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Soc. Alcibiades, are you on your way to offer a prayer to the god?

Alc. I am, certainly, Socrates.

Soc. You seem, let me say, to have a gloomy look, and to keep your eyes on the ground, as though you were pondering something.

Alc. And what might one ponder, Socrates?

Soc. The greatest of questions, Alcibiades, as I believe. For tell me, in Heaven's name, do you not think that the gods sometimes grant in part, but in part refuse, what we ask of them in our private and public prayers, and gratify some people, but not others?

Alc. I do, certainly.

Soc. Then you would agree that one should take great precautions against falling unawares into the error of praying for great evils in the belief that they are good, while the gods happen to be disposed to grant freely what one is praying for? Just as Oedipus, they say, suddenly prayed that his sons might divide their patrimony with the sword: it was open to him to pray that his present evils might by some means be averted, but he invoked others in addition to those which he had already. Wherefore not only were those words of his accomplished, but many other dread results therefrom, which I think there is no need to recount in detail.

Alc. But you have instanced a madman, Socrates: why, do you suppose that anyone could bring himself, while he was in a sound state, to utter such a prayer?

Soc. Do you regard madness as the opposite of wisdom?

Alc. Certainly I do.

Soc. And there are some men whom you regard as unwise, and others as wise?

Alc. Why, yes.

Soc. Come then, let us consider who these people are. We have admitted that some are unwise, some wise, and others mad.

Alc. Yes, we have.

Soc. And again, there are some in sound health?

Alc. There are.

Soc. And others also who are in ill-health?

Alc. Quite so.

Soc. And they are not the same?

Alc. No, indeed.

Soc. And are there any others besides, who are found to be in neither state?

Alc. No, to be sure.

Soc. For a human being must needs be either sick or not sick.

Alc. I agree.

Soc. Well then, do you hold the same view about wisdom and unwisdom?

Alc. How do you mean?

Soc. Tell me, do you think it is only possible to be either wise or unwise, or is there some third condition between these, which makes a man neither wise nor unwise?

Alc. No, there is not.

Soc. So he must needs be in one or the other of these two conditions.

Alc. I agree.

Soc. And you remember that you admitted that madness is the opposite of wisdom?

Alc. I do.

Soc. And further, that there is no third condition between these, which makes a man neither wise nor unwise?

Alc. Yes, I admitted that.

Soc. Well now, can there possibly be two opposites of one thing?

Alc. By no means.

Soc. Then it looks as though unwisdom and madness were the same.

Alc. Yes, apparently.

Soc. So we shall be right, Alcibiades, in saying that all unwise

persons are mad; for example, such of your contemporaries as happen to be unwise—some such there are—and of your elders, even: for tell me, in Heaven's name, do you not think that in our city the wise people are but few, whereas the majority are unwise, and these you call mad?

Alc. I do.

Soc. Well, do you suppose we could safely live with so many madmen as our fellow-citizens, and should not long ago have paid the penalty for it in knocks and blows at their hands, and all the usual proceedings of madmen? Consider now, my wonderful friend, whether the case is not quite different?

Alc. Well, it must be, Socrates. For it looks as though it were not as I thought.

Soc. And I think so too. But there is another way of regarding it.

Alc. I wonder what way you mean.

Soc. Well, I will tell you. We conceive there are some who are sick, do we not?

Alc. We do, to be sure.

Soc. And do you believe that a sick man must necessarily have the gout, or a fever, or ophthalmia? Do you not think that, although he may be afflicted in none of these ways, he may be suffering from some other disease? For surely there are many of them: these are not the only ones.

Alc. I agree.

Soc. And is every ophthalmia, in your opinion, a disease?

Alc. Yes.

Soc. And is every disease also ophthalmia?

Alc. No, I should think not: still, I am in doubt as to my meaning.

Soc. Well, if you will attend to me, "two together" [1] will be searching, and so mayhap we shall find what we seek.

Alc. Nay, but I am attending, Socrates, to the best of my power.

Soc. Then we have admitted that while every ophthalmia is a disease, every disease, on the other hand, is not ophthalmia?

Alc. We have.

Soc. And our admission seems to me quite right. For everyone in a fever is sick, but yet not everyone who is sick has a fever or the gout

[1] Cf. *Hom. Il. 10.224 σύν τε δύ' ἐρχομένω, καί τε πρὸ ὃ τοῦ ἐνόησεν ὅππως κέρδος ἔῃ*, if two go along together, then one marks before the other how advantage may be had.

or ophthalmia, I take it; though everything of the sort is a disease, but differs—to quote those whom we call doctors— in its manifestation. [2] For they are not all alike, nor of like effect, but each works according to its own faculty, and yet all are diseases. In the same way, we conceive of some men as artisans, do we not?

Alc. Certainly.

Soc. That is, cobblers and carpenters and statuaries and a host of others, whom we need not mention in particular; but any way, they have their several departments of craft, and all of them are craftsmen; yet they are not all carpenters or cobblers or statuaries, though these taken together are craftsmen.

Alc. No, indeed.

Soc. In the same way, then, have men divided unwisdom also among them, and those who have the largest share of it we call "mad," and those who have a little less, "dolts" and "idiots"; though people who prefer to use the mildest language term them sometimes "romantic," [3] sometimes simpleminded, [4] or again "innocent," "inexperienced," or "obtuse"; and many another name will you find if you look for more. But all these things are unwisdom, though they differ, as we observed that one art or one disease differs from another. Or how does it strike you?

Alc. That is my view.

Soc. Then let us turn at this point and retrace our steps. For we said, you know, at the beginning that we must consider who the unwise can be, and who the wise: for we had admitted that there are such persons, had we not?

Alc. Yes, we have admitted it.

Soc. Then you conceive those to be wise who know what one ought to do and say?

Alc. I do.

Soc. And which are the unwise? Those who know neither of these things?

Alc. The same.

Soc. And those who know neither of these things will say and do unawares what one ought not?

[2] *ἀπεργασία* here seems to be used for effect produced instead of its usual meaning, fully effecting, completion.

[3] *μεγαλόψυχος* has here declined from high-souled or magnanimous to something like Quixotic.

[4] *εὐήθης*, even in Plato's time, varied between good-hearted and silly.

Alc. Apparently.

Soc. Well, just such a person, as I was saying, Alcibiades, was Oedipus; and even in our time you will find many who do the same, not in a fit of anger, as he was: they think they pray not for something evil, but for something good. He neither prayed for that, nor thought he did, but there are others who are in the opposite case. For I imagine that if the god to whom you are now going should appear to you and first ask you, before you made any prayer, whether you would be content to become sovereign of the Athenian state and, on your accounting this as something poor and unimportant, should add "and of all the Greeks also"; and if he saw you were still unsatisfied unless he promised you besides the mastery of all Europe, and should not merely promise you that, but on the self-same day a recognition by all men, if you so desired, of Alcibiades, son of Cleinias, as their sovereign—I imagine you would actually depart in a transport of delight, as having secured the greatest of goods.

Alc. So would anybody else, I imagine, Socrates, at such a stroke of luck!

Soc. But still you would not wish to sacrifice your life even for the territory and sovereignty of all the Greeks and barbarians together.

Alc. I should think not. How could I, without a prospect of making any use of them?

Soc. And what if you had a prospect of making an evil and injurious use of them? Not in this case either?

Alc. No, indeed.

Soc. So you see it is not safe either to accept casually what one is given, or to pray for one's own advancement, if one is going to be injured in consequence, or deprived of one's life altogether. Yet we could tell of many ere now who, having desired sovereignty, and endeavored to secure it, with the idea of working for their good, have lost their lives by plots which their sovereignty has provoked. And I expect you are not unacquainted with certain events "of a day or two ago,"*Hom. Il. 2.303* when Archelaus, the monarch of Macedonia, was slain [5] by his favorite, who was as much in love with the monarchy as Archelaus was with him, and who killed his lover with the expectation of being not only the monarch, but also a happy man: but after holding the monarchy for three or four days he was plotted against by others in his turn, and perished.

[5]This assassination occurred in 399 B.C., the year of Socrates' death.

Soc. You have only to look at some of our own citizens—and these are examples that we know, not by hearsay, but by personal observation—who in their time have desired to hold military command and have obtained it, and see how some to this very day are exiles from our city, while others have lost their lives. And even those who are deemed to be faring best have not only gone through many dangers and terrors in holding their command, but on returning home have continued to be as sorely besieged by informers as they were by the enemy, so that some of them wished to heaven that they had been anything but commanders rather than have held such appointments. Of course, if these dangers and toils were conducive to our advantage, there would be some reason for them; but the case is quite the contrary. And you will find it is just the same in regard to children: some people have been known to pray that they might have them, and when they have got them have fallen into the greatest disasters and pains. For some have had children that were utterly bad, and have spent their whole lives in repining; while others, though they had good ones, were bereft of them by disasters that overtook them, and thus were cast into as great misfortune as the others, and wished that no children at all had been born to them. But nevertheless, with all this plain evidence, and a great deal more of a similar kind, before men's eyes, it is rare to find anyone who has either declined what was offered to him or, when he was likely to gain something by prayer, refrained from praying. Most men would not decline the offer of either a monarchy or a generalship or any of the various other things which bring with them harm rather than benefit, but would even pray to be granted them in cases where they were lacking: but after a little while they often change their tune, and retract all their former prayers. I question therefore if men are not really wrong in blaming the gods as the authors of their ills, when "they themselves by their own presumption"*Hom. Od. 1.32*—or unwisdom, shall we say?— "have gotten them more than destined sorrows."*Hom. Od. 1.32* It would seem, at any rate, Alcibiades, that one old poet had some wisdom; for I conceive it was because he had some foolish friends, whom he saw working and praying for things that were not for their advantage, though supposed to be by them, that he made a common prayer on behalf of them all, in terms something like these: " King Zeus, give unto us what is good, whether we pray or pray not; But what is grievous, even if we pray for it, do thou avert. " *Anth. Pal. 10.108.*

Soc. So then, to my mind the poet spoke well and soundly; but if you have thought of an answer to his words, do not be silent.

Alc. It is difficult, Socrates, to gainsay what has been well spoken: one thing, however, I do observe —how many evils are caused to men by ignorance, when, as it seems, we are beguiled by her not only into doing, but—worst of all—into praying to be granted the greatest evils. Now that is a thing that no one would suppose of himself; each of us would rather suppose he was competent to pray for his own greatest good, not his greatest evil. Why, that would seem, in truth, more like some sort of curse than a prayer!

Soc. But perhaps, my excellent friend, some person who is wiser than either you or I may say we are wrong to be so free with our abuse of ignorance, unless we can add that it is ignorance of certain things, and is a good to certain persons in certain conditions, as to those others it is an evil.

Alc. How do you mean? Can there be anything of which it is better for anybody, in any condition whatsoever, to be ignorant than cognizant?

Soc. I believe so; and do not you?

Alc. No, indeed, upon my word.

Soc. But surely I shall not have to tax you with an inclination to commit such an act against your own mother as Orestes and Alcmaeon, and any others who have followed their example, are said to have committed against theirs.

Alc. No unlucky words, in Heaven's name, Socrates!

Soc. Why, it is not the person who says, Alcibiades, that you would not like to be guilty of such an act, whom you should bid avoid unlucky words, but much rather him who might say the contrary; since the act seems to you so very dreadful as to be unfit even for such casual mention. But do you think that Orestes, if he had had all his wits about him and had known what was best for him to do, would have brought himself to commit any act of the sort?

Alc. No, indeed.

Soc. Nor would anyone else, I imagine.

Alc. No.

Soc. Then it seems that ignorance of what is best, and to be ignorant of the best, is a bad thing.

Alc. I agree.

Soc. And not only for the person himself, but for everyone else?

Alc. Yes.

Soc. Then let us consider this further case. Suppose it should quite

suddenly occur to your mind that you had better take a dagger and go to the door of Pericles, your own guardian and friend, and ask if he were at home, with the design of killing just him and no one else, and his servants said he was at home: now, I do not say you would be inclined to do any such thing, but I suppose, if you are under the impression which at some moment may well be present, surely, to the mind of a man who is ignorant of the best—that what is really the worst is best at some moment—or do you not agree?

Alc. Quite so.

Soc. Well then, if you went indoors and saw Pericles himself, but did not know him, and thought he was somebody else, would you still venture to kill him?

Alc. No, upon my word, I should think not.

Soc. For your man was, I presume, not anyone you met, but that particular person whom you wished to kill?

Alc. Yes.

Soc. And although you might make a number of attempts, if you always failed to know Pericles when you were about to commit the act, you would never attack him.

Alc. No, indeed.

Soc. Well now, do you suppose that Orestes would ever have attacked his mother if he had similarly failed to know her?

Alc. I do not think he would.

Soc. For presumably he, too, had no intention of killing the first woman he met, or anybody else's mother, but only his own.

Alc. That is so.

Soc. Then to be ignorant in such matters is better for those who are so disposed and have formed such resolves.

Alc. Apparently.

Soc. So you see that ignorance of certain things is for certain persons in certain states a good, not an evil, as you supposed just now.

Alc. It seems to be.

Soc. Then if you care to consider the sequel of this, I daresay it will surprise you.

Alc. What may that be, Socrates?

Soc. I mean that, generally speaking, it rather looks as though the possession of the sciences as a whole, if it does not include possession

of the science of the best, will in a few instances help, but in most will harm, the owner. Consider it this way: must it not be the case, in your opinion, that when we are about to do or say anything, we first suppose that we know, or do really know, the thing we so confidently intend to say or do?

Alc. I think so.

Soc. Well, take the orators, for example: they either know, or think they know, how to advise us on various occasions—some about war and peace, and others about building walls or fitting up harbors; and in a word, whatever the city does to another city or within herself, all comes about by the advice of the orators.

Alc. That is true.

Soc. Then observe the consequence.

Alc. If I am able.

Soc. Why, surely you call men either wise or unwise?

Alc. I do.

Soc. And the many unwise, and the few wise?

Alc. Precisely.

Soc. And in either case you name them in reference to something?

Alc. Yes.

Soc. Then do you call a man wise who knows how to give advice, without knowing whether and when it is better to act upon it?

Alc. No, indeed.

Soc. Nor, I conceive, a man who knows what war is in itself, without knowing when or for how long a time it is better to make war?

Alc. Agreed.

Soc. Nor, again, a man who knows how to kill another, or seize his property, or make him an exile from his native land, without knowing when or to whom it is better so to behave?

Alc. No, to be sure.

Soc. Then it is a man who knows something of this sort, and is assisted by knowledge of what is best,—and this is surely the same as knowledge of the useful, is it not?

Alc. Yes.

Soc. And we shall call him wise, and a competent adviser both of the city and of his own self; but a man not so qualified we shall call the opposite of these. How do you think?

Alc. I agree.

Soc. And what of a man who knows how to ride or shoot, or else to box or wrestle or contend in any other sport, or do anything that we know by rule of art? What do you call him who knows what is better done by rule of that particular art? Do you not say that he who goes by the rules of riding is a good rider?

Alc. I do.

Soc. And the rules of boxing, I suppose, make a good boxer, and those of flute-playing a good flute-player, and so, on the same lines, [6] I presume, with the rest; or is there any difference?

Alc. No, it is as you say.

Soc. Then do you think it inevitable that he who has some knowledge about these things should also be a wise man, or shall we say he comes far short of it?

Alc. Far short of it, I declare.

Soc. Then what sort of state do you suppose it would be, where the people were good bowmen and flute-players, together with athletes and artists in general, and mingled with these the men whom we have just mentioned as knowing war in itself and slaughter in itself, and orator-windbags too with their political bluster, but all of them lacked this knowledge of the best, and none knew when or upon whom it was better to employ their respective arts?

Alc. A paltry one, I should call it, Socrates.

Soc. Yes, you would, I expect, when you saw each one of them vying with the other and assigning the largest part in the conduct of the state to that"Wherein himself is found most excellent,"*Eur. Antiope, Fr.* [7] I mean, what is done best by rule of his particular art—while he is entirely off the track of what is best for the state and for himself, because, I conceive, he has put his trust in opinion apart from intelligence. In these circumstances, should we not be right in saying that such a state is one great mass of turmoil and lawlessness?

Alc. We should, upon my word.

Soc. And we took it to be necessary that we should first think we know, or really know, anything that we confidently intend either to do or to say?

Alc. We did.

Soc. And if a man does what he knows or thinks he knows, and is assisted by knowing how to make it beneficial, we shall find him

[6] *ἀνὰ λόγον* occurs, with the genitive, in *Plat. Tim. 29c*; the normal Platonic phrase for our passage is *ὡσαύτως*.

[7] Cf. *Plat. Gorg. 484e.*

profitable both to the city and to himself?

Alc. Certainly.

Soc. But if, I suppose, he does the contrary, he will not be so either to the city or to himself?

Alc. No, indeed.

Soc. Well then, do you still take the same view now as before, or do you think differently?

Alc. No, I take the same view.

Soc. And you said you called the many unwise, and the few wise?

Alc. I did.

Soc. So now we repeat our statement that the many have missed getting the best because in most cases, I conceive, they have put their trust in opinion apart from intelligence.

Alc. Yes.

Soc. Then it is an advantage to the many neither to know nor to think they know anything, if they are going to be specially eager to do what they know or think they know, but are likely on the whole, in doing it, to be injured rather than benefited.

Alc. That is very true.

Soc. So you see that when I said it looked as though the possession of the sciences as a whole, where it did not include the science of the best, in a few cases helped, but in most harmed the owner, I was evidently right in very truth, was I not?

Alc. Though I did not then, I think so now, Socrates.

Soc. Hence the state or soul that is to live aright must hold fast to this knowledge, exactly as a sick man does to a doctor, or as he who would voyage safely does to a pilot. For without this, the more briskly it is wafted by fortune either to the acquisition of wealth or to bodily strength or aught else of the sort, the greater will be the mistakes in which these things, it would seem, must needs involve it. And he who has acquired the so-called mastery of learning and arts, but is destitute of this knowledge and impelled by this or that one among those others, is sure to meet with much rough weather, as he truly deserves; since, I imagine, he must continue without a pilot on the high seas, and has only the brief span of his life in which to run his course. So that his case aptly fits the saying of the poet, in which he complains of somebody or other that "Full many crafts he knew: but stillHe knew them all so very ill."*Margites, Fr.* [8]

Alc. Why, how on earth is the poet's saying apposite, Socrates? For to my mind it has nothing to do with the point.

Soc. It is very much to the point: but he, good sir, like almost every other poet, speaks in riddles. For poetry as a whole is by nature inclined to riddling, and it is not every man who can apprehend it. And furthermore, besides having this natural tendency, when it gets hold of a grudging person who wishes not to show forth to us his own wisdom but to conceal it as much as possible, we find it an extraordinarily difficult matter to make out whatever this or that one of them may mean. For surely you do not suppose that Homer, divinest and wisest of poets, did not know it was impossible to know ill; for it is he who says of Margites that he knew many things, but knew them all ill: but it is a riddle, I think, in which he has made "ill" stand for "evil," and "knew" for "to know." So if we put it together, letting the meter go, indeed, but grasping his meaning, we get this: "Full many crafts he knew, but it was evil for him to know them all." [9] Then clearly, if it was evil for him to know many things, he was in fact a paltry fellow, assuming we are to believe what we have previously argued.

Alc. But I think we may, Socrates: at least, if I cannot believe those arguments of ours, I shall find it hard to trust any others.

Soc. And you are right in so thinking.

Alc. I repeat that I think so.

Soc. But come now, in Heaven's name—for I suppose you see how great and strange is our perplexity, in which you, as it seems to me, have your share; for you change about from this side to that without settling down for a moment, but as soon as you are firmly convinced of a thing you seem to slip out of it again and cease to hold the same view—well, if the god to whom you are going should even now appear to you and ask before you uttered any prayer, whether you would be content to obtain one of those things which were mentioned at the beginning, or whether he should leave you to pray as you were, how do you suppose you would make the best of your chance—by accepting his offer, or by praying for something on your own account?

Alc. Well, by the gods, I could not answer your question, Socrates, offhand. Why, I take it to be a fatuous request, [10] when it is really

[8] Quoted from the mock-epic *Margites*, of which only this and five other lines have survived. The hero, Margites, became the proverbial type of a blundering idiot, and the poem was generally attributed to Homer.

[9] This trick of twisting the words of a quotation into an unnatural meaning is quite characteristic of Socrates. Cf. *Plat. Prot. 343-7.*

a case for great caution lest one pray unawares for what is evil while thinking it to be one's good, and then after a little while, as you were saying, [11] one change one's tune and retract all one's former prayers.

Soc. And did not the poet whom I quoted at the beginning of our discussion [12] know more than we, when he bade us pray for the averting of what is grievous, even though we pray for it?

Alc. I think so.

Soc. Then it is their admiration of this poet, Alcibiades, or perhaps the result of their own study, that causes the Spartans to offer a similar prayer whether the occasion be private or public—that the gods will give them for their own benefit the beautiful as well as the good: more than this no one can ever hear them pray for. The consequence is that to the present time [13] they have been just as fortunate as any other people; and if it has befallen them to be not invariably fortunate, it was anyhow not owing to their prayer. It rests with the gods, I conceive, to give us either what we may pray for or the reverse. And I would like to give you an account of something else, which I once heard from some of my seniors. A quarrel having arisen between the Athenians and the Spartans, it befell our city to be always unsuccessful in every battle by land and sea, and she could never win a victory. So the Athenians, in their annoyance at this result, and at a loss for some means of finding a deliverance from the trouble they were in, took counsel together and decided that the best thing they could do was to send and inquire of Ammon [14]; and moreover, to ask also for what reason the gods granted victory to the Spartans rather than to themselves:

"for we"—such was the message—

"offer up to them more and finer sacrifices than any of the Greeks, and have adorned their temples with votive emblems as no other people have done, and presented to the gods the costliest and stateliest processions year by year, and spent more money thus than all the rest of the Greeks together."

Soc. "But the Spartans have never taken any such pains, and indeed are so neglectful in their behavior to the gods, that they make a practice

[10] i.e., that I should answer offhand. The pun in *μάργον*, alluding to the "fatuous" Margites, cannot be rendered in English.

[11] *Plat. Alc. 2.142d.*

[12] *Plat. Alc. 2.143d.*

[13] This seems to be the meaning of the Greek, which is certainly not Platonic. In *Aristot. Phys. 4.13.5* *ὁ παρήκων χρόνος* means past time.

[14] An Ethiopian god whose cult spread over Egypt, and through Cyrene to various parts of Greece: he had temples at Thebes and Sparta, but the famous one in the Libyan desert is probably meant here.

of sacrificing defective victims, and generally are very much behind us in the honors that they pay, though the wealth they possess is quite equal to that of our city." When they had so spoken, and added the question, what they should do in order to find a deliverance from the trouble they were in, the prophet's only answer [15]— evidently it was all that the god allowed—was to call them to him and say:

"Thus saith Ammon to the Athenians: I would rather have the reverent reserve [16] of the Spartans than all the ritual of the Greeks." So much he said, and not a word further. Now by "reverent reserve" I suppose the god could only mean their prayer, since in fact it differs greatly from those that are generally offered. For the Greeks in general either lead up bulls with gilded horns, or else present the gods with votive emblems, and pray for any odd thing, whether it be good or bad: so when the gods hear their irreverent speech they reject all these costly processions and sacrifices. Whereas I think we ought to be very cautious, and fully consider what is to be said and what is not. And in Homer too you will find other tales of a similar sort. For he relates how the Trojans, in making their bivouac," Sacrificed to the immortals perfect hecatombs, "*Hom. Il. 8.548* and how the winds bore the sweet savour from the plain into heaven:" But the blessed gods partook not of it, nor would have it, For deep was their hate against holy Ilium, " " And Priam, and the folk of Priam of the good ashen spear. " *Hom. Il. 8.550-2* [17] So it was nothing to their purpose to sacrifice and pay tribute of gifts in vain, when they were hated by the gods. For it is not, I imagine, the way of the gods to be seduced with gifts, like a base insurer. And indeed it is but silly talk of ours, if we claim to surpass the Spartans on this score. For it would be a strange thing if the gods had regard to our gifts and sacrifices instead of our souls, and the piety and justice that may be found in any of us.

Soc. Far rather at these, I believe, do they look than at those costly processions and sacrifices which are offered, it well may be, by individual and state, year in, year out, though they may have offended greatly against the gods, or as greatly against their neighbors. But the gods are not to be won by bribes, and so they despise all these things, as Ammon and the holy prophet say. Certainly it would seem that justice

[15] The use of *ἀποκριθῆναι* for answered instead of the usual *ἀποκρίνασθαι* is evidence for placing the writer a good deal later than Plato.

[16] *εὐφημία* means avoidance of speech that may offend—the opposite being *βλασφημία*.

[17] The four lines directly quoted are not in our manuscripts of Homer, but have been inserted in modern texts as *Hom. Il. 8.548, 550-2*.

and wisdom are held in especial honor both by the gods and by men of intelligence; and wise and just are they alone who know what acts and words to use towards gods and men. But I should like now to hear what may be your opinion on the subject.

Alc. Why, Socrates, it in no wise differs from yours and the god's; for indeed it would not be fitting for me to record my vote against the god.

Soc. And you remember you professed to be in great perplexity lest you should pray unawares for evil, while supposing it to be good?

Alc. I do.

Soc. You see, then, how unsafe it is for you to approach the god with your prayers, for it may chance that when he hears your irreverent speech he will reject your sacrifice altogether, and you may perhaps be accorded some other bad thing as well. In my opinion, therefore, it is best to hold your peace: for I expect you will not consent to use the Spartan's prayer, you have such a romantic spirit—to give it the fairest of folly's names. [18] It is necessary, therefore, to bide one's time until one can learn how one should behave towards gods and men.

Alc. Well, when will that time arrive, Socrates, and who is to be my instructor? For I feel I should very much like to see who the man is,

Soc. It is he who is concerned about you. But I think, as Homer relates how Athena removed the mist from the eyes of Diomede,"That be might well discern both god and man,"*Hom. Il. 5.127.* so you too must first have the mist removed which now enwraps your soul, and then you will be ready to receive the means whereby you will discern both evil and good. For at present I do not think you could do so.

Alc. Let him remove the mist or whatever else he likes to call it: for I am prepared to obey every one of his commands, without shirking, whoever the man may be, so long as I am to be the better for them.

Soc. I tell you, he on his part is prodigiously anxious to help you.

Alc. Then I think it best to defer the sacrifice also till the time comes.

Soc. And you are quite right: for that is safer than running so serious a risk.

Alc. But how say you, Socrates? Look now, I will crown you with this garland, as I consider you have given me such good advice; and to the gods we shall offer both garlands and all the other customary

[18] Cf. *Plat. Alc. 2.140c.*

things when I see that day has come. And come it will ere long, if they are willing.

Soc. Well, I accept this gift; and anything else besides, that you may give me, I shall be only too happy to accept. [19] And as Euripides has made Creon say when he sees Teiresias wearing his wreaths, and hears that he has obtained them, on account of his art, as first-fruits of the spoils of war: "As omen good I take thy victor's wreaths;For in the waves we labour, as you know,—"*Eur. Phoen. 858-9* [20] so do I take this opinion of yours as a good omen. For I consider I am no less wave-tossed than Creon, and would like to come off victorious over your lovers.

[19]The Greek here is literally—I should gladly see myself to have accepted—which seems very unplatonic.

[20]The blind prophet Teiresias has been crowned by the Athenians for the aid he has given them in a successful war. Eteocles, the young king of Thebes, has left the city in charge of his uncle Creon while he is fighting his brother Polynices for the possession of the throne.

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