

# **AD NATIONES. BOOK II.**

Tertullian

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# AD NATIONES. BOOK II.

## Tertullian

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## AD NATIONES. BOOK II.(1)

### CHAP. I. THE HEATHEN GODS FROM HEATHEN AUTHORITIES. VARRO HAS WRITTEN A WORK ON THE SUBJECT. HIS THREEFOLD CLASSIFICATION. THE CHANGEABLE CHARACTER OF THAT WHICH OUGHT TO BE FIXED AND CERTAIN.

OUR defence requires that we should at this point discuss with you the character of your gods, O ye heathen, fit objects of our pity,(2) appealing even to your own conscience to determine whether they be truly gods, as you would have it supposed, or falsely, as you are unwilling to have proved.(3) Now this is the material part of human error, owing to the wiles of its author, that it is never free from the ignorance of error,(4) whence your guilt is all the greater. Your eyes are open, yet they see not; your ears are unstopped, yet they hear not; though your heart beats, it is yet dull, nor does your mind understand(5) that of which it is cognizant.(6) If indeed the enormous perverseness (of your worship) could(7) be broken up(8) by a single demurrer, we should have our objection ready to hand in the declaration(9) that, as we know all those gods of yours to have been instituted by men, all belief in the true Deity is by this very circumstance brought to nought;(10) because, of course, nothing which some time or other had a beginning can rightly seem to be divine. But the fact is,(11) there are many things by which tenderness of conscience is hardened into the callousness of wilful error. Truth is beleaguered with the vast force (of the enemy), and yet how secure she is in her own inherent strength! And naturally enough(12) when from her very adversaries she gains to her side whomsoever she will, as her friends and protectors, and prostrates the entire host of her assailants. It is therefore against these things that our contest lies against the institutions of our ancestors, against the authority of tradition,(13) the laws of our governors, and the reasonings of the wise; against antiquity, custom, submission;(14) against precedents, prodigies, miracles, all which things have had their part in consolidating that spurious(15) system of your gods. Wishing, then, to follow step by step your own commentaries which you have drawn out of your theology of every sort (because the authority of learned men goes further with you in matters of this kind than the testimony of facts), I have taken and abridged the works of Varro;(16) for he in his treatise Concerning Divine Things, collected out of ancient digests, has shown himself a serviceable guide(17) for us. Now, if I inquire of him who were the subtle inventors(18) of the gods, he points to either the philosophers, the peoples, or the poets. For he has made a threefold distinction in classifying the gods: one being the physical class, of which the philosophers treat; another the mythic class, which is the constant burden of(19) the poets; the third, the gentile class, which the nations have adopted each one for itself. When, therefore, the philosophers have ingeniously composed their physical (theology) out of their own conjectures, when the poets have drawn their mythical from fables, and the (several) nations have forged their gentile (polytheism) according to their own will, where in the world must truth be placed? In the conjectures? Well, but these are only a doubtful conception. In the fables? But they are at best an absurd story. In the popular accounts?(1) This sort of opinion,(2) however, is only promiscuous(3) and municipal. Now all things with the philosophers are uncertain, because of their variation with the poets all is worthless, because immoral; with the nations all is irregular and confused, because dependent on their mere choice. The nature of God, however, if it be the true one with which you are concerned, is of so definite a character as not to be derived from uncertain speculations,(4) nor contaminated with worthless fables, nor determined by promiscuous conceits. It ought indeed to be regarded, as it really is, as certain, entire, universal, because it is in truth the property of all. Now, what god shall I believe? One that has been gauged by vague suspicion? One that history(5) has divulged? One that a community has invented? It would be a far worthier thing if I believed no god, than one which is open to doubt, or full of shame, or the object of arbitrary selection.(6)

## CHAP. II. PHILOSOPHERS HAD NOT SUCCEEDED! IN DISCOVERING GOD. THE UNCERTAINTY AND CONFUSION OF THEIR SPECULATIONS.

But the authority of the physical philosophers is maintained among you<sup>(7)</sup> as the special property.<sup>(8)</sup> of wisdom. You mean of course, that pure and simple wisdom of the philosophers which attests its own weakness mainly by that variety of opinion which proceeds from an ignorance of the truth. Now what wise man is so devoid of truth, as not to know that God is the Father and Lord of wisdom itself and truth? Besides, there is that divine oracle uttered by Solomon: "The fear of the Lord," says he, "is the beginning of wisdom."<sup>(9)</sup> But<sup>(10)</sup> fear has its origin in knowledge; for how will a man fear that of which he knows nothing? Therefore he who shall have the fear of God, even if he be ignorant of all things else, if he has attained to the knowledge and truth of God,<sup>(11)</sup> will possess full and perfect wisdom. This, however, is what philosophy has not clearly realized. For although, in their inquisitive disposition to search into all kinds of learning, the philosophers may seem to have investigated the sacred Scriptures themselves for their antiquity, and to have derived thence some of their opinions; yet because they have interpolated these deductions they prove that they have either despised them wholly or have not fully believed them, for in other cases also the simplicity of truth is shaken<sup>(12)</sup> by the over-scrupulousness of an irregular belief,<sup>(13)</sup> and that they therefore changed them, as their desire of glory grew, into products of their own mind. The consequence of this is, that even that which they had discovered degenerated into uncertainty, and there arose from one or two drops of truth a perfect flood of argumentation. For after they had simply<sup>(14)</sup> found God, they did not expound Him as they found Him, but rather disputed about His quality, and His nature, and even about His abode. The Platonists, indeed, (held) Him to care about wordly things, both as the disposer and judge thereof. The Epicureans regarded Him as apathetic<sup>(15)</sup> and inert, and (so to say) a non-entity.<sup>(16)</sup> The Stoics believed Him to be outside of the world; the Platonists, within the world. The God whom they had so imperfectly admitted, they could neither know nor fear; and therefore they could not be wise, since they wandered away indeed from the beginning of wisdom," that is, "the fear of God." Proofs are not wanting that among the philosophers there was not only an ignorance, but actual doubt, about the divinity. Diogenes, when asked what was taking place in heaven, answered by saying, "I have never been up there." Again, whether there were any gods, he replied, "I do not know; only there ought to be gods."<sup>(17)</sup> When Croesus inquired of Thales of Miletus what he thought of the gods, the latter having taken some time<sup>(18)</sup> to consider, answered by the word "Nothing." Even Socrates denied with an air of certainty<sup>(19)</sup> those gods of yours.<sup>(20)</sup> Yet he with a like certainty requested that a cock should be sacrificed to AEsculapius. And therefore when philosophy, in its practice of defining about God, is detected in such uncertainty and inconsistency, what "fear" could it possibly have had of Him whom it was not competent<sup>(1)</sup> clearly to determine? We have been taught to believe of the world that it is god.<sup>(2)</sup> For such the physical class of theologizers conclude it to be, since they have handed down such views about the gods that Dionysius the Stoic divides them into three kinds. The first, he supposes, includes those gods which are most obvious, as the Sun, Moon, and Stars; the next, those which are not apparent, as Neptune; the remaining one, those which are said to have passed from the human state to the divine, as Hercules and Amphiaraus. In like manner, Arcesilaus makes a threefold form of the divinity the Olympian, the Astral, the Titanian sprung from Coelus and Terra; from which through Saturn and Ops came Neptune, Jupiter, and Orcus, and their entire progeny. Xenocrates, of the Academy, makes a twofold division the Olympian and the Titanian, which descend from Coelus and Terra. Most of the Egyptians believe that there are four gods the Sun and the Moon, the Heaven and the Earth. Along with all the supernal fire Democritus conjectures that the gods arose. Zeno, too, will have it that their nature resembles it. Whence Varro also makes fire to be the soul of the world, that in the world fire governs all things, just as the soul does in ourselves. But all this is most absurd. For he says, Whilst it is in us, we have existence; but as soon as it has left us, we die. Therefore, when fire quits the world in lightning, the world comes to its end.

### CHAP. III. THE PHYSICAL PHILOSOPHERS MAINTAINED THE DIVINITY OF THE ELEMENTS; THE ABSURDITY OF THE TENET EXPOSED.

From these developments of opinion, we see that your<sup>(3)</sup> physical class of philosophers are driven to the necessity of contending that the elements are gods, since it alleges that other gods are sprung from them; for it is only from gods that gods could be born. Now, although we shall have to examine these other gods more fully in the proper place, in the mythic section of the poets, yet, inasmuch as we must meanwhile treat of them in their connection with the present class,<sup>(4)</sup> we shall probably even from their present class,<sup>(5)</sup> when once we turn to the gods themselves, succeed in showing that they can by no means appear to be gods who are said to be sprung from the elements; so that we have at once a presumption<sup>(6)</sup> that the elements are not gods, since they which are born of the elements are not gods. In like manner, whilst we show that the elements are not gods, we shall, according to the law of natural relationship,<sup>(7)</sup> get a presumptive argument that they cannot rightly be maintained to be gods whose parents (in this case the elements) are not gods. It is a settled point<sup>(8)</sup> that a god is born of a god, and that what lacks divinity<sup>(9)</sup> is born of what is not divine. Now, so far as<sup>(10)</sup> the world of which your philosophers treat<sup>(11)</sup> (for I apply this term to the universe in the most comprehensive sense<sup>(12)</sup>) contains the elements, ministering to them as its component parts (for whatever its own condition may be, the same of course will be that of its elements and constituent portions), it must needs have been formed either by some being, according to the enlightened view<sup>(13)</sup> of Plato, or else by none, according to the harsh opinion<sup>(14)</sup> of Epicurus; and since it was formed, by having a beginning, it must also have an end. That, therefore, which at one time before its beginning had no existence, and will by and by after its end cease to have an existence, cannot of course, by any possibility, seem to be a god, wanting as it does that essential character of divinity, eternity, which is reckoned to be<sup>(15)</sup> without beginning, and without end. If, however, it<sup>(16)</sup> is in no wise formed, and therefore ought to be accounted divine since, as divine, it is subject neither to a beginning nor an end of itself how is it that some assign generation to the elements, which they hold to be gods, when the Stoics deny that anything can be born of a god? Likewise, how is it that they wish those beings, whom they suppose to be born of the elements, to be regarded as gods, when they deny that a god can be born? Now, what must hold good<sup>(17)</sup> of the universe will have to be predicated of the elements, I mean of heaven, and of earth, and of the stars, and of fire, which Varro has vainly proposed that you should believe<sup>(18)</sup> to be gods, and the parents of gods, contrary to that generation and nativity which he had declared to be impossible in a god. Now this same Varro had shown that the earth and the stars were animated.<sup>(1)</sup> But if this be the case, they must needs be also mortal, according to the condition<sup>(2)</sup> of animated nature; for although the soul is evidently immortal, this attribute is limited to it alone: it is not extended to that with which it is associated, that is, the body. Nobody, however, will deny that the elements have body, since we both touch them and are touched by them, and we see certain bodies fall down from them. If, therefore, they are animated, laying aside the principle<sup>(3)</sup> of a soul, as befits their condition as bodies, they are mortal of course not immortal. And yet whence is it that the elements appear to Varro to be animated? Because, forsooth, the elements have motion. And then, in order to anticipate what may be objected on the other side, that many things else have motion as wheels, as carriages, as several other machines he volunteers the statement that he believes only such things to be animated as move of themselves, without any apparent mover or impeller from without, like the apparent mover of the wheel, or propeller of the carriage, or director of the machine. If, then, they are not animated, they have no motion of themselves. Now, when he thus alleges a power which is not apparent, he points to what it was his duty to seek after, even the creator and controller of the motion for it does not at once follow that, because we do not see a thing, we believe that it does not exist. Rather, it is necessary the more profoundly to investigate what one does not see, in order the better to understand the character of that which is apparent. Besides if (you admit) only the existence of those things which appear and are supposed to exist simply because they appear, how is it that you also admit them to be gods which do not appear? If, moreover, those things seem to have existence which have none, why may they not have existence also which do not seem to have it? Such, for instance, as the Mover<sup>(4)</sup> of the heavenly beings. Granted, then, that things are animated because they move of themselves, and that they

move of themselves when they are not moved by another: still it does not follow that they must straightway be gods, because they are animated, nor even because they move of themselves; else what is to prevent all animals whatever being accounted gods, moving as they do of themselves? This, to be sure, is allowed to the Egyptians, but their superstitious vanity has another basis.(5)

#### **CHAP. IV. WRONG DERIVATION OF THE WORD Qeos . THE NAME INDICATIVE OF THE TRUE DEITY. GOD WITHOUT SHAPE AND IMMATERIAL. ANECDOTE OF THALES.**

Some affirm that the gods (i.e. qeoi ) were so called because the verbs qeein and seisqai signify to run and to be moved.(6) This term, then, is not indicative of any majesty, for it is derived from running and motion, not from any dominion(7) of godhead. But inasmuch as the Supreme God whom we worship is also designated Qeos , without however the appearance of any course or motion in Him, because He is not visible to any one, it is clear that that word must have had some other derivation, and that the property of divinity, innate in Himself, must have been discovered. Dismissing, then, that ingenious interpretation, it is more likely that the gods were not called qeoi from running and motion, but that the term was borrowed from the designation of the true God; so that you gave the name qeoi to the gods, whom you had in like manner forged for yourselves. Now, that this is the case, a plain proof is afforded in the fact that you actually give the common appellation qeoi to all those gods of yours, in whom there is no attribute of course or motion indicated. When, therefore, you call them both qeoi and immoveable with equal readiness, there is a deviation as well from the meaning of the word as from the idea(8) of godhead, which is set aside(9) if measured by the notion of course and motion. But if that sacred name be peculiarly significant of deity, and be simply true and not of a forced interpretation(10) in the case of the true God, but transferred in a borrowed sense(11) to those other objects which you choose to call gods, then you ought to show to us(12) that there is also a community of character between them, so that their common designation may rightly depend on their union of essence. But the true God, on the sole ground that He is not an object of sense, is incapable of being compared with those false deities which are cognizable to sight and sense (to sense indeed is sufficient); for this amounts to a clear statement of the difference between an obscure proof and a manifest one. Now, since the elements are obvious to all, (and) since God, on the contrary, is visible to none, how will it be in your power from that part which you have not seen to pass to a decision on the objects which you see? Since, therefore, you have not to combine them in your perception or your reason, why do you combine them in name with the purpose of combining them also in power? For see how even Zeno separates the matter of the world from God: he says that the latter has percolated through the former, like honey through the comb. God, therefore, and Matter are two words (and) two things. Proportioned to the difference of the words is the diversity of the things; the condition also of matter follows its designation. Now if matter is not God, because its very appellation teaches us so, how can those things which are inherent in matter that is, the elements be regarded as gods, since the component members cannot possibly be heterogeneous from the body? But what concern have I with physiological conceits? It were better for one's mind to ascend above the state of the world, not to stoop down to uncertain speculations. Plato's form for the world was round. Its square, angular shape, such as others had conceived it to be, he rounded off, I suppose, with compasses, from his labouring to have it believed to be simply without a beginning.(1) Epicurus, however, who had said, "What is above us is nothing to us," wished notwithstanding to have a peep at the sky, and found the sun to be a foot in diameter. Thus far you must confess(2) men were niggardly in even celestial objects. In process of time their ambitious conceptions advanced, and so the sun too enlarged its disk.(3) Accordingly, the Peripatetics marked it out as a larger world.(4) Now, pray tell me, what wisdom is there in this hankering after conjectural speculations? What proof is afforded to us, notwithstanding the strong confidence of its assertions, by the useless affectation of a scrupulous curiosity,(5) which is tricked out with an artful show of language? It therefore served Thales of Miletus quite right, when, star-gazing as he walked with all the eyes he had, he had the mortification of falling(6) into a well, and was unmercifully twitted by an Egyptian, who said to him, "Is it

because you found nothing on earth to look at, that you think you ought to confine your gaze to the sky?" His fall, therefore, is a figurative picture of the philosophers; of those, I mean,(7) who persist in applying(8) their studies to a vain purpose, since they indulge a stupid curiosity on natural objects, which they ought rather (intelligently to direct) to their Creator and Governor.

## CHAP. V. THE PHYSICAL THEORY CONTINUED. FURTHER REASONS ADVANCED AGAINST THE DIVINITY OF THE ELEMENTS.

Why, then, do we not resort to that far more reasonable(9) opinion, which has clear proof of being derived from men's common sense and unsophisticated deduction?(10) Even Varro bears it in mind, when he says that the elements are supposed to be divine, because nothing whatever is capable, without their concurrence,(11) of being produced, nourished, or applied to the sustenance(12) of man's life and of the earth, since not even our bodies and souls could have sufficed in themselves without the modification(13) of the elements. By this it is that the world is made generally habitable, a result which is harmoniously secured(14) by the distribution into zones,(15) except where human residence has been rendered impracticable by intensity of cold or heat. On this account, men have accounted as gods the sun, because it imparts from itself the light of day, ripens the fruit with its warmth, and measures the year with its stated periods; the moon, which is at once the solace of the night and the controller of the months by its governance; the stars also, certain indications as they are of those seasons which are to be observed in the tillage of our fields; lastly, the very heaven also under which, and the earth over which, as well as the intermediate space within which, all things conspire together for the good of man. Nor is it from their beneficent influences only that a faith in their divinity has been deemed compatible with the elements, but from their opposite qualities also, such as usually happen from what one might call(16) their wrath and anger as thunder, and hail, and drought, and pestilential winds, floods also, and openings of the ground, and earthquakes: these are all fairly enough(17) accounted gods, whether their nature becomes the object of reverence as being favourable, or of fear because terrible the sovereign dispenser,(18) in fact,(19) both of help and of hurt. But in the practical conduct of social life, this is the way in which men act and feel: they do not show gratitude or find fault with the very things from which the succour or the injury proceeds, so much as with them by whose strength and power the operation of the things is effected. For even in your amusements you do not award the crown as a prize to the flute or the harp, but to the musician who manages the said flute or harp by the power of his delightful skill.(1) In like manner, when one is in ill-health, you do not bestow your acknowledgments on the flannel wraps,(2) or the medicines, or the poultices, but on the doctors by whose care and prudence the remedies become effectual. So again, in untoward events, they who are wounded with the sword do not charge the injury on the sword or the spear, but on the enemy or the robber; whilst those whom a falling house covers do not blame the tiles or the stones, but the oldness of the building; as again shipwrecked sailors impute their calamity not to the rocks and waves, but to the tempest. And rightly too; for it is certain that everything which happens must be ascribed not to the instrument with which, but to the agent by whom, it takes place; inasmuch as he is the prime cause of the occurrence,(3) who appoints both the event itself and that by whose instrumentality it comes to pass (as there are in all things these three particular elements the fact itself, its instrument, and its cause), because he himself who wills the occurrence of a thing comes into notice(4) prior to the thing which he wills, or the instrument by which it occurs. On all other occasions therefore, your conduct is right enough, because you consider the author; but in physical phenomena your rule is opposed to that natural principle which prompts you to a wise judgment in all other cases, removing out of sight as you do the supreme position of the author, and considering rather the things that happen, than him by whom they happen. Thus it comes to pass that you suppose the power and the dominion to belong to the elements, which are but the slaves and functionaries. Now do we not, in thus tracing out an artificer and master within, expose the artful structure of their slavery(5) out of the appointed functions of those elements to which you ascribe (the attributes) of power?(6) But gods are not slaves; therefore whatever things are servile in character are not gods. Otherwise(7) they should prove to us that, according to the ordinary course of things, liberty is

promoted by irregular licence,(1) despotism by liberty, and that by despotism divine power is meant. For if all the (heavenly bodies) overhead forget not(9) to fulfil their courses in certain orbits, in regular seasons, at proper distances, and at equal intervals appointed in the way of a law for the revolutions of time, and for directing the guidance thereof can it fail to result(10) from the very observance of their conditions and the fidelity of their operations, that you will be convinced both by the recurrence of their orbital courses and the accuracy of their mutations, when you bear in mind how ceaseless is their recurrence, that a governing power presides over them, to which the entire management of the world(11) is obedient, reaching even to the utility and injury of the human race? For you cannot pretend that these (phenomena) act and care for themselves alone, without contributing anything to the advantage of mankind, when you maintain that the elements are divine for no other reason than that you experience from them either benefit or injury to yourself. For if they benefit themselves only, you are under no obligation to them.

## **CHAP. VI. THE CHANGES OF THE HEAVENLY BODIES, PROOF THAT THEY ARE NOT DIVINE. TRANSITION FROM THE PHYSICAL TO THE MYTHIC CLASS OF GODS.**

Come now, do you allow that the Divine Being not only has nothing servile in His course, but exists in unimpaired integrity, and ought not to be diminished, or suspended, or destroyed? Well, then, all His blessedness(12) would disappear, if He were ever subject to change. Look, however, at the stellar bodies; they both undergo change, and give clear evidence of the fact. The moon tells us how great has been its loss, as it recovers its full form;(13) its greater losses you are already accustomed to measure in a mirror of water;(15) so that I need not any longer believe in anywise what magians have asserted. The sun, too, is frequently put to the trial of an eclipse. Explain as best you may the modes of these celestial casualties, it is impossible(15) for God either to become less or to cease to exist. Vain, therefore, are(1) those supports of human learning, which, by their artful method of weaving conjectures, belie both wisdom and truth. Besides,(2) it so happens, indeed, according to your natural way of thinking, that he who has spoken the best is supposed to have spoken most truly, instead of him who has spoken the truth being held to have spoken the best. Now the man who shall carefully look into things, will surely allow it to be a greater probability that those(3) elements which we have been discussing are under some rule and direction, than that they have a motion of their own, and that being under government they cannot be gods. If, however, one is in error in this matter, it is better to err simply than speculatively, like your physical philosophers. But, at the same time,(4) if you consider the character of the mythic school, (and compare it with the physical,) the error which we have already seen frail men(5) making in the latter is really the more respectable one, since it ascribes a divine nature to those things which it supposes to be superhuman in their sensibility, whether in respect of their position, their power, their magnitude, or their divinity. For that which you suppose to be higher than man, you believe to be very near to God.

## **CHAP. VII. THE GODS OF THE MYTHIC CLASS. THE POETS A VERY POOR AUTHORITY IN SUCH MATTERS. HOMER AND THE MYTHIC POETS. WHY IRRELIGIOUS.**

But to pass to the mythic class of gods, which we attributed to the poets,(6) I hardly know whether I must only seek to put them on a par with our own human mediocrity, or whether they must be affirmed to be gods, with proofs of divinity, like the African Mopsus and the Boeotian Amphiaraus. I must now indeed but slightly touch on this class, of which a fuller view will be taken in the proper place.(7) Meanwhile, that these were only human beings, is clear from the fact that you do not consistently call them gods, but heroes. Why then discuss the point? Although divine honours had to be ascribed to dead men, it was not to them as such,

of course. Look at your own practice, when with similar excess of presumption you sully heaven with the sepulchres of your kings: is it not such as are illustrious for justice, virtue, piety, and every excellence of this sort, that you honour with the blessedness of deification, contented even to incur contempt if you forswear yourselves(8) for such characters? And, on the other hand, do you not deprive the impious and disgraceful of even the old prizes of human glory, tear up(9) their decrees and titles, pull down their statues, and deface(10) their images on the current coin? Will He, however, who beholds all things, who approves, nay, rewards the good, prostitute before all men(11) the attribute of His own inexhaustible grace and mercy? And shall men be allowed an especial mount of care and righteousness, that they may be wise(12) in selecting and multiplying(13) their deities? Shall attendants on kings and princes be more pure than those who wait on the Supreme God?(14) You turn your back in horror, indeed, on outcasts and exiles, on the poor and weak, on the obscurely born and the low-lived;(15) but yet you honour, even by legal sanctions,(16) unchaste men, adulterers, robbers, and parricides. Must we regard it as a subject of ridicule or indignation, that such characters are believed to be gods who are not fit to be men? Then, again, in this mythic class of yours which the poets celebrate, how uncertain is your conduct as to purity of conscience and the maintenance thereof! For whenever we hold up to execration the wretched, disgraceful and atrocious (examples) of your gods, you defend them as mere fables, on the pretence of poetic licence; whenever we volunteer a silent contempt(17) of this said(18) poetic licence, then you are not only troubled with no horror of it, but you go so far as(19) to show it respect, and to hold it as one of the indispensable (fine) arts; nay,(20) you carry out the studies of your higher classes by its means, as the very foundation(22) of your literature. Plato was of opinion that poets ought to be banished, as calumniators of the gods; he would even have) Homer himself expelled from his republic, although, as you are aware,(23) he was the crowned head of them all. But while you admit and retain them thus, why should you not believe them when they disclose such things respecting your gods? And if you do believe your poets, how is it that you worship such gods (as they describe)? you worship them simply because you do not believe the poets, why do you bestow praise on such lying authors, without any fear of giving offence to those whose calumniators you honour? A regard for truth(1) is not, of course, to be expected of poets. But when you say that they only make men into gods after their death, do you not admit that before death the said gods were merely human? Now what is there strange in the fact, that they who were once men are subject to the dishonour(2) of human casualties, or crimes, or fables? Do you not, in fact, put faith in your poets, when it is in accordance with their rhapsodies(3) that you have arranged in some instances your very rituals? How is it that the priestess of Ceres is ravished, if it is not because Ceres suffered a similar outrage? Why are the children of others sacrificed to Saturn,(4) if it is not because he spared not his own? Why is a male mutilated in honour of the Idaean goddess Cybele, unless it be that the (unhappy) youth who was too disdainful of her advances was castrated, owing to her vexation at his daring to cross her love?(5) Why was not Hercules "a dainty dish" to the good ladies of Lanuvium, if it was not for the primeval offence which women gave to him? The poets, no doubt, are liars. Yet it is not because of their telling us that(6) your gods did such things when they were human beings, nor because they predicated divine scandals(7) of a divine state, since it seemed to you more credible that gods should exist, though not of such a character, than that there should be such characters, although not gods.

### **CHAP. VIII. THE GODS OF THE DIFFERENT NATIONS. VARRO'S GENTILE CLASS. THEIR INFERIORITY. A GOOD DEAL OF THIS PERVERSE THEOLOGY TAKEN FROM SCRIPTURE. SERAPIS A PERVERSION OF JOSEPH.**

There remains the gentile class of gods amongst the several nations:(8) these were adopted out of mere caprice, not from the knowledge of the truth; and our information about them comes from the private notions of different races. God, I imagine, is everywhere known, everywhere present, powerful everywhere an object whom all ought to worship, all ought to serve. Since, then, it happens that even they, whom all the world worships in common, fail in the evidence of their true divinity, how much more must this befall those whom

their very votaries(9) have not succeeded in discovering! For what useful authority could possibly precede a theology of so defective a character as to be wholly unknown to fame? How many have either seen or heard of the Syrian Atargatis, the African Coelestis, the Moorish Varsutina, the Arabian Obodas and Dusaris, or the Norican Belenus, or those whom Varro mentions Deluentinus of Casinum, Visidianus of Narnia, Numiternus of Atina, or Ancharia of Asculum? And who have any clear notions(10) of Nortia of Vulsinii?(11) There is no difference in the worth of even their names, apart from the human surnames which distinguish them. I laugh often enough at the little coteries of gods(12) in each municipality, which have their honours confined within their own city walls. To what lengths this licence of adopting gods has been pushed, the superstitious practices of the Egyptians show us; for they worship even their native(13) animals, such as cats, crocodiles, and their snake. It is therefore a small matter that they have also deified a man him, I mean, whom not Egypt only, or Greece, but the whole world worships, and the Africans swear by; about whose state also all that helps our conjectures and imparts to our knowledge the semblance of truth is stated in our own (sacred) literature. For that Serapis of yours was originally one of our own saints called Joseph.(14) The youngest of his brethren, but superior to them in intellect, he was from envy sold into Egypt, and became a slave in the family of Pharaoh king of the country.(15) Importuned by the unchaste queen, when he refused to comply with her desire, she turned upon him and reported him to the king, by whom he is put into prison. There he displays the power of his divine inspiration, by interpreting aright the dreams of some (fellow-prisoners). Meanwhile the king, too, has some terrible dreams. Joseph being brought before him, according to his summons, was able to expound them. Having narrated the proofs of true interpretation which he had given in the prison, he opens out his dream to the king: those seven fat-fleshed and well-favoured kine signified as many years of plenty; in like manner, the seven lean-fleshed animals predicted the scarcity of the seven following years. He accordingly recommends precautions to be taken against the future famine from the previous plenty. The king believed him. The issue of all that happened showed how wise he was, how invariably holy, and now how necessary. So Pharaoh set him over all Egypt, that he might secure the provision of corn for it, and thenceforth administer its government. They called him Serapis, from the turban(1) which adorned his head. The peck-like(2) shape of this turban marks the memory of his corn-provisioning; whilst evidence is given that the care of the supplies was all on his head,(3) by the very ears of corn which embellish the border of the head-dress. For the same reason, also, they made the sacred figure of a dog,(4) which they regard (as a sentry) in Hades, and put it under his right hand, because the care of the Egyptians was concentrated s under his hand. And they put at his side Pharia,(6) whose name shows her to have been the king's daughter. For in addition to all the rest of his kind gifts and rewards, Pharaoh had given him his own daughter in marriage. Since, however, they had begun to worship both wild animals and human beings, they combined both figures under one form Anubis, in which there may rather be seen clear proofs of its own character and condition enshrined(7) by a nation at war with itself, refractory(8) to its kings, despised among foreigners, with even the appetite of a slave and the filthy nature of a dog.

## **CHAP. IX. THE POWER OF ROME. ROMANIZED ASPECT OF ALL THE HEATHEN MYTHOLOGY. VARRO'S THREEFOLD DISTRIBUTION CRITICISED. ROMAN HEROES (AENEAS INCLUDED,) UNFAVOURABLY REVIEWED.**

Such are the more obvious or more remarkable points which we had to mention in connection with Varro's threefold distribution of the gods, in order that a sufficient answer might seem to be given touching the physical, the poetic, and the gentile classes. Since, however, it is no longer to the philosophers, nor the poets, nor the nations that we owe the substitution of all (heathen worship for the true religion) although they transmitted the superstition, but to the dominant Romans, who received the tradition and gave it wide authority, another phase of the widespread error of man must now be encountered by us; nay, another forest must be felled by our axe, which has obscured the childhood of the de generate worship(9) with germs of superstitions gathered from all quarters. Well, but even the gods of the Romans have received from (the

same) Varro a threefold classification into the certain, the uncertain, and the select. What absurdity! What need had they of uncertain gods, when they possessed certain ones? Unless, forsooth, they wished to commit themselves to(10) such folly as the Athenians did; for at Athens there was an altar with this inscription: "TO THE UNKNOWN GODS."(11) Does, then, a man worship that which he knows nothing of? Then, again, as they had certain gods, they ought to have been contented with them, without requiring select ones. In this want they are even found to be irreligious! For if gods are selected as onions are,(12) then such as are not chosen are declared to be worthless. Now we on our part allow that the Romans had two sets of gods, common and proper; in other words, those which they had in common with other nations, and those which they themselves devised. And were not these called the public and the foreign(13) gods? Their altars tell us so; there is (a specimen) of the foreign gods at the lane of Carna, of the public gods in the Palatium. Now, since their common gods are comprehended in both the physical and the mythic classes, we have already said enough concerning them. I should like to speak of their particular kinds of deity. We ought then to admire the Romans for that third set of the gods of their enemies,(14) because no other nation ever discovered for itself so large a mass of superstition. Their other deities we arrange in two classes: those which have become gods from human beings, and those which have had their origin in some other way. Now, since there is advanced the same colourable pretext for the deification of the dead, that their lives were meritorious, we are compelled to urge the same reply against them, that no one of them was worth so much pains. Their fond(1) father Aeneas, in whom they believed, was never glorious, and was felled with a stone(2) a vulgar weapon, to pelt a dog withal, inflicting a wound no less ignoble! But this Aeneas turns out(3) a traitor to his country; yes, quite as much as Antenor. And if they will not believe this to be true of him, he at any rate deserted his companions when his country was in flames, and must be held inferior to that woman of Carthage,(4) who, when her husband Hasdrubal supplicated the enemy with the mild pusillanimity of our Aeneas, refused to accompany him, but hurrying her children along with her, disdained to take her beautiful self and father's noble heart s into exile, but plunged into the flames of the burning Carthage, as if rushing into the embraces of her (dear but) ruined country. Is he "pious Aeneas" for (rescuing) his young only son and decrepid old father, but deserting Priam and Astyanax? But the Romans ought rather to detest him; for in defence of their princes and their royal(6) house, they surrender(7) even children and wives, and every dearest pledge.(8) They deify the son of Venus, and this with the full knowledge and consent of her husband Vulcan, and without opposition from even Juno. Now, if sons have seats in heaven owing to their piety to their parents, why are not those noble youths(9) of Argos rather accounted gods, because they, to save their mother from guilt in the performance of some sacred rites, with a devotion more than human, yoked themselves to her car and dragged her to the temple? Why not make a goddess, for her exceeding piety, of that daughter(10) who from her own breasts nourished her father who was famishing in prison? What other glorious achievement can be related of Aeneas, but that he was nowhere seen in the fight on the field of Laurentum? Following his bent, perhaps he fled a second time as a fugitive from the battle.(11) In like manner, Romulus posthumously becomes a god. Was it because he rounded the city? Then why not others also, who have built cities, counting even(12) women? To be sure, Romulus slew his brother in the bargain, and trickishly ravished some foreign virgins. Therefore of course he becomes a god, and therefore a Quirinus ("god of the spear"), because then their fathers had to use the spear(13) on his account. What did Sterculus do to merit deification? If he worked hard to enrich the fields stercoribus,(14) (with manure,) Augias had more dung than he to bestow on them. If Faunus, the son of Picus, used to do violence to law and right, because struck with madness, it was more fit that he should be doctored than deified.(15) If the daughter of Faunus so excelled in chastity, that she would hold no conversation with men, it was perhaps from rudeness, or a consciousness of deformity, or shame for her father's insanity. How much worthier of divine honour than this "good goddess"(16) was Penelope, who, although dwelling among so many suitors of the vilest character, preserved with delicate tact the purity which they assailed! There is Sanctus, too,(17) who for his hospitality had a temple consecrated to him by king Plotius; and even Ulysses had it in his power to have bestowed one more god upon you in the person of the most refined Alcinous.

## CHAP. X. A DISGRACEFUL FEATURE OF THE ROMAN MYTHOLOGY. IT HONOURS SUCH INFAMOUS CHARACTERS AS LARENTINA.

I hasten to even more abominable cases. Your writers have not been ashamed to publish that of Larentina. She was a hired prostitute, whether as the nurse of Romulus, and therefore called Lupa, because she was a prostitute, or as the mistress of Hercules, now deceased, that is to say, now deified. They(18) relate that his temple-warder(19) happened to be playing at dice in the temple alone; and in order to represent a partner for himself in the game, in the absence of an actual one, he began to play with one hand for Hercules and the other for himself. (The condition was,) that if he won the stakes from Hercules, he should with them procure a supper and a prostitute; if Hercules, however, proved the winner, I mean his other hand, then he should provide the same for Hercules. The hand of Hercules won. That achievement might well have been added to his twelve labours! The temple-warden buys a supper for the hero, and hires Larentina to play the whore. The fire which dissolved the body of even a Hercules(1) enjoyed the supper, and the altar consumed everything. Larentina sleeps alone in the temple; and she a woman from the brothel, boasts that in her dreams she had submitted herself to the pleasure of Hercules;(2) and she might possibly have experienced this, as it passed through her mind, in her sleep. In the morning, on going out of the temple very early, she is solicited by a young man "a third Hercules," so to speak.(3) He invites her home. She complies, remembering that Hercules had told her that it would be for her advantage. He then, to be sure, obtains permission that they should be united in lawful wedlock (for none was allowed to have intercourse with the concubine of a god without being punished for it); the husband makes her his heir. By and by, just before her death, she bequeathed to the Roman people the rather large estate which she had obtained through Hercules. After this she sought deification for her daughters too, whom indeed the divine Larentina ought to have appointed her heirs also. The gods, of the Romans received an accession in her dignity. For she alone of all the wives of Hercules was dear to him, because she alone was rich; and she was even far more fortunate than Ceres, who contributed to the pleasure of the (king of the) dead.(4) After so many examples and eminent names among you, who might not have been declared divine? Who, in fact, ever raised a question as to his divinity against Antinous?(5) Was even Ganymede more grateful and dear than he to (the supreme god) who loved him? According to you, heaven is open to the dead. You prepare(6) a way from Hades to the stars. Prostitutes mount it in all directions, so that you must not suppose that you are conferring a great distinction upon your kings.

## CHAP. XI. THE ROMANS PROVIDED GODS FOR BIRTH, NAY, EVEN BEFORE BIRTH, TO DEATH. MUCH INDELICACY IN THIS SYSTEM,

And you are not content to assert the divinity of such as were once known to you, whom you heard and handled, and whose portraits have been painted, and actions recounted, and memory retained amongst you; but men insist upon consecrating with a heavenly life(7) I know not what incorporeal, inanimate shadows, and the mere names of things dividing man's entire existence amongst separate powers even from his conception in the womb: so that there is a god Consevius,(8) to preside over concubital generation; and Fluviona,(9) to preserve the (growth of the) infant in the womb; after these come Vitumnus and Sentinus,(10) through whom the babe begins to have life and its earliest sensation; then Diespiter,(11) by whose office the child accomplishes its birth. But when women begin their parturition, Candelifera also comes in aid, since childbearing requires the light of the candle; and other goddesses there are "who get their names from the parts they bear in the stages of travail. There were two Carmentas likewise, according to the general view: to one of them, called Postverta, belonged the function of assisting the birth of the introverted child; while the other, Prosa,(13) executed the like office for the rightly born. The god Farinus was so called from (his inspiring) the first utterance; while others believed in Locutius from his gift of speech. Cunina(14) is present as the protector of the child's deep slumber, and supplies to it refreshing rest. To lift them (when fallen)(15)

there is Levana, and along with her Rumina.(16) It is a wonderful oversight that no gods were appointed for cleaning up the filth of children. Then, to preside over their first pap and earliest drink you have Potina and Edula;(17) to teach the child to stand erect is the work of Statina,(18) whilst Adeona helps him to come to dear Mramma, and Abeona to toddle off again; then there is Domiduca,(19) (to bring home the bride;) and the goddess Mens, to influence the mind to either good or evil.(20) They have likewise Volumnus and Voleta,(21) to control the will; Paventina, (the goddess) of fear; Venilia, of hope;(22) Volupia, of pleasure;(23) Praestitia, of beauty.(24) Then, again, they give his name to Peragenor,(25) from his teaching men to go through their work; to Consus, from his sug- gesting to them counsel. Juventa is their guide on assuming the manly gown, and "bearded Fortune" when they come to full manhood.(1) If I must touch on their nuptial duties, there is Afterenda whose appointed function is to see to the offering of the dower; but fie on you! you have your Mutunus(2) and Tutunus and Pertunda(3) and Subigus and the goddess Prema and likewise Perfica.(4) O spare yourselves, ye impudent gods! No one is present at the secret struggles of married life. Those very few persons who have a wish that way, go away and blush for very shame in the midst of their joy.

## **CHAP. XII.(5) THE ORIGINAL DEITIES WERE HUMAN WITH SOME VERY QUESTIONABLE CHARACTERISTICS. SATURN OR TIME WAS HUMAN. INCONSISTENCIES OF OPINION ABOUT HIM.**

Now, how much further need I go in recounting your gods because I want to descant on the character of such as you have adopted? It is quite uncertain whether I shall laugh at your absurdity, or upbraid you for your blindness. For how many, and indeed what, gods shall I bring forward? Shall it be the greater ones, or the lesser? The old ones, or the novel? The male, or the female? The unmarried, or such as are joined in wedlock? The clever, or the unskilful? The rustic or the town ones? The national or the foreign? For the truth is,(6) there are so many families, so many nations, which require a catalogue(7) (of gods), that they cannot possibly be examined, or distinguished, or described. But the more diffuse the subject is, the more restriction must we impose on it. As, therefore, in this review we keep before us but one object that of proving that all these gods were once human beings (not, indeed, to instruct you in the fact,(8) for your conduct shows that you have forgotten it) let us adopt our compendious summary from the most natural method(9) of conducting the examination, even by considering the origin of their race. For the origin characterizes all that comes after it. Now this origin of your gods dates,(10) I suppose, from Saturn. And when Varro mentions Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, as the most ancient of the gods, it ought not to have escaped our notice, that every father is more ancient than his sons, and that Saturn therefore must precede Jupiter, even as Coelus does Saturn, for Saturn was sprung from Coelus and Terra. I pass by, however, the origin of Coelus and Terra. They led in some unaccountable way(11) single lives, and had no children. Of course they required a long time for vigorous growth to attain to such a stature.(12) By and by, as soon as the voice of Coelus began to break,(13) and the breasts of Terra to become firm,(14) they contract marriage with one another. I suppose either Heaven(15) came down to his spouse, or Earth went up to meet her lord. Be that as it may, Earth conceived seed of Heaven, and when her year was fulfilled brought forth Saturn in a wonderful manner. Which of his parents did he resemble? Well, then, even after parentage began,(16) it is certain(17) that they had no child previous to Saturn, and only one daughter afterwards Ops; thenceforth they ceased to procreate. The truth is, Saturn castrated Coelus as he was sleeping. We read this name Coelus as of the masculine gender. And for the matter of that, how could he be a father unless he were a male? But with what instrument was the castration effected? He had a scythe. What, so early as that? For Vulcan was not yet an artificer in iron. The widowed Tetra, however, although still quite young, was in no hurry(18) to marry another. Indeed, there was no second Coeus for her. What but Ocean offers her an embrace? But he savours of brackishness, and she has been accustomed to fresh water.(19) And so Saturn is the sole male child of Coelus and Tetra. When grown to puberty, he marries his own sister. No laws as yet prohibited incest, nor punished parricide. Then, when male children were born to him, he would devour them; better himself (should take them) than

the wolves, (for to these would they become a prey) if he exposed them. He was, no doubt, afraid that one of them might learn the lesson of his father's scythe. When Jupiter was born in course of time, he was removed out of the way:(20) (the father) swallowed a stone instead of the son, as was pretended. This artifice secured his safety for a time; but at length the son, whom he had not devoured, and who had grown up in secret, fell upon him, and deprived him of his kingdom. Such, then, is the patriarch of the gods whom Heaven(1) and Earth produced for you, with the poets officiating as midwives. Now some persons with a refined(2) imagination are of opinion that, by this allegorical fable of Saturn, there is a physiological representation of Time: (they think) that it is because all things are destroyed by Time, that Coelus and Tetra were themselves parents without having any of their own, and that the (fatal) scythe was used, and that (Saturn) devoured his own offspring, because he,(3) in fact, absorbs within himself all things which have issued from him. They call in also the witness of his name; for they say that he is called Kronos in Greek, meaning the same thing as kronos .(4) His Latin name also they derive from seed-sowing;(5) for they suppose him to have been the actual procreator that the seed, in fact, was dropt down from heaven to earth by his means. They unite him with Ops, because seeds produce the affluent treasure (Opem) of actual life, and because they develop with labour (Opus). Now I wish that you would explain this metaphorical(6) statement. It was either Saturn or Time. If it was Time, how could it be Saturn? If he, how could it be Time? For you cannot possibly reckon both these corporeal subjects(7) as co-existing in one person. What, however, was there to prevent your worshipping Time under its proper quality? Why not make a human person, or even a mythic man, an object of your adoration, but each in its proper nature not in the character of Time? What is the meaning of that conceit of your mental ingenuity, if it be not to colour the foulest matters with the feigned appearance of reasonable proofs?(8) Neither, on the one hand, do you mean Saturn to be Time, because you say he is a human being; nor, on the other hand, whilst portraying him as Time, do you on that account mean that he was ever human. No doubt, in the accounts of remote antiquity your god Saturn is plainly described as living on earth in human guise. Anything whatever may obviously be pictured as incorporeal which never had an existence; there is simply no room for such fiction, where there is reality. Since, therefore, there is clear evidence that Saturn once existed, it is in vain that you change his character. He whom you will not deny to have once been man, is not at your disposal to be treated anyhow, nor can it be maintained that he is either divine or Time. In every page of your literature the origin(9) of Saturn is conspicuous. We read of him in Cassius Severus and in the Corneliuses, Nepes and Tacitus,(10) and, amongst the Greeks also, in Diodorus, and all other compilers of ancient annals.(11) No more faithful records of him are to be traced than in Italy itself. For, after (traversing) many countries, and (enjoying) the hospitality of Athens, he settled in Italy, or, as it was called, OEnotria, having met with a kind welcome from Janus, or Janes,(12) as the Salii call him. The hill on which he settled had the name Saturnius, whilst the city which he rounded(13) still bears the name Saturnia; in short, the whole of Italy once had the same designation. Such is the testimony derived from that country which is now the mistress of the world: whatever doubt prevails about the origin of Saturn, his actions tell us plainly that he was a human being. Since, therefore, Saturn was human, he came undoubtedly from a human stock; and more, because he was a man, he, of course, came not of Coelus and Terra. Some people, however, found it easy enough to call him, whose parents were unknown, the son of those gods from whom all may in a sense seem to be derived. For who is there that does not speak under a feeling of reverence of the heaven and the earth as his own father and mother? Or, in accordance with a custom amongst men, which induces them to say of any who are unknown or suddenly apparent, that "they came from the sky?" Hence it happened that, because a stranger appeared suddenly everywhere, it became the custom to call him a heaven-born man,(14) just as we also commonly call earth-born all those whose descent is unknown. I say nothing of the fact that such was the state of antiquity, when men's eyes and minds were so habitually rude, that they were excited by the appearance of every newcomer as if it were that of a god: much more would this be the case with a king, and that the primeval one. I will linger some time longer over the case of Saturn, because by fully discussing his primordial history I shall beforehand furnish a compendious answer for all other cases; and I do not wish to omit the more convincing testimony of your sacred literature, the credit of which ought to be the greater in proportion to its antiquity. Now earlier than all literature was the Sibyl; that Sibyl, I mean, who was the true prophetess of truth, from whom you borrow their title for the priests of your demons. She in senarian verse expounds the descent of Saturn and his exploits in words to this effect: "In the

tenth generation of men, after the flood had overwhelmed the former race, reigned Saturn, and Titan, and Japetus, the bravest of the sons of Tetra and Coelus." Whatever credit, therefore, is attached to your older writers and literature, and much more to those who were the simplest as belonging to that age,(1) it becomes sufficiently certain that Saturn and his family(2) were human beings. We have in our possession, then, a brief principle which amounts to a prescriptive rule about their origin serving for all other cases, to prevent our going wrong in individual instances. The particular character(3) of a posterity is shown by the original founders of the race mortal beings (come) from mortals, earthly ones from earthly; step after step comes in due relation(4) marriage, conception, birth country, settlements, kingdoms, all give the clearest proofs.(5) They, therefore who cannot deny the birth of men, must also admit their death; they who allow their mortality must not suppose them to be gods.

### **CHAP. XIII.(6) THE GODS HUMAN AT FIRST. WHO HAD THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE THEM DIVINE? JUPITER NOT ONLY HUMAN, BUT IMMORAL.**

Manifest cases, indeed, like these have a force peculiarly their own. Men like Varro and his fellow-dreamers admit into the ranks of the divinity those whom they cannot assert to have been in their primitive condition anything but men; (and this they do) by affirming that they became gods after their death. Here, then, I take my stand. If your gods were elected(7) to this dignity and deity,(8) just as you recruit the ranks of your senate, you cannot help conceding, in your wisdom, that there must be some one supreme sovereign who has the power of selecting, and is a kind of Caesar; and nobody is able to confer(9) on others a thing over which he has not absolute control. Besides, if they were able to make gods of themselves after their death, pray tell me why they chose to be in an inferior condition at first? Or, again, if there is no one who made them gods, how can they be said to have been made such, if they could only have been made by some one else? There is therefore no ground afforded you for denying that there is a certain wholesale distributor(10) of divinity. Let us accordingly examine the reasons for despatching mortal beings to heaven. I suppose you will produce a pair of them. Whoever, then, is the awarder (of the divine honours), exercises his function, either that he may have some supports, or defences, or it may be even ornaments to his own dignity; or from the pressing claims of the meritorious, that he may reward all the deserving. No other cause is it permitted us to conjecture. Now there is no one who, when bestowing a gift on another, does not act with a view to his own interest or the other's. This conduct, however, cannot be worthy of the Divine Being, inasmuch as His power is so great that He can make gods outright; whilst His bringing man into such request, on the pretence that he requires the aid and support of certain, even dead persons, is a strange conceit, since He was able from the very first to create for Himself immortal beings. He who has compared human things with divine will require no further arguments on these points. And yet the latter opinion ought to be discussed, that God conferred divine honours in consideration of meritorious claims. Well, then, if the award was made on such grounds, if heaven was opened to men of the primitive age because of their deserts, we must reflect that after that time no one was worthy of such honour; except it be, that there is now no longer such a place for any one to attain to. Let us grant that anciently men may have deserved heaven by reason of their great merits. Then let us consider whether there really was such merit. Let the man who alleges that it did exist declare his own view of merit. Since the actions of men done in the very infancy of time(11) are a valid claim for their deification, you consistently admitted to the honour the brother and sister who were stained with the sin of incest Ops and Saturn. Your Jupiter too, stolen in his infancy, was unworthy of both the home and the nutriment accorded to human beings; and, as he deserved for so bad a child, he had to live in Crete.(12) Afterwards, when full-grown, he dethrones his own father, who, whatever his parental character may have been, was most prosperous in his reign, king as he was of the golden age. Under him, a stranger to toil and want, peace maintained its joyous and gentle sway; under him

"Nulli subigebant arva coloni"(1)

"No swains would bring the fields beneath their sway;"(2)

and without the importunity of any one the earth would bear all crops spontaneously.(3) But he hated a father who had been guilty of incest, and had once mutilated his(4) grandfather. And yet, behold, he himself marries his own sister; so that I should suppose the old adage was made for him: To ou patros " Father's own child." There was "not a pin to choose" between the father's piety and the son's. If the laws had been just even at that early time,(5) Jupiter ought to have been "sewed up in both sacks."(6) After this corroboration of his lust with incestuous gratification, why should he hesitate to indulge himself lavishly in the lighter excesses of adultery and debauchery? Ever since(7) poetry sported thus with his character, in some such way as is usual when a runaway slave(8) is posted up in public, we have been in the habit of gossiping without restraint(9) of his tricks(10) in our chat with passers-by;(11) sometimes sketching him out in the form of the very money which was the fee of his debauchery as when (he personated) a bull, or rather paid the money's worth of one,(12) and showered (gold. into the maiden's chamber, or rather forced his way in with a bribe;(13) sometimes (figuring him) in the very likenesses of the parts which were acted(14) as the eagle which ravished (the beautiful youth),(15) and the swan which sang (the enchanting song).(16) Well now, are not such fables as these made up of the most disgusting intrigues and the worst of scandals? or would not the morals and tempers of men be likely to become wanton from such examples? In what manner demons, the offspring of evil angels who have been long engaged in their mission, have laboured to turn men(17) aside from the faith to unbelief and to such fables, we must not in this place speak of to any extent. As indeed the general body(18) (of your gods), which took their cue(19) from their kings, and princes, and instructors,(20) was not of the self-same nature, it was in some other way" that similarity of character was exacted by their authority. But how much the worst of them was he who (ought to have been, but) was not, the best of them? By a title peculiar to him, you are indeed in the habit of calling Jupiter "the Best,"" whilst in Virgil he is "Æqueus Jupiter."(23) All therefore were like him incestuous towards their own kith and kin, unchaste to strangers, impious, unjust! Now he whom mythic story left untainted with no conspicuous infamy, was not worthy to be made a god.

#### **CHAP. XIV. GODS, THOSE WHICH WERE CONFESSEDLY ELEVATED TO THE DIVINE CONDITION, WHAT PRE-EMINENT RIGHT HAD THEY TO SUCH HONOUR? HERCULES AN INFERIOR CHARACTER.**

But since they will have it that those who have been admitted from the human state to the honours of deification should be kept separate from others, and that the distinction which Dionysius the Stoic drew should be made between the native and the factitious(24) gods, I will add a few words concerning this last class also. I will take Hercules himself for raising the gist of a reply(25) (to the question) whether he deserved heaven and divine honours? For, as men choose to have it, these honours are awarded to him for his merits. If it was for his valour in destroying wild beasts with intrepidity, what was there in that so very memorable? Do not criminals condemned to the games, though they are even consigned to the contest of the vile arena, despatch several of these animals at one time, and that with more earnest zeal? If it was for his world-wide travels, how often has the same thing been accomplished by the rich at their pleasant leisure, or by philosophers in their slave-like poverty?(26) Is it forgotten that the cynic Asclepiades on a single sorry cow,(27) riding on her back, and sometimes nourished at her udder, surveyed(28) the whole world with a personal inspection? Even if Hercules visited the infernal regions, who does not know that the way to Hades is open to all? If you have deified him on account of his much carnage and many battles, a much greater number of victories was gained by the illustrious Pompey, the conqueror of the pirates who had not spared Ostia itself in their ravages; and (as to carnage), how many thousands, let me ask, were cooped up in one corner of the citadel(1) of Carthage, and slain by Scipio? Wherefore Scipio has a better claim to be considered a fit candidate for deification(2) than Hercules. You must be still more careful to add to the claims of (our) Hercules his debaucheries with concubines and wives, and the swathes(3) of Omphale, and his base

desertion of the Argonauts because he had lost his beautiful boy.(4) To this mark of baseness add for his glorification likewise his attacks of madness, adore the arrows which slew his sons and wife. This was the man who, after deeming himself worthy of a funeral pile in the anguish of his remorse for his parricides,(5) deserved rather to die the unhonoured death which awaited him, arrayed in the poisoned robe which his wife sent him on account of his lascivious attachment (to another). You, however, raised him from the pyre to the sky, with the same facility with which (you have distinguished in like manner) another hero(6) also, who was destroyed by the violence of a fire from the gods. He having devised some few experiments, was said to have restored the dead to life by his cures. He was the son of Apollo, half human, although the grandson of Jupiter, and great-grandson of Saturn (or rather of spurious origin, because his parentage was uncertain, as Socrates of Argon has related; he was exposed also, and found in a worse tutelage than even Jove's, suckled even at the dugs of a dog); nobody can deny that he deserved the end which befell him when he perished by a stroke of lightning. In this transaction, however, your most excellent Jupiter is once more found in the wrong impious to his grandson, envious of his artistic skill. Pindar, indeed, has not concealed his true desert; according to him, he was punished for his avarice and love of gain, influenced by which he would bring the living to their death, rather than the dead to life, by the perverted use of his medical art which he put up for sale.(7) It is said that his mother was killed by the same stroke, and it was only right that she, who had bestowed so dangerous a beast on the world,(8) should escape to heaven by the same ladder. And yet the Athenians will not be at a loss how to sacrifice to gods of such a fashion, for they pay divine honours to Aesculapius and his mother amongst their dead (worthies). As if, too, they had not ready to hand(9) their own Theseus to worship, so highly deserving a god's distinction! Well, why not? Did he not on a foreign shore abandon the preserver of his life,(10) with the same indifference, nay heartlessness,(11) with which he became the cause of his father's death?

## **CHAP. XV. THE CONSTELLATIONS AND THE GENII VERY INDIFFERENT GODS. THE ROMAN MONOPOLY OF GODS UNSATISFACTORY. OTHER NATIONS REQUIRE DEITIES QUITE AS MUCH.**

It would be tedious to take a survey of all those, too, whom you have buried amongst the constellations, and audaciously minister to as gods.(12) I suppose your Castors, and Perseus, and Erigona,(13) have just the same claims for the honours of the sky as Jupiter's own big boy(14) had. But why should we wonder? You have transferred to heaven even dogs, and scorpions, and crabs. I postpone all remarks(15) concerning those whom you worship in your oracles. That this worship exists, is attested by him who pronounces the oracle.(16) Why; you will have your gods to be spectators even of sadness,(17) as is Viduus, who makes a widow of the soul, by parting it from the body, and whom you have condemned, by not permitting him to be enclosed within your city-walls; there is Caeculus also, to deprive the eyes of their perception; and Orbana, to bereave seed of its vital power; moreover, there is the goddess of death herself. To pass hastily by all others,(18) you account as gods the sites of places or of the city; such are Father Janus (there being, moreover, the archer-goddess(19) Jana(20)), and Septimontius of the seven hills.

Men sacrifice(21) to the same Genii, whilst they have altars or temples in the same places; but to others besides, when they dwell in a strange place, or live in rented houses.(1) I say nothing about Ascensus, who gets his name for his climbing propensity, and Clivicola, from her sloping (haunts); I pass silently by the deities called Forculus from doors, and Cardea from hinges, and Limentinus the god of thresholds, and whatever others are worshipped by your neighbours as tutelar deities of their street doors.(2) There is nothing strange in this, since men have their respective gods in their brothels, their kitchens, and even in their prison. Heaven, therefore, is crowded with innumerable gods of its own, both these and others belonging to the Romans, which have distributed amongst them the functions of one's whole life, in such a way that there is no

want of the others gods. Although, it is true,(4) the gods which we have enumerated are reckoned as Roman peculiarly, and as not easily recognised abroad; yet how do all those functions and circumstances, over which men have willed their gods to preside, come about,(5) in every part of the human race, and in every nation, where their guarantees(6) are not only without an official recognition, but even any recognition at all?

## **CHAP. XVI. INVENTORS OF USEFUL ARTS UNWORTHY OF DEIFICATION. THEY WOULD**

**BE THE FIRST TO ACKNOWLEDGE A CREATOR. THE ARTS CHANGEABLE FROM TIME TO TIME, AND SOME BECOME OBSOLETE.**

Well, but(7) certain men have discovered fruits and sundry necessaries of life, (and hence are worthy of deification).(8) Now let me ask, when you call these persons "discoverers," do you not confess that what they discovered was already in existence? Why then do you not prefer to honour the Author, from whom the gifts really come, instead of converting the Author into mere discoverers? Previously he who made the discover, the inventor himself no doubt expressed his gratitude to the Author; no doubt, too, he felt that He was God, to whom really belonged the religious service,(9) as the Creator (of the gift), by whom also both he who discovered and that which was discovered were alike created. The green fig of Africa nobody at Rome had heard of when Cato introduced it to the Senate, in order that he might show how near was that province of the enemy(10) whose subjugation he was constantly urging. The cherry was first made common in Italy by Cn. Pompey, who imported it from Pontus. I might possibly have thought the earliest introducers of apples amongst the Romans deserving of the public honour(11) of deification. This, however, would be as foolish a ground for making gods as even the invention of the useful arts. And yet if the skilful men(12) of our own time be compared with these, how much more suitable would deification be to the later generation than to the former! For, tell me, have not all the extant inventions superseded antiquity,(13) whilst daily experience goes on adding to the new stock? Those, therefore, whom you regard as divine because of their arts, you are really injuring by your very arts, and challenging (their divinity) by means of rival attainments, which cannot be surpassed.(14)

## **CHAP. XVII.(15) CONCLUSION, THE ROMANS OWE NOT THEIR IMPERIAL POWER TO THEIR GODS. THE GREAT GOD ALONE DISPENSES KINGDOMS, HE IS THE GOD OF THE CHRISTIANS.**

In conclusion, without denying all those whom antiquity willed and posterity has believed to be gods, to be the guardians of your religion, there yet remains for our consideration that very large assumption of the Roman superstitions which we have to meet in opposition to you, O heathen, viz. that the Romans have become the lords and masters of the whole world, because by their religious offices they have merited this dominion to such an extent that they are within a very little of excelling even their own gods in power. One cannot wonder that Sterculus, and Mutunus, and Larentina, have severally(16) advanced this empire to its height! The Roman people has been by its gods alone ordained to such dominion. For I could not imagine that any foreign gods would have preferred doing more for a strange nation than for their own people, and so by such conduct become the deserters and neglecters, nay, the betrayers of the native land wherein they were born and bred, and ennobled and buried. Thus not even Jupiter could suffer his own Crete to be subdued by the Roman fasces, forgetting that cave of Ida, and the brazen cymbals of the Corybantes, and the most pleasant odour of the goat which nursed him on that dear spot. Would he not have made that tomb of his superior to the whole Capitol, so that that land should most widely rule which covered the ashes of Jupiter? Would Juno, too, be willing that the Punic city, for the love of which she even neglected Samos, should be

destroyed, and that, too, by the fires of the sons of Aeneas? Although I am well aware that

"Hic illius arma,

Hic currus fuit, hoc regnum des gentibus ease,

Si qua fata sinant, jam tunc tenditque fovetque."(1)

Here were her arms, her chariot here,

Here goddess-like, to fix one day

The seat of universal sway,

Might fate be wrung to yield assent,

E'en then her schemes, her cares were bent."(2)

Still the unhappy (queen of gods) had no power against the fates! And yet the Romans did not accord as much honour to the fates, although they gave them Carthage, as they did to Larentina. But surely those gods of yours have not the power of conferring empire. For when Jupiter reigned in Crete, and Saturn in Italy, and Isis in Egypt, it was even as men that they reigned, to whom also were assigned many to assist them.(3) Thus he who serves also makes masters, and the bond-slave(4) of Admetus(5) aggrandizes with empire the citizens of Rome, although he destroyed his own liberal votary Croesus by deceiving him with ambiguous oracles.(6) Being a god, why was he afraid boldly to foretell to him the truth that he must lose his kingdom. Surely those who were aggrandized with the power of wielding empire might always have been able to keep an eye, as it were,(7) on their own cities. If they were strong enough to confer empire on the Romans, why did not Minerva defend Athens from Xerxes? Or why did not Apollo rescue Delphi out of the hand of Pyrrhus? They who lost their own cities preserve the city of Rome, since (forsooth) the religiousness(8) of Rome has merited the protection! But is it not rather the fact that this excessive devotion(9) has been devised since the empire has attained its glory by the increase of its power? No doubt sacred rites were introduced by Numa, but then your proceedings were not marred by a religion of idols and temples. Piety was simple,(10) and worship humble; altars were artlessly reared,(11) and the vessels (thereof) plain, and the incense from them scant, and the god himself nowhere. Men therefore were not religious before they achieved greatness, (nor great) because they were religious. But how can the Romans possibly seem to have acquired their empire by an excessive religiousness and very profound respect for the gods, when that empire was rather increased after the gods had been slighted?(12) Now, if I am not mistaken, every kingdom or empire is acquired and enlarged by wars, whilst they and their gods also are injured by conquerors. For the same ruin affects both city-walls and temples; similar is the carnage both of civilians and of priests; identical the plunder of profane things and of sacred. To the Romans belong as many sacrileges as trophies; and then as many triumphs over gods as over nations. Still remaining are their captive idols amongst them; and certainly, if they can only see their conquerors, they do not give them their love. Since, however, they have no perception, they are injured with impunity; and since they are injured with impunity, they are worshipped to no purpose. The nation,

therefore, which has grown to its powerful height by victory after victory, cannot seem to have developed owing to the merits of its religion whether they have injured the religion by augmenting their power, or augmented their power by injuring the religion. All nations have possessed empire, each in its proper time, as the Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians, the Egyptians; empire is even now also in the possession of some, and yet they that have lost their power used not to behave<sup>(13)</sup> without attention to religious services and the worship of the gods, even after these had become unpropitious to them,<sup>(14)</sup> until at last almost universal dominion has accrued to the Romans. It is the fortune of the times that has thus constantly shaken kingdoms with revolution.<sup>(15)</sup> Inquire who has ordained these changes in the times. It is the same (great Being) who dispenses kingdoms,<sup>(16)</sup> and has now put the supremacy of them into the hands of the Romans, very much as if<sup>(1)</sup> the tribute of many nations were after its exaction amassed in one (vast) coffer. What He has determined concerning it, they know who are the nearest to Him.<sup>(2)</sup>

## APPENDIX.

## A FRAGMENT CONCERNING THE EXECRABLE GODS OF THE HEATHEN.

....

So great blindness has fallen on the Roman race, that they call their enemy Lord, and preach the filcher of blessings as being their very giver, and to him they give thanks. They call those (deities), then, by human names, not by their own, for their own names they know not. That they are daemons<sup>(1)</sup> they understand: but they read histories of the old kings, and then, though they see that their character<sup>(2)</sup> was mortal, they honour them with a deific name.

As for him whom they call Jupiter, and think to be the highest god, when he was born the years (that had elapsed) from the foundation of the world<sup>(3)</sup> to him<sup>(4)</sup> were some three thousand. He is born in Greece, from Saturnus and Ops; and, for fear he should be killed by his father (or else, if it is lawful to say so, should be begotten<sup>(5)</sup> anew), is by the advice of his mother carried down into Crete, and reared in a cave of Ida; is concealed from his father's search) by (the aid of) Cretans born men!<sup>(6)</sup> rattling their arms; sucks a she-goat's dugs; flays her; clothes himself in her hide; and (thus) uses his own nurse's hide, after killing her, to be sure, with his own hand! but he sewed thereon three golden tassels worth the price of an hundred oxen each, as their author Homer<sup>(7)</sup> relates, if it is fair to believe it. This Jupiter, in adult age, waged war several years with his father; overcame him; made a parricidal raid on his home; violated his virgin sisters;<sup>(8)</sup> selected one of them in marriage; drove<sup>(9)</sup> his father by dint of arms. The remaining scenes, moreover, of that act have been recorded. Of other folks' wives, or else of violated virgins, he begat him sons; defiled freeborn boys; oppressed peoples lawlessly with despotic and kingly sway. The father, whom they erringly suppose to have been the original god, was ignorant that this (son of his) was lying concealed in Crete; the son, again, whom they believe the mightier god, knows not that the father whom himself had banished is lurking in Italy. If he was in heaven, when would he not see what was doing in Italy? For the Italian land is "not in a corner."<sup>(10)</sup> And yet, had he been a god, nothing ought to have escaped him. But that he whom the Italians call Saturnus did lurk there, is clearly evidenced on the face of it, from the fact that from his lurking<sup>(11)</sup> the Hesperian (12) tongue is to this day called Latin,<sup>(13)</sup> as likewise their author Virgil relates.<sup>(14)</sup> (Jupiter,) then, is said to have been born on earth, while (Saturnus his father) fears lest he be driven by him from his kingdom, and seeks to kill him as being his own rival, and knows not that he has been stealthily carried off, and is in hiding; and afterwards the son-god pursues his father, immortal seeks to slay immortal (is it credible?<sup>(15)</sup>), and is disappointed by an interval of sea, and is ignorant of (his quarry's) flight; and while all this is going on between two gods on earth, heaven is deserted. No one dispensed the rains, no one thundered, no one governed all this mass of world.<sup>(1)</sup> For they cannot even say that their action and wars took place in

heaven; for all this was going on on Mount Olympus in Greece. Well, but heaven is not called Olympus, for heaven is heaven.

These, then, are the actions of theirs, which we will treat of first nativity, lurking, ignorance, parricide, adulteries, obscenities things committed not by a god, but by most impure and truculent human beings; beings who, had they been living in these days, would have lain under the impeachment of all laws laws which are far more just and strict than their actions. "He drave his father by dint of arms." The Falcidian and Sempronian law would bind the parricide in a sack with beasts. "He violated his sisters." The Papinian law would punish the outrage with all penalties, limb by limb. "He invaded others' wedlock." The Julian law would visit its adulterous violator capitally. "He defiled freeborn boys." The Cornelian law would condemn the crime of transgressing the sexual bond with novel severities, sacrilegiously guilty as it is of a novel union.(2) This being is shown to have had no divinity either, for he was a human being; his father's flight escaped him. To this human being, of such a character, to so wicked a king, so obscene and so cruel, God's honour has been assigned by men. Now, to be sure, if on earth he were born and grew up through the advancing stages of life's periods, and in it committed all these evils, and yet is no more in it, what is thought(3) (of him) but that he is dead? Or else does foolish error think wings were born him in his old age, whence to fly heavenward? Why, even this may possibly find credit among men bereft of sense,(4) if indeed they believe, (as they do,) that he turned into a swan, to beget the Castors;(5) an eagle, to contaminate Ganymede; a bull, to violate Europa; gold, to violate Danae; a horse, to beget Pirithous; a goat, to beget Egeyppa(6) from a she-goat; a Satyr, to embrace Antiope. Beholding these adulteries, to which sinners are prone, they therefore easily believe that sanctions of misdeed and of every filthiness are borrowed from their reigned god. Do they perceive how void of amendment are the rest of his career's acts which can find credit, which are indeed true, and which, they say, he did without self transformation? Of Semele, he begets Liber;(7) of Latona, Apollo and Diana; of Maia, Mercury; of Alcmena, Hercules. But the rest of his corruptions, which they themselves confess, I am unwilling to record, lest turpitude, once buried, be again called to men's ears. But of these few (offsprings of his) I have made mention; off-springs whom in their error they believe to be themselves, too, gods born, to wit, of an incestuous father; adulterous births, supposititious births. And the living,(8) eternal God, of sempiternal divinity, prescient of futurity, immeasurable,(9) they have dissipated (into nothing, by associating Him) with crimes so unspeakable.

## ELUCIDATION.

This Fragment is noted as spurious, by Oehler who attributes it to somebody only moderately acquainted with Tertullian's style and teaching. (1) I do not find it mentioned by Dupin, nor by Routh. This translation is by Thelwall.