

Marinus

On Happiness

On Happiness is a biography on Proclus by his student and next head of the Academy, Marinus of Samaria. The translation is by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (1925). This document is in the public domain.

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Had I merely considered our contemporary philosopher Proclus's high-mindedness and worth, the multitude of documents and the oratorical achievements of the biographers of such a man,—and besides, my own insufficiency in the practice of eloquence—I think I should have been wise in quietly refraining from “jumping over the ditch,” as the vulgar say, by rushing into this perilous undertaking.

But, brushing aside these requirements, I have reflected that even in the sacrifices the suppliants at the altars present offerings not all of the same value. Some seek to show themselves worthy of participating with the gods by offering whole bulls and goats, not to mention the composition of hymns in prose or verse; while others, having nothing similar to offer, present only cakes, a few grains of incense, or a short invocation, and are none the less favorably heard. Moved by these reflections, and besides fearing to “fail the gods,” as says Plato's Ibycus, but here rather to fail this great sage; also, by my attitude, to assure myself the praises of the world,—for all these reasons, I have decided that it was for me an obligation to relate in writing some of the high and numerous qualities which the philosopher exemplified in his life, and to relate them in all their truth.

I indeed feared that it was not an act of piety to remain silent, I alone among his friends, and to omit relating the truth about him, within the limits of my ability, when the duty to speak is particularly mine; and while even among men generally I might be misunderstood, had I not undertaken this task they might believe that I refrained not from modesty, but from laziness, or worse.

2. I shall not follow the example of most writers by dividing up my subject mathematically into regularly successive chapters; rather, as the most suitable foundation for this essay I shall adopt the happiness enjoyed by this truly blessed man. For I believe that he has been the happiest of all men whose happiness has for centuries been celebrated. Nor am I speaking merely of the happiness which is allotted to sages, although that also he enjoyed to the fullest extent; nor because he had all the physical advantages which permit the enjoyment of life; nor of the happiness of Fortune which most people prize, and with which Chance most unusually favored Proclus, in as he disposed of unusually large resources,—but I am referring to a complete and perfect happiness, to which absolutely nothing was lacking, and which combined both conditions of felicity.

3. If we may classify virtues as physical, moral and political, then the purifying, theoretic and theurgical,—not to mention the higher superhuman ones—we may begin with the physical virtues which are born with us. This blessed man possessed them all naturally since his birth, which could be clearly seen in his exterior wrapper, which we carry as the oyster does his shell.

First, he possessed an extreme delicacy of the senses, which may be called ‘corporeal wisdom,’ especially of our noblest senses, sight and hearing, which were given by the gods to man so that he might devote himself to philosophy, and to enjoy the sweetness of well-being. Our philosopher preserved them intact his life-long.

Secondly, his was a most robust constitution, which resisted the extremes of heat and cold, and

which remained unaffected by irregularities, by his neglect of food, by excess of work by day and night, when occupied in prayers, pouring over scientific books, writing, conversing familiarly with his friends,—and all that so continuously as if each was his only occupation. Such power might justly be called corporeal bravery.

The third bodily quality he possessed is comparable to temperance, to which is properly related handsomeness. For as the former consists in the harmony and mutual agreement of the faculties of the soul, so the latter physical beauty may be discovered in a certain symmetry of its organic members. His appearance was most agreeable, for not only did he possess the beauty of just proportions, but from his soul exuded a certain living light, or miraculous efflorescence which shone over his whole body, and which is quite indescribable. He was so lovely that no painter was able to catch his likeness, and that in all of his portraits that are in circulation (however fine they be) there is still a lack of many features to represent his personality adequately.

His fourth bodily virtue was health, which is often compared to justice in the soul. These two are really quite analogous, for justice is a soul-habit which hinders upsets of the soul-parts, while health fosters order and mutual agreement between the disordered elements of the body. That is just the definition given by the Asklepian healers [or physicians].

So profoundly had this health been rooted in Proclus ever since his birth, that he was able to tell how many times he had been sick, which was twice or thrice during seventy-five completed years. Indeed, so true is this that during his last sickness he did not recognize his symptoms, so rarely had he felt them.

4. And although these were purely bodily advantages, one might say that they were the premonitions of the particular types into which we subdivide virtue. According to Plato, these are the elements of a philosophic nature. The primary elements of the soul were innate in him, and he had no need of learning them, and even so they were highly developed in him. His was a great memory, an intelligence suited to all kinds of studies; he was liberal, affable, loving, and fraternal to truth, justice, courage and temperance. Never had he voluntarily told a lie; lies he abhorred, and he cherished sincerity and veracity. What else could be expected from a man who was to achieve the presence of True Being? Since youth, he was impassioned for truth, for truth is the source of all goods, among gods as among men. His profound scorn for sensuality, and his inclination to temperance was well illustrated by his extreme ardor and overwhelming leaning towards science, and all kinds of sciences, which do not even allow a first start to the pleasures of gross and animal life, and, on the contrary have the power to impress us with the pure and unmingled joys of the soul.

Love of gain was entirely alien to Proclus, to the point that, from childhood, he neglected care of the fortune left him by his parents, who were very rich, from passionate love for philosophy. So he was entirely foreign to thievery and meannesses, his soul being ever directed towards the universal and total in human and divine things. From this arose a high-mindedness which impressed him with the nothingness of human life, and released him from the usual fear of death. He felt no fear of the things which seem so terrible to men generally, and his disposition was no less than courageous.

This illustrates his youthful love of justice: honorable and gentle, never moody, or difficult in daily intercourse, never unjust; gracious, un-covetous, never taking advantage, as foreign to arrogance as to timidity.

5. It is well to bring out for those who never met him personally that his mind was open, his intelligence fruitful, his knowledge thorough, his ideas, that he produced and published, novel, and that he alone seemed never to have drunk of the potion of Lethe (or Forgetfulness). His powerful memory never betrayed the least hesitation; he was always self-possessed, and had no business other than science. His disposition was opposed to rudeness and discourtesy; his taste was ever selective and the best in everything, and his politeness and affability both in worldly gatherings, religious banquets, and all acts of life, without in any way detracting from his dignity, captivated his interlocutors, so that they always left him in a better soul-disposition than when they had met him.

6. Such were the physical and mental qualities which he received from his mother Marcella,

legitimate wife of Patricius. Both were Lycians, noble, and very virtuous. At birth he was welcomed by the Constantinopolitan goddess Poliouchos [Athena], who as it were assisted his mother in childbirth. She might have been considered the cause of his life, because he was born in the town she protects and saves; and who, when he reached childhood and youth, made him live well: for she appeared to him in a dream inducing him to follow philosophy. That is how he began so close an intimacy with the goddess, so that he sacrificed especially to her, and practiced her precepts with the greatest enthusiasm. Shortly after his birth, his parents removed him to their homeland, to Xanthus, a town dedicated to Apollo, and which thus, by some divine chance, became his own homeland. For it seemed no more than fitting that a man who was to become a prince of all sciences should be raised and grow under the influence of the divine Leader of the Muses. The excellent education he received there permitted him to acquire the moral virtues, and to accustom himself to love what duty commands, and to avoid the contrary.

7. That was the time when the great favor of the gods that he had enjoyed since his birth became most evident. One day he was suffering from a serious illness, and he had been given up for lost when above his bed appeared a child, an exceedingly beautiful boy who, even before he announced his name, was easily recognized as Telesphorus.¹ As he stood near, bending over the pillow, he announced his name and touched the patient's head, curing him of his sickness, and then suddenly disappeared. This divine miracle testified to the favor of the gods for the youth.

8. For a very short time he attended a grammar school in Lycia, and then traveled to Egyptian Alexandria, already deeply imbued with the moral qualities which charmed the teachers he attended. The Isaurian sophist Leonas, the most celebrated among his fellow philosophers, not only admitted him to his courses, but invited him to become his house-guest, admitted him to intimacy with his wife and children, as if he had been his own son. He introduced the youth to the magistrates who were governing Egypt, who received him among their most intimate friends, charmed with the youth's natural mental vivacity and his manners, distinction and dignity. He frequented the school of the grammarian Orion, who was a descendant of an ancient Egyptian priestly caste, and who was so learned in the practice of his art that he himself composed works very useful to posterity.

Then he attended the lessons of Roman teachers, and rapidly made great progress in their curriculum; for at the beginning he proposed to follow the legal career of his father, who had thereby made himself famous in the capital.

While he was still young, he took much delight in rhetoric, for he had not yet become acquainted with philosophical studies. In rhetoric he even became celebrated, capturing the admiration of his fellow students and his teachers by his fine flow of language, by his facility in assimilating this art, and by his appearing a teacher rather than a student both by his proficiency and diplomacy.

9. He was still studying when Leonas invited him to share his journey to Constantinople, which he had undertaken as a favor to Theodorus, the Alexandrian governor, a man of great distinction, liberality and friendliness to philosophy. The youth accompanied his teacher with much pleasure, so as not to interrupt his studies. But, after all, this was exceedingly providential, as it brought him back to the influence of the goddess who had been the cause of his birth [Athena].

For on his arrival the goddess advised him to devote himself up to philosophy, and to attend the Athenian schools. So he said farewell to rhetoric, and to his other former studies, and first returning to Alexandria, he attended only what philosophical courses were there given. To begin his study of Aristotle's philosophy he attended the instruction of the Younger Olympiodorus, whose reputation was very extensive. For mathematics, he trusted himself to Heron, a very pious person, who possessed and practiced the best methods of his art.

These teachers were so charmed with the virtues of this youth that Olympiodorus, who had a daughter who was acquainted with philosophy wished to betroth her to him; and Heron did not hesitate to initiate him into all his ideas about religion, and to make him his continuous companion.

Now it seems that Olympiodorus possessed such a gift of speech, that he talked too rapidly and

¹ Telesphorus was a child-deity associated with Asclepius the healer-god.

indistinctly, and only a few of his auditors understood him. One day, at the close of the lecture, Proclus repeated the whole lecture to his fellow students, word by word, from memory. It had been very long, but Proclus missed nothing, as I have been informed by one of the other auditors, Ulpian of Gaza, who had also devoted his whole life to philosophy.

Proclus easily understood Aristotle's treatises on logic, at the first reading, though they are difficult to comprehend by beginners.

10. After having studied under the teachers in Alexandria, and having profited by their lessons according to their talent and science, it seemed to him, one day on reading an author with his teacher, that the latter's explanation of the passage had failed to represent the author's meaning. So he looked upon these schools with scorn, and simultaneously remembering the divine vision that had visited him in Constantinople, and the command which it had brought him, he embarked for Athens, so to speak under the escort of [divine] oracles and all the gods and good daimons who watch over the preservation of philosophy. For he was being sent there by the gods of philosophy to preserve the school of Plato in its truth and pureness. This was clearly demonstrated by the circumstances of his arrival, and the really divine symbols which clearly prognosticated the function which he was to inherit from his 'father',² and the election which was, one day, to call him to the direction and administration of the School.

For at his landing in the Piraeus, and as soon as his arrival was bruited about in Athens, Nicholaus, who was later to become so famous as a sophist, and who at this time was pursuing his studies here, came to the harbor to welcome him, and to offer him hospitality, as he was acquainted with him personally, and was his co-national, from Lycia. So Nicholaus led him to the town; but on the way, having arrived at the monument to Socrates, Proclus felt himself tired of walking. Now he did not know, and had never heard tell that there existed there a place sacred to Socrates. Yet he begged Nicholaus to stop there a moment, so he might sit down to rest, and asked him to fetch him a little water, from any place at all, for, said he, "I am dying of thirst." Nicholaus, very anxious, had some brought him, not from any chance place, but from the consecrated shrine itself, for the spring of Socrates's Pillar was not far off. After Proclus had drunk, Nicholaus suddenly saw in this a symbol, and told him that he was resting in a place consecrated to Socrates, and that the water he had drunk, the first Attic water he had tasted, was from this source. So Proclus rose, and before proceeding, offered a prayer.

As he was arriving at the fortified gate, at the entrance he met the porter, who was already preparing to insert his keys in the lock, and he actually said to Proclus: "Really, if you had not arrived, I should have closed!" Could there have been a clearer omen, and one whose interpretation would need neither a Polles, nor a Melampus, nor any other?³

11. Although he was anxiously invited by the teachers of eloquence, as if he had come for this very purpose, he scorned the oratorical theories and methods. Chance led him to hear first Syrianus, son of Philoxenus, at whose lecture was present Lachares, who was profoundly versed in the doctrines of the philosophers, and at that time was an assiduous auditor of the philosopher, although his art in sophistry excited as much admiration as Homer's in poetry. It happened to be late dusk, and the sun was setting during their conversation, and the moon, quitting her conjunction with the sun, began to appear. So as to be able to adore the goddess alone and leisurely, they tried to dismiss the youth who to them was a stranger. But, after having taken but a few steps from the house Proclus,—he also seeing the moon leaving her celestial house—stopped in his tracks, undid his shoes, and in plain sight of them adored the goddess. Struck by the free and bold action of the youth, Lachares then said to Syrianus this admirable expression of Plato's about geniuses: "Here is a man who will be a great good, or its contrary!" Such are the presages,—to mention only a few of them—that the gods sent to our philosopher just as he arrived in Athens.

12. On taking him into his home, Syrianus presented him to the great Plutarch, son of Nestorius.

² His 'father' could be either the god Apollo, or his mentor Syrianus who preceded him in the Platonic succession.

³ *i.e.* the succession of Platonist philosophers would have ceased.

The latter, on seeing this barely twenty-year-old youth, and on learning of his ardent desire and determination to devote himself entirely to philosophy, was charmed with him, to the point of urgently welcoming him to his lessons of philosophy, although he was often hindered by his age, being already very old. With him Proclus read Aristotle's *De Anima*, and Plato's *Phaedo*. After thus proving the student's aptitude for the finer things, Plutarch loved him more and more, continually called Proclus his child, and received him into his house. The great master advised Proclus to record the text of their conversations in writing, and to arouse his zeal, sought to excite his ambition by saying to him that if he completed these notes people would say "It is Proclus who is the author of these commentaries on Plato!"

As Plutarch saw Proclus very rigidly abstaining from flesh food, he advised him not to push this abstinence too far, so as to keep his body vigorous enough to carry on the labors and fatigues of his spirit. He even asked the philosopher Syrianus to endorse this advice about diet, but the latter retorted to the old man, as Proclus himself reported to me, "Let him learn what I want, by following this so rigid a diet; and afterwards, if he insists on it, let him die!" Such was the solicitude that Proclus aroused in his teachers!

After the arrival of Proclus, the old man survived only two years; and, on dying, recommended him to his successor Syrianus with the same instances as his own grandson Archiadas. So Syrianus took Proclus into his own home, made him profit as much as possible from his lessons, and made Proclus share in his philosophical way of life, because he had found in him the disciple and successor he had long been seeking,—someone, namely, who was capable of understanding the sciences in both their multiplicity and diversity, while simultaneously grasping the divine verities.

13. During this season of less than two years, with his teacher, Proclus read all of Aristotle's treatises on logic, ethics, politics, physics, and on the science which rises above all these, theology. Solidly outfitted with these studies, which so to speak, are a kind of preparatory initiation or lesser mysteries, Syrianus led Proclus to the Greater Mysteries of Plato, proceeding in an orderly manner, and not, as says the Oracle, "jumping over the threshold." So Syrianus led Proclus to direct and immediate vision of the really divine mysteries contained in this philosopher, for when the eyes of the soul are no longer obscured as by a mist, reason, freed from sensation, may cast firm glances into the distance.

By an intense and unrelenting labor by day and night, he succeeded in recording in writing, along with his own critical remarks, the doctrine which he heard discussed, and of which he finally made a synoptic outline, making such progress that at the age of twenty-eight years, he had composed many treatises, among others a *Commentary on the Timaeus*, written with utmost elegance and science. Through these prolonged and inspiring studies, to science he added virtue, increasing the moral beauty of his nature.

14. Besides, he acquired political virtues, which he derived from Aristotle's political writings, and Plato's *Laws* and *Republic*. He was in this dilemma, that he could not mingle with politics, because his thoughts took a higher flight; and yet he did not wish people to believe that his knowledge was verbal only, and that he made no practical application thereof. So he encouraged Archiadas to devote himself to them, instructing him, explaining to him the political virtues and methods, acting like the coaches who pace runners, exhorting him to direct the affairs of his whole town, and at the same time to render services to individuals, in all kinds of virtues, but especially in justice. And indeed he succeeded in arousing in Archiadas a noble emulation, taught him liberality in financial matters, and munificence, himself making benefactions to his friends, relatives, and fellow citizens, in everything showing himself superior to the vanity of wealth.

Proclus did indeed make important public benefactions, and at his death bequeathed his fortune to Xanthus and Athens, after the decease of Archiadas. The latter indeed showed himself, both by his own nature, and by his affection for Proclus, so sincere a friend of religion that even our contemporaries, when they spoke of him, called him by the venerable name, "the most pious Archiadas."

15. Nevertheless, sometimes he undertook to give political advice. He would attend the public meetings where they deliberated on the town interests, proposed resolutions of a great practical wisdom, conferred with the magistrates on matters appertaining to justice, and not only gave them counsel, but, with a philosopher's boldness would partly constrain them to administer justice generally.

He watched over the honorable character of those charged with public education, obliging them to practice temperance in their public conduct; teaching them the virtues not only by discourses, but also by the actions and occupations of his whole life; making himself, so to speak, an exemplar of temperance.

He even displayed political courage in a Herculean degree. For he managed to save his life in the midst of the greatest perils, when he had to weather terrible tempests, when all the unleashed typhoons were shaking his so well regulated life, without letting himself be frightened or discouraged.

One day, indeed, when he found himself the object of the suspicions and vexations of a sort of vultures that surrounded him [i.e., certain Christians], obeying that [divine] Power which starts revolutions in this world, he left Athens and made a journey to Asia, where his residence became most profitable to him. For his guardian spirit (*daimonion*) furnished him the occasion of this departure in order that he might not remain ignorant of the ancient religious institutions which had been there preserved. Indeed, among the Lydians, he succeeded in gaining a clear conception of these doctrines, while they through long vicissitudes had come to neglect certain liturgical operations, received from him a more complete doctrine, because the philosopher more perfectly conceived what relates to the divinities. By doing this and in thus ordering his conduct, he succeeded in achieving oblivion, even better than the Pythagoreans observed the inviolate command of their master, to "live unnoticed."

After no more than a year's sojourn in Lydia he returned to Athens, guided by the providence of the deity friendly to wisdom [Athena].

That is how was firmly established in him the virtue of courage; first by nature, then by habit, then by science, and then by that practical wisdom which reasons from cause to effect. In another respect he showed that he knew how to put into practice his political art, by writing to the magistrates of towns, and by his suggestions rendering service to entire cities, as he did to the Athenians and the inhabitants of Andros, and elsewhere.

16. As a result of these sentiments he favored the development of literary activity, assisting those who devoted themselves to such occupations, claiming from the magistrates distribution of a living pension, or other subventions suited to their deserts. But in such matters he did not act without full information about the details, nor with any favoritism; nay, he compelled those in whom he took so serious an interest to fulfil their chosen avocations with zeal, questioning them, and examining all the minutiae of their tasks, for he was an excellent judge in all things. If he found someone who complied with his counsels only with negligence, he reprimanded them severely, so that in fact he may have appeared very irascible, and also very sensitive in respect to the consideration due him, because he was both willing and able to make accurate and certain judgements in all matters.

Indeed, he did love honors, but this love of reputation did not in him, as it does in others, degenerate into a passion. He was ambitious of glory only for virtue and goodness, and it is possible that without the energy inspired by this sentiment nothing great might be accomplished in this world.

Yes, I will grant that he was irascible; but he was simultaneously kind, for he was easily appeased, and in the winking of an eyelash his anger would melt like wax. For at the very moment that he was giving a reprimand his tender and sympathetic disposition led him to put the culprit under obligations, and to direct towards them the kind offices of the government.

17. It is fortunate that I should have been led to mention his trait of sympathy, which swayed him more powerfully than any other known man. Never having tasted the joys of family or of marriage,—that is, because he so elected it, having received many propositions very favorable from the standpoint of birth and fortune—having, therefore, remained free from these bonds, he showed such a solicitude

for his pupils and friends, and even for their wives and children, that he was looked upon as a common father and as the author of their existence. If any one of his acquaintances fell sick, he implored the gods on his behalf with ardent piety in sacrifices and hymns; then he visited the patient with a zealous solicitude, convoked the physicians and urged them without delay to apply their art, and himself suggested some more efficacious remedy, and thus saved many sick people in most dangerous crises.

As to his humanity towards his most familiar servants, it appears from the last will of this perfect good man. Of all the people he knew, the one he loved best was Archiadas, and after him, those who belonged to his family, especially because he belonged to the family of the philosopher Plutarch, and then because he had been his fellow student and teacher; for of these two forms of friendship which are so rarely recorded among the ancients, that which bound them seems to have been the most profound. There was nothing that Archiadas desired that Proclus did not desire, and reciprocally.

18. After having thus set forth the principle kinds of our philosopher's political virtues, which are crowned by friendship, and which are far inferior to the kinds of higher virtues, let us now proceed to a different kind, the virtues purificatory. For while these have the same function,—of purifying the soul and preparing it to attend freely to human affairs so as to achieve assimilation to God, which is the most perfect purpose of the soul—they do not all operate in the same manner, or to the same extent, some more, some less. Even if there are certain political purifications which give order and beauty to those who possess them, and make them better, even during their sojourn here below, because they impose limits and measure on irascible affections, and on sensual desires, and in general act to suppress passions, and false opinions, the purificatory virtues are superior to them, because they produce a separation that is complete, relieving us from the leaden burdens of the world of generation, and removing the obstacles to our flight from things here below.

These are virtues which our philosopher practiced all through a life devoted to philosophy, by eloquent lessons teaching their nature, how man acquires them, and especially by conforming his life to them, and practicing the actions by which the soul succeeds in separating itself, continually, by day or night, making use of the purificatory practices which woo us from evil, of lustrations, and of all other processes of purification, whether Orphic or Chaldean, such as dipping himself into the sea without hesitation every month, and sometimes even twice or thrice a month. He practiced this discipline, rude as it was, not only in his prime, but even also when he approached his life's decline; and so he observed, without ever failing, these austere habits of which he had, so to speak, made himself a law.

19. As to the necessary pleasures of food and drink, he made use of them with sobriety, for to him they were no more than a solace from his fatigues. He especially preached abstinence from animal food, but if a special ceremony compelled him to make use of it, he only tasted it, out of consideration and respect. Every month he sanctified himself according to the rites devoted to the Mother of the Gods [Cybele] by the Romans, and before them by the Phrygians; he observed the holy days observed among the Egyptians even more strictly than did they themselves; and especially he fasted on certain days, quite openly. During the first day of the lunar month he remained without food, without even having eaten the night before; and he likewise celebrated the New Moon in great solemnity, and with much sanctity. He regularly observed the great festivals of all peoples, so to speak, and the religious ceremonies peculiar to each people or country.

Nor did he, like so many others, make this the pretext of a distraction, or of a debauch of food, but on the contrary they were occasions of prayer meetings that lasted all night, without sleep, with songs, hymns and similar devotions. Of this we see the proof in the composition of his hymns, which contain homage and praises not only of the gods adored among the Greeks, but where you also see worship of the god Marnas of Gaza, Asklepius Leontuchus of Ascalon, Thyandrites who is much worshipped among the Arabs, the Isis who has a temple at Philae, and indeed all other divinities. It was a phrase he much used, and that was very familiar to him, that a philosopher should watch over the salvation of not only a city, nor over the national customs of a few people, but that he should be

the hierophant of the whole world in common. Such were the holy and purificatory exercises he practiced, in his austere manner of life.

That is how he avoided physical sufferings; and if he was overwhelmed by them he bore them with gentleness, and he dulled their keenness by not allowing his most perfect part to grow tender about himself. He showed the strength of his soul in the face of suffering in his last illness. Even when beaten down by it, a prey to atrocious sufferings, he was still trying to conjure the evil. He begged us in turn to read hymns, during which readings the suffering seemed appeased, and replaced by a sort of impassibility. What is still more surprising, he recalled all that he had heard read, even though the weakness which had overcome him had made him apparently lose the recognition of persons around him.

When we read the beginning of a hymn, he would recite its middle and end, especially when they were Orphic verses; for when we were near him we would recite some of them.

20. It was not only against physical sufferings that he showed insensibility; but when external events would unexpectedly strike him, seeming to be contrary to the usual course of events, he would on the occurrence of such events say, "Well, such are the habitual accidents of life!" This maxim has seemed to me worthy of preservation, because it bears strong testimony to our philosopher's strength of soul.

So far as possible, he repressed anger; rather, he did not allow it to break out at all, or rather it was only the sensitive part of the soul that was thereby affected; these involuntary movements no more than touched the rational part, and that only lightly and transitorily. As to sexual pleasures, I think that he admitted them only in the imaginative degree, and that only very superficially.

21. So the soul of this blessed man went on gathering itself, and concentrating itself, separating itself, so to speak, from its body, during the very time when it seemed contained in him. This soul possessed wisdom,—no longer only the political wisdom which consists in good behavior in the realm of contingent things, and which can seem otherwise than they are—but thought in itself, pure thought, which consists in returning unto one's self, and in refusing to unite with the body to acquire conjectural knowledge. It possessed the temperance which consists in not associating with the inferior element of our being, not even in limiting oneself to setting boundaries to our passions, but desiring to be absolutely exempt from all passion. It possessed the courage which for her consists in not fearing separation from the body. Since in him reason and pure thought were the rulers, the lower faculties no longer resisted purificative justice, and the virtues imparted to his whole life a perfect beauty.

22. Provided with this sort of virtues, without effort, and with a steady stride making constant progress in following the order of the degrees of mystic initiation, he achieved greater and higher [contemplative] virtues, as if led by the hand, first by his fortunate disposition, then by an education founded upon a profound science. For he was already purified from and raised above the world of generation and change, scorning the "many who carry the narthex,"⁴ who revel therein. He on the contrary intoxicated himself with love for the primary beings. So he had himself achieved seeing directly the really beatific visions from beyond, establishing his assured science not on apodictic and discursive syllogisms, but on what he could contemplate with his eyes, on the intuitions of intellectual activity, on the models contained within divine reason. So he acquired this virtue whose true and proper name is not science, but rather wisdom, *sophia*, or any other if possible more reverend name.

Conforming all his actions to this virtue, the philosopher had no trouble in understanding the whole Hellenic and foreign mythology, even those revelations which had been obscured by mythical fictions; and these he expounded for those who would or could attain their elevation, giving to all of them profoundly religious interpretations, and relating them all in a perfect harmony.

The writings of the most ancient authors he studied thoroughly, and after having subjected them

⁴ The reference is to Plato, *Phaedo* 69c-d, "The narthex-carriers are many but the bacchantes (true initiates) are few." In the mysteries of Dionysius, the initiates carried the *thyrsus* or Bacchic wand. This was a wand or stalk (*narthex*) wrapped in ivy and vine-leaves with a pine-cone at the top.

to criticism, he gathered whatever thoughts he therein found to be useful and fruitful; but whatever seemed to lack force or value he set aside, branding them ridiculous puerilities. What however was contrary to true principles, he very energetically discussed, submitting it to thorough-going criticism, in his lectures treating each one of these theories with as much clearness as vigor, and recording all his observations in books.

For without stint did he give himself up to his love for work, daily teaching five periods, and sometimes more, and writing much, about 700 lines. Nor did this labor hinder him from visiting other philosophers, from giving purely oral evening lectures, from practicing his devotions during the night, for which he denied himself sleep; and further, from worshipping the sun at dawn, noon, and dusk.

23. He is the author of many hitherto unknown theories, that were physical, intellectual, or still more divine. For he was the first to assert the existence of a kind of souls that are capable of simultaneously seeing several Ideas. He had very properly postulated their existence as intermediate between the Mind (*Nous*) which embraces all things together by a single intuition, and the souls whose discursive thoughts pass, and who are unable to conceive more than a single idea at one time.

If we wished, we might easily mention other doctrines formulated by him,—you need only undertake the reading of his works—which I have at present abstained from doing, in the fear of drawing out this essay too much, by commenting on these details. He who will undertake this work will recognize the truth of all that we have attributed to him.

Still better would this have been realized if one had seen him, if one had basked in his presence, if one had heard him deliver his lectures, and had heard him pronounce such noble discourses at his yearly celebrations of the birthdays of Socrates and Plato. It was quite noticeable that he was borne along by a divine inspiration when he spoke, when from this so wise a mouth flowed in waves the words, which flew like flakes of snow. Then it seemed that his eyes filled with a shining splendor, and all over his face spread rays of a divine illumination.

One day a very distinguished political personage named Rufinus, who was entirely trustworthy and honorable, while listening to one of his lectures, saw a halo surrounding his head. At the close, Rufinus rose, and saluted him with respect, under oath testifying to the divine manifestation of which he had been witness. It was this same Rufinus who offered Proclus a large sum of money on his return from Asia, after his political troubles. Proclus however refused this offering.

24. Let us however return to the subject we had begun above. After having, however inadequately, related what concerns his theoretic wisdom, we must now speak of that form of justice whose dignity equals this sort of virtues. Not like those of which we have spoken above does it consist of a plurality of parts, neither in the mutual agreement of those parts, but in an absolutely proper action, which belongs only to the thinking soul, and which therefore must be independently defined by itself. That which is peculiar to this virtue is that its action absolutely conforms to Mind (*Nous*) and to God; and this was the eminent characteristic of our philosopher's intellectual activity. For he hardly rested from the fatigues of his daily labors, and while he yielded his body to slumber, not even during these moments did his thought refrain from activity. So, after having early shaken off slumber, as a sort of psychic laziness, when his prayer-hour had not yet arrived because the night was far from having elapsed, alone, in his bed, he composed hymns, examined certain theories, and searched for ideas, which he later committed to writing at the coming of day.

25. He possessed the temperance which accompanies this noetic order of virtues, consisting of the soul's internal conversion towards reason, and the moral disposition which allows itself neither to be touched nor shaken by anything else. In all its perfection, its accompanying courage was manifested by Proclus, who sought to imitate this principle's state of passionlessness, which is imperturbable in its real essence. In short, as says Plotinus, not of the worthy man's life whom political virtue has rendered good and able to live, but, scorning this very life, he exchanged it for another, the life of the gods; for Proclus wished to resemble them, and not merely worthy individuals.

26. He already possessed and practiced these virtues when he was still studying with the

philosopher Syrianus, and while reading the treatises of the ancient philosophers; from his master's lips he had gathered the primary elements, and so to speak the germs of the Orphic and Chaldean theology. But Proclus never had the time to explain the Orphic poems.

Syrianus had indeed planned to explain to him and to Syrian Domninus, either one of these works, the Orphic writings or the [Chaldean] Oracles, and had left the choice to them. But they did not agree in choosing the same work, Domninus choosing the Orphic, Proclus the Chaldean. This disagreement hindered Syrianus from doing anything, and then he soon died.

Therefore Proclus had received from him only the first principles; but he studied the master's notes on the Orphics, and also the very numerous works of Porphyry and Iamblichus on the Oracles and other kindred Chaldean writings. Thus imbued with the divine Oracles, he achieved the highest of the virtues which the divine Iamblichus has so magnificently called the 'theurgic.' So Proclus combined the interpretations of his predecessors into a compendium that cost him much labor, and which he subjected to the most searching criticism, and he inserted therein the most characteristically Chaldean hypotheses, as well as the best drawn from the preceding commentaries written on the Oracles communicated by the divinities.

It was in regard to this work, which took him more than five years, that, in a dream, he had a divine vision. It seemed to him that the great Plutarch predicted to him that he would live a number of years equal to the four-page folios he had composed on the Oracles. Having counted them, he found that there were seventy of them. The eventual close of his life proves that this dream was divine; for although, as we have said above, he lived five years beyond seventy, in these he was very much weakened. The too severe, nay, excessive austerity of his rule of life, his frequent ablutions, and other similar ascetic habits, had exhausted this constitution that nature had made so vigorous; so after his seventieth year he began to decline so that he could no longer attend to all his duties. In this condition he limited himself to praying, to composing hymns, to conversing with his friends,—all of which, however, still weakened him. Yet, remembering the dream that he had, he would be surprised about it, and would jokingly say that he had lived no more than seventy years.

In spite of this great state of feebleness, Hegias induced him to take up his lectures again; from childhood this youth showed manifest signs of his ancestral virtues, which proved that he belonged to the family of the veritable golden chain, which began with Plato's ancestor Solon; and with zeal did he study the writings of Plato and the other theologians.

The old man confided to him his manuscripts, and felt great joy at seeing what giant's steps he was taking in the advancement of all the sciences. So enough about his Chaldean studies.

27. One day while reading with him the Orphic writings, and hearing him, in his commentaries, quoting the interpretations not only of Iamblichus and Syrianus, but also of many more authorities who had explored the depths of theology, I begged the philosopher not to leave this divine Orphic poetry without complete commentaries. He answered me that he had often planned to undertake this, but that he had been hindered by certain dreams of Syrianus who discouraged him therefrom with threats. Thinking of no other expedient, I suggested that he at least paraphrase what he approved of in his master's books. He was kind enough to yield, and wrote certain notes at the beginning of these commentaries. That is how we possess a compendium of all the writings relating to this same author and very extensive notes and commentaries on the Orphics, although he did not consent to do this work on all the Orphic Myths and Rhapsodies.

28. But since, as I said before, by his studies on this subject, he had acquired a still greater and more perfect virtue, namely the theurgic, passing beyond the theoretic step, he did not conform his life exclusively to one of the two characteristics suitable to divine beings, but to both: not only did he direct his thoughts upward to the divine, but by a providential faculty which was not merely social, he cared for those things which were lower.

He practiced the Chaldean prayer-meetings and conferences, and even employed the art of moving the divine tops.⁵ He was a believer in these practices, in unpremeditated responses, and other such

⁵ A reference to the Chaldaean practice of *Strophalomancy* or the use of rotating tops for divination.

divinations, which he had learned from Asklepigenia, daughter of Plutarch, to whom exclusively her father had confided and taught the mystic rites preserved by Nestorius, and the whole theurgic science.

Even before that, according to the prescribed order, and purified by the Chaldean lustrations, the philosopher had, as epoptic initiate, witnessed the apparitions of Hecate under a luminous form, as he himself has mentioned in a special booklet.

He had the power of producing rains by activating, at the right time, a particular rite, and was able to deliver Attica from a terrible drought. He knew how to foresee earthquakes, he had experimented with the divinatory power of the tripod, and had himself uttered verses prophetic about his own destiny.

When 40 years old, he felt that in a dream he had uttered the following verses: "Here broods an immortal splendor, that is supercelestial, which has sprung from the consecrated spring, and whence streams a fiery light!"

At the beginning of his 42nd year, he so seemed to be shouting the following verses: "I am possessed by a spirit which breathes into me the force of fire, which, enfolding and entrancing my reason in a whirl of flame, flies toward the aether, and with its immortal vibrations reechoes in the starry vaults!"

Besides, in a dream he had clearly seen that he belonged to the Hermetic Chain; and, on the authority of a dream, he was convinced that his was the reincarnated soul of the Pythagorean Nicomachus.

29. If we wished to do so, we might easily extend our observations on the theurgic labors of this blessed man. From among thousands, I will mention but one, which is really miraculous. One day Asklepigenia, daughter of Archiadas and Plutarque, and [now] wife of our benefactor Theagenes, being still small, and being raised at her parents', became ill with a sickness pronounced incurable by the physicians. Archiadas was in despair, as the child was the family's only hope, and naturally uttered distressful lamentations. Seeing her abandoned by the physicians, the father, as in the gravest circumstances of life, turned to his last resort, and ran to the philosopher's, as to the only person who could save her, and urgently besought him to come and pray for his daughter. The latter, taking with him the great Lydian Pericles, who also was a genuine philosopher, ran to the temple of Asklepius to pray to God in favor of the patient, for Athens was still fortunate enough to possess it, and it had not yet been sacked [by the Christians].

While he was praying according to the ancient rite, suddenly a change manifested in the little girl's condition, and there occurred a sudden improvement,—for the Savior, being a divinity, swiftly gave her back her health. On completing the religious ceremonies, Proclus visited Asklepigenia, who had just been delivered from the sufferings that had assailed her, and who now was in perfect health. He had indeed performed his vows and offered his prayers in spite of everybody, so as to preclude any possibility of malicious slander, and the whole household had taken part in this act.

This indeed was one of Proclus's good fortunes, that he lived in the house that suited him best, where had dwelt both Syrianus, whom he called his father, and Plutarch, whom he called his grandfather. It was in the vicinity of the Asklepius temple which Sophocles had immortalized, and of the Dionysus temple near the theater, and was in sight of the Acropolis.

30. His choice of the philosophic life amply proves how dear he was to the goddess friendly to wisdom [Athena], But the goddess testified to that herself when the statue of the goddess which had been erected in the Parthenon had been removed by the [Christian] people who move that which should not be moved. In a dream the philosopher thought he saw coming to him a woman of great beauty, who announced to him that he must as quickly prepare his house "because the Athenian Lady wishes to dwell with you."

How high he stood in the esteem of Asklepius has already been shown in the story I have related above, and we were, in his last malady, thereof convinced by the god's appearance. For being in a

semi-waking condition, he saw a serpent⁶ creeping around his head, and from this moment on he felt relieved from his suffering; and he had the feeling that this apparition would cure him from his disease. But he seemed to have been restrained by an ardent and even violent desire for death, and I am indeed certain that he would have completely recovered his health if he had been willing to receive the cares demanded by his condition.

31. Here is one more fact worthy of being remembered, and that I cannot recall without tears. Now arthritis is a disease which is frequently, and even habitually transmitted from parents to children; and as his father had suffered therefrom, Proclus had always feared that it would afflict him also; and in my opinion, his fears were not entirely groundless, for, before the incident I am about to relate, he had felt pains of this nature, when took place another and very surprising incident.

On the advice of certain persons he put on the afflicted foot a bandage. While he was stretched out on his bed, suddenly a sparrow halted in his flight and carried it away. This was a divine sign that was really paeonic,⁷ and of a nature that should have inspired him with confidence for the future; but even in spite of this he did not any the less experience fears of being later on visited by this malady.

Having therefore implored the divinity on this subject, and having besought a clear guidance on this subject, while sleeping he saw something that is so bold, apparently, that I have to appeal to my courage to openly proclaim the truth of the matter. So he seemed to see somebody who was returning from Epidaurus,⁸ who bent over his legs, and without hesitation, showing a gesture of tender affection, kissed his knees. From this day on, he lived his whole life long without any anxiety about this subject, and he reached an extreme old age without feeling even a twinge of this disorder.

32. The god of Adrotta [in Lydia] most openly showed this holy man's affinities with him. For when Proclus visited him, the god showed Proclus his favor by appearing to him. Because the natives were not in agreement as to which god or gods resided in this place, and were worshipped, Proclus was in doubt about it and desired enlightenment. Resting on numerous testimonies, some supposed that it was a temple of Asklepius; they said that voices really resounded there, that a table was consecrated to that god, and that there had been received there oracular responses relative to health; and that those who came for consultation were cured of the most dangerous maladies, against all hope. Others, on the contrary, thought it was the Dioscuri⁹ who haunted that temple, for some persons thought that they had seen on the highway leading to Adrotta two young men, of an extreme beauty, riding horses of great speed, who said that they were going in all haste to the temple, so that, at first glance it had been believed they were human beings; but soon after the onlookers were convinced that it was a really divine manifestation, because when they themselves arrived at the temple and asked questions, they were told by the local officiating attendants that nothing had been seen there, the horsemen having vanished into thin air.

Proclus was therefore uncertain, and hardly knew what credit to give to the facts related. So he begged the local divinities to reveal their true and proper character by some indubitable testimony. In a dream then he saw a god coming to him and speaking clearly to him, thus:

“What, did you not hear Iamblichus say who those two persons were when he praised the names of Machaon and Podilarius [sons of Asklepius]?”

Thereupon the divinity gave this holy man a testimony of his good will. Just as in the theater orators pronounce panegyrics of great men, the god stood up, and with a gesture of his hand, and in a dramatic tone, with great force uttered these words (for I will repeat the exact words uttered by the divinity): “Proclus is the glory of the fatherland!” What greater proof of the gods' affection for this really blessed man could be adduced? After having received such sympathetic testimonies from the divinities, Proclus would burst into tears, every time he would recall to us what he had seen, and the divine praise uttered about him.

⁶ a symbol of Asclepius

⁷ Belonging to Apollo.

⁸ Epidaurus was the center of the Asclepius cult

⁹ Castor and Pollux.

33. But if I was to enumerate all the facts of this kind, and to report the particular devotion which he held for Pan, son of Hermes, the great favors he received, and the numerous times he was, in Athens, saved by intervention of the divinity, and to relate in detail the protections and the advantages he received from the Mother of the Gods, of which he was particularly proud and happy, I would no doubt seem chattering vainly, to those who may light on this book by chance, and some may even think I am saying things little worthy of belief. For there were a considerable number of episodes, that were of almost daily occurrence, when this goddess [Cybele] spoke or acted in his favor; and their number and character are so unusual that I myself do not have their exact and precise memory.

If anyone desires to know with what favor he was attached to this goddess, let him read Proclus's book on the Mother of the Gods, and it will be seen that with inspiration from on high he has been able to expound the whole theology relative to the goddess, and to explain philosophically all that the liturgical actions and the oral instructions mythically teach us about the goddess, and Attis, so that they will no longer be troubled by those seemingly absurd lamentations [for Attis] and all the secret traditions related in her ceremonies.

34. After having rapidly and cursorily exhibited the actions and fortunate results of his theurgic virtues, after having shown that it was quite on the level with all his other virtues, and that to a degree unheard of for several centuries, we must now come to a close. For us, the beginning was not merely the beginning, nay, nor even as says the proverb, the half of the whole, but it was the entirety. For we began by happiness; happiness was the middle, and here we are brought back to happiness. In this exposition we have demonstrated the goods which the gods and providence in general procured for this worthy man; we have shown their disposition to listen to him favorably, their appearances, their solicitude, and all their assistances, all the favors which he was allotted by destiny, and Good Fortune, fatherland, parents, strength, and natural beauty of body, teachers and friends, and all the other advantages which, by their greatness and splendor, are very superior to those seen among other men,—all this we have brought out.

We have in addition enumerated those superiorities which he owed to his own will, and which did not come to him from an exterior or extraneous source,—such as the moral greatness of his soul, the resultant of all his virtues. In short, we have expounded that his soul's activity in all the steps he took conformed to perfect virtue, and that during a perfect life he was showered with all other human and divine benefits.

35. But in order that persons interested in noble sciences may, by the position of the stars under which he came into the world, conclude that the life which Fate allotted to him was not disposed in the lowest, nor even in medium conditions, but rather in the highest, we have arranged the table of the position of the heavens, such as it was at the moment of his birth:

The Sun was in Aries, at 16 degrees 26 minutes

The Moon was in Gemini, at 17 degrees 29 minutes

Saturn in Taurus, at 24 degrees 23 minutes

Jupiter in Taurus, at 24 degrees 41 minutes

Mars in Sagittarius at 29 degrees 50 minutes

Venus in Pisces, at 23 degrees

Mercury in Aquarius at 4 degrees 42 minutes

The horoscope was taken in Aries at 8 degrees 19 minutes

The meridian in Capricorn at 4 degrees 42 minutes

The ascendant at 24 degrees 33 minutes

The preceding New Moon in Aquarius at 8 degrees 51 minutes.

36. Proclus left this world in the 124th year from Julian's accession to the empire [361 C.E.] under the archonship of the younger Nicagoras in Athens on the seventeenth day of the month Munychion, or the seventeenth of April [485 C.E.]. His body received the funerary honors usual among the Athenians, as he himself had requested; for more than any other did this blessed man have the

knowledge and practice of funerary honors due the dead. Under no circumstances did he neglect to render the customary homages, and on fixed yearly dates he went to visit the tombs of the Attic heroes, those of the philosophers, of his friends, and acquaintances; he performed the rites prescribed by religion, and not through some deputy, but personally. After having fulfilled this pious duty towards each of them, he went to the Academy, in a certain particular place, and by vows and prayers, he invoked the souls of his ancestors, collectively and separately; and, in another part of the building, in common with others, he made libations in honor of all those who had practiced philosophy.

After all that, this holy person traced out a third distinct space and offered a sacrifice to all the souls of the dead.

His body, clothed and arranged as I have said above, according to his own request, and carried by his friends, was buried in the most easterly part of the suburbs, near Mount Lycabettus, where rested the body of his teacher Syrianus. For it was Syrianus's own desire, expressed to the pupil, in view of which Proclus had caused a double funerary monument to be erected. But after Syrianus's death, Proclus wondered whether this was not contrary to respect and proprieties; but in a dream he saw Syrianus reproaching and threatening him for these questionings, and blamed him for harboring such thoughts. So [matters remained, and when Proclus died we] engraved on [the vacant part of the double monument] an inscription in four verses, which he himself had composed, as follows:

I, Proclus am of Lycian origin;

Syrianus here nourished me with his lessons, to succeed as teacher;

This same tomb has received our bodies, May our two souls find the same abode!

37. A year before his death there were celestial prodigies, such as a solar eclipse which caused nocturnal darkness during daytime; the stars appeared, and it occurred at the moment when the sun was in the eastern center of Capricorn. The specialists who busy themselves with describing the daily weather mention a second one which was to occur exactly one year after his death.

These disorders to which the heavens are subject are said to be signs of events which happen on earth; in any case they suggested to us the disappearance and the eclipse of philosophy at that time.

38. The facts about our philosopher that I have just related are sufficient for me; but the field is open for whoever may desire to write an honest story about his disciples and friends. For many people came from different countries to attend his courses, some only to hear him, others to become his rivals, and then were bound to him in philosophical union. A writer more laborious than I will be able to make out the general list of his works, for my only purpose has been to satisfy a duty imposed by my conscience, and to satisfy my debt of pious homage toward this divine person, and towards the Good Daimon to whom he had been allotted.

As to his writings, I will limit myself to the statement that he always preferred his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, although he had a great fondness for his *Commentary on the Theatetus*. He would often say, "If I had the power, of all ancient books I would leave in circulation only the Oracles and the *Timaeus*; all the others, I would make them disappear from the eyes of our contemporaries, for they can only harm those who undertake their reading without care and attention!"

Proclus or Concerning Happiness has been completed with the help of God.