

**THE TRINITIES OF THE ANCIENTS; OR, THE  
MYTHOLOGY OF THE FIRST AGES, AND THE  
WRITINGS OF SOME OF THE PYTHAGOREAN  
AND OTHER SCHOOLS, EXAMINED, WITH  
REFERENCE TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE  
TRINITY ASCRIBED TO PLATO, AND OTHER  
ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS**

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The trinities of the ancients; or, The mythology of the first ages, and the writings of some of the Pythagorean and other schools, examined, with reference to the knowledge of the Trinity ascribed to Plato, and other ancient philosophers by Robert Mushet

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**ROBERT MUSHET**

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KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRINITY ASCRIBED TO PLATO,  
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BY  
ROBERT MUSIET.

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"As man is formed by nature with an incredible appetite for truth; so his strongest pleasure in the enjoyment, arises from the actual communication of it to others."

WARBURTON'S *Divine Legation*.

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TO  
WILLIAM MUSHET, ESQ.,  
OF GRAY'S INN.

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THERE IS NO ONE to whom I can more appropriately dedicate the following pages than to yourself; not only on account of a community of tastes, sentiments, and opinions, but as a token of ancient friendship; and because the subject to which they are devoted has been one of mutual interest, which we have frequently discussed together, in those hours of rational relaxation for which I am so greatly indebted to you.

You were then inclined, as I was, to regard the opinion—attributing to Plato a knowledge of the Trinity—with considerable distrust and suspicion; and when afterwards you turned your attention to other objects, I proceeded, in the indulgence of my inclination, to prosecute an inquiry into the evidence on which that opinion is supposed to rest.

This volume contains the result of the inquiry, so far as I thought necessary to pursue it. You will perceive there

of that devotion which we pay to self-evident truth : others, again, having an object to gain, or an hypothesis to support, have attempted to prove their opinion with such arguments as the subject can supply ; and, in fulfilling this task, we must admire their learning, if we are not convinced by their reasoning.

As I was conscious, from the beginning, of some misgivings in my own mind,—first, as to the truth of the assertion, and, secondly, as to the cogency of the conclusions arrived at by these writers,—I made it a source of amusement to collect what evidence I could, conveniently, to oppose their arguments, and to satisfy myself of their truth or falsehood.

When the inquiry was brought to a conclusion, so as to confirm my preconceived idea, I judged (with what justice or truth I know not,) that the fruits of it might be useful and instructive to others, whose pursuits would bring them constantly in contact with the opinion which is attempted to be refuted. Such as they are, I willingly bequeath them to the reader.

But as this Essay was not originally designed to



meet the public eye; and as the inquiry was pursued at long intervals in a desultory manner, just as inclination prompted me, or as the manifold avocations of life allowed me quietude and leisure, I had some apprehensions that the arguments were not developed so clearly, nor the evidence collated and arranged so carefully, as if it had been undertaken with the object of publication immediately in view. However, I have striven to compensate, in some degree, for the defects and irregularities of my first mode of proceeding, by reducing the "indigesta moles" of the primary materials to their present form; having tried to breathe into them some of the spirit of order and harmony. And it is hoped the sage maxim of the Latin poet has not been violated with respect to brevity and propriety:—

. . . . . Id arbitor,  
Adprimè in vitâ esse utile, nequid nimis.

If I am too sanguine in thinking, that I have conclusively disproved the opinion of Plato and the ancients having a knowledge of the Trinity, I am certain that the weakness of the argument rests with the author, and not with the subject. There

is enough given to excite doubt and inquiry at all events; and he who is disposed to extend his researches further, will, I have no doubt, be more and more convinced of the truth, that the opinion referred to is without foundation, and the superstructure raised upon it is, consequently, without stability.

It might appear almost superfluous to make any observations here on the prevalence of this opinion. I will, however, limit myself to the early Fathers and to the ancient philosophers.

With respect to Plato himself having some knowledge of the Trinity, it seems to have met with universal concurrence in the early times of our religion, by the Christians as well as by the pagans.

There is no feature of that interesting period more curious, if not extraordinary, than this general acquiescence in that which I am now convinced has no foundation in truth. The pagan Platonists had probably some reason for their conduct: the rivalry of the new religion brought into being things new and strange; but I can find no more tangible explanation for the conduct of the Chris-

tian writers than the conjecture, that they were deluded or deceived by the specious Eclectic system of philosophy, whose singular interpretations of the expiring mythology, and of the writings of the ancient philosophers, obliterated all the landmarks of certainty and of truth. The pagans fancied they saw a resemblance between the Christian Trinity and the doctrines of Plato and others: the Fathers met them more than half-way, and in the end willingly confessed, that this essential truth of our religion was known before Christ revealed it a second time to mankind\*.

It has been supposed, that the Christian Fathers complied with, and acquiesced in, the notions of the pagan Platonists, by way of an *argumentum ad hominem*, (being, as it were, all things to all men, for the sake of proselytism,) that they might the

\* "As the Platonic pagans, after Christianity, did approve of the Christian doctrine, concerning the Logos, as that which was exactly agreeable with their own; so did the generality of the Christian Fathers, before and after the Nicene Council, represent the genuine and Platonic Trinity as really the same thing with the Christian; or as approaching so near to it, that they differed chiefly in circumstances, or in the manner of expression."—Intell. System, vol. iii. p. 185.