

**ON THE DELAY OF THE
DEITY IN PUNISHING
THE WICKED**

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On the Delay of the Deity in Punishing the Wicked by Plutarch

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PLUTARCH

**ON THE DELAY OF THE
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PUNISHING THE WICKED.

REVISED EDITION,

WITH

NOTES,

BY

PROFESSORS H. B. HACKETT AND W. S. TYLER.

*Ὅταν γὰρ ἴδῃ τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῆ, οὗτοι νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες ἑαυτοῖς εἰσι νόμος, οἷοντες ἐνδείκνυνται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου ἡρατῶν ἐν τοῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν.—Rom. ii. 14, 15.

Sive argumentum spectes, nullum majus graviusque est; sive explicandi rationem, adeo subtiliter eleganterque disputavit Plutarchus, ut, summorum virorum judicio, proxime ad Christianae doctrinae praestantiam accesserit. WYTTENBACH.

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON & CO., 443 & 445 BROADWAY.
1867.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

It may be proper to repeat here the import of a few sentences from this Preface, since they have a bearing also on the object and plan of the present publication.

The hope was expressed there that Theological students especially would find the reading of this treatise useful to them as a means of keeping up their knowledge of the Greek language and making still further progress in it. The book may be used as a sort of parallel course at the same time with the study of the New Testament. The earnest student of the Gospels and Paul's Epistles will not be content with the acquisitions in Greek scholarship which he brings from the College to the Seminary.

This destination of the work suggests at once the reasons for selecting this treatise of Plutarch. The title indicates its general object. We can conceive of no question which is likely to have been so full of perplexity to the mind of a thoughtful heathen as the one which is here brought up for discussion—the question, namely, how the impunity, and not unfrequently the signal prosperity of the wicked, can be reconciled with the doctrine of a just Providence; or, in other words, with the belief of a Deity who observes the right and the wrong of human actions, and governs the world according to the principles of a righteous moral retribution. A subject like this, as viewed from the

position of those destitute of the light of revelation, could not have failed to present much which was mysterious, and to all appearance incapable of explanation. We see from the treatise before us what objections were urged against the justice of Providence from this source, and also what replies could be offered to them, on grounds of mere reason or natural religion.* The work, in the first instance, was directed more particularly against the followers of Epicurus. As a sect, they denied the moral accountability of men; they acknowledged nothing as retributive in the sufferings or allotments of life; they referred everything to an inexorable fate, or mere chance; while, in common with other ancient skeptics, they alleged, as one of the main arguments for their opinion, the self-evident absurdity of any other; since nothing, as they affirmed, could be more reproachful to the gods, than to attribute to them any concern in the government of a world which exhibits such a manifest want of correspondence between the experience and the deserts of men. The considerations which Plutarch has here urged, for the purpose of obviating or diminishing the force of such a statement, are such as evince an elevation of views, a depth and soundness of moral feeling, to which I know of no parallel in any work of pagan antiquity. I am not aware, indeed, that even Christian writers, who have attempted to defend the same truth within the same limits of natural theology, have been able to do anything better than to reaffirm his positions, and perhaps amplify and illustrate his arguments.†

The object of the notes has been not so much to criticize the reasoning and views of the author, as to put the reader in a

* A summary of the argument will be found prefixed to the notes.

† On the question whether Plutarch had any knowledge of Christianity, see Appendix at the end of the notes.

situation to form his own judgment concerning their correctness and relevancy. It was impossible, in order to attain this end, to insert fewer historical notes than have been introduced. The rule followed was to presuppose, on the part of the reader, all the knowledge of this sort which it was reasonable to expect, and yet avoid making it necessary for him to resort to books which he might not have within reach, or which he could not stop to examine without an irksome delay. Yet, with this restriction, the space allotted to such notes is not inconsiderable: in part because the illustrations from fact and example, which occur in the work, are so very numerous, and in part because these take us so often entirely out of the ordinary circle of history. Occasional references have been made to passages both in the Old and New Testaments. The design of these in part is to call attention to some of those contrasts or accordances of sentiment which strike one in comparing the Scriptures with the writings of heathen authors, and which are not uninteresting, as showing the infinite superiority of the Gospel to the purest pagan morality; while at the same time they teach us how entirely consonant to the dictates of sound reason are many of the very doctrines of Revelation which objectors have most violently assailed. The other references of this nature relate mostly to points of language which involve some analogy to that of the New Testament, and deserve to be noticed the more because the Greek of Plutarch comes so near to the dialect of the first Christian writers.

No recent scholar has edited this treatise. It has been necessary to rely chiefly on the labors of the older critics, as Xylander, Reiske, Hutten, Wyttenbach. Something has been gleaned from other sources indicated in the notes. The text followed is, in the main, that of Wyttenbach. Some variations from this,

many of them suggested by this distinguished critic, will be found in the Tauchnitz edition, published at Leipzig, 1829, and that of Dübner, from the press of Didot, Paris, 1841.

H. B. H.

NEWTON THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTION,
December 27, 1843.

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION.

THE first edition of this treatise was published in 1844. That having been out of print for several years, the present edition is now issued in compliance with the request of various friends of classical learning, and in the conviction that a work so valuable for the moral lessons which it teaches, and so well adapted for occasional use as a text-book, as well as for private study, should be kept within the reach of teachers and others who might desire to read the work in the original. Time and experience have confirmed the conviction which we have always entertained of the surpassing value of the writings of Plutarch, as emphatically the historian of divine Providence, among the writers of heathen antiquity, and of this treatise in particular, as a means of strengthening men's faith in the certainty of moral retributions, and of arousing them to a juster sensibility to the deserts of crime committed against law, divine or human.

The former edition (owing in part to its more special design), was deficient in verbal and textual illustration. It is hoped the reader will find here the evidence of greater maturity and completeness in this respect. Additions have been made to the notes, consisting largely of grammatical and exegetical commentary, with references to the Grammars now most approved in this country, and easily consulted by the student. Many of the other notes have been rewritten, and still others abridged or