

Appendix B: Excerpt From Francois Fenelon

The following is from a collection entitled "The World's Greatest Books".

It is an extended excerpt from a book by Francois Fenelon.

The book is now in the public domain.

"... A man deeply concerned in an affair of great importance, that should take up all the attention of his mind, might pass several days in a room treating about his concerns without taking notice of the proportions of the chamber, the ornaments of the chimney, and the pictures about him, all of which objects would continually be before his eyes, and yet none of them make any impression upon him. In this manner it is that men spend their lives. Everything offers God to their sight, and yet they see Him nowhere.

"They pass away their lives without perceiving that sensible representation of the Deity. Such is the fascination of worldly trifles that obscure their eyes. Nay, oftentimes they will not so much as open them, but rather affect to keep them shut, lest they should find Him they do not look for. In short, what ought to help most to open their eyes serves only to close them faster. I mean the constant duration and regularity of the motions which the Supreme Wisdom has put in the universe.

"But after all, whole nature shows the infinite art of its Maker. When I speak of an art, I mean a collection of proper means chosen on purpose to arrive at a certain end; or, if you please, it is an order, a method, an industry, or a set design. Chance, on the contrary, is a blind and necessary cause, which neither sets in order nor chooses anything, and has neither will nor understanding. Now, I maintain that the universe bears the character and stamp of a cause infinitely powerful and industrious; and, at the same time, that chance - that is, the fortuitous concourse of causes void of reason - cannot have formed this universe.

"Who will believe that so perfect a poem as Homer's "I Iliad" was not the product of the genius of a great poet, but that the letters of the alphabet, being confusedly jumbled and mixed, were by chance, as it were by the cast of a pair of dice, brought together in such an order as is necessary to describe, in verses full of harmony and variety, so many great events; to place and connect them so well together; to paint every object with all its most graceful, most noble, and most affecting attendants; in short, to make every person speak according to his character in so natural and so forcible a manner? Let people subtilize upon the matter as much as they please, yet they never will persuade a man of sense that the "Illiad" was the mere result of

chance. How, then, can a man of sense be induced to believe, with respect to the universe, what his reason will never suffer him to believe in relation to the "Illiad"?

II. - Earth, the Mother of All Living

After these comparisons, about which I only desire the reader to consult himself, without any argumentation, I think it is high time to enter into a detail of nature. I do not pretend to penetrate through the whole. Who is able to do it? Neither do I pretend to enter into any physical discussion. Such way of reasoning requires a certain deep knowledge, which abundance of men of wit and sense never acquire; and therefore I will offer nothing to them but the simple prospect of the face of nature. I will entertain them with nothing but what everybody knows, which requires only a little calm and serious attention.

"Let us, in the first place, stop at the great object that first strikes our sight - I mean the general structure of the universe. Let us cast our eyes on this earth that bears us.

"Who is it that hung and poised this motionless globe of the earth? Who laid its foundation? Nothing seems more vile and contemptible, for the meanest wretches tread it under foot; but yet it is in order to possess it that we part with the greatest treasures. If it were harder than it is, men could not open its bosom to cultivate it; and if it were less hard it could not bear them, and they would sink everywhere as they do in sand, or in a bog. It is from the inexhaustible bosom of the earth we draw what is most precious. That shapeless, vile, and rude mass assumes the most various forms, and yields alone, by turns, all the goods we can desire. That dirty soil transforms itself into a thousand fine objects that charm the eye. In the compass on one year it turns into branches, twigs, buds, leaves, blossoms, fruits, and seeds, in order, by those various shapes, to multiply its liberalities to mankind.

"Nothing exhausts the earth; the more we tear her bowels the more she is liberal. After so many ages, during which she has produced everything, she is not yet worn out. She feels no decay from old age, and her entrails still contain the same treasures. A thousand generations have passed away, and returned into her bosom.

"Everything grows old, she alone excepted; for she grows young again every year in the spring. She is never wanting to men; but foolish men are wanting to themselves in neglecting to cultivate her. It is through their laziness and extravagance they suffer brambles and briars to grow instead of grapes and corn. They contend for a good they let perish. The conquerors leave uncultivated the ground for the possession of which they have sacrificed the lives of so many thousand men, and

have spent their own in hurry and trouble. Men have before them vast tracts of land uninhabited and uncultivated, and they turn mankind topsy-turvy for one nook of that neglected ground in dispute. The earth, if well cultivated, would feed a hundred times more men than she does now. Even the unevenness of ground, which at first seems to be a defect, turns either into ornament or profit. The mountains arose and the valleys descended to the place the Lord had appointed for them. Those different grounds have their particular advantages, according to the place the divers aspects of the sun. In those deep valleys grow fresh and tender grass to feed cattle. Next to them opens a vast campaign covered with a rich harvest. Here, hills rise like an amphitheatre, and are crowned with vineyards and fruit-trees. There, high mountains carry aloft their frozen grows to the very clouds, and the torrents that run down from them become the springs of rivers. The rocks that show their craggy tops bear up the earth of mountains just as the bones bear up the flesh in human bodies.

"There is scarce any spot of ground absolutely barren if a man do not grow weary of digging, and turning it to the enlivening sun, and if he require no more from it than it is proper to bear. Amidst stone and rocks there is sometimes excellent pasture, and their cavities have veins which, being penetrated by the piercing rays of the sun, furnish plants with most savoury juices for the feeding of herds and flocks. Even sea-coasts that seem to be the most sterile and wild yield sometimes either delicious fruits or most wholesome medicines that are wanting in the most fertile countries. Besides, it is the effect of a wise over-ruling Providence that no land yields all that is useful to human life. For want invites men to commerce, in order to supply one another's necessities. It is therefore that want which is the natural tie of society between nations; otherwise, all the people of the earth would be reduced to one sort of food and clothing, and nothing would invite them to know and visit one another.

"All that the earth produces, being corrupted, returns into her bosom, and becomes the source of a new production. Thus she resumes all she has given in order to give again. Thus the corruption of plants, and of the animals she feeds, feed her, and improve her fertility. Thus, the more she gives the more she resumes; and she is never exhausted, provided they who cultivate her restore to her what she has given. Everything comes from her bosom, everything returns to it, and nothing is lost in it. Nay, all seeds multiply there.

"Admire the plants that spring from the earth; they yield food for the healthy, and remedies for the sick. Their species and virtues are innumerable. They deck the earth, yield verdure, fragrant flowers, and delicious fruits. Do you see those vast

forests that seem as old as the world? Those trees sink into the earth by their roots, as deep as their branches shoot up to the sky. Their roots defend them against the winds, and fetch up, as it were by subterranean pipes, all the juices destined to feed the trunk. The trunk itself is covered with a tough bark that shelters the tender wood from the injuries of the air. The branches distribute, by several pipes, the sap which the roots had gathered up in the trunk. In summer the boughs protect us with their shadow against the scorching rays of the sun.

"The farther we seek through the universe the more sure is her teaching. That which we learnt from the earth and from plants is taught us again by water, by the air, and by fire. It is the lesson of the skies, and of the sun and the stars. The whole animal world teaches us the same. If we turn from things that are large, we shall find wonders no less in the infinitely little; if we turn from the bodies of animals to the study of their instincts, their sleep, their food, the persistence of their races from age to age - though all individuals are mortals - again we find evidence of the skill and power of the Author of all things.

"Still more wonderful is the body of man, his skin and veins, his bones and joints, his senses, tongue, and teeth, the proportions of his body, and above all things, his soul, which alone among all creatures thinks and knows and is sovereign master over the body.

"It is this reason that is in man which, above all, demonstrates the residence of God in us."

III. - God in the Mind of Man

"It cannot be said that man gives himself the thoughts he had not before; much less can it be said that he receives them from other men, since it is certain he neither does nor can admit anything from without, unless he finds it in his own foundation, by consulting within him the principles of reason, in order to examine whether what he is told is agreeable or repugnant to them. Therefore, there is an inward school wherein man receives what he neither can give himself, nor expect from other men who live upon trust as well as himself.

"Here, then, are two reasons I find within me, one of which is myself, the other is above me. That which is myself is very imperfect, prejudiced, liable to error, changeable, headstrong, ignorant, and limited; in short, it possesses nothing but what is borrowed. The other is common to all men, and superior to them. It is perfect, eternal, immutable, ever ready to communicate itself in all places, and to

rectify all minds that err and mistake; in short, incapable of ever being either exhausted or divided, although it communicates itself to all who desire it.

"Where is that perfect reason which is so near me, and yet so different from me? Surely it must be something real, for nothing cannot either be perfect or make perfect imperfect natures. Where is that supreme reason? Is it not the very God I look for?

"We have seen the prints of the Deity, or to speak more properly, the seal and stamp of God Himself, in all that is called the works of nature. When a man does not enter into philosophical subtleties, he observes with the first cast of the eye a hand, that was the first mover, in all the parts of the universe, and set all the wheels of the great machine agoing. Everything shows and proclaims an order, an exact measure, an art, a wisdom, a mind superior to us, which is, as it were, the soul of the whole world, and which leads and directs everything to His ends, with a gentle and insensible, though ever an omnipotent, force.

"We have seen as it were, the architecture and frame of the universe; the just proportion of all its parts; and the bare cast of the eye has sufficed us to find and discover even in an ant, more than in the sun, a wisdom and power that delights to exert itself in polishing and adorning its vilest works.

"This is obvious, without any speculative discussion, to the most ignorant of men; but what a world of other wonders should we discover should we penetrate into the secrets of physics, and dissect the inward parts of animals, which are framed according to the most perfect mechanics.

"Let a man study the world as much as he pleases; let him descend into the minutest details; dissect the vilest of animals; narrowly consider the least grain of corn sown in the ground, and the manner in which it germinates and multiplies; attentively observe with what precautions a rose bud blows and opens in the sun, and closes again at night; and he will find in all these more design, conduct, and industry than in all the works of art. Nay, what is called the art of men is but a faint imitation of the great art called the laws of nature, which the impious did not blush to call blind chance. Is it, therefore, a wonder that poets animated the whole universe, bestowed wings upon the winds, and arrows on the sun, and described great rivers impetuously running to precipitate themselves into the sea and trees shooting up to heaven to repel the rays of the sun by their thick shades? These images and figures have also been received in the language of the vulgar, so natural it is for men to be sensible of the wonderful art that fills all nature.

"Poetry did not only ascribe to inanimate creatures the art and design of the Creator, who does everything in them. From the figurative language of the poets those notions passed into the theology of the heathens, whose divines were the poets. They supposed an art, a power, or a wisdom, which they called numen (divinity), in creatures the most destitute of understanding. With them great rivers were gods, and spring naiads. Woods and mountains had their particular deities; flowers had their Flora; and fruits, Pomona. After all, the more a man contemplates nature, the more he discovers in it an inexhaustible stock of wisdom, which is, as it were, the soul of the universe.

"What must we infer from thence? The consequence flows of itself. 'If so much wisdom and penetration,' says Minutius Felix, 'are required to observe the wonderful order and design of the structure of the world, how much more were necessary to form it?'

"If men so much admire philosophers because they discover a small part of the wisdom that made all things, they must be stark blind not to admire that wisdom itself."

IV. - A Prayer to God

"O my God, if so many men do not discover Thee in this great spectacle Thou givest them of all nature, it is not because Thou art far from any of us. Every one of us feels Thee, as it were, with his hand; but the senses, and the passions they raise, take up all the attention of our minds. Thus, O Lord, Thy light shines in darkness; but darkness is so thick and gloomy that it does not admit the beams of Thy light.

"Thou appearest everywhere; and everywhere inattentive mortals neglect to perceive Thee. All nature speaks of Thee, and resounds with Thy holy name; but she speaks to deaf men, whose deafness proceeds from the noise and clatter they make to stun themselves. Thou art near and within them; but they are fugitive, and wandering, as it were, out of themselves. They would find Thee, O Sweet Light, O Eternal Beauty, ever old and ever young, O Fountain of Chaste Delights, O Pure and Happy Life of all who live truly, should they look for Thee within themselves. But the impious lose Thee only by losing themselves. Alas! Thy very gifts, which should show them the hand from whence they flow, amuse them to such a degree as to hinder them from perceiving it. They live by Thee, and yet they live without thinking on Thee or, rather, they die by the Fountain of Life for want of quenching their drought in that vivifying stream; for what greater death can there be than not to know Thee, O Lord? They fall asleep in Thy soft and paternal bosom, and, full of the

deceitful dreams by which they are tossed in their sleep, they are insensible of the powerful hand that supports them.

"If Thou wert a barren, impotent, and inanimate body, like a flower that fades away, a river that runs, a house that decays and falls to ruin, a picture that is but a collection of colors to strike the imagination, or a useless metal that glistens, they would perceive Thee, and fondly ascribe to Thee the power of giving them some pleasure, although in reality pleasure cannot proceed from inanimate beings, which are themselves void and incapable of it, but from Thee alone, the true spring of all joy. If, therefore, Thou wert but a lumpish, frail, and inanimate being, a mass without any virtue or power, a shadow of a being, Thy vain fantastic nature would busy their vanity, and be a proper object to entertain their mean and brutish thoughts. But because Thou art too intimately within them, and they never at home, Thou art to them an unknown God; for while they rise and wander abroad, the intimate part of themselves is most remote from their sight. The order and beauty Thou scatterest over the face of Thy creatures are like a glaring light that hides Thee from them and dazzles their sore eyes. In fine, because Thou art too elevated and too pure a truth to affect gross senses, men who are become like beasts cannot conceive Thee, though man has daily convincing instances of wisdom and virtue without the testimony of any of his senses; for those virtues have not sound, color, odor, taste, figure, nor any sensible quality.

"Why, then, O my God, do men call Thy existence, wisdom, and power more in question than they do those other things most real and manifest, the truth of which they suppose as certain, in all the serious affairs of life, and which, nevertheless, as well as Thou, escape our feeble senses? O misery! O dismal night that surrounds the children of Adam! O monstrous stupidity! O confusion of the whole man! Man has eyes only to see shadows, and truth appears a phantom to him. What do I behold in all nature? God. God everywhere, and still God alone.

"When I think, O Lord, that all being is in Thee, Thou exhaustest and swallowest up, O Abyss of Truth, all my thoughts. I know not what becomes of me. Whatever is not Thou disappears; and scarce so much of myself remains wherewithal to find myself again. Who sees Thee not never saw anything; and who is not sensible of Thee, never was sensible to anything. He is as if he were not. His whole life is but a dream. Arise, O Lord, arise. Let Thy enemies melt like wax and vanish like smoke before Thy face. How unhappy is the impious soul who, far from Thee, is without God, without hope, without eternal comfort! How happy he who searches, signs, and thirsts after Thee. But fully happy he on whom are reflected the beams of Thy countenance,

whose tears Thy hand has wiped off, and whose desires Thy love is already completed.

"When will that time be, O Lord? O fair day, without either cloud or end, of which Thyself shalt be the sun, and wherein Thou shalt run through my soul like a torrent of delight! Upon this pleasing hope I cry out: 'Who is like Thee, O Lord? My heart melts and my flesh faints, O God of my soul, and my eternal wealth.'"

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