

## THAT VIRTUE MAY BE TAUGHT.

---

1. MEN deliberate and dispute variously concerning virtue, whether prudence and justice and the right ordering of one's life can be taught. Moreover, we marvel that the works of orators, shipmasters, musicians, carpenters, and husbandmen are infinite in number, while good men are only a name, and are talked of like centaurs, giants, and the Cyclops, and that as for any virtuous action that is sincere and unblamable, and manners that are without any touch and mixture of bad passions and affections, they are not to be found; but if Nature of its own accord should produce any thing good and excellent, so many things of a foreign nature mix with it (just as wild and impure productions with generous fruit) that the good is scarce discernible. Men learn to sing, dance, and read, and to be skilful in husbandry and good horsemanship; they learn how to put on their shoes and their garments; they have those that teach them how to fill wine, and to dress and cook their meat; and none of these things can be done as they ought, unless they be instructed how to do them. And will ye say, O foolish men! that the skill of ordering one's life well (for the sake of which are all the rest) is not to be taught, but to come of its own accord, without reason and without art?

2. Why do we, by asserting that virtue is not to be taught, make it a thing that does not at all exist? For if by its

being learned it is produced, he that hinders its being learned destroys it. And now, as Plato \* says, we never heard that because of a blunder in metre in a lyric song, therefore one brother made war against another, nor that it put friends at variance, nor that cities hereupon were at such enmity that they did to one another and suffered one from another the extremest injuries. Nor can any one tell us of a sedition raised in a city about the right accenting or pronouncing of a word, — as whether we are to say *Τέλιχνας* or *Τέλιχνας*, — nor that a difference arose in a family betwixt man and wife about the woof and the warp in cloth. Yet none will go about to weave in a loom or to handle a book or a harp, unless he has first been taught, though no great harm would follow if he did, but only the fear of making himself ridiculous (for, as Heraclitus says, it is a piece of discretion to conceal one's ignorance); and yet a man without instruction presumes himself able to order a family, a wife, or a commonwealth, and to govern very well. Diogenes, seeing a youth devouring his victuals too greedily, gave his tutor a box on the ear, and that deservedly, as judging it the fault of him that had not taught, not of him that had not learned better manners. And what? is it necessary to begin to learn from a boy how to eat and drink handsomely in company, as Aristophanes expresses it, —

Not to devour their meat in haste, nor giggle,  
Nor awkwardly their feet across to wriggle,†

and yet are men fit to enter into the fellowship of a family, city, married estate, private conversation, or public office, and to manage it without blame, without any previous instruction concerning good behavior in conversation?

When one asked Aristippus this question, What, are you everywhere? he laughed and said, I throw away the fare of the waterman, if I am everywhere. And why canst not thou also answer, that the salary given to tutors is thrown

\* Plato, Clitophon, p. 407 C.

† Aristoph. Nub. 983.

away and lost, if none are the better for their discipline and instruction. But, as nurses shape and form the body of a child with their hands, so these masters, when the nurses have done with them, first receive them into their charge, in order to the forming of their manners and directing their steps into the first tracks of virtue. To which purpose the Lacedaemonian, that was asked what good he did to the child of whom he had the charge, answered well: I make good and honest things pleasant to children. These masters also teach them to bend down their heads as they go along, to touch salt fish with one finger only, but fresh fish, bread, and flesh with two; thus to scratch themselves, and thus to tuck up their garments.

3. Now he that says that the art of physic may be proper for a tetter or a whitlow, but not to be made use of for a pleurisy, a fever, or a frenzy, in what does he differ from him that should say that it is fit there should be schools, and discourses, and precepts, to teach trifling and childish things, but that all skill in greater and more manly things comes from use without art and from accidental opportunity? For as he would be ridiculous who should say, that one who never learned to row ought not to lay hand on the oar, but that he might guide the helm who was never taught it; so is he that gives leave for men to be instructed in other arts, but not in virtue. He seems to be quite contrary to the practice of the Scythians, who, as Herodotus \* tells us, put out their servants' eyes, to prevent them from running away; but he puts the eye of reason into these base and slavish arts, and plucks it from virtue. But the general Iphicrates — when Callias, the son of Chabrias, asked him, What art thou? Art thou an archer or a targeteer, a trooper or a foot-soldier? — answered well, I am none of all these, but one that commands them all. He therefore would be ridiculous that should say that the skill of draw-

\* See Herod. IV. 2.

ing a bow, of handling arms, of throwing with a sling, and of good horsemanship, might indeed be taught, but the skill of commanding and leading an army came as it happened, one knew not how. And would not he be still more ridiculous who should say that prudence only could not be taught, without which all those arts are useless and unprofitable? When she is the governess, ranking all things in due place and order, every thing is assigned to become useful; for instance, how ungraceful would a feast be, though all concerned were skilful and enough practised in cookery, in dressing and serving up the meat, and in filling the wine as they ought, if all things were not well disposed and ordered among those that waited at the table? . . .

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



The Complete Text can be found on our CD:  
**Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature**  
which can be purchased on our Website :  
[www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)

or

by sending **\$64.95** in check or money order to :  
**Brainfly Inc.**  
**5100 Garfield Ave. #46**  
**Sacramento CA 95841-3839**

## **TEACHER'S DISCOUNT:**

If you are a **TEACHER** you can take advantage of our teacher's discount. Click on **Teachers Discount** on our website ([www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)) or **Send us \$55.95** and we will send you a full copy of *Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature* **AND** our *5000 Classics CD (a collection of over 5000 classic works of literature in electronic format (.txt))* plus our *Wholesale price list*.

If you have any suggestions such as books you would like to see added to the collection or if you would like our wholesale prices list please send us an email to:

[webcomments@brainfly.net](mailto:webcomments@brainfly.net)