

Visions of Philosophy.

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Immortal Sages! Godlike Sires of Greece.

O ye noblest Benefactors of mankind!

Unworthy as I am to lift my ~~own~~ thoughts

To ~~thoughts~~ of your beatitude, or ~~hope~~ to aspire

In this degenerate Superstitious age,

To emulate your glories, or receive

That ~~wisdom~~ ^{wisdom - more sublimity} ~~parts of imaginary wisdom~~,

Which mark'd alike your precepts & your lives

Enrich'd the true sublime! O! let me yet

~~Indulge~~ ^{let me yet} my ~~hastid~~ fancy for awhile

~~Indulge~~ ⁱⁿ your high converse, ~~hence~~ while I roam

Forgetful of the world ^{degenerate} ~~the systems vain~~

~~And ate~~ ^{my I found} the crude conceits of Bigotry,

Whose ~~fruits~~ ^{fruits} enslave and stifle the human race!

And then majestic Athens! ^{of mind} ~~Thou~~ ^{blest} nurse ^{of mind} ~~of~~
Of arts and knowledge, Liberty and Taste!

Under whose free ^{and equal} ~~invigorating~~ laws the soul

The giant soul of heav'n enlighten'd man ^{no cramp} ~~nor shack~~
(Unrestrained)

Visions of Philosophy¹

John Thelwall

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IMMORTAL SAGES! Ye whose rays of mind
Shed their best glories o'er the realms of Greece,—
And still, bright beaming thro the mists obscure
Of far Antiquity, illumine the name
And give the image vital to the view
Of that illustrious clime!—enkindling thence
The soul of patriot fervour, & the thirst
Of never dying honour! Godlike Sires,
Who at the fountain head, sublime & pure,
Of Heaven-deriv'd Philosophy first quaff'd 10
Of the inspiring stream, and open laid,
The living sources to our mortal view
Of Wisdom, Science, intellectual worth;—
Of all that to benighted man reveals
What man in conscious dignity should be!
O! godlike natures! venerated names!
Unworthy as I am to lift my thoughts
To your beatitude, or to aspire
In this degenerate, superstitious age
To emulate your footsteps, or revive. 20
That awful wisdom, eloquent, intense,
That in the fervour of your precepts breath'd!—
Oh! let my raptur'd fancy, yet awhile,
Indulge in your high converse, while I roam,
(Tho in no Attic grove, or Academe)
Forgetful of the tumult-stirring world—
Its sordid views—its sensual, vain pursuits,—³
Its systems crude of bigotry & fraud
And tyrannous ambition, that conspire
To crush, embroil & thin the human race. 30
And thou, majestic Athens! nurse of mind!
Under whose free and equal Laws the soul
Of heav'n-aspiring Man (nor checkt, nor mockt
By badges of distinction, power conferr'd,
Which virtue own'd not, nor which merit claim'd)
Gigantic rose, in full-proportion'd might,

¹ “Q” *The Platonist* [JT’s note]. “Q” is a standard proof mark for “query.”

² *The Coleridge Bulletin* is very grateful to Mark Young of Derby Local Studies Library for supplying this image (DLSL 5869MSS Thelwall Vol.2_p701), which is an early draft of the opening of the poem.

³ Coleridge, “France: An Ode” line 85.

Leaving the pigmy slaves of future Courts
 In base despair to wonder at its greatness,
 Or veil their feeble vision from the blaze
 Of that inherent grandeur which confounds 40
 The gilded meanness, empty pageantries
 And ostentation of their servile pride.

Oh! might imagination body forth⁴
 The godlike actors of that elder scene,
 And on this rustic theatre present
 Their deeds heroic in the patriot strife
 (Or gainst the foreign or domestic foe)
 That quail'd oppression!—or reanimate,
 In all their venerable wisdom clad,
 The sage inspirers of the eventful act, 50
 And bid the mental drama rise renew'd.

Fir'd with the thought, the kindling eye dilates,
 The present fades,—the ideal world expands—
 The dim remote of Elder time revives,
 And all its constellations round me throng.

This grove, these hedgerows, & these coppice bowers
 Become my Academus. Neath your palms
 Ye hallow'd sages of time-reverenc'd Greece!
 I see ye glide before me pouring forth
 Divine instruction, or more calm reclin'd 60
 In thought abstract and meditation high,
 Intent on self-communion, or to solve
 Some mighty problem, & the occult profound
 Of Nature's awful mysteries explore.

And see—who, you, his full expanse of brow
 And eye of inspiration heaven-ward rears!—
 In pregnant energy of thought sublime,
 Soaring on Contemplation's eagle wing
 Thro the immeasurable abyss & highth
 Beyond this visual sphere—there to converse 70
 With Nature and her primal entities,
 Of origins, and aptitudes, and means—
 The infinitude of essences and Cause:—
 Divining & developing the source
 Of all existences perceiv'd, & all
 That to intelligent perception be,
 Tho to the sense occult: Created time
 From increate Eternity how sprung,
 And space from infinite immensity,

⁴ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1

And form & matter from the formless void! 80
 Materiality, inert and dead,
 By immateriality impregn'd;—
 And sense and motion from creative thought!
 Beauty and strength,—the soothing, the sublime,—
 The lovely, & the fearful, & the calm—
 All that the touch attests, the vision grasps,—
 All objects, & all organs, from the idea
 Of that Eternal whose perceptions needs
 No aid organic, nor by ministry
 Of such restricted agency receives 90
 Impression of what is—but, all in all,
 What we by touch of nerve, or beam of eye,
 Or tympanum, or palate, or report
 Olfactory, or aught corporeal else,
 Partial acquire, embraces unacquired;
 Thro all his essence sensitive to all!—
 Who sees all, hears all, without ear or eye;
 And without hands compacts & moulds & forms
 In infinite proportions variegate;—
 Who, of no elements compounded, yet 100
 All elements compounds—earth, air & fire,—
 The fluid—the inert—what upward tends
 By levity, instinctive, or what falls
 As by instinctive weight;—Yon beauteous vault
 Earth's azure canopy, with golden rays
 Illustrious dazzling now; anon, to view
 Curtaining the earth's repose, more silvery soft—
 Bespangled with a thousand thousand worlds,
 Remote & more remote, that onward lead
 From this approximate the' excursive⁵ thought, 110
 From center on to center hurrying still,
 Thro the illimitably inexorable,
 Where all alike is centre—all alike
 From boundary conceivable remote—
 A circle infinite. Thus, Seer divine!
 In revelation of thy eye I read
 Thy soul's intense abstraction,—following thee
 As, inspiration-led, thou rov'st thro all
 The maze of Nature up to Nature's Cause,
 The universal animating soul 120
 Of what or is, or was, or yet shall be;—
 Communing with whose attributes the mind

⁵ Here "excursive" is written over "enquiring."

As tho from grosser elements reliev'd.
 Dwells in the world of spirits—till recall'd
 By the soft rippings of the neighbouring rill
 Back to its mundane sphere, again to walk
 With Matter in her sense-recognis'd forms,
 And thro the marvels of her mazes trace
 Another element—another mode
 Of the creative mind:—the fluid mass 130
 That bounds & fertilizes, decks & feeds
 And freshens & sustains—renewing all
 That vegetates or breathes:—the forest cloathes,
 Converts the desert, cools the sultry beam,
 Spreads in the lake, & scatters in the dew,
 And with diverse phenomena, the while,
 Alternate in its moods and functions, soothes
 Or awes;—in musical meanders here
 Sparkling & murmuring thro the enamel'd turf
 A song of peace; & in hoarse thunders there 140
 Bursting infuriate on the opposing shore,
 And toppling down the adamantine rocks
 From their deep-rooted base—as what of strength
 And ever-during mass might else appear,
 Were frail & soluble, and this alone
 Substantial: yet, with ease, the attenuate oar
 Of smallest fry⁶ its uncohering parts
 Divides at will, & thro the watry mass,
 With undisputed passage, wanders free.
 Nor less the wonder from what secret depths 150
 Its everlasting fountains were supplied,
 From every ebb with undiminish'd flow
 Returning inexhaustible—till, trac'd
 The Laws of Nature up to Nature's Cause,
 Thro all their mazy labyrinths, we descry
 How in eternal revolution urg'd,
 Obedient to the first impress'd command,
 The Protean atoms thro their whole extent
 In infinite mutation interchange—
 Ignious to aqueous, aqueous into flame; 160
 The dark to lucid, brilliant to opake,
 While solid, fluid,—fluid, firm becomes;
 How the thin air to substance turns, & how
 The now substantial shall again be air!
 How clouds the fountains, fountains feed the clouds,

⁶ Young fish, whose fins (sometimes called oars, in archaic usage) divide the water.

Ascending vapours shall be falling showers,
 And rivers to the ocean give again
 What the Sun drinking from the ocean wave
 Thro lymbec clouds on the parch'd earth distill'd;
 While, all in each, & each in all contain'd 170
 But shift their seemings as one will directs;
 All that as separate elements we name
 Being but phenomena of the eternal mind
 That everchanging, yet is still the same.

Nor Plato in that heaven-communing eye
 Does gazing admiration read alone
 Philosophy with Poesy combin'd,
 Research profound with fervid eloquence
 To sound the depths of nature & illume:—
 But, not less fervid, marks the glow divine 180
 Of more than patriot virtue—the pure love
 Of Liberty whose philanthropic zeal
 (Nor located to soil, or race, or name,)
 Would proud oppressions lawless power control:—
 That for the general love of human kind
 Would brave the Tyrant & his hand disarm
 Of heaven's asserted bolt;— And in the face
 Of all its lightning terrors vindicate
 The claims of Nature.—In the Despot's court,
 Where sanguinary licence rioted— 190

Even to the footstool of Trinacria's throne,
 I see thee with undaunted firmness stand
 Pleading the Cause of Man,—hear thee denounce
 With all the fervid force of eloquence
 Oppression's fearful crime; depict unaw'd
 Th' opprobrious guilt—the tenure insecure
 Of lawless lust and power—the deeds that call
 For retribution from a realm incens'd,
 Where sanguinary fury, in the pride
 Of martial might, usurps the judgement seat, 200
 And, giving to rapacious riot rein,
 Makes deaf the ear to misery's suppliant groan,
 And substitutes for equitable laws
 The dungeon & the sword:—durst this contrast
 With the calm safety of a righteous sway,
 Where Virtue & Benevolence preside,
 And equal laws, maintaining equal rights,
 Dispense their blessings thro a grateful land
 And make the affections of the gladden'd heart

The bulwark of their power. Oh! vainly urg'd 210

Not to voluptuous Tyranny was e'er
 (Tho' eloquent as music of the spheres)
 The voice of Truth harmonious! nor secure
 From its vindictive wrath the greatly good
 That durst that voice attune! Yet thou supreme
 In virtue as in wisdom!—tho condemn'd
 (The accustom'd meed of those who, in their zeal
 For truth & virtue, dare, in evil days,
 To plead the cause of wrong'd humanity
 And warn oppression of its fearful course) 220
 To feel the Tyrant's wrath!—tho sold to bonds
 By treachery of the pilot wretch suborn'd
 Entrusted in thy flight, & doom'd a space
 In base Egina's hostile chains to toil,—
 Yet still the' unconquerable zeal was thine
 New perils & new treachery to confront,
 In fruitless efforts to subdue the pride
 Of gorgeous tyranny, & by the love
 Of wisdom & of virtue to redeem
 Power from its crimes & nations from their woes. 230
 O! worthy to have heard & to record
 The farewell eloquence sublime of him
 Thy predecessor & thy early guide
 In wisdom's sacred path—who when condemn'd⁷
 By faction's envious rage, & vile intrigue
 Of demagogues, on superstition's plea—
 —The priestly plea ay ready to prevail
 Upon the vulgar ear!—of scorn prophane
 And blasphemy against their 'stablish'd Gods
 Their altars and their sanction'd mysteries, 240
 For that in phrase intelligent he upheld
 The Godhead's purer essence, undefiled
 By vain traditions of licentious fable—
 Brought from her clouds of mystery down to earth
 Divine Philosophy to walk with men
 In open haunt and in the public mart—
 Unmask'd the Sophist's flimsy rhetoric –
 The juggling logic of the schools; instill'd
 Truth, wisdom, virtue, reason's golden rules
 And what to equity & right pertains 250
 In phrase familiar to the general ear,
 And to the workshop & mechanic's stall
 (Whose ignorance is the politician's bliss)

⁷ Thelwall originally wrote "the martyr Socrates."

Brought useful knowledge & intelligence.—
 For this condemn'd, disdaining to preserve
 By mean evasion, or the suppliant's plea
 A life devoted to the sacred cause
 Of truth & rectitude, and but for these,
 Divine old man! regarded,—when with brow
 Sublim'd with all thy rays philosophy 260
 Which like a halo round his temples play'd
 And spoke with inspiration from his eye,
 With steady hand unfaltering, undismay'd
 By apprehension of the doom decreed,
 He held the fated cup, & to the throng
 Of griev'd disciples, circling him around
 Pour'd forth sublime the eloquence of soul
 That sets at nought the transient vanities,
 The envy, & the malice & the frauds,
 The tyrannies & partial distributions, 270
 And disappointments of this demy-life,—
 Lifting on seraph wings the immortal spirit
 To its eternal home, where virtue dwells
 Secure of its reward, & walks serene,
 With mind unclouded by material mists,
 In the broad light of intellectual day
 Thro fields Elysian, & thro starry realms,
 Communing with the godlike & the pure,
 And crown'd with glory to the full extent
 Of its capacities, by just award 280
 And bounty of the great primeval cause—
 The fountain of all being, & the sea
 To which its tribute streams again return:⁸
 The consummation of beatitude!
 So ending, to his lips serene, he rais'd
 The fatal cup,—and draining, left to thee
 The glorious heritage, to tread his steps
 And to the admiring ear of future times
 Transmit his great example, and this last
 Best lesson of his mortal eloquence— 290
 To instruct the wise & good when in the scale
 Life & unsullied virtue claim the poise
 To hold the balance with untrembling hand
 And calmly with Socratic firmness die.

⁸ An echo of Wordsworth, "Intimations Ode" 154, 166.