

Hymns

Proclus



TO THE SUN. — .

Hear golden Titan! king of mental fire,
Ruler of light; to thee supreme belongs
The splendid key of life's prolific fount;
And from on high thou pour'st harmonic streams
In rich abundance into matter's worlds. 5
Hear! for high raised above th' ætherial plains,
And in the world's bright middle orb thou reign'st,
Whilst all things by thy sov'reign power are filled
With mind-exciting, providential care.
The starry fires surround thy vig'rous fire, 10
And ever in unwear'y'd, ceaseless dance,
O'er earth wide-bosom'd, vivid dew diffuse.
By thy perpetual and repeated course
The hours and seasons in succession rise;
And hostile elements their conflicts cease, 15
Soon as they view thy awful beams, great king,
From deity ineffable and secret born.
The steady Parcæ, at thy high command,
The fatal thread of mortal life roll back;
For wide-extended, sov'reign sway is thine. 20
From thy fair series of attractive song,
Divinely charming, Phœbus into light
Leaps forth exulting; and with god-like harp,
To rapture strung, the raging uproar lulls
Of dire-resounding Hyle's mighty flood. 25

From thy bland dance, repelling deadly ill,
Salubrious Pæan blossoms into light,
Health far diffusing, and th' extended world
With streams of harmony innoxious fills.
Thee too they celebrate in sacred hymns 30
Th' illustrious source whence mighty Bacchus came;
And thee in matter's utmost stormy depths
Euion Ate they for ever sing.
But others sound thy praise in tuneful verse,
As fam'd Adonis, delicate and fair. 35
Ferocious dæmons, noxious to mankind,
Dread the dire anger of thy rapid scourge;
Dæmons, who machinate a thousand ills,
Pregnant with ruin to our wretched souls,
That merg'd beneath life's dreadful-sounding sea, 40
In body's chains severely they may toil,
Nor e'er remember in the dark abyss
The splendid palace of their fire sublime.
O best of gods, blest dæmon crown'd with fire,
Image of nature's all-producing god, 45
And the soul's leader to the realms of light —
Hear! and refine me from the stains of guilt;
The supplication of my tears receive,
And heal my wounds defil'd with noxious gore;
The punishments incurr'd by sin remit, 50
And mitigate the swift, sagacious eye
Of sacred justice, boundless in its view.
By thy pure law, dread evil's constant foe,

Direct my steps, and pour thy sacred light
In rich abundance on my clouded soul: 55
Dispel the dismal and malignant shades
Of darkness, pregnant with invenom'd ills,
And to my body proper strength afford,
With health, whose presence splendid gifts imparts.
Give lasting fame; and may the sacred care 60
With which the fair-hair'd muses gifts, of old
My pious ancestors preserv'd, be mine.
Add, if it please thee, all-bestowing god,
Enduring riches, piety's reward;
For power omnipotent invests thy throne, 65
With strength immense and universal rule.
And if the whirling spindle of the fates
Threats from the starry webs pernicious dire,
Thy sounding shafts with force resistless send,
And vanquish ere it fall th' impending ill. 70

Ver. 5. Matter's worlds. According to the Chaldaic theology, there are seven corporeal worlds, viz. one empyrean, three ætherial, and three material, which last three consist of the inerratic sphere, the seven planetary spheres, and a sublunary region. But the empyrean and etherial worlds, when compared with the three last, are said to be immaterial, not that they are void of matter, but because the matter from which they are composed bears the relation of an immaterial essence to that of the other worlds, from the extreme purity and vitality of its nature. I only add, that according to the same theology, the sun moves beyond the inerratic sphere in the last of the etherial worlds. See more concerning this in my notes to the Cratylus.

Ver. 7. That is, in the last ætherial world, which is of course the middle of the seven worlds.

Ver. 17. That is, from the first cause, or the good. But the sun is said, by way of eminence, to be the progeny of this highest god, on account of the analogy which he bears to him in his illuminations. For as the good is the source of light of the intelligible world, so Apollo gives light to the supermundane, and the sun to the sensible, worlds.

Ver. 25. I have used the word Hyle, or matter, instead of generation, , which is employed by Proclus, because it is better adapted to the measure of the verses; but the meaning of each word is nearly the same, for the regions of matter are the regions of generation.

Ver. 36. According to the most accurate division of the Demoniactal order, there are six species of dæmons, as we learn from the excellent Olympiodorus, in his Commentary on the Phædo of Plato. There first of these species is called divine, from subsisting according to the one, or that which is superessential in the mundane gods; the second is denominated intellectual, from subsisting according to the intellect of these gods; the third is rational, from subsisting according to the soul with which the mundane gods are connected; the fourth is natural, being characterized from the nature which depends on these gods; the fifth is corporeal, subsisting according to their bodies; and the sixth is material, subsisting according to the matter which depends on these divinities. Or, we may say, that some of these dæmons are celestial, others ethereal, and others ærial; that some are aquatic, others terrestrial, and others subterranean. Olympiodorus adds, that irrational dæmons commence from the ærial species; in proof of which he cites the following verse from some oracles, (most probably from the Zoroastrian oracles):

That is, “Being the charioteer of the ærial, terrestrial and aquatic dogs.” For evil dæmons, as I have shewn in my Dissertation on the Mysteries, appear in the shape of dogs. And perhaps in this verse the sun is the charioteer alluded to, as it wonderfully agrees with what Proclus says of that deity in the verses before us. I only add, that when irrational dæmons are said to be evil, this must not be understood as if they were essentially evil, but that they are noxious only from their employment; that is, from their either calling forth the vices of depraved souls that they may be punished and cured, or from their inflicting punishment alone: for, indeed, there is not any thing essentially evil in the

universe; for as the cause of all is goodness itself, every thing subsisting from thence must be endued with the form of good; since it is not the property of fire to refrigerate, nor of light to give obscurity, nor of goodness to produce from itself any thing evil.

Ver. 45. That is, image of the first cause.

Greek original (.)

TO THE MUSES. — .

A sacred light I sing, which leads on high
Jove's nine fam'd daughters, ruler of the sky,
Whose splendours beaming o'er this sea of life,
On souls hard struggling with its storms of strife,
Through mystic rites perfective and refine, 5
(From books which stimulate the sluggish mind)
From earth's dire evils leads them to that shore,
Where grief and labour can infest no more;
And well instructs them how, with ardent wing,

From Lethe's deep, wide-spreading flood to spring, 10
And how once more their kindred stars to gain,
And ancient seats in truth's immortal plain,
From whence they wand'ring fell, thro' mad desire
Of matter's regions and allotments dire.
In me this rage repress, illustrious Nine! 15
And fill my mental eye with light divine.
Oh may the doctrines of the wise inspire
My soul with sacred Bacchanalian fire,
Lest men, with filthy piety replete,
From paths of beauteous light divert my feet. 20
Conduct my erring soul to sacred light,
From wand'ring generation's stormy night:
Wise thro' your volumes hence, the task be mine,
To sing in praise of eloquence divine,
Whose soothing power can charm the troubled soul, 25
And throbbing anguish and despair control.
Hear, splendid goddesses, of bounteous mind,
To whom the helm of wisdom is assign'd,
And who the soul with all-attractive flame
Lead to the blest immortals whence she came, 30
From night profound enabling her to rise,
Forsake dull earth, and gain her native skies,
And with unclouded splendour fill the mind,
By rites ineffable of hymns refin'd.
Hear, mighty saviours! and with holy light, 35
While reading works divine illumine my sight,
And dissipate these mists, that I may learn

Immortal gods from mortals to discern;
Lest, plung'd in drowsy Lethe's black abyss,
Some baneful dæmon keep my soul from bliss; 40
And lest deep merged in Hyle's stormy mire,
Her powers reluctant suffer tortures dire,
And some chill Fury with her freezing chain,
In ling'ring lethargy my life detain.
All-radiant governors of wisdom's light, 45
To me now hast'ning from the realms of night,
And ardent panting for the coast of day,
Thro' sacred rites benignant point the way,
And mystic knowledge of my view disclose,
Since this for ever from your nature flows. 50
Ver. 19. Proclus here, I have no doubt, alludes to the Christians.

Greek original (.)

TO VENUS. — .

A celebrated royal fount I sing,
From foam begotten, and of Loves the spring,
Those winged, deathless powers, whose gen'ral sway

In different modes all mortal tribes obey.
With mental darts some pierce the god-like soul, 5
And freedom rouse unconscious of control;
That anxious hence the centre to explore
Which leads on high from matter's stormy shore,
The ardent soul may meditate her flight,
And view their mother's palaces of light. 10
But others, watchful of their father's will,
Attend his councils and his laws fulfil,
His bounteous providence o'er all extend,
And strengthen generation without end.
And others last, the most inferior kind, 15
Preside o'er marriage, and its contracts bind,
Intent a race immortal to supply
From man calamitous and doom'd to die.
While all Cythera's high commands obey,
And bland attention to her labours pay. 20
O venerable goddess! hear my prayer,
For nought escapes thine universal ear:
Whether t' embrace the mighty heav'n is thine,
And send the world from thence a soul divine;
Or whether, seated in th' ætherial plain 25
Above these seven-fold starry orbs you reign,
Imparting to our ties, with bounteous mind,
A power untam'd, a vigour unconfin'd; —
Hear me, O goddess, and my life defend,
With labours sad, and anxious for their end; 30
Transfix my soul with darts of holy fire,

And avert the flames of base desire.

Greek original (.)

TO VENUS. — EI .

THEE, Venus, royal Lycian queen, I sing,
To whom of old by deity inspir'd,
In grateful signal of thy fav'ring aid,
Our country's guides, a sacred temple rais'd
In Lycia; of the intellectual rites 5
Symbolical, which link'd in Hymen's bands
Celestial Venus and the god of fire.
Olympian hence they called thee, by whose power
They oft avoided death's destructive ire,
To virtue looking; and from fertile beds 10
Through thee, an offspring provident and strong
Rose into light; while all their days were crown'd
With gentle peace, the source of tranquil bliss.
Illustrious queen! benignantly accept
The grateful tribute of this sacred hymn, 15
For we from Lycian blood derive our birth.
Expell base passions from my wand'ring soul,
And once more raise her to true beauty's light;
Averting far the irritation dire,

And rage insane, of earth-begotten love. 20

Greek original (EI .)

TO MINERVA. — .

Daughter of ægis-bearing Jove, divine,
Propitious to thy vot'ries prayer incline;
From thy great father's fount supremely bright,
Like fire resounding, leaping into light.
Shield-bearing goddess, hear, to whom belong 5
A manly mind, and power to tame the strong!
Oh, sprung from matchless might, with joyful mind
Accept this hymn; benevolent and kind!
The holy gates of wisdom by thy hand
Are wide unfolded; and the daring band 10
Of earth-born giants, that in impious fight
Strove with thy fire, were vanquish'd by thy might.
Once by thy care, as sacred poets sing,
The heart of Bacchus, swiftly-slaughter'd king,
Was sav'd in æther, when, with fury fir'd, 15
The Titans fell against his life conspir'd;
And with relentless rage and thirst for gore,
Their hands his members into fragments tore:
But ever watchful of thy father's will,
Thy pow'r preserv'd him from succeeding ill, 20

Till from the secret counsels of his sire,
And born from Semele through heav'nly fire,
Great Dionysius to the world at length
Again appear'd with renovated strength.
Once, too, thy warlike axe, with matchless sway, 25
Lopp'd from their savage neck the heads away
Of furious beasts, and thus the pests destroy'd
Which long all-seeing Hecate annoy'd.
By thee benevolent great Juno's might
Was rous'd, to furnish mortals with delight: 30
And through life's wide and various range 'tis thine
Each part to beautify with arts divine:
Invigorated hence by thee, we find
A demiurgic impulse in the mind.
Towers proudly rais'd, and for protection strong, 35
To thee, dread guardian, deity belong,
As proper symbols of th' exalted height
Thy series claims amidst the courts of light.
Lands are belov'd by thee to learning prone,
And Athens, O Athena, is thy own! 40
Great goddess, hear! and on my dark'ned mind
Pour thy pure light in measure unconfin'd; —
That sacred light, O all-protecting queen,
Which beams eternal from thy face serene:
My soul, while wand'ring on the earth, inspire 45
With thy own blessed and impulsive fire;
And from thy fables, mystic and divine,
Give all her powers with holy light to shine.

Give love, give wisdom, and a power to love,
Incessant tending to the realms above; 50
Such as, unconscious of base earth's control,
Gently attracts the vice-subduing soul;
From night's dark region aids her to retire,
And once more gain the palace of her sire:
And if on me some just misfortune press, 55
Remove th' affliction, and thy suppliant bless.
All-saving goddess, to my prayer incline!
Nor let those horrid punishments be mine
Which guilty souls in Tartarus confine,
With fetters fast'ned to its brazen floors, 60
And lock'd by hell's tremendous iron doors.
Hear me, and save (for power is all thy own)
A soul desirous to be thine alone.

Greek original (.)