

Epicurus and Hedonism

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Epicurus was an Athenian citizen and belonged to the deme Gargettus. Hence he is often called the Gargettian sage. The few simple facts and dates of his uneventful career as a teacher and writer are particularly well established. He was born in the year 341 B.C., in the lunar month Gamelion, the tenth day of which was kept in his honour. Probably it was three days earlier, on the seventh of the month, that he first saw the light. The Attic civil year began, theoretically, with the summer solstice, and Gamelion, the seventh month, would naturally fall after the winter solstice, in our January. Epicurus was born in Samos, whither his father, Neocles, had gone out from Athens to settle as a colonist. His father bore the same name as the father of Themistocles, a fact which led Menander to compose an epigram comparing the achievements of their respective sons. The son of one Neocles had freed his country from slavery; Epicurus, the son of the other, from the worse bondage of superstitious folly. Many philosophers and founders of religion have aimed at emancipation, deliverance in a word, freedom. Seldom has the world seen one who went to the same lengths in this direction as Epicurus. In the extreme individualism of his ethical no less than of his physical doctrine, and his refusal to base the co-operation of his units on anything else but voluntary consent, he would seem to anticipate the principles professed by modern anarchists, when these latter pride themselves on their distinction from collectivist socialists. The family of Neocles was never well-to-do; his occupation was that of an elementary schoolmaster. The gossip of a later day affirmed that, when a boy, the son helped the father in his duties and prepared ink for the pupils. From the same perhaps untrustworthy source we learn that his mother, Chaerestrata, performed certain dubious rites, half religious, half magical, intended to propitiate the deities and avert disease and misfortune by charms and incantations. At these rites, celebrated at the cottages of her neighbours, it was the boy's part to assist his mother by reading the incantations. If this story is true, the employment must have been singularly uncongenial to one who all his life long hated falsehood, deceit, and superstition. In 323 B.C. he proceeded to Athens to be enrolled as a citizen and to undergo that training in military duties which the constitution assigned to youths between the ages of eighteen and twenty. In this service he made the acquaintance of the poet Menander, who, born in the same year as himself, became his

friend and admirer. The spirit of the Epicurean philosophy may be said to pervade the works of this great dramatist of the New Comedy. About this time Xenocrates was teaching in the Academy and Theophrastus in the Lyceum; Aristotle had retired to Chalcis, where in the next year he died. But events marched apace. The death of Alexander was followed by the unfortunate Lamian war, and in 322 B.C. Perdiccas expelled the Athenian colonists from their holdings in Samos. Epicurus joined his father, now more than ever a broken man, at Colophon. Of the next dozen years we have little information, but we find him in 310 B.C., in his thirty-second year, at Mitylene, where he came forward as a teacher of philosophy. Even as a schoolboy he is said to have given proofs of an inquiring mind. When reading in Hesiod how all things had their origin in Chaos, he puzzled the master by asking, "Whence came Chaos?" In after days he boasted that he had been self-taught.

His writings and conversation were enlivened with scoffs, gibes, and sneers at all other schools of so-called wisdom, a precedent of liberty which in the later Epicureans ran to unbounded licence. "The followers of Plato he used to call the flatterers of Dionysius and Plato himself the man of gold and Aristotle a profligate who, after squandering his patrimony, joined the army and sold drugs. Protagoras he called the porter and the copyist of Democritus and said that he taught grammar in villages Heraclitus he called the confusion-maker and Democritus the babbler."¹ It is quite certain, however, that he studied the system of Democritus with unusual care, and there is no ground for rejecting the story that he was for some time a pupil of the Democritean Nausiphanes of Teos, whom he sarcastically styled a "mollusc," to express contempt for his want of backbone. At Mitylene, Epicurus gained over Hermarchus, afterward his successor, and at Lampsacus, on the Hellespont, he made the most enduring friendships of his life. Here he became acquainted with Idomeneus and Leonteus, men of great influence in that town, who were his patrons and lifelong correspondents and, with Metrodorus and Polyaeus, the ablest among his disciples. Though his teaching in Asia had been eminently successful, he must have felt the attraction of the home of philosophy. Athens was still the centre of intellectual activity and social intercourse for the ancient world, as Paris for the modern world. Here was the most refined society, the greatest possibilities for the aesthetic enjoyment of life. Accordingly, about 306 B. C., Epicurus removed with his pupils to Athens, which he never afterward quitted except for short visits to Asia Minor. Of one such visit we have a charming

¹ Usener, *Epicurea*, p. 363, l. 8. This invaluable work will be our main source throughout the next two chapters.

memorial, unearthed, like so much besides of Epicurean literature, from beneath the ashes of Herculaneum. It is a letter written by the master to a little child, possibly the daughter of Metrodorus, of whom more hereafter. We may premise that Themista was the wife of Leonteus, of Lampsacus, and Matron obviously a domestic in charge of the child.

“We came to Lampsacus, Pythocles, Hermarchus, Ctesippus, and myself, and we are quite well. We found there Themista and our other friends, and they are quite well. I hope you are well, too, and your mamma, and that you obey her and papa and Matron in everything, as you used to do. For you know quite well, my pet, that I and all the others love you very much, because you are obedient to them in everything.”²

Even Swinburne admits the genius of the child less George Eliot for understanding the, ways of children, and we may well believe that the bachelor Epicurus, like the bachelor Herbert Spencer, was a welcome guest in a family where there were children. For more than thirty years, then, Epicurus resided continuously in Athens. He founded a school by the simple expedient of purchasing for eighty minae a house and garden in the quarter known as Melite, where his friends and disciples might have easy access to him. Hence his followers were often known as the Garden Philosophers. The little society was united together by no other tie than that of a common affection to their teacher. Friends and admirers quickly gathered round him, among them his three brothers, who almost worshipped him. Nor were women excluded, and even slaves were numbered among his pupils. Though leading the life of a recluse and holding aloof from political parties, he enjoyed intercourse with the best minds of the day. These years were not spent idly. Like Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle before him, he was an indefatigable and voluminous author. He wrote some three hundred separate treatises, being surpassed in the wealth of his philosophic output by Chrysippus alone among the ancients. At the same time he kept up a vigorous correspondence with friends at a distance who shared his aims. As we know from Herculaneum, selections were published from the letters of Epicurus, Metrodorus, Polyaeus, Hermarchus, and their acquaintance. His great work, *Nature*, in thirty-seven books or rolls, occupied for several years. It had reached Book XV in 300-299 B. C., while Book XXVIII was finished in 296-5 B.C. In the production of a quantity of literature so prodigious, something had to be sacrificed. Ancient critics complain sadly that the qualities of elegance and lucid arrangement so conspicuous in his three great predecessors above mentioned were totally wanting in him. Yet even Cicero admits that, crude and commonplace as his ideas were, the

² Epicurea, Fragment 176, p. 154, u. In his Note on Charlotte Bronte.

meaning was always plain; and probably this was all their author cared for. He was too much in earnest to cultivate the graces of style, and he looked down with contempt upon the accomplishments of an ordinary Athenian education, in which high-flown rhetoric and hair-splitting logic played a leading part.³

The last years of Epicurus were clouded. His favourite disciple, Metrodorus, died in 277 B.C., at the age of fifty-three, and another able pupil, Polyænus, predeceased him. The former left a son and daughter, the latter a son, and Epicurus must have deemed himself in a special sense responsible for the education and future welfare of these orphans, to whom he was probably guardian. By his will his executors are charged⁴ to provide for their maintenance in consultation with Hermarchus, and in due course to provide a dowry for the girl on her marriage. Epicurus had always been in delicate health. In his boyhood, if we may trust Suidas, he had to be lifted down from his chair, was blear-eyed, and of so sensitive a skin that he could not bear any clothing heavier than a tunic. He was long subject to gout and dropsy, for many years he was unable to walk, and finally renal calculus carried him off in 270 B.C., in his seventy-second year. These painful disorders he endured with the utmost fortitude. Scraps have come down to us from two letters written by him in his last illness, the one to his successor Hermarchus, the other to Idomeneus, of Lampsacus. The latter I runs as follows:

“On this last, yet blessed, day of my life, I write to you. Pains and tortures of body I have to the full, but there is set over against these the joy of my heart at the memory of our happy conversations in the past. Do you, if you would be worthy of your devotion to me and philosophy, take care of the children of Metrodorus.”

To the members of his little society he seems to have been at all times extremely generous in contributions from his own means, though he scouted the notion of a common purse, as savouring too much of mistrust and suspicion between friends. It appears from his letters that the aged philosopher had accepted annual contributions sent for his support from his wealthy friends in Lampsacus and possibly from other quarters. Here we are reminded of the pecuniary help which Auguste Comte received from his friends and admirers. In the character of Epicurus the conspicuous traits are sympathy, generosity, and sweet reasonableness. No man

3 To judge by the scanty remains, the diction of Epicurus is not pure Attic, but already betrays signs of that fusion of Greek dialects, generally known by the name of Koine, which began about the time of Alexander's conquests. In this respect Epicurus stands midway between Aristotle and Polybius. See P. Linde, *De Epicuri vocabulis ab optima Attide alienis*.

4 *Epicurea*, p. 166, 13.

was ever more vilely slandered or more cruelly misunderstood, but the severest critics of his teaching, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, in the most honourable way dissociate themselves entirely from the aspersions cast upon his personal character. "Of his unequalled consideration toward all there is ample testimony," says an ancient writer.⁵ "I appeal to his native country, which honoured him with a statue, to the great number of his friends, who could be counted by whole cities, to the followers attracted and held fast by the siren-charms of his doctrines, to the long continuance and perpetuation of his school in strong contrast to the checkered fortunes of its rivals, to his gratitude to his parents, his generosity to his brothers, his gentleness to his slaves, as attested by his will and also by the fact that slaves were among his pupils in fact, to his universal kindness to all men." No less positive is the evidence as to his frugality and abstemious mode of life. "Send me some cheese of Cythnos," he writes to a friend, "that I may be able to fare sumptuously when I like."⁶ He was usually contented with mere bread and water. The school made experiments in frugal living. In a letter to Polyænus the master tells him that, while Metrodorus had only reduced his expenses to fourpence a day, he himself had contrived to subsist on less. Whatever else he was, such a man was at all events no epicure. At the same time such abstemiousness, if practised universally, would not be without its dangers. It has often happened that to raise the standard of comfort and so to create wants is the first step in social advance. What satisfied Epicurus would fail to satisfy all men, or even the average man. He must be credited with a certain lack of imagination if he did not perceive this. Similarly with another characteristic trait, his quietism. The love of adventure, the thirst for honour, the cravings of ambition found no response in his breast; but neither would his own love of study, meditation, and retirement ever appeal to any but a small section of men, invalids, the elderly or the disillusioned. One detail serves to illustrate the practical turn of his mind. He foresaw that many would be curious to learn the main outlines of his system without possessing the leisure, inclination, or ability to master its details. Instead of repelling the advances of such honest folk, as Plato had done when he inscribed over the portals of the Academy "Let no one enter here who is ignorant of geometry," Epicurus is careful, even anxious, to cater for their peculiar needs. He brought out an epitome of his doctrines, itself a work of considerable length, known as the "larger" epitome. As scholars now recognise, this was the work which the poet Lucretius made the basis of his poem in six books and over seven thou-

⁵ Epicurea, Fragment 138, p. 143, 16.

⁶ Epicurea, Fragment 182, p. 156, 17..

sand lines. But this was not enough. A shorter summary was prepared and possibly the extant epistles to Herodotus and Menoeceus formed part of this.

They may, however, be distinct compilations. Lastly, either the master himself or some authorities of the school picked out a selection of golden sentences or maxims,⁷ articles of belief, which the members of the society were exhorted to commit to memory, to recite, and make the subject of meditation. The Epicurean literature is full of allusions to them. Not only are they preserved in the pages of Diogenes Laertius, but they were actually discovered a few years ago inscribed on the walls of the market-place of (Enoanda, an obscure Pisidian town in the heart of Asia Minor, where they might best catch the eye alike of the rustic from the country and of the cultured traveller.

Thus, though the three hundred treatises of the master are either wholly lost or survive only in the buried treasures of Herculaneum, yet, as a result of these precautions, we are better informed upon most points of Epicurean doctrine than upon the system of any ancient philosopher with the sole exception of Plato and Plotinus. But in fact the subsequent history of the school is in itself a sufficient proof of its founder's talent for organisation. Elsewhere we find contending influences at work, perpetual change of view and shifting of opinion, particularly when a succession of teachers interpreted, enlarged, or violently combated the doctrines bequeathed to them. The Academy was not content to preserve the tenets of Plato unaltered, but passed by violent reactions from dogmatism to scepticism, and probabilism, and back to dogmatism again. In the Epicurean society there was nothing comparable to this. From first to last its members were united by a common reverence for their founder, and hardly a trace is to be discovered of any serious dissent. It is their constant boast that they frequently won adherents from the rival schools, but that no Epicurean had gone over to another school. To this rule there are only one or two exceptions, the most conspicuous being Timocrates, who seems, on personal grounds, to have had a feud with his brother Metrodorus. Numenius⁸ compared the school of Epicurus to a republic free from party strife, having only one mind, one opinion, in which an innovation would have been regarded as an impiety. When Lucretius speaks of himself as repeating oracles more holy, and far more certain than those of the Pythian prophetess, he merely voices the convictions of the whole brotherhood. Their reverence for the writings of their master is the counterpart of the attitude of evangelical Protestants toward the

⁷ Epicurea, p. 71, sqq.

⁸ Eusebius, *Præp. Evangel.*, XIV, 5.

Bible.

It is now time to inquire into the nature of that teaching which met with such an enthusiastic reception and was greeted almost like a revelation. Philosophy was defined by Epicurus as “a daily business of speech and thought to secure a happy life.”⁹ Here is struck the note of intense earnestness characteristic alike of Epicurus and his age. Philosophy is a practical concern; it deals with the health of the soul. It is a life and not merely a doctrine. It holds out the promise of well-being and happiness. This is the one thing needful. Literature, art, and the other embellishments of life are not indispensable. The wise man lives poems instead of making them. “It need not trouble anyone/ said Metrodorus,¹⁰ “if he had never read a line of Homer and did not know whether Hector was a Trojan or a Greek.” Accordingly, as we have seen, Epicurus regarded with indifference the ordinary routine education of the day in grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, and music, and for mere erudition he had a hearty contempt. The only study absolutely necessary for a philosopher was the study of nature, or what we now call natural science, and this must be cultivated, not for its own sake, but merely as the indispensable means to a happy life. Unless and until we have learned the natural causes of phenomena, we are at the mercy of superstition, fears, and terrors.

We must defer to a subsequent chapter the consideration of the steps by which Epicurus was led to the conclusion that the external world is a vast machine built up by the concurrence of atoms in motion without an architect or plan. Suppose, however, this conclusion firmly established; what has our philosopher to tell us respecting human life and action? In what consists the happiness which is our being's end and aim? This had, by the time of Epicurus, become the chief question of philosophy, and, strange as it may appear, the answer is no new doctrine, but one which had often been proposed and discussed in the ancient schools. He identifies happiness, at least nominally, with pleasure, and he means the pleasure of the agent. His is a system of Egoistic Hedonism. Verbally, then, he is in agreement with Aristippus, the founder of the Cyrenaics, with the Socrates of Plato's Protagoras, and with Eudoxus, whose doctrine of pleasure is criticised by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics. The same doctrine is discussed in more than one of Plato's dialogues, sometimes apparently with approval, some times with disapproval. The historical Socrates never, so far as we know, reached a final definition of Good. He knew no good, he said, which was not good for somebody or something. His teaching would serve equally well as an introduction to Egoistic He-

9 1 Epicurea, Fragment 219, p. 169.

10 Fragment 24, ed. Korte..

donism, to Universal Hedonism, to Utilitarianism, or to Eudaemonism. The difficulty at once occurs; if pleasure and good are identical, why is it that some pleasures are approved as good and others condemned as evil? Why, on this hypothesis, should life ever present conflicting alternatives in which we are called upon to choose between doing what is good and doing what is pleasant? Every hedonistic system must face this problem. Some progress had been made by Plato in the Protagoras.

There his spokesman, Socrates, maintains that since every one desires what is best for himself, and since he further identifies good with pleasure, evil with pain, he avoids pleasure when it is the source of still greater pain, and only chooses pain when a greater amount of pleasure results from it. In this Epicurus heartily concurred. He never recedes from the position that pleasure is always a good and pain always an evil, but it does not follow that pleasure is always to be chosen, pain to be shunned. For experience shows that certain pleasures are attended by painful consequences, certain pains by salutary results, and it is necessary to measure or weigh these after-effects one against the other before acting. "No one be holding evil chooses it, but, being enticed by it as by I a bait, and believing it to contain more good than I evil, he is ensnared."¹¹ We now get a clearer notion of the end of action, which turns out to be the maximum of pleasure to the agent after subtraction of whatever pain is involved in securing the pleasure or directly attends upon it.

At this point Epicurus parts company with Aristippus, whose crude presentation of hedonistic doctrine identified the end with the pleasure of the moment. So soon as conditions and consequences are taken into account, pleasure tends to become an ideal element capable of being realised in a series of actions, or in the whole of life, but not to be exhausted at any given point of the series. More important, however, for determining the exact significance of this conception is the incursion which Epicurus makes into the psychology of desire. Desire is prompted by want; unsatisfied want is painful. When we act in order to gratify our desires, we are seeking to remove the pain of want, but the cessation of the want brings a cessation of mental trouble or unrest, and this must carefully be distinguished from positive pleasure which is itself a mental disturbance. Experience shows a succession of mental disturbances, painful wants, the effort to remove them, and the pleasurable excitement which attends their removal. But all this shifting train has for its natural end and aim a state which is neither want nor desire nor the pleasurable excitement of satisfying want. All of them are fugitive states as contrasted with the resultant peace and serenity in which they end. The former

¹¹ Wotke, Wiener Stitdien, X, p. 192, sent. 16.

are compared to an agitated sea, whether swept by storms or tempests or in gentle, equable motion, the latter to the profound calm, waveless and noiseless, of a sheltered haven. Beyond this neutral state of freedom from bodily pain and mental disturbance it is impossible to advance. We may seek new pleasures by gratifying new desires; we are only returning to the old round of painful want, desire, and pleasurable excitement of removing the want. There is only one way to escape from this round, and that is to be content to rest in the neutral state. After all, this is the maximum of pleasure of which we are capable; any deviation from it may vary our pleasure but cannot increase it. "The amount of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain. Wherever there is pleasure, so long as it is present, there is neither bodily pain nor mental suffering, nor both"¹² The consideration of these elementary facts should regulate preference and aversion. Prudence demands the suppression of all unnecessary desires. Epicurus does not carry renunciation so far as the Buddhists, who hold that to live is to suffer, and explain the will to live as that instinctive love of life which, partly conscious, partly unconscious, is inherent in all living beings. They look for their rest in Nirvana. Certain things, says Epicurus, we must desire, because without them we cannot live, and life to Epicurus is worth living; and yet the repose which consists in the cessation of desire is, after all, not altogether unlike the Nirvana of the Buddhists.

In this negative conception of happiness as freedom from pain, whether of body or mind, Epicurus must have been influenced by the ethical teaching of Democritus, who also made happiness in its essential nature consist in the cheerfulness and well-being, the right disposition, harmony, and unalterable peace of mind which enable a man to live a calm and steadfast life. Democritus also exalted mental above bodily pleasures and pains, and laid stress upon ignorance, fear, folly, and superstition as causes of those mental pains which tend most to disturb life. With Epicurus the great obstacle to happiness is neither pain nor poverty, nor the absence of the ordinary good things of life; it is rather whatever contributes to disturb our serenity and mental satisfaction, whatever causes fear, anxiety -- in a word, mental trouble. To be independent of circumstances is his ideal; that a man should find his true good in himself. He is ready with practical suggestions for realising this independence. groundless fear must be removed by the study of nature, which shows that the fear of death, the fear of the gods, belief in Providence and in divine retribution are chimeras; desire must be regulated by prudence and the virtues cultivated as the indispensable means to a pleasant life. Fatalism is not true

¹² Epicurea, p. 72, i, golden maxim No. 3.

any more than the doctrine that all things happen by chance. The future is not in our power; our actions alone are in our power to make them what we please. The letter to Menoeceus sets forth the ethical doctrine of Epicurus in a convenient summary as follows:¹³

Let no one be slow to seek wisdom when he is young nor weary in the search thereof when he is grown old. For no age is too early or too late for the health of the soul. And to say that the season for philosophy has not yet come, or that it is passed and gone, is like saying that the season for happiness is not yet or that it is now no more. Therefore, both old and young ought to seek wisdom, that so a man as age comes over him may be young in good things, because of the grace of what has been, and while he is young may likewise be old, because he has no fear of the things which are to come. So we must exercise ourselves in the things which bring happiness, since, if that be present, we have everything and, if that be absent, all our actions are directed toward attaining it.

“Those things which without ceasing I have declared unto thee, those do and exercise thyself therein, holding them to be the elements of right life. First, believe that God is a being blessed and immortal, according to the notion of a God commonly held amongst men; and so believing, thou shalt not affirm of him aught that is contrary to immortality or that agrees not with blessedness, but shalt believe about him whatsoever may uphold both his blessedness and his immortality. For verily there are gods, and the knowledge of them is manifest; but they are not such as the multitude believe, seeing that men do not steadfastly maintain the notions they form respecting them. Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them, is truly impious. For the utterances of the multitude about the gods are not true preconceptions but false assumptions, according to which the greatest evils happen to the wicked and the greatest blessings happen to the good from the hand of the gods, seeing that they are always favourable to their own good qualities and take pleasure in men like unto themselves, but reject as alien what ever is not of their kind.

“Accustom thyself to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentience and death is the privation of all sentience; therefore, a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes enjoyable the mortality of life, not by adding to life an illimitable time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality. For life has no terrors for him who has thoroughly apprehended that there are no terrors for him in ceasing to live. Foolish, therefore, is the man who says that he fears death, not because it will pain when it comes, but because it pains in the pros-

13 Epicurea, p. 59 sqq.

pect. Whatsoever causes no annoyance when it is present causes only a groundless pain in the expectation. Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that when we are, death is not come, and when death is come, we are not. It is nothing, then, either to the living or the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer. But in the world, at one time men shun death as the greatest of all evils and at another time choose it as a respite from the evils in life. The wise man does not deprecate life nor does he fear the cessation of life. The thought of life is no offence to him nor is the cessation of life regarded as an evil. And even as men choose of good, not merely and simply the larger portion, but the more pleasant, so the wise seek to enjoy the time which is most pleasant and not merely that which is longest. And he who admonishes the young to live well and the old to make a good end, speaks foolishly, not merely because of the desirableness of life, but because the same exercise at once teaches to live well and to die well. Much worse is he who says that it were good not to be born, but when once one is born to pass with all speed through the gates of Hades. If he, in truth, believes this, why does he not depart from life? It were easy for him to do so if once he is firmly convinced. If he speaks only in mockery his words are foolishness, for those who hear believe him not.

“We must remember that the future is neither wholly ours nor wholly not ours, so that neither must we count upon it as quite certain to come nor despair of it as quite certain not to come.

“We must also reflect that of desires some are natural, some are groundless; and that of the natural, some are necessary as well as natural and some are natural only. And of the necessary desires, some are necessary if we are to be happy, some if the body is to be rid of uneasiness, some if we are even to live. He who has a clear and certain understanding of these things will direct every preference and aversion toward securing health of body and tranquility of mind, seeing that this is the sum and end of a blessed life. For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, and when once we have attained this all the tempest of the soul is laid, seeing that the living creature has no need to go in search of something that is lacking nor to look for anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled. When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure; but when we feel no pain, then we no longer stand in the need of pleasure. Wherefore we call pleasure the alpha and omega of a blessed life. Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is the starting-point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge of every good thing.

“And since pleasure is our first and native good, for that reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but oftentimes pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them. And oftentimes we consider pains superior to pleasures when submission to the pains for a long time brings us as its consequence a greater pleasure. While, therefore, all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, not all pleasure is choiceworthy, just as all pain is an evil but all pain is not to be shunned. It is, however, by measuring one against another, and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences, that all these matters must be judged. Sometimes we treat the good as an evil and the evil, on the contrary, as a good. Again, we regard independence of outward things as a great good, not so as in all cases to use little, but so as to be contented with little if we have not much, being honestly persuaded that they have the sweetest enjoyment of luxury who stand least in need of it, and that whatever is natural is easily procured and only the vain and worthless hard to win. Plain fare is not more distasteful than a costly diet, when once the pain of want has been removed, while bread and water confer the highest possible pleasure when they are brought to hungry lips. To habituate one's self, therefore, to simple and inexpensive diet supplies all that is needful for health, and enables a man to meet the necessary requirements of life without shrinking, and it places us in a better condition when we approach at intervals a costly fare and renders us fearless of fortune.

“When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some, through ignorance, prejudice, or willful misinterpretation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking feasts and of revelry, not sexual love, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which greatest tumults take possession of the soul. Of all this was the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Wherefore, prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy; from it spring all the other virtues, for it teaches that we cannot lead a life of pleasure which is not also a life of prudence, honour, and justice; nor lead a life of prudence, honour, and justice which is not also a life of pleasure. For the virtues have grown into one with a pleasant life is inseparable from them.

“Who, then, is superior, in thy judgment, to such a man? He holds a holy belief concerning the gods, and is altogether free from the fear

of death. He has diligently considered the end fixed by nature, and understands how easily the limit of good things can be procured and attained; that as for evils either their duration or their poignancy is but slight. Destiny, which some introduce as sovereign over all things, he laughs to scorn, affirming that certain things happen of necessity, others by chance, others through our own agency. For he sees that necessity destroys responsibility and that chance or fortune is inconstant; whereas our own actions are free, and it is to them that praise and blame naturally attach. It were better, indeed, to accept the legends of the gods than to bow beneath that yoke of destiny which the natural philosophers have imposed. The one holds out some faint hope that we may escape by honouring the gods, while the necessity of the philosophers is deaf to all supplications. Nor does such an one make chance a god, as the world in general does (for in the acts of God nothing is irregular), nor yet regard it as a vacillating cause, for he believes that chance dispenses to men no good or evil which can make life blessed though it furnishes means and occasions for great good and great evil. He believes that the misfortune of the wise is better than the prosperity of the fool. It is better, in short, that what is well judged in action should not owe its successful issue to the aid of chance.

Exercise thyself in these and kindred precepts day and night, both by thyself and with him who is like unto thee; then never, either in waking or in dream, wilt thou be disturbed but wilt live as a god amongst men. For by living in the midst of immortal blessings man loses all semblance of mortality.”

In this document scientific ethics, as the term is now understood, is overlaid with a variety of other topics. The practical exordium, the dogmatic inculcation of moral precepts, the almost apostolic fervour and seriousness of tone find their nearest counterpart in the writings of religious teachers. We are reminded by turns of the Proverbs of Solomon and of the Epistles of St. Paul. The rejection of the popular religion and the denial of divine retribution are coupled with an emphatic affirmation of the existence of blessed and immortal gods. The instinctive fear of death is declared to be groundless; and here the writer enlarges upon a theme, first started by the sophist Prodicus, that death is nothing to us. Incidentally, the value of life is vindicated and the folly of pessimism exposed.

The limitation of desire is seen to involve habituation to an almost ascetic bodily discipline, in order that the wise man may become self-sufficing, that is, independent of external things. Lastly, the freedom of human action is stoutly maintained in opposition to the doctrine of natural

necessity first promulgated by the earlier Atomists Leucippus and Democritus, but at the time of Epicurus developed with the utmost rigour and consistency by the Stoics. On the main question there is no uncertainty. The pleasure of the agent is the foundation upon which Epicurus, like many after him, sought to construct a theory of morality which would explain scientifically the judgments of praise and blame passed by the ordinary man. All systems allow that there are self-regarding virtues and self-regarding duties, and when he has given his peculiar interpretation of pleasure, Epicurus has no great difficulty with these. But the case is different when we come to the social virtues and the duties which a man owes to his neighbour. In a system which makes self-love the centre of all virtues, and in which all duties must be self-regarding, if we accept, as he did, as a psychological truth that by instinct and nature all are led to pursue their own pleasure and avoid their own pain, how can any conduct savouring of disinterestedness find rational justification? This was the great problem of the English and French moralists in that age of enlightenment, the eighteenth century. As then, so two thousand years before in Greece, extreme individualism was the order of the day. The primary fact is individual man as he is given by nature, and all that lies outside this, all that he has been made by institutions like the family and the state, all the relations that go beyond the individual are subsequent, secondary, derivative, requiring to be explained from him and to justify their validity to the reason. Take a concrete instance. Whence came the rules of justice? What makes actions just and how is my obedience to such rules, enjoined by Epicurus, an indispensable means to my own happiness? In short, how does disinterested conduct arise under a selfish system? The answer given to this question was often repeated later. It reappears in Hobbes and Rousseau. Before dealing with it, it is necessary to consider briefly the Epicurean conception of the growth of human civilisation from the earliest times.

Looking back at the past history of our planet, Epicurus derives all organisms, first plants, then animals, from mother earth. The species with which we are familiar are those which, being adapted, to their environment, prospered in the struggle for existence. They were preceded by many uncouth creatures and ill-contrived monsters, many races of living things, which have since died out from lack of food or some similar cause. Apart from the undeniable suggestion of one feature in the doctrine of evolution, the account of the origin of life is in its details wholly unscientific and even repulsive. But with surer insight primitive man is described as hardier than now: destitute of clothing and habitation, he lived a roving life like the beasts with whom he waged ceaseless warfare,

haunting the woods and caves, insensible to hardship and privation. The first step in advance was the discovery of fire, due to accident. Afterward man learned to build huts and clothe himself with skins. Then the progress of culture is traced with the beginnings of domestic life through the discovery and transmission of useful arts. As comforts multiplied, the robust strength of the state of nature was gradually impaired by new disabilities, particularly susceptibility to disease. Language was not the outcome of convention, but took its rise from the cries which, like the noises of animals, are the instinctive expression of the feelings and emotions. Experience is the mother of invention and of all the arts. They are all due to the intelligent improvement of what was offered or suggested to man by natural occasions. None of the blessings of civilisation are due to the adventitious aid of divine agency. Man raised himself from a state of primitive rudeness and barbarism and gradually widened the gulf which separated him from other animals. From the stage when men and women lived on the wild fruits of the wood and drank the running stream, when their greatest fear was of the claws and fangs of savage beasts, to the stage when they formed civic communities and obeyed laws and submitted to the ameliorating influences of wedlock and friendship, all has been the work of man, utilising his natural endowments and natural circumstances. Religion has been rather a hindrance than a help in the course of civilisation. Next to the use of money, the baleful dread of supernatural powers has been the most fruitful source of evil.

In this historical survey, where shall we find the origin of law and justice? Epicurus was fully convinced that in the present state of society "the just man enjoys the greatest peace of mind, the unjust is full of the utmost disquietude"¹⁴; and yet injustice is not in itself an evil, and in the state of nature man is predatory. The explanation tendered by Epicurus, as by Hobbes and Hume, is that of a compact which, once made, is ever afterward strictly observed. Yet it is not easy to discover why men should carry out a compact made in their natural, that is, predatory state. Why should the wise man observe it if he find secret injustice possible and convenient? Epicurus frankly admits that the only conceivable motive which can deter him is self-interest, the desire to avoid the painful anxieties that the perpetual dread of discovery would entail. Even if the compact could be evaded, prudential considerations forbid it, since the risk of detection is enormous and the mere possibility of discovery is an ever-present evil sufficient to poison all the goods of life. That such motives do not weigh with criminals is irrelevant; we are dealing now with the wise and prudent man. "Natural justice is a contract of expediency,

¹⁴ Epicurea, p. 75, 3, golden maxim No. XVII.

to prevent one man from harming or being harmed by another.”¹⁵ “Those animals which were incapable of making compacts with one another, to the end that they might neither inflict nor suffer harm, are without either justice or injustice. Similarly those tribes which either could not or would not form mutual covenants to the same end are in the like case.”¹⁶ Justice, then, is artificial, not natural. The view could not be more clearly expressed. This is just the position taken up by modern international law and just the attitude adopted by Christian nations; in historical times to those outside the pale of civilisation, who are assumed to have no rights. So, too, Hume holds that we should not, properly speaking, lie under any restraint of justice with regard to rational beings who were so much weaker than ourselves that we had no reason to fear their resentment. There never was an absolute justice,” says one of the golden sentences, “but only a convention made in mutual intercourse, in whatever region, from time to time, providing against the infliction or suffering of harm.”¹⁷ “Injustice is not in itself an evil, but only in its consequence, viz., the terror which is excited by apprehension that those appointed to punish such offences will discover the injustice.”¹⁸ “It is impossible for the man who secretly violates any article of the social compact to feel confident that he will remain undiscovered, even if he has already escaped ten thousand times; for until his death he is never sure he will not be detected.”¹⁹ It was easy for the Stoics to present this in an unfavourable light as does Epictetus when he says: “Not even does Epicurus himself declare, stealing to be bad, but he admits that detection is, and because it is impossible to have security against detection, for this reason he says, Do not steal.”²⁰ Taken generally,” to quote another Epicurean saying, “justice is the same for all, but in its application to particular cases of territory or the like, it varies under different circumstances.”²¹ In other words, justice is the foundation of all positive law, but the positive law of one state will differ from that of another. “Whatever in conventional law is attested to be expedient in the needs arising out of mutual intercourse is by its nature just, whether the same for all or not, and in case any law is made and does not prove suitable to the expediency of mutual intercourse, then this is no longer just. And should the expedien-

15 *Ib.*, p. 78, 8, golden maxim No. XXXI.

16 *Ib.*, p. 78, 10, golden maxim No. XXXII.

17 *Epicurea*, p. 78, 15, golden maxim No. XXXIII.

18 *Ib.*, p. 79, i, golden maxim No. XXXIV.

19 *Ib.*, p. 79, 4, golden maxim No. XXXV.

20 *Ib.*, p. 322, 6.

21 *Ib.*, p. 79, 8, golden maxim No. XXXVI.

cy which is expressed by the law vary and only for a time correspond with the notion of justice, nevertheless, for the time being, it was just, so long as we do not trouble ourselves about empty terms but look broadly at facts.”²² Thus a law judged to be inexpedient is no longer binding. The old sophistical quibble that no positive law can be unjust Epicurus, from his stand-point, can easily expose, and he is equally well able to meet the conservative dislike and dread of legislative innovation as something essentially immoral. “Where without any change in circumstances the conventional laws when judged by their consequences were seen not to correspond with the notion of justice, such laws were not really just; but wherever the laws have ceased to be expedient in consequence of a change in circumstances, in that case the laws were for the time being just, when they were expedient for the mutual intercourse of the citizens, and ceased subsequently to be just when they ceased to be expedient.”²³ “He who best insured safety from external foes made into one nation all the folk capable of uniting together, and those incapable of such union he assuredly did not treat as aliens; if there were any whom he could not even on such terms incorporate, he excluded them from intercourse when ever this suited with his own interests.”²⁴

Thus civilisation is an advance upon the condition of primitive man; nor does Epicurus ever contemplate the possibility of undoing what has been done. Applying the standard of human good in his own conception of it as tranquil enjoyment, he pronounces government to be a benefit to the wise so far as it protects them from harm. But it does not therefore follow that they should themselves take part in political administration; they are only advised to do so in circumstances where it is necessary and so far as it is necessary for their own safety. Experience shows that as a rule the private citizen lives more calmly and safely than the public man. The burdens of office are a hinderance rather than an aid to the end of life. “The Epicureans,” says Plutarch, “shun politics as the ruin and confusion of true happiness.” An unobtrusive life is the ideal. To strive at power without attaining one’s own personal security is an act of folly certain to entail lasting discomfort. Moreover, as Philodemus remarks, “If any one were to inquire which influence is of all others the most hostile to friendship and the most productive of enmity, he would find it to be politics, because of the envy of one’s rivals and the ambition natural in those so engaged and the discord recurring when opposite notions

22 Epicurea, p. 79, 12, golden maxim No. XXXVII.

23 *Ib.*, p. 80, 6, golden maxim No. XXXVIII.

24 *Ib.*, p. 80, 15, golden maxim No. XXXIX.

are proposed.”²⁵ Restless spirits, however, who cannot find satisfaction in retirement are permitted to face the risks of public activity. To all forms of government the Epicureans were theoretically indifferent, but the impossibility of pleasing the multitude and the necessity of strong control inclined them to favour the monarchical principle. Under all circumstances they recommended unconditional obedience. The traditions of the old republican life of petty Greek states demanded from the citizen far more than this active co-operation, personal sacrifice, enthusiasm for the common cause. Judged by this standard, the Epicurean would seem to take an unfair advantage of the state. He got all the protection it afforded and shirked as much as he could of its burdens. But, in reality, what he was prepared to contribute would fully satisfy the demands of the modern territorial state. To obey the laws, to pay taxes, to assist by an occasional vote in the formation of public opinion constitutes nowadays the whole of civic duty for the vast majority of citizens. Under existing conditions how can it be otherwise? For, in order to integrate, as it were, these multitudinous infinitesimals, organisation is required; but division of responsibility and specialisation of function circumscribe personal effort. Again, when the popular cry has been adequately voiced by press or platform and has taken effect through proportional representation or other constitutional means, the greatness of the results secured and the very perfection of the machinery for securing them leave less and less scope to private initiative.

The consistent application of individualist principles might enjoin a severance, so far as is possible, from the ties of the family no less than of the state, and the picture of the wise man represents him as shirking these responsibilities also. But such a counsel of perfection has regard to special circumstances, and in all fairness the actual conduct of the man should be allowed to correct the supposed tendency of his system. Now, by his kindness to his brothers, his gratitude to his parents, and his tender solicitude for his wards, Epicurus is proved to have cherished warm family affection himself. Nor is it reasonable to presume that the philosopher who deprecated suicide, except in extreme cases, and set the example by so cheerfully enduring severe physical pain, can ever seriously have intended race suicide. Political association, even if originally based upon a contract, has its present sanction in pains and penal ties. It is at best a compromise, a pisaller of only relative and subsidiary value. Men submit to the compulsion and constraint which it entails for fear of finding something worse. The true form of association is that in which man surrenders nothing of his original freedom, and this Epicurus

²⁵ Epicurea, p. 327, 20. a &., p. 328, 4.

believed to be realised in friendship, upon which he set the highest value. The only duties that Epicurus recognises are those voluntarily accepted on reasonable grounds, not from natural instinct or compulsion of circumstances. "No one," says Epicurus, "loves another except for his own interest." "Human nature alone does not give natural affection for nothing, nor can it love without advantage to it self." "Of all things which wisdom provides for the happiness of a lifetime, by far the greatest is the acquisition of friendship." The terms in which it is extolled recall the eulogies lavished upon the Christian grace of charity or love. It was the signal characteristic of the little society in the founder's lifetime, and it continued a prominent trait of the sect to the latest times. Upon its own principles no ethical system which starts with self-love can recognize²⁶ disinterested conduct. Nor did Epicurus anticipate Hume's discovery and call in sympathy as a necessary supplement to self-interest. He is, therefore, obliged to maintain that friendship, like justice, is based solely upon mutual utility. The services rendered have the same selfish motive which prompts the farmer to commit the seed to the soil in expectation of a future harvest. So alone the theory is consistent; friendship, like the cynic's gratitude, must needs be a lively sense of favours yet to come. There is, of course, a difficulty at the beginning. Some one must make the start. "Neither those who are over-ready nor those who are too slow to enter into friendships are to be approved; one must even run some risk in order to make friends."²⁷ To do good," says Epicurus, "is not only more noble, but also more pleasant" (mark the predicate) "than to receive good."²⁸ Benevolence would cease to be a virtue if it ceased to be self-regarding. Yet it was upon this unsound basis that devoted friendships were based. When we are told that the wise man will, upon occasion, even die for his friend, the suggestion of disinterested action, however inconsistent, can hardly be dismissed. "The wise man suffers no more pain when on the rack himself than when his friend is upon it; but if any man suspects his friend, his whole life will by his distrust be confounded and turned upside down."²⁹ And there are other utterances to the same effect. "What we require is not so much to have our needs supplied by our friends as to be assured that our needs will be supplied by them." "The wise man, when brought into distress in company with others, shows himself a comrade ready to give rather than to receive; so great a treasure of self-reliance has he found."

26 Epicurea, p. 324, 16; cf. Wotke, Wiener Studien, X, p. 193, sent. 23.

27 Wotke, Wiener Studien, X, p. 193, sent. 28.

28 Epicurea, p. 325, 10.

29 Wotke, c., p. 196, sent. 56, 57.

In the foregoing sketch the main questions of ethics have come before us and the answers of Epicurus have been indicated in outline. Like his rivals the Stoics, he made his appeal to the world primarily as a moral teacher, an inquirer whose aim was to deal comprehensively and systematically with moral problems. To this inquiry the study of nature, which will occupy us in the next chapter, was subordinate. He had convinced himself that the main fruit of philosophy consisted in happiness of life and that philosophy was successful just in so far as this was promoted. This aspect of the system will become more apparent if we now consider the remarkable collection of its more important tenets, which has come down to us in the form of some forty isolated quotations from his voluminous writings. Whether Epicurus himself made this collection or whether it was formed by his disciples cannot now be precisely determined. At a very early time it obtained a wide circulation among his followers, who were ever afterward recommended to commit to memory this collection of golden maxims as well as other shorter or longer epitomes of the master's teaching. The importance attached to these authoritative pronouncements must be our excuse for reproducing the greater part of them, although it will be obvious that except the first, which lays the foundation for his views upon religion, and the twenty-second, twenty-third, and twenty-fourth, which deal with his theory of knowledge, they are of an ethical character and must therefore simply recapitulate the ethical theory which we have already attempted to expound. The following, then, are the main tenets or golden maxims of Epicurus³⁰:

I. A blessed and eternal being has no trouble itself and brings no trouble upon any other being; hence it is exempt from movements of anger and favour, for every such movement implies weakness.

II. Death is nothing to us; for the body, when it has been resolved into its elements, has no feeling, and that which has no feeling is nothing to us.

III. The magnitude of pleasures is limited by the removal of all pain. Wherever there is pleasure, so long as it is present, there is no pain either of body or of mind or both.

IV. Continuous pain does not last long in the flesh, and pain, if extreme, is present a very short time, and even that degree of pain which barely outweighs pleasure in the flesh does not occur for many days together. Illnesses of long duration even permit of an excess of pleasure over pain in the flesh.

V. It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and

³⁰ The golden maxims are given in Usener, *Epicurea*, pp. 71 sgg.

well and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and well and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any one of these is lacking, when, for instance, the man does not live wisely, though he lives well and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life.

VI. As far as concerns protection from other men, any means of procuring this was a natural good.

VII. Some men sought to become famous and renowned, thinking that thus they would make themselves secure against their fellow-men. If, then, the life of such persons really was secure, they attained natural good; if, however, it was insecure, they have not attained the end which by nature's own promptings they originally sought.

VIII. No pleasure is in itself evil, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail annoyances many times greater than the pleasures themselves.

IX. If all pleasure had been capable of accumulation, if this had gone on not only in time, but all over the frame or, at any rate, the principal parts of man's nature, there would not have been any difference between one pleasure and another as, in fact, there now is.

X. If the objects which are productive of pleasures to profligate persons really freed them from fears of the mind the fears, I mean, inspired by celestial and atmospheric phenomena, the fear of death, the fear of pain if, further, they taught them to limit their desires, we should not have any reason to censure such persons, for they would then be filled with pleasure to overflowing on all sides and would be exempt from all pain, whether of body or mind, that is, from all evil.

XI. If we had never been molested by alarms at celestial and atmospheric phenomena, nor by the misgiving that death somehow affects us, nor by neglect of the proper limits of pains and desires, we should have had no need to study natural science.

XII. It would be impossible to banish fear on matters of the highest importance if a man did not know the nature of the whole universe but lived in dread of what the legends tell us. Hence, without the study of nature there was no enjoyment of un mixed pleasures.

XIII. There would be no advantage in providing security against our fellow-men so long as we were alarmed by occurrences over our heads or beneath the earth, or in general by whatever happens in the infinite void.

XIV. When tolerable security against our fellow-men is attained, then on a basis of power arises most genuine bliss, to wit, the security of a private life withdrawn from the multitude.

XV. Nature's wealth has its bounds and is easy to procure, but the

wealth of vain fancies recedes to an infinite distance.

XVI. Fortune but slightly crosses the wise man's path; his greatest and highest interests are directed by reason throughout the course of life.

XVII. The just man enjoys the greatest peace of mind, the unjust is full of the utmost disquietude.

XVIII. Pleasure in the flesh admits no increase when once the pain of want has been removed; after that it only admits of variation. The limit of pleasure in the mind is obtained by calculating the pleasures themselves and the contrary pains, which cause the mind the greatest alarms.

XIX. Infinite time and finite time hold an equal amount of pleasure, if we measure the limits of that pleasure by reason.

XX. The flesh assumes the limits of pleasure to be infinite, and only infinite time would satisfy it. But the mind, grasping in thought what the end and limit of the flesh is, and banishing the terrors of futurity, procures a complete and perfect life and has no longer any need of infinite time. Nevertheless, it does not shun pleasure, and even in the hour of death, when ushered out of existence by circumstances, the mind does not fail to enjoy the best life.

XXI. He who understands the limits of life knows how easy it is to procure enough to remove the pain of want and make the whole of life complete and perfect. Hence he has no longer any need of things which are not to be won save by conflict and struggle.

XXII. We must take into account as the end all that really exists and all clear evidence of sense to which we refer our opinions; for otherwise everything will be full of uncertainty and confusion.

XXIII. If you fight against all your sensations you will have no standard to which to refer, and thus no means of judging even those sensations which you pronounce false.

XXIV. If you reject absolutely any single sensation without stopping to discriminate between that which is matter of opinion and awaits further confirmation and that which is already present, whether in sensation or in feeling or in any mental apprehension, you will throw into confusion even the rest of your sensations by your groundless belief, so as to reject the truth altogether. If you hastily affirm as true all that awaits confirmation in ideas based on opinion, as well as that which does not, you will not escape error, as you will be taking sides in every question involving truth and error.

XXV. If you do not on every separate occasion refer each of your actions to the chief end of nature, but if instead of this in the act of choice or avoidance you swerve aside to some other end, your acts will not be consistent with your theories.

XXVI. Some desires lead to no pain when they remain ungratified. All such desires are unnecessary, and the longing is easily got rid of when the thing desired is difficult to procure or when the desires seem likely to produce harm.

XXVII. Of all the means which are procured by wisdom to insure happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends.

XXVIII. The same conviction, which inspires confidence that nothing we have to fear is eternal or even of long duration, also enables us to see that even in our limited life nothing enhances our security so much as friendship.

XXIX. Of our desires, some are natural and necessary; others are natural, but not necessary; others, again, are neither natural nor necessary, but are due to groundless opinion.

XXX. Some natural desires, again, entail no pain when not gratified, though the objects are vehemently pursued. These desires also are due to groundless opinion, and when they are not got rid of, it is not because of their own nature, but because of the man's groundless opinion.

XL.³¹ Those who could best insure the confidence that they would be safe from their neighbours, being thus in possession of the surest guarantee, passed the most agreeable life in each other's society, and their enjoyment of the fullest intimacy was such that, if one of them died before his time, the survivors did not lament his death as if it called for pity. To the foregoing we may add a few ethical fragments of Diogenes of Cenoanda, which may or may not be actual words of Epicurus³²:

"Nothing is so productive of cheerfulness as to abstain from meddling and not to engage in difficult undertakings, nor force yourself to do something beyond your power. For all this involves your nature in tumults."³³

"The main part of happiness is the disposition which is under our own control. Service in the field is hard work, and others hold command. Public speaking abounds in heart-throbs and in anxiety whether you can carry conviction. Why, then, pursue an object like this, which is at the disposal of others?"

"Not nature, which is the same in all, makes men noble or ignoble, but their actions and dispositions."

"Wealth beyond the requirements of nature is no more benefit to men

31 1 Numbers XXXI to XXXIX, which deal with justice, have already been quoted in this chapter, pp. 177 sqq.

32 See Diogenes (Enoandensis Fragmenta (loh. William), p. xi.

33 Diogenes of (Enoanda, Fragment LVI (William).

than water to a vessel which is full. Both alike must be supposed to overflow. We can look upon another's possessions without perturbation and can enjoy purer pleasure than they, for we are free from their arduous struggle."

"Nature forces us to utter an exclamation when groaning under pain, but to indulge in lamentations because we cannot rejoice in the ranks of the healthy and prosperous is the result of groundless opinion."

It is one thing to trace the outlines of an ethical system; it is quite another to comprehend its inner spirit. When a philosopher's works have not come down to us, it is some compensation if some of his memorable and characteristic utterances have been preserved, because they impressed themselves upon contemporaries and on posterity. Epicurus was a fearless and original thinker, contending at great odds against the sympathies and prejudices of the world. It is worth while to collect a few of his striking sayings in order, if possible, to get some idea of the workings of his mind. You must become a slave to philosophy if you would gain true freedom."

The most precious fruit of independence and plain living is freedom."

"Let us completely drive out evil habits as if they were wicked men who have for long wrought us great harm."

"Among the other ills which attend folly is this: it is always beginning to live."

"We are born once; twice we cannot be born, and for everlasting we must be non-existent. But thou, who art not master of the morrow, puttest off the right time. Procrastination is the ruin of life for all; and, therefore, each of us is hurried and unprepared at death."

"A foolish life is uncomfortable and restless; it is wholly engrossed with the future."

"It is absurd to run to death from weariness of life when your style of life has forced you to run to death. What so absurd as to court death when you have made life restless through fear of death?"

"Learn betimes to die or, if thou like it better, to pass over to the gods."

"He who is least in need of the morrow will meet the morrow most pleasantly."

"Vain is the discourse of that philosopher by which no human suffering is healed."

"We must both study philosophy and manage our household affairs at the same time, and use the rest of our resources, and never cease to proclaim the maxims of true wisdom."

"How fleeting a thing is all the good and evil of the multitude! But

wisdom has naught to do with Fortune.”

“The repose of most men is a lethargy and their activity a madness.”
34

“Though he is being tortured on the rack, the wise man is still happy.”
35

“If the wise man is being burned, if he is being tortured nay, within the very bull of Phalaris, he will say: How delightful this is ! How little care I for it!”³⁶

Many critics before and after the time of Cicero concur with Cicero himself in treating this famous utterance as unjustifiable exaggeration or even as mere sentimental rhodomontade. But a French scholar³⁷ has recently called attention to a remarkable fact. Modern psychology seems to show that, given the right set of conditions, Epicurus was, after all, right. Even now we know very little of the extent to which the mind, under the obsession of certain ideas, can ignore or even be unconscious of what goes on in the body.

“It is the wise man alone who will feel gratitude to his friends, but to them equally whether they are present or absent.”

“If you live by nature, you will never be poor; if by opinion, you will never be rich.”³⁸

“Great wealth is but poverty when matched with the law of nature.”³⁹

“If any one thinks his own not to be most ample, he may become lord of the whole world and will yet be wretched.”⁴⁰

“With many the acquisition of riches is not an end to their miseries but only a change.”⁴¹

“The perturbation of the soul is not removed nor any considerable joy produced by the possession either of the greatest wealth or of honour and reputation with the multitude or by anything else due to indeterminate causes.”⁴²

“Happiness and blessedness do not consort with extent of wealth or weight of responsibilities or public office or power, but with painless-

34 Wotke, Wiener Studien, X, p. 192, sent. n.

35 Epicurea, p. 338, i.

36 *Ib.*, p. 338, 4 sqq.

37 V. Brochard, in *Uannee philosophique* for 1903. The article is entitled *La Morale d Epicure*. See especially pp. 8-12.

38 Epicurea, p. 335, i. 6 *Ib.*, p. 161, 19.

39 *Ib.*, p. 303, 24.

40 *Ib.*, p. 302, 29.

41 *Ib.*, p. 304, 23; cf. *ib.*, 304, 19.

42 Wotke, Wiener Studien, X, p. 198, sent. 81.

ness, with mildness of feeling, and that disposition of soul which defines what is according to nature."⁴³

"Trust me, your words (professions of philosophy) will sound grander in a common bed and a rough coverlet; they will not be merely spoken then, they will be proved true."

"The knowledge of sin is the beginning of salvation."⁴⁴

"The first duty of salvation is to preserve our vigour and to guard against the defiling of our life in consequence of maddening desires."⁴⁵

"It is an evil thing to live in necessity, but there is no necessity to live in necessity."⁴⁶

"Let us not accuse the flesh as the cause of great evils, neither let us attribute our distresses to outward things. Let us rather seek the causes of this distress within our souls, and let us cut off every vain craving and hope for things which are fleeting, and let us become wholly masters of ourselves. For a man is unhappy either from fear or from unlimited and vain desires, but if a man bridle these he may secure for himself the blessing of reason. In so far ; as thou art in distress, thou art in distress because thou hast forgotten Nature, for thou layest upon thy self fears and desires which have no limits. And it were better for thee to have no fears and to lie upon a bed of straw, than to have a golden couch and lavish table, yet to be troubled in mind."

"Give thanks to Nature, the blessed, because she hath made necessary things easy to procure, while things hard to be obtained are not necessary."

"By the love of true philosophy every troublous and painful desire is destroyed."

"If you wish to make Pythocles happy, add not to his riches, but take away from his desires."

"No one of the foolish is content with what he has, but rather he is distressed on account of what he has not. Just as those who are fever-stricken are always athirst, owing to the severity of their disease, and desire things of the most opposite kinds, so those who are sick in soul are always in need of everything, and through their excessive craving they fall head long into manifold desires."

"Nothing is enough for him to whom enough is too little."

"Cheerful poverty is an honourable thing."

"Having bread and water, I revel in the pleasure of the body, and I

43 Usener, *Epicurea*, p. 325, 30.

44 *Epicurea*, p. 162, 25.

45 *Ib.*, p. 318, 12.

46 Wotke, *Wiener Studien*, p. 198, sent. 80.

loathe the pleasures of costly living, not on their own account, but because of the inconveniences which follow them.”

“We strive after independence, not that in all cases we may use that which is cheap and plain, but that we may have no anxiety as to such matters.”

“We must select some good man and keep him ever before our eyes, that so we may live as if he were beholding us, and may do everything as if in his sight.”⁴⁷

“Do everything as if Epicurus saw you.”

“Reverence for the wise man is a great good for the reverer.”⁴⁸

“The wise man will not punish his slaves, but will take pity on them, and will show consideration to I any that are zealous.”⁴⁹

“Turn not away from the prayer of thine enemy when he is in distress, yet take heed to thyself, for he is no better than a dog.”⁵⁰

“Nobility is best brought out in wisdom and friendship, whereof the one, wisdom, is an immortal; the other, friendship, a mortal good.”⁵¹

“We ought to look round for people to eat and drink with before we look for something to eat and drink; feeding without a friend is the life of a lion or a wolf.”⁵²

“Sweet is the memory of the friend who is dead.”⁵³

Upon politics and the pursuit of fame Epicurus is very plain-spoken.

“I never wished to please the people; for that which I know, the people does not approve; and what the people approves, that I know not.”⁵⁴

“Man is not by nature adapted for living in civic communities and in civilisation.”⁵⁵

“The wise man will be fond of living in the country.”

“The wise man will take just so much thought for fame as to avoid being despised.”⁵⁶

“I have said this not to many persons, but to thee, for we are a large

47 I Epicurea, p. 163, 18. Compare the similar precept of Epictetus given above, Chapter IV, p. 115. a lb., p. 163, 26.

48 3 Wotke, Wiener Studien, X, p. 193, sent. 32.

49 Epicurea, p. 335, 14.

50 lb., p. 164, 21.

51 Wotke, c., p. 197, sent. 78.

52 Epicurea, p. 324, 25.

53 lb., p. 164, 6.

54 lb., p. 157, 26.

55 lb., p. 327, 9.

56 Epicurea, p. 331, 12.

enough theatre one to the other.”⁵⁷

“Arnid so many blessings, it has done us no harm that our glorious Greece not only does not know us, but has hardly heard of us.”⁵⁸

“Epicurus spurns under his feet the achievements of Themistocles and Miltiades, and makes them cheap. . . . The Epicureans name statesmen only to ridicule them and to destroy their fame, saying that Epaminondas had some merit in him, but it was small or wee such is the word they use while they nickname him Iron Bowels, and ask what possessed him to go marching through the middle of the Peloponnesus, and why he did not sit at home with a woollen cap on his head.”⁵⁹

But Epicurus was no harder on the great Athenians than Plato had been before him in the *Gorgias*. The following extracts are controversial and directed against the Stoics:

“Epicurus makes a jest of our distinctions between what is honourable and what is base and says we are taken up with words and utter mere empty sounds. He says that he does not understand what honourable conduct means, if it be not a thing accompanied by pleasure, unless, perchance, it mean what is praised by the popular breath. The praise of men, Epicurus says, is sought after for the sake of pleasure.”

“Ask Epicurus, and he will say that moderate pain is a greater evil than the utmost disgrace.”⁶⁰

“Courage is a thing enslaved to fashions, and to the blame of men, and shaped by foreign opinion and notions; you practise courage, and you encounter hardships and dangers, not because you have no fear of them, but because you are still more afraid of those other things.”

Here again we are reminded of Plato, who in the *Phcedo* disparages civic or popular courage (that is, the virtue of the ordinary citizen as distinct from that of the philosopher) on precisely the same grounds, that it is inspired by fear. But there is this difference, that Plato, who upheld the absolute value of true courage, as of the other virtues, would cultivate and develop even its imperfect and inadequate manifestations; while Epicurus, who denied the absolute value of virtue, and made it simply a means to pleasure, is free to reject it whenever it does not conduce to that end.

This chapter may fitly close with a few more gleanings from the sayings of Epicurus:

“There is no need to spoil the present by longing for what is not;

57 *Ib.*, p. 63, 7.

58 *Ib.*, p. 58, 13.

59 *Ib.*, p. 329, 13 sqq., 16 sqq.

60 *Ib.*, p. 340, 32 sqq.; 123, 4 sqq. *fi Ib.*, p. 326, 14.

rather reflect that even what you have was beyond your expectations.”

“Envy no one; the good do not merit it, while as for the wicked, the more they prosper, the more harm they do to themselves.”⁶¹

“It is vain to ask the gods for what we can procure for ourselves.”

“Confront every desire with this question: What shall I gain by gratifying this desire and what shall I lose by suppressing it?”

“The man of tranquil mind causes no annoyance either to himself or to others.”⁶²

It is worth while to make an effort to discover the real Epicurus, to understand what manner of man he was. Our best materials are his own writings. The letter to Menoeceus has already been translated; that to Herodotus will occupy us in the next chapter, per haps to the weariness and impatience of the reader. These letters together with other fragmentary records certainly convey the impression of a strong personality. We see that Epicurus had a logical mind, was a great systematiser, belonged, in short, to the class of daring and self-confident innovators. Like others of this class, he felt that he had a mission, and under great difficulties, in face of much opposition, laboured with unremitting industry to accomplish a self-imposed task. It may not be amiss to compare him with other such men. If amid great differences points of resemblance are disclosed, these may enable us to fill in the outlines of our mental picture and to form a better judgment of Epicurus himself. For this purpose we select two eminent modern philosophers, Jeremy Bentham and Herbert Spencer, men who far surpassed the Athenian sage in the greatness of their aims and achievements, but yet may be said, in a sense, to have continued his work and to have sustained, in later ages and under altered conditions, the same cause.

Bentham lived the life of a recluse as much as Epicurus. The great influence he exercised was due solely to his writings. We are told that his constitution was weakly in childhood, but strengthened with advancing years so as to allow him to get through an incredible amount of sedentary labour, while he retained to the last the fresh and cheerful temperament of a boy. This might be said almost word for word of Epicurus. Bentham was able to gather around him a group of congenial friends and pupils; so did Epicurus.

Though not a morose visionary, he thought general society a waste of time, disliked poetry as misrepresentation, but gave good dinners, delighted in country sights, and in making others happy. We have seen that each one of these traits is reproduced in our accounts of Epicurus. When

61 Epicurea, p. 317, lines 4 sqq. of Notes.

62 Wotke, Wiener Studien, X, pp. 194 sqq., sentt. 35, 53, 65, 71, 79.

Rush, at that time the American minister in England, visited Bentham at the Hermitage, he tells us that he was received with the simplicity of a philosopher amid shrubberies and flowers, green and large shaded walks. So, we may well believe, were visitors received by Epicurus in his gardens. Rush further records that Bentham had the benevolence of manner suited to the philanthropy of his mind. The visitor to Epicurus would, we may be sure, have said the same. Bentham's conversation revealed a typically logical as opposed to a historical mind, a contempt for the past, and a wish to be clear of all association with it. The same trait is suggested by what we learn of Epicurus, who evidently believed he was inaugurating a new era in which the search for happiness might at last be prosecuted with success.

Turning now to Spencer, one of the most striking features of his character was the small weight he attached to authority or, to be more exact, his utter disregard of it. Professed apologists admit this.⁶³ The prominence of the same trait in Epicurus is unmistakable. As we have seen, he avowed that he was self-taught, and did not scruple to assail the most eminent of his predecessors with merciless ridicule. As Spencer grew up to manhood, his constitutional proneness to set authority at defiance became, we are told, less an instinctive impulse and more a matter of principle. In his thinking, as well as in his acting, he set authority at naught. That with Epicurus also contempt for authority was a matter of principle is very obvious. "All my life long," writes Spencer, "I have been a thinker and not a reader, being able to say with Hobbes that if I had read as much as other men I should have known as little."⁶⁴ Epicurus would have indorsed this sentiment, as Heraclitus had done before him. But Spencer's disregard of authority was, we are told, a disregard of personal authority only, and was accompanied by a whole-hearted fealty to principles. So too emphatically with Epicurus. Spencer's father wrote of him: "It appears to me that the laws of nature are to him what revealed religion is to us, and that any wilful infraction of those laws is to him as much a sin as to us is disbelief in what is revealed."⁶⁵ His biographer insists that though Spencer did not accept the dogmas of any creed, he was, in the truest sense, religious.

"To pay homage to royal persons, while showing little respect for the principles that underlie human society, drew from him the reproof: It is so disloyal. To bend the knee and utter praise to a Divine person, while ignoring the principles of religion and morality, met with a similar con-

63 *Life*, by Duncan, c. XXIX, p. 489.

64 Duncan, p. 490.

65 *Ib.*, p. 491.

demnation: It is so irreligious.”⁶⁶ This may help us better to understand the position of Epicurus on the subject of religion. With all his outspoken condemnation of the prevailing polytheism, he claimed for himself and his followers the possession of the only true and genuine piety.

Indeed, the approximation is yet closer than at first appears. No one can read his own fragmentary utterances, much less the splendid poem of Lucretius, without perceiving a deep undertone of religious fervour. It was impious, they held, to acquiesce in the popular faith, but it is not in the reverence due to the shadowy deities of the intermundia that their religious spirit finds its true manifestation. The laws of nature, *foedera natura*, excite, especially in the Roman poet, a higher emotion, a more reverent awe. The comparison holds good of less pleasing traits. Spencer, his biographer admits, had an abundant share of self-confidence. “The possible failure of any of his many inventions was seldom taken into account. His doctrines were from the outset deemed secure against attack, notwithstanding repeated experiences of having to modify or enlarge or restrict his previous expositions. On Spencer, accustomed to think and act for himself, the other side did not obtrude.”⁶⁷ It is hardly necessary to point out that all this is eminently true of Epicurus, whose confidence in himself again and again becomes arrogance, while his dogmatism was not “occasional” but a permanent habit. Had this not been the case, he would never have rejected the natural necessity of Democritus with such scorn, would never have excogitated the declination of the atom, to say nothing of other less serious errors. Galton writes of Spencer: “He loved to dogmatise from a priori axioms” how true this is of Epicurus “and to criticise, and I soon found that the way to get the best from him was to be patient and not to oppose.” The subservience of the Epicurean brotherhood to the master was *pro verbial* in antiquity; the man who expected his disciples to get his doctrines by heart and memorise the epitomes he prepared for their use must have had more than Spencer’s share of dogmatism. But the two resembled each other in more important matters, in the passion for systematisation, the determination to deduce, so far as possible, all the consequences of one wide-reaching principle; again, in freedom from worldly ambition and in whole-hearted devotion to their task. Spencer often spoke, we are told, as if he had a mission, a message to deliver to mankind. We have noticed the same trait in Epicurus and it is a clue to much of his conduct.

No one can be better aware than the present writer that the foregoing coincidences are useful only by way of illustration and must be taken

66 76., p. 490.

67 Duncan, p. 492. a /6., p. 501.

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cum grano salts. Historical parallels, however interesting, are apt to be purely fanciful. At the best they have little independent value, just because so much depends upon the point of view from which the comparison is made.