PLUTARCH'S RULES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HEALTH.

A DIALOGUE.

MOSCHIO, ZEUXIPPUS.

1. Moschio. And you, Zeuxippus, diverted Glaucus the physician from entering into a philosophical discourse with you yesterday.

Zeuxippus. I did not hinder him in the least, friend Moschio, it was he that would not discourse in philosophy. But I feared and avoided giving so contentious a man any opportunity of discourse; for though in physic the man has (as Homer * expresses it) an excellency before most of his profession, yet in philosophy he is not altogether so candid, but indeed so rude in all his disputations, that he is hardly to be borne with, flying (as it were) at us open mouthed. So that it is neither an easy nor indeed a just thing, that we should bear those confusions in terms he makes, when we are disputing about a wholesome diet. Besides, he maintains that the bounds of philosophy and medicine are as distinct as those of the Mysians and Phry-And taking hold of some of those things we were discoursing of, perhaps not with all exactness, yet not without some profit, he made scurrilous reflections on them.

Moschio. But I am ready, Zeuxippus, to hear those and the other things you shall discourse of, with a great deal of pleasure.

Zeuxippus. You have naturally a philosophical genius, Moschio, and are troubled to see a philosopher have no kindness for the study of medicine. You are uneasy that he should think it concerns him more to study geometry, logic, and music, than to be desirous to understand

What in his house is well or ill-designed,*

his house being his own body. You shall see many spectators at that play where their charges are defrayed out of the public stock, as they do at Athens. Now among all the liberal arts, medicine not only contains so neat and large a field of pleasure as to give place to none, but she pays plentifully the charges of those who delight in the study of her by giving them health and safety; so that it ought not to be called transgressing the bounds of a philosopher to dispute about those things which relate to health, but rather, all bounds being laid aside, we ought to pursue our studies in the same common field, and so enjoy both the pleasure and the profit of them.

Moschio. But to pass by Glaucus, who with his pretended gravity would be thought to be so perfect as not to stand in need of philosophy, — do you, if you please, run through the whole discourse, and first, those things which you say were not so exactly handled and which Glaucus carped at.

2. Zeuxippus. A friend of ours then heard one alleging that to keep one's hands always warm and never suffer them to be cold did not a little conduce to health; and, on the contrary, keeping the extreme parts of the body cold drives the heat inward, so that you are always in a fever or the fear of one. But those things which force the heat outwards do distribute and draw the matter to all parts, with advantage to our health. If in any work we employ our hands, we are able to keep in them that heat which is

induced by their motion. But when we do not work with our hands, we should take all care to keep our extreme parts from cold.

3. This was one of those things he ridiculed. The second, as I remember, was touching the food allowed the sick, which he advises us sometimes both to touch and taste when we are in good health, that so we may be used to it, and not be shy of it, like little children, or hate such a diet, but by degrees make it natural and familiar to our appetite; that in our sickness we may not nauseate wholesome diet, as if it were physic, nor be uneasy when we are prescribed any insipid thing, that lacks both the smell and taste of a kitchen. Wherefore we need not squeamishly refuse to eat before we wash, or to drink water when we may have wine, or to take warm drink in summer when there is snow at hand. We must, however, lay aside all foppish ostentation and sophistry as well as vain-glory in this abstinence, and quietly by ourselves accustom our appetite to obey reason with willingness, that thus we may wean our minds long beforehand from that dainty contempt of such food which we feel in time of sickness, and that we may not then effeminately bewail our condition, as if we were fallen from great and beloved pleasures into a low and sordid diet. It was well said, Choose out the best condition you can, and custom will make it pleasant to you. And this will be beneficial in most things we undertake, but more especially as to diet; if, in the height of our health, we introduce a custom whereby those things may be rendered easy, familiar, and, as it were, domestics of our bodies, remembering what some suffer and do in sickness, who fret, and are not able to endure warm water or gruel or bread when it is brought to them, calling them dirty and unseemly things, and the persons who would urge them to them base and troublesome. The bath hath destroyed many whose distemper at the beginning was not very bad, only because they could not endure to eat before they washed; among whom Titus the emperor was one, as his physicians affirm.

- 4. This also was said, that a thin diet is the healthfulest to the body. But we ought chiefly to avoid all excess in meat or drink or pleasure, when there is any feast or entertainment at hand, or when we expect any royal or princely banquet, or solemnity which we cannot possibly avoid; then ought the body to be light and in readiness to receive the winds and waves it is to meet with. hard matter for a man at a feast or collation to keep that mediocrity or bounds he has been used to, so as not to seem rude, precise, or troublesome to the rest of the com-Lest we should add fire to fire, as the proverb is, or one debauch or excess to another, we should take care to imitate that ingenious droll of Philip, which was this. He was invited to supper by a countryman, who supposed he would bring but few friends with him; but when he saw him bring a great many, there not being much provided, he was much concerned at it: which when Philip perceived, he sent privately to every one of his friends, that they should leave a corner for cake; they believing this and still expecting, ate so sparingly that there was supper enough for them all. So we ought beforehand to prepare ourselves against all unavoidable invitations, that there may be room left in our body, not only for the meal and the dessert, but for drunkenness itself, by bringing in a fresh and a willing appetite along with us.
- 5. But if such a necessity should surprise you when you are already loaded or indisposed, in the presence either of persons of quality or of strangers that come in upon you unawares, and you cannot for shame but go and drink with them that are ready for that purpose, then you ought to arm yourself against that modesty and prejudicial shame-facedness with that of Creon in the tragedy, who says,—

'Tis better, sirs, I should you now displease, Than by complying next day lose my ease.**

He who throws himself into a pleurisy or frenzy, to avoid being censured as an uncivil person, is certainly no well-bred man, nor has he sense of understanding enough to converse with men, unless in a tavern or a cook-shop. Whereas an excuse ingeniously and dexterously made is no less acceptable than compliance. He that makes a feast, though he be as unwilling to taste of it himself as if it was a sacrifice, yet if he be merry and jocund over his glass at table, jesting and drolling upon himself, seems better company than they who are drunk and gluttonized together. Among the ancients, he made mention of Alexander, who after hard drinking was ashamed to resist the importunity of Medius, who invited him afresh to the drinking of wine, of which he died; and of our time, of Regulus the wrestler, who, being called by break of day by Titus Caesar to the bath, went and washed with him, and drinking but once (as they say) was seized with an apoplexy, and died immediately. These things Glaucus in laughter objected to as pedantic. He was not over-fond of hearing farther, nor indeed were we of discoursing more. But do you give heed to every thing that was said.

6. First, Socrates advises us to beware of such meats as persuade a man to eat them though he be not hungry, and of those drinks that would prevail with a man to drink them when he is not thirsty. Not that he absolutely forbade us the use of them; but he taught that we might use them where there was occasion for it, suiting the pleasure of them to our necessity, as cities converted the money which was designed for the festivals into a supply for war. For that which is agreeable by nature, so long as it is a part of our nourishment, is proper for us. He that is

^{*} See Eurip. Medea, 290.

hungry should eat necessary food and find it pleasant; but when he is freed from his common appetite, he ought not to raise up a fresh one. For, as dancing was no unpleasant exercise to Socrates himself, so he that can make his meal of sweetmeats or a second course receives the less damage. But he that has taken already what may sufficiently satisfy his nature ought by all means to avoid them. And concerning these things, indecorum and ambition are no less to be avoided than the love of pleasure or gluttony. For these often persuade men to eat without hunger or drink without thirst, possessing them with base and troublesome fancies, as if it were indecent not to taste of every thing which is either a rarity or of great price, as udder, Italian mushrooms, Samian cakes, or snow in Egypt. Again, these often incite men to eat things rare and much talked of, they being led to it, as it were, by the scent of vain-glory, and making their bodies to partake of them without any necessity of it, that they may have something to tell others, who shall admire their having eaten such rare and superfluous things. And thus it is with them in relation to fine women; when they are in bed with their own wives, however beautiful and loving they may be, they are no way concerned; but on Phryne or Lais they bestow their money, inciting an infirm and unfit body, and provoking it to intemperate pleasures, and all this out of a vain-glorious humor. Phryne herself said in her old age, that she sold her lees and dregs the dearer because she had been in such repute when she was young.

7. It is indeed a great and miraculous thing that, if we allow the body all the pleasures which nature needs and can bear, — or rather, if we struggle against its appetites on most occasions and put it off, and are at last brought with difficulty to yield to its necessities, or (as Plato saith) give way when it bites and strains itself, — after all we should come off without harm. But, on the other hand,

those desires which descend from the mind into the body, and urge and force it to obey and accompany them in all their motions and affections, must of necessity leave behind them the greatest and severest ills, as the effects of such infirm and dark delights. The desire of our mind ought no ways to incite our bodies to any pleasure, for the beginning of this is against nature. And as the tickling of one's armpits forces a laughter, which is neither moderate nor merry, nor indeed properly a laughter, but rather troublesome and like convulsions; so those pleasures which the molested and disturbed body receives from the mind are furious, troublesome, and wholly strangers to nature. Therefore when any rare or noble dish is before you, you will get more honor by refraining from it than partaking of it. Remember what Simonides said, that he never repented that he had held his tongue, but often that he had spoken; so we shall not repent that we have refused a good dish or drunk water instead of Falernian, but the contrary. We are not only to commit no violence on Nature; but when any of those things are offered to her, even if she has a desire for them, we ought oftentimes to direct the appetite to a more innocent and accustomed diet, that she may be used to it and acquainted with it; for as the Theban said (though not over honestly), If the law must be violated, it looks best when it is done for an empire.* But we say better, if we are to take pride in any such thing, it is best when it is in that moderation which conduces to our health. But a narrowness of soul and a stingy humor compel some men to keep under and defraud their genius at home, who, when they enjoy the costly fare of another man's table, do cram themselves as eagerly as if it were all plunder; then they are taken ill, go home, and the next day find the crudity of their stomachs the reward of their unsatiableness. Wherefore Crates, sup-

^{*} Eteocles the Theban, in Eurip. Phoeniss. 524.

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