

OF THE WORD *EI* ENGRAVEN OVER THE GATE OF
APOLLO'S TEMPLE AT DELPHI.

AMMONIUS, LAMPRIAS, PLUTARCH, THEON, EUSTROPHUS,
NICANDER.

1. I HAPPENED not long since, dear Serapion, on certain not unelegant verses, which Dicaearchus supposes Euripides to have spoken to King Archelaus .

I'm poor, you rich, I'll therefore nothing give ;
Lest me or fool or beggar you believe.

For he who out of his little estate makes small presents to those that have great possessions does them no pleasure ; nay, being not believed to give even that little for nothing, he incurs the suspicion of being of a sordid and ungenerous disposition. But since pecuniary presents are both in bounty and beauty far inferior to such as proceed from learning and wisdom, it is honorable both to make such presents, and at our giving them, to desire suitable returns from the receivers. I therefore, sending to you, — and through you to our friends in those parts, — as a first-fruit offering, some discourses concerning the Pythian affairs, confess that I do in requital expect others, both more and better, from you, as being persons conversant in a great city, and enjoying more leisure amongst many books and conferences of all sorts. For indeed our good Apollo seems to cure and solve such difficulties as occur in the ordinary management of our life, by giving his oracles to those that resort to him ; but as for those which concern

learning, he leaves and proposes them to that faculty of the soul which is naturally addicted to the study of philosophy, imprinting in it a desire leading to truth; as is manifest both in many other matters, and in the consecration of this inscription *EI*. For it is not probable, that it was by chance or by a lottery (as it were) of letters that this word alone was placed in the principal seat in the God's temple, and received the dignity of a sacred donary and spectacle; but it is highly credible that those who at the beginning philosophized concerning this God gave it that station, either as seeing it in some peculiar and extraordinary power, or using it as a symbol to signify some other thing worthy of our attention.

Having therefore often formerly declined and avoided this discourse, when proposed in the school, I was lately surprised by my own children as I was debating with certain strangers, who were on their departure out of Delphi, so that I could not in civility hold them in suspense nor yet refuse discoursing with them, since they were exceeding earnest to hear something. Being therefore set down by the temple, I began myself to search into some things, and to ask them concerning others, being by the place and the very talk put in mind of those things we had heretofore, when Nero passed through these parts, heard Ammonius and some others discourse; the same difficulty having been then likewise in this very place propounded.

2. Since therefore this God is no less a philosopher than a prophet, Ammonius seemed to all of us rightly to apply every one of his names to this purpose, and to teach that he is Pythius (or a *questionist*) to those who begin to learn and enquire; Delius and Phanaeus (or a *manifestor* and *prover*) to those to whom somewhat of the truth is already manifest and shines forth; Ismenius (or *knowing*) to those that have acquired knowledge; and Leschenorius (or *discoursing*) when they practise and enjoy their science, mak-

ing use of it to discourse and philosophize with one another. Now, forasmuch as to philosophize implies to enquire, to wonder, and to doubt, it is probable (he said) that many of the things that concern God are not unfitly concealed under enigmas, and require that one should ask the reason why, and seek to be instructed in the causes, — as, why of all wood fir only is burnt in the eternal fire, why the laurel only is used in fumigations, why there are erected but two statues of the Fates, they being everywhere else thought to be three, why no woman is permitted to have access to the oracle, what is the reason of the tripod, and other such like things, which, being proposed to those who are not altogether irrational and soulless, allure and incite them to consider, hear, and discourse something about them. And do but behold how many questions these inscriptions, “ Know thyself ” and “ Nothing too much, ” have set afoot amongst the philosophers, and what a multitude of discourses has sprung up from each of them, as from a seed ; than neither of which, I think the matter now in question to be less fruitful.

3. Ammonius having spoken thus, Lamprias the Delphian said : The reason indeed which we have heard of this is plain and very short ; for they say that those Sages, who were by some called Sophisters, were but five, Chilo, Thales, Solon, Bias, and Pittacus. But after that Cleobulus the tyrant of the Lindians, and Periander the Corinthian, though wholly destitute of virtue and wisdom, had by their power, friends, and courtesy forced a reputation, they usurped the name of Sages, and set forth and dispersed all over Greece certain sentences and sayings, not unlike to those which had been spoken by the five former wise men. The five, however, being discontented at this, would not reprove their arrogancy, nor openly contest and enter into quarrels for glory with men of so great power ; but assembling here together, and consulting with one another,

they consecrated the letter *E*, which is in the order of the alphabet the fifth, and signifies five in number, protesting of themselves before the God that they were but five, and rejecting and abdicating the sixth and seventh as not belonging to them. Now that these things are not spoken beside the cushion, any one might understand who should have heard those who have care of the temple naming the golden *EI* the *EI* of Livia, the wife of Augustus Caesar; and the brazen one the *EI* of the Athenians; but the first and ancientest of all, which is the wooden one, they call the *EI* of the Sages, as not being of any one, but the common dedication of them all.

4. At this Ammonius gently smiled, supposing Lamprias to have delivered an opinion of his own, but to have feigned that he had heard the story from others, lest he might be obliged to give an account of it. But another of those that were present said that this had some affinity with what a certain Chaldean stranger had lately babbled, to wit, that there are in the alphabet seven letters rendering a perfect sound of themselves, and in the heavens seven stars moved by their own proper motion, not bound or linked to that of the others; that *E* is from the beginning the second in order of the vowels, and the sun the second of the planets, or next to the moon, and that the Greeks do unanimously (so to speak) repute Apollo to be the same with the sun. But these things, said he, wholly savor of his counting-table and his trifling. But Lamprias, it seems, was not sensible of his having stirred up all those of the temple against his discourse. For there was not a man of the Delphians who knew any thing of what he said; but they all alleged the common and current opinion, holding that neither the sight nor the sound of this writing, but the word alone as it was written, contained some symbol or secret signification.

5. For the syllable *EI* (*if*) is, as the Delphians conceive

it, and as Nicander the priest (who was then present) also said, a conveyance and form of prayer to the God, and has the leading place in the questions of those who at every turn use it, asking *if* they shall overcome, *if* they shall marry, *if* it is convenient to go to sea, *if* to till the ground, *if* to travel. And the wise God, bidding adieu to the logicians, who think nothing at all can be made of this particle *EI* and any clause following it, understands and admits all interrogations annexed to it, as real things. Now, because it is proper for us to consult him as a prophet, and common to pray to him as a God, they suppose that this word has no less a precatory than an interrogatory power. For every one who prays or wishes says, *εἰ γὰρ ὄφελον, O if I were, &c.* And Archilochus has also this expression :

If I might be so happy as to touch
My Neobule's hand.

And they say that the second syllable in the word *εἶθε* is redundant like *θήν* in this of Sophron, "*Ἄμα τέκνων θήν δενομένα, desiring also children* ; and in this of Homer, '*Ὡς θήν καὶ σὸν ἐγὼ λύσω μένος, as I will also foil thy strength* ; but in the word *EI* there is sufficiently declared an optative power.

6. Nicander having delivered these words, our friend Theon, whom you know, asked Ammonius if he might have liberty to plead for logic, which was so highly injured. And Ammonius bidding him speak and defend it, he said : Now that this God is a most expert logician many of his oracles show ; for it is, to wit, the part of the same artist to dissolve and frame ambiguities. Moreover, as Plato said, when an oracle was given to the Greeks that they should double the altar in Delos, which is a work of the utmost perfection in geometry, that the God did not order the doing of that very thing, but commanded the Greeks to apply themselves to geometry ; so the same God, by giving ambiguous oracles, honors and recommends logic,

as necessary to those who desire to understand him aright. Now this conjunction *EI*, or *if*, has a very great efficacy in logic, as forming the most rational proposition; for how can it be otherwise, since the very brutes have indeed the knowledge of the substance of things, but to man only has Nature given the consideration and judgment of consequence? For that there is both day and light, wolves and dogs and birds are sensible. But that if it is day there must be light, no other animal understands but man, who only has the conception of antecedent and consequent, of the significance and connection of these things with one another, and of their habitude and difference, from which demonstrations take their principal beginnings. Now since philosophy is conversant about truth, since the light of truth is demonstration, and the beginning of demonstration this connection of propositions; the faculty which contains and effects this was by wise men, with good reason, consecrated to the God who most of all loves truth. Now the God indeed is a prophet, and the art of prophesying is a divination concerning the future from things that are present and past. For neither is the original of any thing without a cause, nor the foreknowledge of any thing without reason. But since all things that are done follow and are connected to those that have been done, and those that shall be done to those that are done, according to the progress proceeding from the beginning to the end; he who knows how to look into the causes of this together, and naturally connect them one with another, knows also and divines

What things now are, shall be, or e'er have been.*

And Homer indeed excellently well places first things that are present, and afterwards what is future and past. For by the very nature of the connection the argument is based on that which now is. Thus, "if this is, that preceded;"

and again, "if this is, that shall be." For the knowledge of the consequence is, as has been said, an artificial and rational thing; but sense gives the assumption to reason. Whence (though it may seem indecent to say it) I will not be afraid to aver this, that the tripod of truth is reason, which recognizes the dependence of the consequent on the antecedent, and then, assuming the reality of the antecedent, infers the conclusion of the demonstration. If then the Pythian Apollo delights in music, and is pleased with the singing of swans and the harmony of the lute, what wonder is it that, for the sake of logic, he embraces and loves this argumentative particle, which he sees the philosophers so much and so frequently to use? Hercules indeed, not having yet unbound Prometheus, nor conversed with the sophisters that were with Chiron and Atlas, but being still a young man and a plain Boeotian, at first abolished logic and derided this word *EI*; but afterwards he seemed by force to have seized on the tripod, and contended with our God himself for the pre-eminence in this art; for being grown up in age, he appeared to be the most expert both in divination and logic.

7. Theon having ended his speech, I think it was Eustrophus the Athenian who said to us: Do you not see how valiantly Theon vindicates logic, having, in a manner, got on the lion's skin? So it is not right even for us — who comprehensively place all the affairs, nature, and principles of things both divine and human in number, and make it most especially the author and lord of honest and estimable things — to be at quiet, but we must willingly offer the first-fruits of our dear mathematics to the God; since we think that this letter *E* does not of itself differ from the other letters either in power, figure, or expression, but that it has been preferred as being the sign of that great number which has an influence over all things, called the Quinary (or Pemptas), from which the Sages

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