuzer again. Title: *Plotini Enneades.*

Volkmann (R.); Leipzig (Teubner), 1883, 1884, 8vo, 2 vols. Text simply, without various readings. Title: *Plotini Enneades.*

Complete Translations.

Ficinus (M.); Florence, 1492, in-folio; Basle, 1580 (Perna's ed.), also 1615, in-folio; Oxford, 1835 (Creuzer's ed.). Title: *Plotini Opera.*

Bouillet (M. N.); Paris, 1857, 1861, 8vo, 3 vols. An excellent and painstaking work Title: *Les Ennéades de Plotin.*

Müller (H. F.); Berlin (Weidmann), 1878; Leipzig, 1880, 8vo. Title: *Die Enneaden des Plotin.*

Partial Translations.

Taylor (T.); London, 1787; reprinted with another title page 1792, 12mo, pp. xx, 4. A paraphrase of En. I. vi. Title: *Concerning the Beautiful.*

Taylor (T.); London, 1794, 8vo, pp. 228. Contains "On Felicity," "On the Nature and Origin of Evil," "On Providence," "On Nature, Contemplation and the One," and "On the Descent of the Soul." Title: *Five Books of Plotinus.*

Taylor (T.); London, 1817, 8vo, pp. 560. This is the work which is now reproduced. Title: *Select Works of Plotinus.*

Taylor (T.); London, 1834, 8vo, pp. 129. Contains translations of En. I. ix; VI. iv, v, and extracts from En. VI. vii. Title: *On Suicide.*

Johnson (T. M.); Osceola, Mo., 1880, 8vo. Contains three Books only; the work of an enthusiastic admirer of Taylor. Title: *Three Treatises of Plotinus.*

The above represents the sum total of the labours of English translators of Plotinus.

Engelhardt (J. G. V.); Erlangen, 1820, 1823, 8vo. Only a partial translation with notes and explanations. Title: *Die Enneaden des Plotinus.*

Anquetil and Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire have each translated En. I. iv. 6, under the title: *Traité du Beau;* and Salvini translated two books in *Discorsi Academici, 1733.*

Essays and Articles.

Winzer (J. F.); Wittemberg, 1809, 4to. Title: *Adumbratio Decretorum Plotini de Rebus ad Doctrinam Morum Pertinentibus.*

Gerlach (G. W.); Wittemberg, 1811, 4to. Title: *Disputatio de Differentia quæ inter Plotini et Shellingii Doctrinas de Numine Summo intercedit.*

Heigl (G. A.); Landshut, 1815, 8vo. Title: *Die Plotinische Physik.*

Engelhardt (J. G. V.); Erlangen, 1820, 8vo. Title: *Dissertatio de Dionysio Areopagita Plotinizante.*

Jahn; Bern, 1838. Title; *Basilius Plotinizans.*

Steinhart; *De Dialectica Plotini Ratione* (1829) and *Meletemata Plotiniana* (1840).

Neander (A.); "Ueber die welthistorische Bedeutung des 9. Buchs in der 2. Enneade des Plotinos," in the *Abhandl. der Berliner Akademie* (1843).

Kircher; Halle, 1854. Title: *Die Philosophie der Plotin.*

Also the two following "Theses for the Doctorate."

Matter (M. J.); Strasbourg, 1817, 4to. An excellent study by the well known author of *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme.* Title: *Commentatio Philosophica de Principiis Rationum Philosophicarum, Pythagoræ, Platonis atque Plotini.*

Daunas (A.); Paris, 1848, 8vo. Very superficial and patronizing. Title: *Études sur le Mysticisme: Plotin et sa Doctrine.*

Valentiner; "Plotin u. s. Enneaden," in the *Theo. Stud. u. Kritiken* (1864).

Loesche; *Augustinus Plotinizans* (1881).

Steinhart; "Plotin," in Pauly's *Realencyklop. d. klass. Alterthums.*

Brandis (C. A.); "Plotinus," in Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography* (1870).

Harnack (A.); "Neoplatonism," in *Encyclopædia Brittanica*, 9th ed. (1884).

Mozley (J. R.); "Plotinus" and "Neoplatonism" (for admirable digest of system), in Smith and Wace's *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (1887).

See also articles in Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique*, Fabricius' *Bibliotheca Græca* (v. 691-701), Dounau's *Biographie Universelle* and Franck's *Dictionnaire des Sciences Philosophiques.* Also Ravaisson (M. Fr.); Paris, 1846, *Essai sur la Métaphysique d' Aristote* (ii. 380-467). And the histories of philosophy of M. de Gérando, (III. xxi); of Tiedemann (iii. 281 *sq.*); and of Tennemann (vi. 166 *sq.*) *Geschichte der Philosophie* (Leipzig, 1796, 1819, 8vo); or §§ 203-215 of the English and French translation, where a capable digest of the philosophy of Plotinus is to be found; Johnson (A.), Oxford, 1832; and Cousin (V.), Paris, 1839.

But by far the most important works to consult are: Simon (Jules François); Paris, 1845, 8vo, 2 vols. Vol. i, Book ii, pp. 197-599, are entirely devoted to Plotinus. Title: *Histoire de l'École d'Alexandrie.*