

Somnium
Scipionis

Cicero

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SOMNIUM SCIPIONIS

BY

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH
WITH AN ESSAY

“THE VISION OF SCIPIO
CONSIDERED AS A FRAGMENT OF
THE MYSTERIES”

BY L.O.

EDITED WITH A PREFACE & NOTES

BY

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PREFACE

CICERO, who was almost the most celebrated orator of antiquity, was born B.C. 107, and was educated by Crassus. He served as a Roman warrior under Sylla, and subsequently became a philosopher. After many years he entered political life, becoming Quæstor of Sicily, Ædile, and finally Consul. At the last he retired to Tusculura, and was assassinated B.C. 43. He left many classical works, among which are the beautiful essays on "Friendship" and on "Old Age." His only mystical work was the *Somnium Scipionis, or Vision of Scipio*, of which a translation by L.O. is here produced, with an Essay upon its connection with the doctrines taught in the ancient Mysteries.

This Scipio was named Africanus the Younger; he had died in B.C. 128; he was the grandson by adoption of Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus the Elder. The account of this dream or Vision is put into the mouth of the younger Scipio Africanus, who relates that, in early youth, when he first served in Africa he visited the Court of Masinissa, the steady friend of the Romans, and particularly of the Cornelian family. During the feasts and entertainments of the day, the conversation turned on the words and actions of the first great Scipio. His adopted grandson having

retired to rest, the Shade of the departed hero appeared to him in sleep, darkly foretold the future events of his life, and encouraged him to tread in the paths of Patriotism and true glory, by announcing the reward prepared in a future state for those who have served their country faithfully in this life. The scene is laid in the suburban garden of the younger Africanus, and the *dramatis personæ* consist of certain intimate friends and acquaintances.

A few literary and suggestive Notes have been added.

W. W. Westcott, M.B., D.P.H.

1894.

SOMNIUM SCIPIONIS
The Vision of Scipio

WHEN I came to Africa, where, as you know, I was Tribune to the Fourth Legion of soldiers, under the Consul Manius Manilius,* nothing appeared to me more desirable than that I should meet Massinissa, a Monarch who had ever been most friendly to our family for just reasons.† When I came to him, the old man, having embraced me, wept, and, after a pause, looked up to Heaven: “Ah, thanks,” said he, “to Thee I render, Oh highest Sun, and to ye other Celestial companions, in that before I depart this life, I am permitted to behold in my own Kingdom and under these skies P. Cornelius Scipio, whose name itself refreshes me: for, never from my soul has the memory of that best and most invincible of men departed!” Then I inquired of him concerning the affairs of his Kingdom, and he of me respecting our Republic; and our day thus passed in lengthened conference. After a royal entertainment our talk again drew out into the far night, when the old man would speak of nothing save the elder Scipio (Africanus Major): everything about him he remembered, not only his deeds, but even his sayings. When, therefore, we parted to retire to rest, what with the journey and our nocturnal sitting, I was more than usually tired and fell sound asleep.

* M. Manilius was introduced as a sharer in the dialogue.

† The *just causes* were that the elder Scipio had amply rewarded Massinissa, Prince of Numidia, for his fidelity in the Second Punic War.

Whereupon (as I believe arising out of the subject of our talk;—for it often happens that our thoughts and conversation produce some such result in sleep as that which Ennius* relates to have happened concerning Homer, whom it appears he was frequently accustomed to meditate upon and to talk about during his waking hours) Africanus appeared to me in a form † which I recognised more from his bust than from my knowledge of the man himself. When I recognised him, I trembled indeed; he, however, speaking said, “Take courage and banish fear, O Scipio; commit to memory what I have to say.”

“Seest thou yonder City, which, compelled me to submit to the Roman people, yet renews its former wars, unable to remain at peace? (Here he shewed me Carthage from a certain clear and brilliant spot in the celestial heights, full of stars) and to the assault of which thou comest, as yet a mere boy? This City, in two years from the present time, thou as Consul shalt overthrow, and that hereditary name, which hitherto thou bearest from us, shall belong to thee by thine own exertions. When moreover Carthage has been razed by thee, thou shalt effect thy Triumph and be made Censor; then as Legate thou shalt proceed to Egypt, Syria, Asia and Greece, being made Consul a second time during thy absence, and undertaking thy greatest war,

* Ennius not only said that Homer used to appear to him in dreams, but also that he was indeed a reincarnation of Homer.

† That is, his adoptive grandfather appeared to him; but as Africanus the Elder had died when our Scipio was but a year old, he could have had no idea of his personal appearance.

destroy Numantia. But when thou art borne upon the triumphal car to the Capitol, thou shalt find the Republic thrown into confusion by the policy of my grandson.* Here, O Africanus, it will be necessary for thee to display to the Fatherland the light of thy spirit, thy genius, and thy wisdom; at this period of thy life I see but darkly the course of thy destiny, though when thine age shall have completed eight times seven circuits and returns of the Sun, thus bringing thee to the fatal epoch of thy life † by the natural circuit of these two numbers (each of which is held to be perfect, the one from a different reason to the other); to thee alone and to thy name the whole State will turn; to thee, as Senator, all good people, the Latin allies and the Latins themselves shall turn; thou shalt be the one upon whom the whole salvation of the State shall rest, and, lest misfortune befall, it behoves thee as dictator to firmly establish the Republic if you would escape the impious hands ‡ of thy kinsmen:” at this portion of the recital Laelius § cried out and the others bitterly lamented, but Scipio, smiling slowly, said: “I beseech you not to arouse me from slumber; peace for a little, and hear the rest.”

“But, O Africanus, in order that thou mayest be the

* Tiberius Gracchus, a Tribune of Rome, died B.C. 133.

† That is fifty-six years of age. Seven was esteemed venerable, holy, divine and motherless. See Westcott on *Numbers*, p. 31. Eight was called Perfect, being the cube; it is the only evenly even number of the decad.

‡ Scipio was found dead in bed B.C. 128, murdered by order of Caius Gracchus, and it is said that the chamber door was opened by his wife, Sempronia, to give admission to the assassins.

§ Laelius was a character seen as an actor in the vision.

more devoted to the welfare of the Republic, mark this well: for all those who have guarded, cherished, and assisted their Fatherland, a particular place in Heaven is assigned, where the blessed enjoy everlasting life. For nothing on earth is more acceptable to that supreme Deity who reigns over the whole Universe, by Law which we call States; the rulers and preservers whereof coming forth from this place, return thither.”

At this point, although I was thoroughly terrified, not so much by the fear of death, as by the treachery of my own kinsmen, I asked notwithstanding whether he himself was really alive and my father Paulus* and others whom we believed to be annihilated?

“Yea,” said he, “in very truth, those still live who have flown forth from the bonds of the body as from a prison: for indeed, what is called your life, is but a death! Why, dost thou not see thy father Paulus coming to thee?”

At that sight I indeed burst forth into a flood of tears; he, on the other hand, embracing, kissed me and forbade me to weep; and then, when my tears had been repressed, and I began to be able to speak, “Prithee tell me.” said I, “most revered and excellent father: Since this is life, as I have heard Africanus say. Why do I tarry upon Earth? Why do I not hasten to come hither to you?”

“It may not be,” he replied, “for, unless that Deity

* Paulus Æmilius, the conqueror of Perseus, son of Philip King of Macedon, was his natural father, but our Scipio was adopted by the son of the Elder Scipio Africanus.

who is the Lord of this Universe which thou beholdest, shall liberate thee from the prison of your body,* hither approaching, it is not possible to come. For men are born under this Law to be faithful guardians of that Globe which thou seest in the midst of this Universe and which is called the Earth: and a Soul has been given to them from those sempiternal fires which you call Stars and Constellations; † these being spherical and globular bodies, animated with divine Souls, pursue their circling orbits with marvellous celerity. Wherefore, O Publius, ‡ both by thee and all pious persons, the Soul should be retained in the keeping of the body: not without His command, by whom that Soul is given to you, must it depart from mortal life, lest you should appear to be untrue to that duty to Mankind which has been assigned to you by the Deity. But do thou cultivate justice and piety, O Scipio, following in the steps of thy Grandsire and of myself, who begat thee. These qualities, although excellent among parents and relations, become still more noble when practised towards one's Country: through this life lies the road to Heaven and to the assemblage of those, who have already lived upon earth and now, released from the body, inhabit

* A condemnation of suicide, which deprived one of the entry to the Heaven, before mentioned.

† The heavenly bodies are inhabited by egos in certain states of progress, but not necessarily by men, perhaps by those higher than men.

‡ Publius Cornelius Æmilianus Scipio was the full name of the dreamer; Africanus Minor was added by his admirers.

this place which thou seest* (this Sphere shone forth with the most resplendent brightness amid blazing stars) and which, after the Greeks, you call the Milky Way. From this place all other bodies appeared to my gaze exceedingly bright and marvellous. There were, moreover, those Stars which are never seen from Earth: and the magnitude of all of them were such as we have never suspected: among these I beheld the smallest † to be the farthest from Heaven and the nearest to Earth, shining with a borrowed Light. Moreover, the spheres of the Stars far transcended the size of the Earth. Thus, the Earth itself already appeared small to me, so that I was grieved to observe how small a part of its surface we in reality occupy.” ‡

As I continued to gaze steadfastly, Africanus continuing said, “How long wilt thy mind remain rivetted to the Earth? Dost thou not behold into how glorious a Temple thou art come? Now know that the Universe consists of nine circles or rather Spheres, all connected together, one of which is celestial and the furthest off, and governing the others.§ In this sphere are traced the eternal revolutions of the Stars and to it are subject the seven spheres which revolve backwards with a contrary motion to that of the Celestial Sphere. The first (of these Seven) Spheres is

* This heaven was in the Via Lactea.

† The Moon, which is not itself a luminary, but is illuminated by the Sun.

‡ The Roman Empire was but a small spot of the whole exposed surface of the earth.

§ Eight similar spheres enveloped in a ninth vast and glorious envelope.

occupied* by the Star which on Earth is called Saturn. Next comes the sphere of that splendid Star, salutary and fortunate to the human race, called Jupiter. Then comes the Red Sphere, terrible to the Earth, which you call Mars. Following beneath these spheres, and in almost the middle region, is placed the Sun, the Leader, Chief and Governor of the other Lights, the mind† of the World and the organizing principle,—of such wondrous magnitude that it illuminates and impregnates every part of the Universe with its Light. The Spheres of Venus and Mercury in their respective courses follow the Sun as companions. In the lowest Sphere the Moon revolves illumined by the rays of the Sun. Below this in truth nothing exists which is not subject to death and decay, save indeed the Souls, which by the gift of the Gods are bestowed upon the human race. Above the moon all things are eternal, but the sphere of the Earth, which occupies a middle place and comes ninth‡ does not move: it is the lowest and to it all ponderable bodies are born by their own gravity.”

When I had recovered from my amazement at the sight of these things, “What,” said I, “is this sweet and wondrous melody which fills my ears?”

* Note the distinction between the Sphere and the Planet pertaining to it.
 † Mens; in ancient occult works, this word is of far higher import than our word, *mind*. Compare the Chaldæic philosophy in Stanley's *History of Philosophy*.

‡ G.R.S. Mead in his remarks on the *Somnium*, calls attention to this paragraph as demonstrating the early existence in Europe of the present Theosophic system. Of the Nine, omitting the first universal sphere, and the last, the Earth, there remain Seven types, which are traced in Man as the Seven human Principles.

“This,” said he, “is that harmony, which, affected by the mingling of unequal intervals, yet notwithstanding in harmonious proportions and with reason so separated, is due to the impulse and movement of the spheres themselves; the light with the heavier tones combined,—the various sounds uniformly going to make up one grand symphony.* For, not with silence, can such motions be urged forward, and Nature leads us to the conclusion that the extremes give forth a low note at the one end and a high note at the other. Thus the celestial sphere, whose motion in its starlight course is more rapid, gives forth a sharp and rousing sound: the gravest tone being that of the lunar sphere, which is lowest; but the Earth, the ninth sphere, remains immovable, always fixed in the lowest seat encompassing the middle place of the Universe. Moreover, the motions of those eight spheres which are above the earth, and of which the force of two† is the same, cause seven sounds supported by regular intervals; which number is the connecting principle of almost all things. Learned men, having imitated this divine mystery with stringed instruments and vocal harmonies, have won for themselves a return to this place, just as others, who, endowed with superior wisdom, have cultivated the divine sciences even in human life.”

* This is a statement of the Pythagorean doctrine of the “Music of the Spheres,” so frequently referred to in occult works. In this consideration refer to the first chapters of the *Timæus* of Plato.

† G.R.S. Mead suggests Mercury and Venus.

“Now to this melody the stopped ears of men have become deaf;* nor is there any duller sense in you. Just as at that place which is called Catadupa,† where the Nile falls from the highest Mountains, the people living there lose the sense of hearing on account of the magnitude of the sound, so, indeed, such a tremendous volume Cosmos that the ears of men are not capable of rewhole Cosmos that the ears of men are not capable of receiving it, just as you are unable to look straight at the Sun whose rays would blind the eye and conquer the sense.”

Filled with wonder at these things, my eyes ever and anon wandered back to Earth.

Hereupon Africanus said: “I perceive that even now you gaze upon the habitation and abode of mortals. But, if it appear as small to thee, as indeed it is, thus seen, strive ever after these heavenly things and lightly esteem those of earth. For what glory or renown really worthy of being sought after canst thou derive from the mouths of men. Thou seest that the earth is inhabited in scattered places confined within narrow limits, such inhabited regions are in themselves mere specks upon its surface with vast wildernesses intervening: and those who dwell upon the earth are not only separated thus, so that no communication is possible amongst them from the one to the other, but they occupy positions partly oblique, partly

* The hearing of this Music being constant, is not perceived by men.

† The Great Cataract.

transverse, partly even opposite to yours; from these you can certainly hope for no glory. Also thou wilt perceive this same earth to be, as it were, circumscribed and encircled by zones, two of which, the most widely separated and situated at each end under the very poles of heaven, are ice-bound as thou seest*: while the middle and largest zone is burnt up with the heat of the Sun. Two zones are habitable, one of which lies to the South, those who dwell therein planting footsteps opposite to your own, and having nothing to do with your race. As to the other zone which you inhabit, and which is subject to the North wind, see how very slender a part has to do with you: for the whole surface inhabited by your race, restricted towards the poles and wider laterally, is indeed but a small island † surrounded by the sea, which you call on earth the Atlantic, the Great Sea, or Ocean. Yet, notwithstanding its name, it is but small as thou seest. How then is it possible that from these known and cultivated countries either thy name or that of any of us can cross those Caucasian Mountains, which thou seest, or pass beyond the Ganges? Who, in the remaining parts of the East, in the uttermost regions of the wandering Sun, either in Northern or Southern Climes, will hear thy name? So then, with these parts taken away, dost thou indeed perceive within what narrow limits your glory seeks to spread itself; and how long even will those

* H.P. Blavatsky suggested that at the true poles this was not so.

† Island; the word is *Insula* in all the Latin versions I have seen. Mead reads *Infula*, a strip.

who sing your praises continue to do so?

“Yea, indeed, if generations hence posterity shall seek to perpetuate the fame of anyone of us handed down from father to son, yet notwithstanding, on account of fire and flood, which will inevitably happen at certain fixed periods* of time, we are unable to attain lasting renown, much less eternal glory. Moreover, of what importance are the things which shall be said concerning thee by those to be born hereafter, when no one who existed before will then be alive? More especially, when of those same men who are to come, not one will be able to remember the events of even one year. Now, according to common custom, men usually measure the year merely by the return of the sun, or, when the whole of the constellations shall return to the original positions from which they once set forth, thus restoring at long intervals the original configuration of the Heavens, then can that be truly called ‘the Great Year,’† within which period, I scarcely dare say how many generations of men are comprised. For, just as in time past, when the Soul of Romulus entered into these sacred abodes, the Sun appeared to fail and be extinguished, so when the Sun shall again fail in the same position and at the same time, then, when the Signs of the Zodiac shall have returned to their

* H.P. Blavatsky’s Theosophic cosmology states that the dominant race are successively overthrown by alternate cataclysms of water and fire. The words are indeed here “eluvions exustionesque.”

† The Romans knew of this Great Cycle of rather more than 25,000 years. Hipparchus noted the Precession of the Equinoxes, which forms a reason for this cycle.

original position, and the Stars are recalled, the cycle of the Great Year shall be accomplished; of this enormous period of time, know that not a twentieth part has yet passed away.*

“Wherefore, if thou despairst of a speedy return to this quarter, wherein all things are prepared for great and excellent men, pray of what value is that human glory which can scarcely endure the smallest part of one cycle? And so, if you would look on high and fix your gaze on this state and your eternal home, thou shalt pay no heed to vulgar talk, neither allow thy actions to be influenced by the hope of human rewards. True virtue for its own sake should lead thee to real glory. Leave to others the care of ascertaining what they may say of you: they will assuredly speak of you beyond all doubt. Human fame is wholly restricted within these narrow limits which thou seest, and never at any time has anyone gained immortal renown, for that is impossible through the annihilation of men and the oblivion of posterity.” †

Whereon I said, “If indeed O, Africanus, for those who have deserved well of their country a Path, as it were, lies open to Heaven ‡—although from my youth, up I have followed in the footsteps of yourself and my father, and

* Only about 600 years had passed.

† Kill out ambition, is the burden of this passage; both Western and Eastern schools of Occult Science dwell on the need of subjugating the lower Self.

‡ Even patriotism is not the Highest Path. Compare the Thirty-two Paths of *Sepher Yetzirah*.

never tarnished your great renown—now nevertheless, with such a prospect before me, I will strive much more vigilantly.”

“Strive on,” said he, “with the assurance that it is thou art not what this form appears to be, but the real man is the thinking principle of each one—not the bodily form which can be pointed out with the finger.* Know this, then, that thou art a God,† inasmuch as Deity is that which has Will, sensation, memory, foresight, and who so rules, regulates and moves the body to which his charge is committed, just as the supreme Deity does the Universe, and as the Eternal God directs this Universe, which is in a certain degree subject to decay, so a sempiternal Soul moves the frail body.

“Now, that which is always in motion is eternal, whereas that which only communicates motion, and which itself is put in motion by some other cause, must necessarily cease when the motive impulse is withdrawn. Accordingly that alone which moves spontaneously because it is ever all itself, never indeed ceases to move, and is moreover the source of motion in all things. Now a primary cause is not derived from any other cause; for forth from that do all things proceed, and from no other. That which springs from something else cannot be the primary cause, and if this indeed never had a commencement, neither will it ever

* The constant theme of the Mystic, but one utterly neglected by the man in the street.

† A truly Rosicrucian idea.

have an end. For the primal cause once destroyed could neither be generated afresh from any other thing, nor itself produce anything else: for all things must necessarily proceed from the primal cause. This eternal principle of all Motion arises out of that which is moved by itself and of itself, and cannot therefore be born or perish; or else of necessity the whole heavens must collapse, and all Nature come to a standstill, unable any longer to derive the impulse by which it was set in motion at the first.

“Since, accordingly, it is manifest that that is eternal which moves of itself, who will deny this eternal principle to be a natural attribute of Souls. For everything which is moved by an external impulse is inanimate: but that, on the other hand, which energizes from within is truly animated, and this is the peculiar operation of the Soul. If then the Soul is the one thing above all, which is self motive, it certainly is not born, but eternal. Do thou then exercise this Soul of thine in the noblest pursuits: solicitude and care for the welfare of one’s country are the best: for, animated and controlled by these sentiments, the Soul passes more swifflly to this sphere—its true home. And this may be the more speedily achieved if, while imprisoned in the body, it shall rise superior to terrestrial limitations, and by the contemplation of those things which are beyond the body, it shall abstract itself to the greatest degree from its earthly tabernacle.

“For the Souls of men who have delivered themselves over to the desires of the body, and of those women who, as

abettors, have surrendered themselves, and by the impulse of passions obedient to sensual gratifications, have violated the laws of God and of Man, once liberated from the body, are whirled around this world, and such tortured Souls will not return to this place, save after many centuries.”

Here he ceased, and I awoke from sleep.

THE VISION OF SCIPIO
CONSIDERED AS A FRAGMENT
OF THE MYSTERIES.
BY L.O.

“To some he gave the ability of receiving the knowledge of Light, which may be taught, but to others, even when asleep, he extended the fruit of his strength.”—SYNESIOS.

As a literary production merely, this is one of the most beautiful and imaginative compositions bequeathed to us by Cicero. A careful examination of the ideas unfolded in its few short pages will prove instructive to every earnest student of the Mysteries—those great Institutions of Antiquity, guardians of a sacred science, the echoes of which still linger herein. This opinion has been entertained by more than one commentator upon the strength of internal evidence, and constitutes the *raison d'être* of the present translation.

The Vision of Scipio is suggestive, resuming as it does so many of the leading conceptions involved in the mystical philosophy of the old world, and, in this respect, it but rarely happens that so much is conveyed in so brief a fragment. To those, however, who have grasped the many beauties of the Magian philosophy, or such traces of it as appear discernible in the lapse of time, any attempt to reconstruct the scattered fragments which remain to us must be welcome, and hence the object of this article is to examine the leading conceptions of the *Somnium*, in order to arrive at a coherent view of the philosophy which underlies it. That philosophy, it is reasonable to conjecture, was alike the system inculcated in the ancient Mysteries of every nation—those Mysteries being considered as the organised endeavour of illuminati to elucidate the great problems of Life and Death, the nature of the Soul and its

relation to the Deity.

Men have ever found themselves face to face with these great difficulties, striving to unravel the skein of life with all the poverty of language, and the restrictions of human thought. But human thought alone is powerless for such sublime ascents—a higher faculty of the Soul being requisite. “Strive,” says the Zoroastrian* Oracle, “to understand the Intelligible which exists beyond the Mind, with the extended flame of an extended intellect.”

The solution of these momentous questions is of the first importance, because of the moral consequences involved; morality being largely modified in scope and direction by the conclusions arrived at in philosophy. Thus the influence of a system of thought purely of the intellect, must obviously differ from that resulting in the case of a Religio-philosophical system: while it is powerful in the direction of human affairs—no sentiment so ineradicably implanted in the human breast—as that of Religion. Here lies the supreme bond of union between all human beings—the most highly vitalized sentiment of which humanity is capable.

It seems probable that the Mysteries—which were almost cosmopolitan†—had for object to draw men closer to each other by bonds of union deeper than those of mere worldly interest, and this was only possible by an appeal at once to both the philosophic and religious sides of nature.

* *Collectanea Hermetica Volume VI. - The Chaldean Oracles*

† Vide *L'immortalité de l'ame chez les anciens Egyptiens*, by Wiedmann.

Before the instinct of veneration had been dwarfed, as, generally speaking, it has now largely become, and, at a time when the whole activities of the higher mind functioned, so to speak, under the ægis of Religion, it is not surprising that the Mysteries should have exerted an enormous influence in the lands where they were established.

What, it will be asked, was the nature of the revelations vouchsafed to participants, or the benefit to be derived from initiation therein? Our information on this subject is confined to certain meagre historical details, from which we gather that these Institutions professedly existed to celebrate the mythological histories associated with certain divinities. That they were held in universal esteem and treated with profound reverence is certain—a fact which sufficiently points to the serious nature of these activities, and the lofty intentions which animated them. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how any suggestions to the contrary could gain credence in face of the fact that the most cultured and luminous minds in the past have contributed to elucidate our reflections upon this subject—all the resources of poetry and philosophy in the early days of the world being mainly burthened with this one theme in some shape or form.

The best thought of the ancient world was, to a large extent, the Theosophy we know to-day in another dress. From Plato to Proclus, from Homer to Ovid—the thoughts of such men have lived after them, and even if to-day largely misunderstood, they nevertheless succeeded

in investing the traditions of their time with a significance which none but a student of the Mysteries can hope to understand.

The peculiar Mythologies of Egypt and Greece respectively were but the machinery of a symbolism, the interpretation of which formed alike the science of the Soul and the system of the Mysteries. Herein lay concealed those great truths which serve to explain the immediate mysteries of our environment, the development and elucidation of which served to enlighten and astonish the Neophyte; these culminating in appropriate theurgic formulae, conferred a clearer hope of immortality—a perception of the Universal Presence, such as the *Entheast** alone could derive.

Needless to say that such results are not attainable by any process of thought *per se*: all that thought can do is to dimly apprehend a higher faculty of the Soul—a mode of perception transcending the merely intellectual.

In the Vision of Scipio this higher faculty takes the form of a clairvoyant perception, a marvellous insight superior to all bodily limitations, whereby the consciousness is brought into *rapport* with other worlds than those normally perceived by the senses.

Apuleius, Who was initialed into the Isiac Mysteries, thus refers to his experience: “I approached the confines of death, and having trod on the threshold of Proserpine, I returned therefrom, being borne through all the elements.

* A word used by the Neoplatonic writers meaning “Immersed in God.”

At midnight I saw the Sun shining with its brilliant Light, and I approached the presence of the Gods beneath and the Gods above, and stood near and worshipped them. Behold, I have related to you things of which, though heard by you, you must necessarily remain ignorant.”*

Although the initiates themselves appear to have remained true to their trust and we are thus denied a direct statement, professedly expounding the system in question, there yet remain to us a collection of utterances attributed to Zoroaster and others, known as the Zoroastrian Oracles, which were continually appealed to by the ablest commentators † on the Mysteries and are of great assistance in solving this difficult problem. These fragments tersely resume many of the most daring conceptions of mature thinkers and theurgists long ago—conceptions which endow Religion with enterprise and the Soul with God-like attributes. Little wonder then at the old proverb “Man, know thyself,”—when that knowledge involved so much. Such self-knowledge—the most profound homage that man can render to the divinity—was by no means an analysis of the *human self*, but an attempt to consider the principles working in the great Universe around us as all reflected in the total constitution of each human being. It is for this reason that the Vision of Scipio is *apparently* devoted to an exposition of the divine Potencies operating

* *Metamorphosis of Apuleius*, 11th Book.

† *Vide* the writings of Proclus on the Philosophy of Plato, also of Plotinus and Porphyry.

in the Universe around us.

The Gods, in the ancient conception, around which so many classic traditions have clustered, were representations through images and similitudes of certain mighty powers, considered to exist between Man and the Supreme Principle: these powers, although rooted in this Principle, were yet regarded as possessing energies distinct from their ineffable cause. "These mighty powers," says Taylor, "are called by the Poets a Golden Chain, on account of their connection with each other and incorruptible nature, . . . they are rooted in this Supreme Principle like trees in the Earth, which have a distinct energy of their own at the same time that they energize in conjunction with their cause."*

But what, it may be asked, about the Supreme Principle of things, that which is so incomparable to its attributes:—was this not lost sight of in the multitude of divinities? "To that God," says Porphyry, "who is above all things, neither external speech ought to be addressed, nor yet that which is inward, when it is defiled by the passion of the soul, but we should venerate him in pure silence and through pure conceptions of his nature,"

With this view in mind the student is led to regard the Pantheon of any Nation as a collection of symbols, more or less appropriate, and intended to convey some idea of the totality of divine attributes.

It is moreover comparatively easy to discover certain

* Taylor's *Miscellany*, p. 129.

fundamental similarities which may lie said to underlie the great classic Pantheons, and such comparisons clearly indicate a unity of conception which enables us to identify as essentially one and the same the Mystical Systems pervading alike Chaldæa and Greece on the one hand, and Egypt on the other.

The divinities of Mythology were symbols;—symbols which translated to the trained perception of the initiate the factors of his great equation, those supramundane forces which are most reverently defined as deific. One in many and many in One. It was the intimate knowledge of these and of the various entities correlated therewith which constituted the “Divine Sciences” to which reference is made in the Vision of Scipio.

These Divine Sciences, by the practice of which wise men have attained release from the gross and the nether, gaining the upper air and endless light, were formulated on Universal Truths, proceeding from Universals to Particulars. The unspeakable harmony in the bosom of the world which causes all things to sympathise with all, justified the Hermetic Axiom, *Qui se cognoscit, in se omnia cognoscit*,* and hence our consideration of Macrocosmic truths implies in reality much more than their merely phenomenal observance would seem to warrant.

The nine Spheres alluded to in this Vision, and which for the purposes of study are more properly regarded as either seven or ten—are primal powers and the roots alike

* Who knows himself knows all things in himself.

of force and form. Hence the “divine sciences” derived from the decimal numeration rest upon a basis of mathematical accuracy—mathematics being an exact science. Here we find the first traces of the Kabalistic Sephiroth,—three Triads of Powers resumed in a Tenth,—the Ennead or procession of nine Gods occurring alike in Chaldæan and Egyptian Theology as well as in the Platonic system.*

This idea was no doubt based upon the principle that as the numbers from 1 to 10 formed the base of every possible numerical variation, so every manifested thing in Nature is ultimately referable to these Ten primordial powers, for the number guides form and lies at the root of sound. Pursuing this conception further, it will be seen that the linear equivalents of numbers 1 and 2 cannot of themselves produce a concrete form: for the first would be represented by one straight line, and the second by two straight lines, neither of which can enclose a space. These two numbers must therefore ever remain abstractions, and the succeeding number Three become the first concrete expression: on the other hand, the number Ten is a synthetical return to Unity, or the that the objective powers of manifestation are septenary, also allied to colours and sounds, as suggested in the *Somnium*.

These Seven divine forces were anciently supposed to

* Compare also the Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto of the Greeks and Romans ruling respectively over three great Realms—Heaven, “The Sea,” and Infernal Regions. Also in *Lydus (de Mensibus)* p. 121, Taylor, we read “That the number nine is divine, receiving its completion from three triads, and preserving the summits of Theology according to the Chaldaic philosophy as Porphyry informs us.”

reside in the Planets, the ruling intelligences of which were thus regarded as the Vicegerents of the Sephirothic powers; and the administration not only of the whole physical world, but even of human affairs, came to be attributed to the celestial wanderers.

This Septenate—called also the “Tree of Life”—was traced in every created thing—in the Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral departments. This theoretical procession, from primal natures down to the more complex, also laid the foundations of Alchemy, for some subjects, from the simple integrity of their nature, were considered as peculiarly appropriate vehicula for the Anima Mundi.

It is important to notice in the Vision of Scipio, that the Planets are regarded as in a way distinct from the Spheres within which they energize, and here also lies a conception which will repay attention.* According to Hermetic teaching, everything which has culminated in idea or materiality—in form, *per se*, or its physical expression—is regarded as ensphered, and thereby individualized: such intangible and magnetic circuli are conceived to be forces evolving form—form being static force. Each individual or entity—whether a stone, a plant, an animal, or a man—energizes according to its nature, *i.e.*, gives expression to the archetype of its sphere and this is the work of evolution: while the crown of manifested life

* “According to the Orphic theology, each of the planets is fixed in a luminous ethereal sphere called *ολοτης* or *Wholeness*, because it is a part with a total subsistence and is analogous to the sphere of the fixed stars.” *Metamorphosis of Apuleius*, eleventh book, Taylor’s translation.

is naturally considered to be the production of spiritually perfect man—the form of forms.

In just the same way as the planetary spheres are here said to be comprised within the sphere of the fixed Stars, so all entities are vested in the Anima Mundi in varying degree, according to vehiculum; in the higher kingdoms increased complexity obtains, culminating in the human being—as it is said, “Oh, Man of a daring nature, thou subtil production!”*

The Unity of the Divine One—“circumscribing the Heavens with convex form”—which is considered to underlie all manifestation, is a necessary conception to the doctrines of Macrocosim and Microcosim, the greater and lesser worlds: that which is a part, of necessity partakes of the nature of the whole, and thus every entity is a microcosim, or little world, reflecting the greater world or macrocosim after a certain formula—but reflection involves reversal. This latter truth, resumed also in the old axiom, “As above, so below, but after another manner,” is probably the explanation of more than one incongruity in the *Somnium*.

Man being made in the likeness of the Gods, the planetary forces find their representatives in the constitution of his being, but whereas in macrocosmic action their operation is, as it were, without within—in the human organism it is rather within without, and not only are the Seven great Sephirothic powers distributed

* See *Collectanea Hermetica Vol. VI. - The Chaldean Oracles*.

throughout the entire human system as a whole, but also the three worlds in Man, *viz.*, the head, the chest, and vital parts, are said to each contain Seven important centers or orifices.*

In the ancient conception, the Planets were the presidential heads of the elemental permutations—exciting forces which communicated their own peculiar energies through one or another of the Signs of the Zodiac. To understand the action of the Planets, it is necessary to consider what these Signs of the Zodiac are. The celestial definition is of course familiar to everyone, but that does not throw light on the Chaldæan theory. The twelve constellations were related to the three conditions of each of the four elements of the ancient, thus making twelve elemental variations in all: these are not, however, to be confounded with the Fire, Air, Water, and Earth usually recognized under these terms, but to the subtil æthers underlying them, and necessary for the manifestation of the gross elements, Thus the fiery Signs, *viz.*, Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius, were all considered to transmit the influence of subtil Fire, but in three different conditions, these being respectively the Fiery, Watery, and Any degrees of ætheric Fire—and so on with each of the other elemental triplicities.

In one complete diurnal revolution of the Sun, the successive influences of the whole of these twelve constellations are transmitted around the circuit of our

* *Vide Sepher Yetzirah*, Westcott, and Mather's *Kabbalah Unveiled* p. 50.

Earth: this would give an *average* time of two hours to each Sign, during which its elemental current would be operative. * These influences are intensified, or the reverse, by the presence or absence of the planets from the Signs, because some planets are considered to harmonize with the elemental vibrations of certain Signs, and *vice versa*.

This, in its human application, will be the better understood when it is stated that the four elements referred to were especially connected with the constitution of the human being, and the proportion in which these mingled would thus regulate the temperament of the individual under the regimen of the planets. According to the Hermetic system, it is only when these aetheric vibrations are disposed with due interval and proper balance that the spirit can be rendered manifest—the dead Osiris be raised to life, and the Lord of this World enter into his Kingdom. Some Souls lack qualities in which others abound, but the perfect man is fully representative. The elemental constitution of the individual is derived from the vivific fountains of Nature's energies: the Zodiacal hierarchies having successively endowed the human race at certain stages of its evolution, under the presidency of the Sephirotic powers.

The history of human evolution passing in its different phases, from the blackness of putrefaction “through all the colours,” to the golden glory of spiritual perfection, presents a perfect parallel with the Alchemical process of

* Compare the Eastern theory of the Tatwas.

the "Great Work," with which, Indeed, in a major aspect it is identical. The period of the Annus Magnus, or Great Year, comprising 25,868 solar years, or thereabouts, is that of one complete "circulation," for a minor revolution of the Zodiacal powers is both begun and finished within that time. The great celestial phenomena thus become coincident with the progress of the Race, and its final apotheosis approximately predicable.

The Earth is now under the dominion of Sorrow and Sadness: "When, Oh Lord of the Universe, shall she turn from her evil ways, and again behold Thy face?"

"The music of the Spheres,"*—a doctrine attributed to Pythagoras (who probably learnt it from the Egyptians)—is another cardinal Mystery tenet: by the skilful blending of these celestial harmonies, we are told, sages achieve their apotheosis. This is an allusion to the secret of the Lagash (mystical speech or incantation) and probably has the same significance as the Seven Thunders of Revelations (accompanied by lightning). As it is written, "Thy splendour, Oh Lord, shall fill the ends of the Universe!" But, in addition to this, subtil forces of our spiritual being have long been denoted by the Rainbow of Glory, our perception of which is the promise of a new life.

This blessed vision has been vouchsafed to other Seers of the World. Hai Ebn Yokdhan also perceived and described the essences of those Spheres: in each "he saw distinct immaterial essences, like the image of the Sun reflected

* *Vide* "Creation by Voice and the *Ennead* of Hermopolis," Maspero.

from one glass to another, according to the order of the Spheres . . . in all he discovered infinite beauty, brightness and pleasure, such as neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man . . . except those who have attained it or *experimentally known it*.”*

No wonder then at the exclamation of the younger Scipio, “*Quid moror in terris? Quin hue ad vos venire propero?*” †

To so reasonable a suggestion as this the reply given is not one which it is easy to appreciate. Upon this head Plato observes:—“The instruction in the doctrine given in the Mysteries that we human beings are in a kind of prison, and that we ought not to free ourselves from it or seek to escape, appears to me difficult to be understood, and not easy to apprehend.” ‡

On the other hand, it is of course not clear that the suicide really escapes from his prison by reason of having put off the material body: the explanation appears to be that the term of our life period is imposed by the astral forces prior to birth, and is therefore not dependent for its determination on physical circumstance during the individual career. The result therefore of such an abrupt termination of human life as that involved by suicide, § would be to transfer the life energies to the astral centres where they would still be operative, thereby enormously

* *Vide Platonist*, Vol. III., p. 335.

† “Why tarry upon the earth? Why do I not hasten to come to thee?”

‡ *Phaedo* 16.

§ *Vide Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, p. 31.

intensifying the unimpeded phantasy of excarnate life to which the Soul of the suicide would be subject.

In early life the disciples of the magi learnt to resolve the bonds of proscription, and by loosening the ungirders of the Soul, to enter the immeasurable region.

“Explore the River of the Soul,” says the Oracle, “so that, having become a servant to the body, you may again rise to the order from which you descended, joining works to sacred reason.”

The Magian and Hermetic philosophies appear to have persistently considered the body as the charnel house of the Soul, “occultly intimating that the death of the Soul was nothing more than a profound union with the ruinous bonds of the body.”*

Perplexing possibly, but none the less is it a great truth that the exterior and sensuous life is death to the highest energies of the Soul, *for all divine natures are incorporeal.*

This identification of the spiritual and, comparatively speaking, immortal being, with the impermanent and fleeting nature, was overcome by the purifications. The method adopted seems to have been that, after a certain period of rigour of life and practice of the virtues, the latter were, so to speak, confirmed and established by initiation into the Sacred Mysteries. Julian says, “The Oracles of the Gods declare that through purifying ceremonies, not the Soul only, but bodies themselves become worthy of receiving much assistance and health: ‘for (say they) the

* Taylor.

mortal vestment of bitter matter will by these means be preserved.”*

According to Plato, “Purification is to be derived from the five mathematical disciplines, *viz.*, from Arithmetic, Geometry, Stereometry, Music and Astronomy.” But the parts of initiation into the sacred Mysteries were also five, and the first of these parts consisted of the purification. “The fifth gradation is the most perfect felicity . . . and according to Plato an assimilation to divinity as far as it is possible to mankind.”† It is possible that this five-fold initiation had reference to the regimen of the four elements of the ancients and the Eternal Spirit operating therein. ‡

The Hermetic doctrine, which explains and resumes these ideas, considers these four Elements to intervene, as it were, between man and the divine Spirit. They are the Zones immediately penetrated by Souls departing this life, and their period of detention therein is regulated by the past spent life. Some few Souls coming forth pure, traverse these without let or hindrance and others require a long purification therein. The following allegorical fragment of Empedocles, cited by Plutarch, is doubtless a true echo of the ancient Mystery teaching Concerning this matter. Speaking of the unpurified Souls which enter these Regions, he thus describes the treatment they undergo: “The ethereal force pursues them towards the Sea. The Sea vomits them forth

* *Julian Orat.* V., p. 334.

† *Mathematica*, Theon of Smyrna.

‡ *Vide Hermes in Asclepius*, Part III.

upon its shores, the Earth in turn flings them upwards to the untiring Sun, and the Sun again drives them back into the Whirlwind of Space. Thus all the elements toss them from one to another, and all hold them in horror.”*

Purity of Soul is therefore a *sine qua non* to all, who, while yet upon the Earth, would come “forth from the bands of body step by step.” But purity itself is not sufficient, it must be accompanied by Intelligence and Will: Intelligence to direct the life to the highest Good, Will to preserve the “equilibrium of balance,”—that steady mean between two opposing forces, which to pursue is indeed difficult.

The exhortation to devote attention to divine things, while faithfully performing the duties of practical life, is one which must echo universal response. The calms of lofty contemplation expand our being, enlarging the purview of life, and the true dignity of the Soul is alone maintained when in alliance with its own divine summit. For not until the Spirit has penetrated beyond the limitations of body, and the mind been raised amid the stately solitudes of the Universal Temple, can the Man be said to be really Man, or the “Mercury of the philosophers” “truly animated.”

The value of right motive in the direction of human life is forcibly exemplified in the *Somnium*, and while the noblest activities in incarnation are recognized to be those which benefit collective interests, yet the fallacy of identifying the self with a life of even political celebrity or warlike achievement for their own sake, is clearly shown; personal

* *Asclepios*, Part X.

fame is but the meteoric gleam flashing at intervals down the avenues of time, and cannot permanently endure. The cataclysms of Water and Fire, which at regular intervals visit our Earth, are vicissitudes too sweeping and vast in their nature to permit the unbroken continuity of the human race; these "baptisms" of the two primal elements confirm and initiate each new phase in the great work of the world's perfectionment: marking stages alike in the spiritual history of Mankind.

The human Soul—the child of the Night of time—tends ever to the phenomenal and transient on the one hand, and the noumenal and essential on the other: situated between the divine and the animal, it is assimilable unto either. The channel to the other world is a stillovered way—often impassible, formed of spiritual aspirations—stepping-stones across the River of Lethe. This efflorescence of the human mind opens up a pathway into Heaven, a means whereby the identity may be transferred to the higher spheres by those who, while yet in the body, study the divine science. This off-shoot of the "Tree of Life" was, in the Kabbalistic initiation, resolvable into a septenary of perfections, reflecting the glories of the Seven Heavens, denoted respectively as Wisdom and Understanding, Mercy and Severity, Beauty, Glory and Victory.

The great revelation vouchsafed to the illuminati of all ages, and which has been the constant experience of Seers and initiates throughout the past, is a perception of Light—a brilliance unperceived by the normal senses—

compared to which physical illumination is but darkness. It is this LVX AOUR or Limitless Light pervading the primeval vastness of Universal Nature, the attainment of which confers unspeakable content upon the “subterranean workers”—dwellers in this material sphere—for it is the divine radix of all things. “The mortal who approaches the Fire shall receive a Light from divinity: for unto the persevering mortal the blessed Immortals are swift!”

EDITORIAL NOTE TO THE ELECTRONIC EDITION

This edition of *Somnium Scipionis* is based on the first edition originally published in *Collectanea Hermetica, Volume V*.

The pagination and page layout have not been retained for this edition. In the original, Westcott's notes to the translation were placed after the accompanying essay, while his notes on the essay were placed on the appropriate pages. The text has been reset and all of the notes placed on the pages in question. The scans which were used in the preparation of this document were of very poor quality and as a result several of the footnote placemarkers in the translation were missing. Using the contents of the notes as reference, the placemarkers were restored using the *educated guess* method. These will be corrected when a better copy of the volume can be acquired.

The translation of this work and authorship of the accompanying essay are cited as being by L.O., which is an abbreviation of *Levavi Oculos*—"I will lift up mine eyes". This was the magical motto of Percy Bullock who by 1892 had attained the grade of 5^o = 6^o, and was quickly becoming a prominent member of the Golden Dawn. In 1902 Bullock was appointed one of the *Chiefs* of the order along with J.W. Brodie-Innes and Dr. R.W. Felkin. This appointment was for one year until 1903, when all three men did not get re-elected and control of the order was assumed by A.E. Waite.

Frater Nec Temere Nec Timide
Editor

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