

LECTURE VI. *Eschatology*

In the previous lecture we showed how, to the astronomer theologians, contemplation of the sky had become the source of a mystic union with the divine stars. The sublime joys of ecstasy, which brings man into communion with the sidereal gods, give him but a foretaste of the bliss which is in store for him when after death his soul, ascending to the celestial spheres, shall penetrate all their mysteries. The transient exaltation, which illumines his intelligence here below, is a dim foreshadowing of the intoxication which will be wrought in him by the immediate prospect of the stars and the full comprehension of truth. The most ideal pursuits of the sage in this world are but a faint adumbration of a blessedness which will be perfected in the life to come.

Thus astral mysticism based upon a psychological experience the construction of a complete doctrine of immortality. It glorified its ideal of earthly life and projected it into the life beyond. These ideas, as they spread throughout the Roman world, could not fail to modify profoundly the whole conception of man's destiny. In to-day's lecture we shall devote ourselves to exhibiting this transformation.



At the beginning of the Empire the ancient beliefs concerning existence beyond the grave, the idea that the dead man lived a gloomy life in the tomb, sustained by the funeral offerings of his descendants, retained hardly any influence, and the mythological tales about the Styx, Charon's barque, and the punishments inflicted in the nether world no longer obtained any credence. Philosophical criticism had shown the absurdity of these lugubrious chimeras. Greek philosophy in general aimed at realising the *summum bonum* in this world. Of the two great systems which were predominant at Rome, one

flatly denied a future life. It is well known that Epicurus taught that the soul is composed of atoms and is dissolved with the body, and there is no doctrine of the Master on which his disciples insist with more complacent assurance. Lucretius¹ praises him for having driven from men's minds "this dread of Acheron which troubles the life of man to its inmost depths." The other great philosophical school, Stoicism, showed considerable hesitation concerning the fate in store for our souls. Its various representatives held different views on this point. Panætius, the friend of the Scipios, one of the writers who contributed most to win Rome over to the tenets of the Porch, resolutely declined to believe in a survival of the individual. In reality it is in this world that true Stoicism places the realisation of its ideal. For it the aim of existence is not the preparation for death but the attainment of perfect virtue. By giving freedom from the passions, virtue confers independence and felicity. The sage, a happy being, is a god on earth, and heaven can offer nothing more to him. In this system eschatological theories had only a secondary importance, and that explains their variations.

The negative point of view adopted by Panætius is that of the majority, perhaps, of the theorists of astrology. Among those who prided themselves on philosophy, many denied immortality or at least doubted it, as for instance Ptolemy, who was influenced by the ideas of the Peripatetics, or Vettius Valens, who represents purer Stoicism. According to them the divine spark which animated bodies, became merged after death in the cosmic fires, from which it had issued, without preserving any individuality. From death, then, they expected nothing but liberation from Destiny, of which they were the bondsmen here below; henceforth they were freed from those cruel necessities and pitiless vicissitudes to which those beings are subject who live under the planetary vaults. Their conception of existence and their highest aspirations were those to which the most antique of modern poets has given forcible

¹ Lucret., III, 37:

*Et metus, ille foras praeceps Acheruntis agendus
Funditus humanam qui vitam turbat ab imo.*

expression; I mean Leconte de Lisle, who, adopting a definition of Alfred de Vigny, declared that life is "a sombre incident between two endless periods of sleep." His musical and despondent apostrophe is well known¹:

"Et toi, divine Mort, où tout rentre et s'efface,
Accueille tes enfants dans ton sein étoilé,
Affranchis nous du temps, du nombre, et de l'espace,
Et rends nous le repose que la vie a troublé."²

This pessimism, which regarded annihilation as a blessing, might be accepted by certain spirits and sometimes preached with a kind of passion, as by Pliny in a famous confession of faith.³ But the majority, without venturing to admit the certainty of a future life, clung to it as a comfortable hypothesis entertained by certain thinkers.

We find it hard to resign ourselves to complete annihilation; even when reason acquiesces in the destruction of our transitory being, subconsciously we protest against it. The deep instinct of self-preservation drives man to desire a continuance of life, and feeling revolts against the anguish of an irrevocable separation, against the final loss of all one loves. Moreover in imperial Rome there were so many unpunished crimes, so much undeserved suffering, that men naturally took refuge in the hope of a happier future which would repair all the injustices of a sorrowful present. This is the explanation of the ever-increasing triumph of new theories concerning a life to come. To the scepticism and the negative views which were prevalent at the end of the Republic, at least in intellectual circles, were opposed doctrines taught by the professors of the theology which found in Posidonius its most illustrious exponent. A Stoic, he combines the teaching of the Porch with

¹ *Poèmes antiques*, "Dies Irae."

² O Death divine, at whose recall
Returneth all
To fade in thy embrace,
Gather thy children to thy bosom starred,
Free us from time, from number, and from space,
And give us back the rest that life hath marred.

³ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, vii, 55, § 188.

the idealism of Plato, who held that the soul, being an immaterial essence, must rise to a fairer world. But he welcomes also, and above all, the religious traditions of the Syrians, of which he is to be the eloquent propagandist.

All Oriental mysteries profess to reveal to their adepts the secret of attaining to a blessed immortality. In place of the shifting and contradictory opinions of philosophers concerning the fate of man after death, these religions offered a certainty based on a divine revelation and corroborated by the belief of countless generations which had clung to it. The despairing world eagerly welcomed these promises, and philosophy, undergoing a transformation, joined with the ancient beliefs of the East to give to the Empire a new eschatology.

In point of fact, the different cults conceived blessedness under very different forms, some of them gross enough. To the followers of Bacchus or of the Phrygian Sabazius drunkenness is divine possession. The devotee was to be admitted to the feast of the gods, there to rejoice with them for ever in a state of pleasant intoxication. The Alexandrine mysteries of Isis and Serapis diffused a less material conception of future happiness. The dead will descend to the nether world in full possession of his body as well as of his soul, and will enjoy an eternal rapture in contemplating face to face the ineffable beauty of the gods, whose equal he has become. But of the various beliefs which secured adepts in the Roman world, none was to become so influential as that of sidereal eschatology. This is the purest and most elevated doctrine which can be put to the credit of ancient paganism, and it was to establish a firm hold on the Western mind.

We shall attempt to show how it developed, by whom and when it was disseminated, and what different forms it assumed in the Græco-Roman world.



Certain beliefs which are found, side by side with many others, among primitive peoples, regard the spirits of the dead as departing to inhabit the moon or the sun, or even fancy that their evergrowing host forms the multitude of stars or crowds

the long track of the Milky Way. This very ancient idea received a new significance when philosophers, as far back as Heraclitus, taught that the soul is of the same nature as the ether, which is, as it were, the soul of the universe. Just as the one causes our bodies to move, the other, they said, caused the stars to fly across the spaces of the heavens. At death the body fell to dust and was reunited with the earth, but the glowing breath which had animated it, ascended to the luminous fluid that extended above the clouds, and coalesced with this subtle air, which was the source of all life. The official epitaph on the Athenians who fell at Potidæa in 432 B.C., expresses the conviction that the ether has received into its bosom the souls of these heroes as the earth has received their bodies.¹

There we have an opinion wide-spread in the fifth century from one end of the Hellenic world to the other. In opposition, then, to the views of the Homeric age and of popular belief, these doctrines taught that the abode of souls was neither the tomb nor the nether realm of Pluto, but the upper zone of the universe. Some, with greater exactitude, made them the companions of the stars, whose divinity philosophers devoted themselves to proving.² The two ideas are closely related, for the affinity of gods and men is an eminently Greek idea. Some sects of mystics—Orphic or Pythagorean—taught that the spirits of the dead departed to dwell in the moon, or to shine among the constellations. Thus Aristophanes³ transforms the Pythagorean poet, Ion of Chios, the friend of Sophocles, into the morning star. In Plato's view souls which have made a good use of their lives return to inhabit the heavenly bodies, which served as their dwelling-place before birth, and there partake of the bliss of a divine existence.

Moreover, the Greeks, as we have seen,⁴ had long before told how certain heroes of fable had been transported to heaven in reward for their exploits. Hercules, Perseus and Andromeda, the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux, and many others had thus been

¹ *Corp. Inscr. Att.*, i, 442: *Αἰθὴρ μὲν ψυχὰς ὑπεδέξατο, σώματα δὲ χθών.*

² See above, Lecture II, p. 23 sqq.

³ Aristoph., *Pax*, 831.

⁴ See above, Lecture IV, p. 65.

metamorphosed into constellations. "Catasterism" forms the *dénouement* of a number of mythological stories. Hence it did not appear bold to assign to eminent men of the day the same destiny as to the heroes of the past, and no one saw anything offensive in the supposition that their divine spirits took a place in the sky. The astronomer Conon did not hesitate even to recognise there the lock of hair which queen Berenice had dedicated to Aphrodite, and which became thenceforth a new cluster of stars. All persons, animals, and objects whose image men professed to find in the celestial vault, thus had their legends which connected them with some mythological episode or some historical event.

These doctrines, which in this way gradually spread over classical Greece, were to be taken up and transformed by the Stoics. To the disciples of Zeno the soul of man is a portion of that divine fire in which their pantheistic naturalism saw at once the productive force and the intelligence of the world. Human reason, a particle of this universal reason, was conceived as a breath, a fiery emanation. Now the stars are the most brilliant manifestation of the cosmic fire. The philosophy of the Porch, then, favoured the belief that the soul was united with the heavenly bodies by a special relation, and thus Stoicism was readily reconciled with astrology. It is a remarkable fact that this doctrine was defended, in the second century before our era, notably by Hipparchus, who was not only one of the great astronomers but a convinced adept of astrological theories, and, as we have seen,¹ Pliny applauds him warmly for having proved better than any one else that man is related to the stars and that our souls are "a part of the heaven."

Yet the pure Stoics, as we said above, while fully admitting the continued existence of this divine essence which warms and governs the body, inclined to the belief that after death it was reabsorbed into the universal fire without retaining any individuality. But very early this philosophy was led to make concessions to popular beliefs. Certain of its professors sought to bring the new principles which were formulated in the sphere of physics and psychology into agreement with the mystic ideas

¹ See above, Lecture II, p. 40.

propagated by the religious sects which began to spread from Asia over the Græco-Latin world. Posidonius, let us recall the fact, was the most active agent in bringing about this syncretism between East and West, and his pupil Cicero gives us in the *Dream of Scipio* the earliest statement of this eschatology at Rome: The souls of those who have deserved immortality will not descend to the depths of the earth, they will rise again to the starry spheres. We shall return several times to this remarkable *Dream*.

A number of inscriptions attest the extent to which this belief had spread by the first century before our era. There is an unlimited choice of examples to quote. Thus an epitaph on a girl thirteen years old discovered in the island of Thasos¹ says: "In this tomb lies the body of a young maiden, *anthophoros* (flower-bearer) of Ceres, carried off by the merciless Fates. But her soul by the good-will of the Immortals dwells among the stars and takes its place in the sacred choir of the blest." Here is a Latin epitaph,² one among many of the same kind: "My divine soul shall not descend to the shades; heaven and the stars have borne me away; earth holds my body, and this stone an empty name." Epigraphy proves that these ideas of a future life became gradually prevalent. They were more and more generally accepted under the Roman Empire in proportion as Oriental religions acquired more authority, and in the last days of paganism they exerted a preponderating influence.



After this rapid sketch of the historical development of sidereal eschatology, we shall attempt to trace the outlines of the doctrine and to show its varieties.

We shall have to examine four points:

1. Who obtains astral immortality?
2. How does the soul ascend to heaven?
3. Where is the abode of the blest to be found?
4. How is the blessedness that is vouchsafed to them conceived?

1. *Who is it that wins the boon of this sidereal immortality?*

It appears certain that in the East it was at first reserved for

¹ Kaibel, *Epigr. Gr.*, 324.

² Buecheler, *Carmina Epigr.*, 611.

those monarchs who, while still on earth, were raised by the reverence of their subjects above their fellow-men and put almost, or altogether, on a level with the heavenly powers. Traces of this primitive conception survived even at Rome. According to a tradition which is echoed by Manilius,¹ Nature first revealed her mysteries to the minds of kings, whose lofty thoughts reach the summit of the heavens. Another doctrine was also taught, that the divine souls of sovereigns come from a higher place than those of other men, that the greater a man's dignity, the greater is the dower he gets from heaven. But, in a general way, the rites employed to ensure immortality to kings by putting them on a level with the gods, were by degrees extended to important members of their *entourage*. This was a sort of privilege, of posthumous nobility, which was conferred on great ministers of state, or which they usurped, long before the common crowd of the dead attained it. Such is the idea to which Cicero gives expression in the *Dream of Scipio*²: "To all those who have saved, succoured, or exalted their fatherland, there is assigned a fixed place in heaven, where they will enjoy everlasting bliss, for it is from heaven that they who guide and preserve states have descended, thither to reascend." This is the republican paraphrase of the doctrine of the divinity of kings. But if an ex-consul is thus willing to accord apotheosis to statesmen, philosophers claim it for sages, men of letters for great poets, and artists for creative geniuses. Here the old Greek worship of heroes, combined with belief in "catasterism," comes in to enlarge the narrow conception of monarchy. Hermes Trismegistus³ taught that there were different kinds of royal souls, for there is a royalty of spirit, a royalty of art, a royalty of science, even a royalty of bodily strength. All exceptional men resemble the gods, and the people were loath to believe that they perished for ever. Some modern writers have shared this sentiment. "That a Shah of Persia or a critic of Milan," said Carducci, who had suffered at the hands of the latter class, "dies irrevocably, I believe, and I congratulate

¹ Manil., i, 41.

² Cic., *Somn. Scip.*, c. 3.

³ Herm. Trism. ap. Stobaeum, *Ecl.*, p. 466, Wachsmuth.

myself on the belief. But that Mazzini or that Dante Alighieri is utterly dead, I am entirely unconvinced."

Among those heroes whose merits had opened to them the gates of heaven,—"*virtus recludens immeritis mori caelum*," as Horace puts it,¹—the military monarchies of the East placed in the forefront the warriors who had died sword in hand in defence of their country, or rather of their king. This doctrine, which was deep-rooted particularly in Syria, has been preserved, as is well known, in Islam. But, side by side with these valiant soldiers, pious priests also were judged to merit immortality, or rather they adjudged it to themselves. Who could be more worthy to mount to the stars than those who, while yet on earth, lived in their society and in contemplation of them? Then, when Oriental mysteries spread, they all professed to prolong the existence of the initiated beyond the hour of death appointed by Destiny and to exempt them from the fatal law imposed on mankind. Participation in the occult ceremonies of worship becomes an infallible means of securing salvation. The gods welcomed amongst them the faithful who had served them fervently and had purified themselves by the scrupulous performance of rites.

But the demands of a less exclusive morality did not allow happiness beyond the grave to be secured as the reward of sectarian piety. Side by side with devotional observances the practice of more essentially human virtues was demanded. The purity necessary to salvation, which was originally ritual purity, now became spiritual. Though priests doubtless insisted strongly on the fulfilment of religious duties, the more philosophical theologians looked, above all, to the psychological conditions necessary for translation to heaven. We have indicated in dealing with the subject of ecstasy,²—and we shall return to it shortly,—how souls made gross by carnal passions were unable to ascend to the abode of the gods of light. For those who have not kept themselves pure throughout their lives, a posthumous purification is indispensable.



¹ Horace, *Odes*, iii, 2, 21.

² See above, Lecture V, p. 83.

2. This brings us to the second question which we have set before ourselves: *How did souls rise to the stars?*

It may be said that originally they made use of every method of locomotion: they ascended to heaven on foot, on horseback, in carriages, and they even had recourse to aviation. Among the ancient Egyptians the firmament was conceived as being so close to the mountains of the earth that it was possible to climb up to it with the aid of a ladder. Although the stars had been relegated to an infinite distance in space, the ladder still survived in Roman paganism as an amulet and as a symbol. Many people continued to place in tombs a small bronze ladder which recalled the naïve beliefs of distant ages; and in the mysteries of Mithra a ladder of seven steps, made of seven different metals, still symbolised the passage of the soul across the planetary spheres.

Though it had become difficult to reach heaven on foot, it was still possible to get there on horseback,—on the back of a winged horse. Thus the large cameo of Paris called “The Apotheosis of Augustus,” represents a prince of his house, Germanicus or Marcellus, borne by a “Pegasus,” which doubtless has no connection with Bellerophon’s mount. Sometimes a griffin is preferred to Pegasus: the monster flies heavenwards carrying on its sturdy back the deceased raised to the level of the gods. The dead, however, more frequently travelled in a car,—the car of the Sun. The idea that the divine charioteer drives a team across the heavenly fields existed in very early times in Syria as well as in Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The horses of fire and the chariot of fire, which carried up the prophet Elijah in a whirlwind, are very probably the horses and chariot of the Sun. In the same way, when Mithra’s mission on earth was fulfilled, he had been conveyed in the chariot of Helios to the celestial spheres over the ocean, and the happy lot which the hero had won for himself he granted also to his followers. The Emperors in particular were commonly reputed to become companions of the Sun-god after death, as they had been his *protégés* in life, and to be conducted by him in his chariot up to the summit of the eternal vaults.

Finally, there is a very wide-spread belief of Syrian origin

that souls fly to heaven on the back of an eagle.¹ According to the story, Etana in Babylon, like Ganymede in Greece, had been carried off in this way. The pious shared this happy lot. This is why the eagle is used as the ordinary decorative *motif* on sepulchral *stelae* at Hierapolis, the holy city of the great Syrian goddess, and it appears with the same meaning in the West. At the funeral rites of Emperors at Rome there was always fastened to the top of the pyre on which the corpse was to be consumed, an eagle, which was supposed to bear aloft the monarch's soul, and art frequently represents the busts of the Cæsars resting on an eagle in the act of taking flight, by way of suggesting their apotheosis. The reason is that in the East the eagle is the bird of the Baals, solar gods, and it carries to its master those who have been his servants in the world below.

All these supposed methods of reaching heaven are very primitive: they start from the supposition that a *load* has to be carried; they hardly imply a separation of body and soul, and they are anterior to the distinctions which philosophers established between different parts of man's being. They are religious survivals of very ancient conceptions, which only vulgar minds still interpreted literally.

The same idea is involved when magicians by secret processes professed to assure the credulous of the possibility of raising themselves upwards. If we are to believe Arnobius,² they asserted that they could cause wings to grow from the backs of their dupes, so as to enable them to fly up to the stars. One of the wonders which miracle-mongers most frequently boasted of working was that of soaring up into the air. The phenomena of levitation are produced at all periods. The power which magic professed to bestow on its adepts, is merely one particular application of this art to eschatology or rather to deification (*ἀπαθανατισμός*). Of this the papyrus erroneously called a "Mithraic liturgy" is the most typical example.³

These mechanical means of raising oneself, body and soul,

¹ For further details see my paper "L'aigle funéraire des Syriens et l'apothéose des empereurs" (*Revue de l'histoire des religions*), 1910.

² Arnob., *Adv. Nat.*, ii, 33, 62 (p. 65, 5; 97, 27, Reifferscheid).

³ Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, 1910, compare my *Oriental Religions* (1911), p. 260.

to the starry vault could still be recognised by superstition, which picks up all the ideas that have dropped out in the evolution of beliefs. They carry us back to an extremely low stage of religion, as we said. Hence theologians no longer accepted them save as symbols. Other doctrines of a more advanced character were developed, and these constituted the true teaching of the great Oriental mysteries, just as they had secured the adhesion of thinking men. They connected the ascent of the soul after death with physical and ethical theories, and thus caused sidereal immortality to enter into the order of the universe. They either appealed to *solar attraction*, or based their doctrine on the actual *nature of the soul*.

The Pythagoreans already believed that the glittering particles of dust which danced ceaselessly in a sunbeam (ξύματα), were souls descending from the ether, borne on the wings of light. They added that this beam, passing through the air and through water down to its depths, gave life to all things here below. This idea persisted under the Empire in the theology of the mysteries. Souls descended upon the earth, and reascended after death toward the sky, thanks to the rays of the sun, which served as the means of transport. On Mithraic bas-reliefs, one of the seven rays which surround the head of *Sol Invictus*, is seen disproportionately prolonged towards the dying Bull in order to awake the new life that is to spring from the death of the cosmogonic animal. But this ancient belief was brought into connection with a general theory held by the Chaldeans.¹ We saw that in the eyes of astrologers the human soul was an igneous essence, of the same nature as the celestial fires. The radiant sun continually caused particles of his resplendent orb to descend into the bodies which he called to life. Conversely, when death has dissolved the elements of which the human being is composed, and the soul has quitted the fleshly envelope in which it was imprisoned, the sun elates it again to himself. Just as his ardent heat causes all material substances to rise from the earth, so it draws to him again the invisible essence that dwells in us. He is the *Ἀναγωγεύς*, "he who brings up from below," who attracts the spirit out of the

¹ See above, Lecture IV, p. 73 ss.

flesh that defiles it. By a series of emissions and absorptions he in turn sends his burning emanations into bodies at birth and after death causes them to reascend into his bosom.

In this theory it is to the power of the sun, the great cosmic divinity, that the ascension of the soul is due. According to another doctrine mentioned above, which we are now going to consider more closely, the cause of this ascension is the physical nature of the soul.

This doctrine is set forth with great precision by Cicero in the *Tusculan Disputations*,¹ doubtless after Posidonius. The soul is a fiery breath (*anima inflammata*)—that is to say, its substance is the lightest in this universe composed of four elements. It necessarily, therefore, has a tendency to rise, for it is warmer and more subtle than the gross and dense air which encircles the earth. It will the more easily cleave this heavy atmosphere, since nothing moves more rapidly than a spirit. It must, therefore, in its continuous ascent, pass through that zone of the sky where gather the clouds and the rain, and where rule the winds, which, by reason of exhalations from the earth, is damp and foggy. When finally it reaches the spaces filled by an air that is rarefied and warmed by the sun, it finds elements similar to its own substance, and, ceasing to ascend, it is maintained in equilibrium. Henceforth it dwells in these regions, which are its natural home, continually vivified by the same principles that feed the everlasting fires of the stars.

This theory made it easier than the previous theory had done to establish a firm connexion between ethical beliefs concerning future destiny and physical theories about the constitution of the universe and the nature of man. We have seen² that virtue was conceived as liberation from the dominion of the flesh; the soul is never purely spiritual or immaterial, but when it abandons itself to the passions, it becomes gross, its substance grows more corporeal, if I may use the expression, and then it is too heavy to rise to the stars and gain the spheres of light. Its mere density will compel it to float in our mephitic atmosphere until it has been purified and con-

¹ *Tusc. Disp.*, i, 43, § 18.

² See above, p. 100, and Lecture V, p. 83.

sequently lightened. Thus the door is opened to all doctrines concerning punishment beyond the grave. How did pagans conceive this Purgatory situated in the air?

There is a very old opinion that the soul is a breath and that, at the moment when it escapes through the mouth of the dying man, it is carried away by the winds. Thus the atmosphere was filled with wandering souls, which became demons with power to succour or harm mortals. The origin of these beliefs goes back to the most primitive animism. But the mysteries introduced into them the idea of purification. Souls tossed by whirlwinds are freed from defilements contracted during life, just as linen hung in the air is bleached and loses all odour. When, after being thus buffeted and blown about by the winds, souls are purified from part of their sins, they rise to the zone of the clouds, where they are drenched by rain and plunged into the gulf of the upper waters. Thus cleansed from the stains that polluted them, they reach at last the fires of heaven, whose heat scorches them. Not till they have undergone this threefold trial, during which they have passed through countless years of cruel expiation, do they find at length everlasting peace in the serenity of the ether.

Virgil alludes to this doctrine in the famous line of the sixth book of the *Aeneid*,¹ where, speaking of souls, he says:

Aliae panduntur inanes
Suspensae ad ventos, aliis sub gurgite vasto
Infectum eluitur scelus aut exurit igni.

Again, the passage of souls through the elements is represented symbolically on a funeral monument almost contemporary with the poet. Above the portrait of the deceased there appear first in the spandrels of this *cippus*, two busts of the Winds facing each other. Higher up, on the architrave are two Tritons and two dolphins, which evidently represent the idea of the aqueous element. Finally, at the top of the stone, in the pediment, we see two lions which, as on the Mithraic monuments, are symbols of fire, the igneous principle.²

¹ Virgil, *Æn.*, vi, 740.

² *Jahresb. Inst. Wien*, xii (1910), p. 213.

Side by side with physical ideas, mythological beliefs always retained their sway. Various sects professed to assure to the deceased a passage through these regions peopled by malevolent demons: they taught their members prayers which would propitiate hostile powers; they instructed them in formulæ, consisting of veritable "pass-words," which would compel the commandants (*ἀρχοντες*), posted to guard the gates of heaven, to allow them to enter the upper sphere. Here is a legacy from the ancient religions of the East. The Egyptian *Book of the Dead* is a veritable guide to the other world, and the Orphic tablets of Petilia are of the same character. The papyrus of Paris, called a Mithraic liturgy, affords us the most characteristic example of the use of these magical processes.

But more often the priests professed to give the soul a god to lead it on its perilous journey through the whirlwinds of air, water, and fire to the starry heavens. "Among the dead," says a funeral inscription,¹ "there are two companies: one moves upon the earth, the other in the ether among the choirs of stars; I belong to the latter, for I have obtained a god as my guide." This divine escort of souls frequently retains the name of Hermes in conformity with ancient Greek mythology. An epigram belonging to the first century of our era apostrophises the deceased in these words: "Hermes of the wingèd feet, taking thee by the hand, has conducted thee to Olympus and made thee to shine among the stars."² But more often the rôle of escort now devolves upon the Sun himself: We have seen³ that at the end of paganism the royal star is figured as carrying mortals in his flying chariot. Those who had not by their piety merited the protection of the god whose duty it was to escort and introduce them, and who nevertheless ventured up to heaven, were cast headlong into the perpetually raging gulf of the warring elements which fought unceasingly around the earth.



¹ Kaibel, *Epigramm. Græca*, 650.

² Haussoullier, *Revue de philologie*, 1909, p. 6.

³ See above, p. 101.

3. The lowest of the seven planetary spheres, that of the moon, separates the domain of the violent and restless elements and of beings subject to fate, from that of the eternal gods, where all is order and regularity. What becomes of the souls that enter this celestial zone, and where are they stationed? In other words, *where is the abode of the blest?*—the third question which we have to examine.

The masses did not attain to very precise ideas on this subject: they hesitated, they contented themselves with the general assertion that the soul is "among the stars." At the beginning of their poems, Lucan addressing Nero and Statius addressing Domitian both asked what part of heaven these Emperors will inhabit after their apotheosis¹: Will they mount on the flaming chariot of the Sun? will they take their place as new stars among the constellations? Or even will Jupiter himself in the height of the heavens yield to them his sceptre? In the same way theologians doubted where to place the Elysian Fields. The Stoics had already emphatically declared that they were not situated in the depths of the earth, as the ancient Greeks believed. In conformity with their system of physical interpretations of mythological names, Acheron became in their eyes the air, Tartarus and Pyriphlegethon the zones of fire and hail. As for the Elysian Fields, they are found to be located sometimes in the moon, sometimes between the moon and the sun, sometimes in the sphere of the fixed stars and particularly in the Milky Way, sometimes beyond this extreme sphere of the heavens, outside the limits of the world. Among the various doctrines there are two of which we have more precise information from ancient authors. One is set forth by Plutarch after Demetrius of Tarsus²: it is a combination of the ideas of Posidonius with the religious beliefs of the mysteries. According to this doctrine, man is composed of body (*σῶμα*), nutritive soul (*ψυχὴ*), and reason (*νοῦς*). The body is made of earth; the vital principle, which nourishes it and causes it to grow, is lunar; reason comes to us from the sun. Death severs from the body the nutritive soul and the rational soul; the former is

¹ Lucan, i, 45 ss. Stat., *Thebaid.*, i, 22

² Plut., *De Facie in Orbe Lunae*, c. 26; cf. my *Théologie solaire*, pp. 464, 475.

dissolved in the moon, the latter ultimately, after complete purification, reascends to its original source, the fount of all light.

This doctrine was adopted by those who regarded the Sun as the principal god. But when, as we have explained,¹ paganism renounced the view that the Sun is the lord of the world, the Prime Cause, and set the Supreme Being beyond the limits of the sensible world, enthroning him above the planetary spheres in the highest of the heavens, the abode of the blest was naturally transferred to the seat of divinity; and a theory, more complicated than that of solar immortality, but doubtless only a development of it, prevailed towards the end of the Roman empire.

This psychology, which owed its triumph to the astrological cults of Asia, professed to establish a sevenfold division in the soul, to which corresponded seven creations. It taught that our soul descends from the height of heaven to this sublunary world, passing through the gates of the planetary spheres, and thus at its birth the soul acquires the dispositions and the qualities peculiar to each of these stars. After death it regains its celestial home by the same path. Then, as it traverses the zones of the sky, which are placed one above another, it divests itself of the passions and faculties which it has acquired during its descent to earth, as it were of garments. To the moon it surrenders its vital and alimentary energy, to Mercury its cupidity, to Venus its amorous desires, to the sun its intellectual capacities, to Mars its warlike ardour, to Jupiter its ambitious dreams, to Saturn its slothful tendencies. It is naked, disencumbered of all sensibility, when it reaches the eighth heaven, there to enjoy, as a sublime essence, in the eternal light where live the gods, bliss without end.

All these doctrines, then, in spite of differences in detail, taught that souls, descended from the light above, were raised to the region of the stars, where they dwelt forever with these radiant divinities. This eschatology of "Chaldean" origin gradually displaced all others under the Empire. The Elysian Fields, which not only the ancient Greeks, but also the followers of Isis and Serapis still located in the depths of the earth, were

¹ See above, Lecture IV, p. 75.

transferred to the ether which laves the stars, and the subterranean world became henceforth the gloomy abode of malevolent spirits. This conception, a novelty in Europe, had long been that of Persian dualism, which the mysteries of Mithra imported into the West. Their theology systematically contrasts the infernal darkness, into which are plunged demons and reprobates, with the bright abodes of the gods and the elect.



4. Before concluding this lecture, we have still a fourth question to examine: *What conception was formed of the bliss reserved for the elect who were raised to the stars?*

We have seen (p. 95) that the mysteries of Bacchus and Thracian Orphism represented immortality as a sort of holy intoxication: the faithful, sharing the banquet of the gods, rejoiced with them for ever at a feast liberally supplied with wine. These beliefs were combined with sidereal eschatology, only the locality of the repast was transferred to the new Olympus, and the idea of a celestial banquet was to survive up to the end of paganism and to impose itself, at any rate as a symbol, even on Christianity.

But Plato had already ridiculed those who looked upon ceaseless wine-bibbing as the highest reward of virtue, and the author of the *Epinomis* already conceived eternal life as the contemplation of the most beautiful things which eye can perceive—that is, the constellations. This idea was developed in the sidereal cults, and Posidonius was to set forth in stately language how the contemplation of the sky and the study of the stars is the preparation for another existence, in which human reason will know the fulness of the sublime joy which a transient ecstasy causes it here below. As soon as it is delivered from the trammels of the flesh, the soul will soar to these lofty regions, whither it has hitherto been unable to escape except at intervals. Flying across the immensity of space, it will reascend to the stars from which it descended. Embracing in its view the entire circuit of the world, it will perceive our globe as a scarcely visible point, or as an ant-heap for the dominion of which a host of minute insects contend. This earth, frozen in

the north, scorched in the south, submerged all round by the ocean, intersected by deserts, devastated and defiled, is uninhabitable except here and there. How contemptible will appear to the soul the narrowness of its former dwelling, how empty the ambition of those who dream of no other immortality than glory in this finite realm! As soon as it reaches the starry spheres, reason is nourished and expands; in its former home it regains its original qualities; it rejoices among the divine stars; it contemplates all the glory of the bright heaven, and at the same time it is ravished by the accordant sounds of enchanting music, the glorious world-concert made by the harmonious movement of the spheres. Freed from the passions of the body, it will be able to abandon itself entirely to its insatiable desire for knowledge. Marvelling at the sidereal revolutions, it will set itself to comprehend them; its keener vision will enable it to discover the causes of all phenomena, and it will receive a full revelation of all the secrets of Nature—that is, of God.

The doctrine of sidereal immortality is certainly the most elevated that antiquity conceived. It was at this definitive formula that paganism stopped. This belief was not to perish utterly with it; and even after the stars had been despoiled of their divinity, it survived to some extent the theology which had created it. If I had not already abused your patience, it would be an interesting study to join you in searching for survivals of these pagan tenets through the Middle Ages, and in showing the forms which they assumed in the popular creed and amongst the divines. In general, souls continued to be represented as passing through the spheres of heaven in order to reach the abode of the Most High. May I remind you that Dante was still inspired by these most ancient astrological conceptions? His Paradise shows us the blest, who have practised the virtues proper to each of the planets, inhabiting the spheres of these seven wandering stars. To destroy these old eschatological ideas it was necessary for Copernicus and Galileo to overthrow the system of Ptolemy and bring down those heavens peopled by bright beings, and so to open to the imagination the infinite spaces of a boundless universe.