

A FORGOTTEN UTOPIA

BY JOHN WILSON TAYLOR

AS FAR as I know we have no portrait of Gemistus Pletho. We are therefore free to form our own mental picture of that fiery-spirited Greek who, in the fifteenth century, cherished to an extreme old age the conviction that he held the secret of the world's true and ultimate religion.

There have been many fanatics who were willing to die for a truth revealed to them alone. Pletho did not belong to their number. He had none of the Oriental abandon which almost seeks persecution as a visible mark of being a faithful servant of the Lord and of bearing witness among unbelievers to a special revelation from his divine master. Mental inebriation of this type was impossible for Pletho. He was a Greek in whom lived the ancient Hellenic sense of human dignity and a realization of the frailty of all things human. The truth might prevail or it might not, but it would have little chance of doing so unless he who saw it remained alive and influential in order to advance its interests.

Pletho, in his youth, having dared to question his ancestral faith, was forced to flee from his native land and to take refuge at the Turkish court. His spirit was not tamed, but he learned to be more careful in the future. He concealed his views except from a small group, the members of which were sworn to secrecy. Obtaining an appointment from the Emperor, he served as a judge for many years in the Peloponnese and enjoyed, throughout Greece and Italy, an enviable reputation as a scholar and a Platonic philosopher. Orthodox churchmen suspected him, but they could obtain no hold upon him.

The judge and celebrated scholar, however, remained none the less heretic. He received as pupils and instructed young men of promise who could in his judgment endure the blinding light of philosophic truth. To the more trustworthy he confided the hope which he had of giving to the less-gifted part of mankind a glimpse

of truth suited to their weaker vision. The many, in his opinion, needed a religion, which would, like an allegory or a parable, lead the mind toward the truth. Pletho therefore devised a religion for this purpose. For its actual realization in Greece he relied on the prince of the Peloponnese, whom he hoped to be able to persuade and win over to his views.

That a religion and a social order should be the work of one man who had planned and devised it seems strange to us, familiar as we are with the idea of evolution, social as well as biological. We look on a religion or a culture as the outcome of a complex process, the result of many factors. We find it difficult, therefore, to appreciate Pletho's confidence in the ability of a law-giver to reform Greece and the rest of the world. Nevertheless, Pletho's view was the generally accepted one until fairly recent centuries. Moses gave the Israelites their laws; Solon was the author of the Athenian polity; Lycurgus was responsible for Sparta's characteristic institutions. Plato, with his eye on Sparta, had hoped that he might find in Dionysius of Syracuse a Lycurgus who would found a perfect state, fashioned after an ideal model to which the tyrant's eyes should be opened by Plato. The hope was doomed to disappointment, to be sure, but that was a misfortune due to the unsuitable character of the prince in whom Plato had reposed his confidence. So Pletho thought in recalling his master Plato's disappointment. In his own case, however, he expected a more fortunate result, trusting that, by persuading Emanuel, Prince of the Peloponnese, he might succeed where his master had failed. There is a letter extant in which Pletho urged Emanuel to introduce reforms leading to the new order. He offered his own services, also, in helping to effect the changes.

Pletho's confidence was not justified by the results. The forces setting against his ambitions were too strong to be stemmed. His plans for the regeneration of mankind have been buried in oblivion. Their very magnitude made their fate certain. With a sublime assurance they proposed the setting aside of Christianity at a time when it had not yet suffered any major reverses, such as the Protestant revolt and the religious wars in the West or the triumph of an atheistic tyranny, such as has recently occurred in the East. Mohammedanism also was to be replaced, and at the very time when every advantage yielded by the Cross was being pressed with relentless vigor by the armies of the Crescent.

The form which the failure of Pletho's hopes took was that which he had long feared. There was in Greece an influential younger

contemporary of Pletho's, a scholar, to be sure, but a scholar whose chief zeal was for the faith. Gennadius watched the brilliant Platonist with wolfish eyes. He sensed from Pletho's guarded utterances the dangerous ideas lurking beneath, none the less dangerous for being concealed from the world at large. Pletho was conscious of being watched, and he confided to a friend that the chief obstacle to the fulfillment of his program was the continued influence of Gennadius.

Pletho divined truly. He had, throughout his life, kept within a small circle of intimate friends all knowledge of his plans for the regeneration of mankind. These plans were contained in a book, entitled, like Plato's work, *The Laws*. After Pletho's death, Gennadius obtained a copy of the book. Having become the Patriarch of Constantinople, he was charged with the duty of defending the faith. He read *The Laws*. His suspicions proved to have been more than justified. The work bespoke the most shameless heathenism. It taught a form of polytheism and denied the doctrine of revelation as the Church understood it. In pursuance of his duty as Patriarch, Gennadius issued an edict threatening excommunication for any one who should be found with a copy of *The Laws* and should retain it after a second demand for its surrender. All the copies were burned. From that in the possession of Gennadius, however, a number of pages were preserved as evidence of the reprehensible character of the book. These pages, containing several chapters and an index of the whole work, have been preserved to the present day and are sufficient to indicate the general character of the book. They were edited by C. Alexandre some 65 years ago, but they have been little noticed and insufficiently studied.

The work contains material of three kinds. It is concerned partly with doctrine, mainly modifications and ingenious elaborations of Platonic teachings. Another part consists of regulations for the management of the ideal state to be organized in accordance with the religious and ethical doctrines outlined in the book. Finally, there is a liturgy of hymns and ceremonies to be used in the new form of worship.

If Pletho had been as successful as St. Paul or Mohammed, *The Laws* would, in the normal course of events, have become a sacred book. It is probable, however, that from the nature of things, Pletho could not have been as successful as Mohammed or St. Paul. They were convinced of the literal truth of their messages. Pletho also was convinced of the truth of his religious doctrines, but not of their literal truth. They were intended, by means of allegory, to convey

philosophic truths which were not sufficiently simple to be imparted directly to the many. He did not take the popular form of his doctrines with the seriousness which is necessary for the founding of a religion. The book shows too clearly the marks of the thinker; it lacks the burning conviction that characterizes a divine revelation.

The religious dogma contained in the work is a consciously elaborated myth, intended to serve the same purpose as the "myths" of Plato. That is to say, it is a more or less concrete representation of truths incomprehensible to the many when stated in their abstract form. In an extant argumentative tract Pletho had urged the necessity of so adapting truth to the understanding of the many. A minute examination of the Plethonic theology shows that it consists of a system of deities related to each other as the various parts of Plato's world of Ideas are related to each other. In other words, although the gods of Pletho's polytheistic system had the names of the popular gods and goddesses of ancient Greece, they really constituted in their totality the world of Ideas as depicted by Plato. An increasing comprehension of the religion, then, on the part of a worshipper, was calculated to lead to an understanding of the ultimate truth regarding life, which Pletho believed to be contained in Platonism.

Pletho's ethical doctrine departed in certain respects from that of Plato, but its basis was similar. That is to say, it was, like Plato's, founded on a psychological dualism, a deep-seated and absolute division between reason and passion, between the soul and the body. Pletho, in company with the Stoics, went further than Plato. Plato's dualism was partially disguised by the presence of a third element in the soul of man. This *tertium quid* was the spirited element, which usually supported the reason but was not a part of it. Following the Stoics, Pletho found no place for the spirited element. The soul resolved itself into reason, the higher and godlike part, and appetite, the lower and animal part. Man's duty was to exalt the former and to subjugate the latter by means of self-control and rational thought.

Pletho's doctrine is distinct from that of the mystic. The end of action is not the ecstatic emotional conviction of an abstract unity. It is, on the contrary, a synoptic view of life attained by means of consistent and persistent thought. The appetites are not to be exterminated as St. Paul and even, at times, Plato would have them treated. They are to be ruled. In other words, they are to be retained; they have a value. It is not the habit of a Stoic, however, to admit that pleasure has value in itself. To uncover this opinion

in a Stoic, one must take him off his guard. So we find Pletho hating Epicurus and commending self-control. But one of his arguments has a strangely Epicurean ring. It rests on the consideration that enjoyment is enhanced by a temporary abstinence from pleasure. Again, he recommends a certain lavishness of expenditure in surrounding oneself with beautiful objects. At this point, however, he recalls himself to his Stoic ideals, adding that one should never forget in the midst of his beautiful surroundings that the true beauty is virtue and that it resides in the soul.

The pages of *The Laws* rescued from the fire contain a number of passages of regulations to be applied to the inhabitants of the ideal society. One of the more interesting of these passages is that relating to the institution of marriage. Pletho shows in this connection a certain super-Christian ferocity of spirit, yet his attitude is not specifically that of historic Christianity. That is to say, he does not regard the flesh as evil, nor does he consider it regrettable that the human race must be recruited by sexual differentiation. On the contrary, he went to some pains to construct a rationalized psychology of modesty in order to show that in reality the concealment practised in connection with the sexual act is by no means proof that the act is considered shameful. Nevertheless, such relations were regulated with an almost barbaric severity.

Pletho did not share his master's favor for a communism of women. His ideal state was to have a peculiarly strict form of monogamy, which he would make secure by savage penalties against irregularities and by providing a safety valve in the form of prostitution, which was to exist as an institution subsidiary to marriage. Thus, while male adulterers were to be burned at the stake, female adulterers were to be transferred to the class of those who sold their embraces for money. By resort to them, men whose passions were too strong to endure monogamy might find a "less accursed" outlet for their appetite and so might avoid tampering with married women or with those intended for marriage.

Death by fire is a savage form of execution which our humanitarian age does not inflict in cold blood. Pletho prescribed it, however, for such acts as seemed to him to be highly anti-social. Not only were adultery and murder included in the list, but also another crime highly dangerous to the polity and perhaps the most stubborn of all in resisting eradication. This crime was heresy, or, as Pletho characteristically put it, sophistry.

The heretic was one found teaching doctrines opposed to those on which the state was based. Utopias are, from their very nature,

static. Being a best form of society, a Utopia is worth preserving at all costs. So it comes about that the utopian finds himself in company with the extreme conservative, concurring with him in the imposition of the severest penalties on social or intellectual innovations. Both Pletho and his master Plato, each in his way, defied existing society, yet each prepared dire penalties for those who might defy the ideal society which he envisaged. It is apparently beyond human nature for one to construct a society of one's own without identifying one's interests with the continuity of the society's ideals. It would appear that in the past, at any rate, it has been beyond divine nature also. Zeus's cruelty was unbounded toward Prometheus, who prevented the annihilation of mankind and the creation of a race more satisfactory to Zeus. Jehovah did not hesitate to drown his first failure and to threaten with fire those who refused to accept his later plans.

Like most other Utopias, Pletho's was buried in oblivion. Possibly it had something to do with carrying its author also into oblivion. When, fourteen years after the death of Pletho, a vitriolic work appeared from the pen of George of Trebizond, vilifying both Plato and his deceased supporter Pletho, Cardinal Bessarion replied to the attack on Plato. Bessarion had been one of Pletho's pupils and had repeatedly expressed his respect for the opinions of his master, but on this occasion he said not a word in behalf of his former teacher. A knowledge of *The Laws* had in the meantime transpired. The work had apparently brought upon its author such a storm of indignation that his most powerful supporter found it advisable to seek shelter by ignoring his former relationship. *The Laws*, nevertheless, even in their fragmentary form, reveal better than any other work of Pletho the measure of the vigor and independence of that strange figure, who was among the most revered and the most hated men of his day.

JUSTICE AND SOCIAL EFFICIENCY

BY HARDIN T. MCCLELLAND

WE DO well to recognize a certain approach to political and economic justice in the growing demand that whatever work a man or body of men performs shall be suited to their individual capacity and genius ; but we make a much closer and more sympathetic approach when we demand that this work shall be useful to society as a whole, not benefit one part and be detrimental to another part. Such a code would rule out all our recent war-industries, profiteering, mandatory government and class discriminations. But in the particular realm of education we feel that such political and economic justice will never be bought with bloodshed and turmoil, but will come naturally when everyone has become free to elect his own vocation and pursue whatever manual, intellectual or spiritual labor he is by nature most fit to pursue. The recent flush of popular excitement over Felix Adler's conception of social efficiency holding that society loses more than it gains by its forced misfits, its unnecessary poverty, its unequal distribution of labor, wealth, leisure, opportunity and responsibility, proves that people are ready for such ideas and will eagerly grasp them and translate them into action as soon as such a policy is given educational and governmental sanction.

The efficiency of social service means that justice has been applied to labor and the rewards of labor ; it means that everyone is employed at some universally useful, wholesome and constructive work ; it means that there are no more misfits, criminals, delinquents or sickly souls because the root cause of crime and delinquency has been removed. Those who can think straight know that the community and the world at large will automatically improve when once a resolute and unerring justice has been put into all our political, industrial and economic activities ; they also realize what larger benefits, what nobler and more liberal forms of enlightenment and achievement will accrue to humanity as a whole when once we have inaugurated a system of social efficiency rather than one of social exploita-

tion, a system of service rather than one of profit and spoliation. But this truer, better, nobler and more efficient service cannot be had in a lukewarm polity made up part slave and part free, part cowardly, lazy, grasping or corrupt and part heroic, industrious, generous or devout. It can only be had when every person's peculiar talent, skill, ambition or capacity has been purified, exalted and given a chance to develop and express itself in his chosen line of work. And further, it must be a worthy, ethically just sort of work he is engaged in, else the resultant service be really detrimental and inefficient. A just division of labor, wealth and opportunity is the basic ideal, and the character education which aims at this among its other tasks, is lending great assistance and impetus to the growing revolt against social waste and non-essential industries; it is in a fair way to succeed, too, when nearly every sensible person is beginning to think that there is not much difference anyway between the *essential merits* of most employers and workers, between the functional values to society of most financial wizards or captains of industry and the lawyer who gives them clever advice or the clerk who "books" them properly on their income tax report.

It is but natural that we arrive sooner or later at some plan of social efficiency, seeing that the efficiency idea is running amuck in nearly every other phase of human activity. Misfits and delinquents, war-lords and spoils-mongers must be cut off from their too arbitrary power to injure and exploit society. If we cannot successfully segregate and reform them, then we had better invent some nice unobjectionable euthanasia whereby to rid ourselves of them. We must see and understand life through sympathy, not through cold and selfish calculations; and if we do this we will know why it is that no one will stay put for long at uncongenial labor, doing unsuitable tasks or performing unjust duties and disciplines. We will see that he is simply following natural law when he feels unmindful of his misfit obligations and seeks relief in idleness, inattention and absence, if not later on in actual inclinations toward revolt. But there should be no maudlin sympathy, no weak mercy, no coddling sentiment about the matter, else the world soon be nothing but an inferno of ravine and revolution, crime and corruption. No artificial safeguard against this disaffection is really wanted or necessary, it is not a rational protection in case of continuous and intentional mischief; but there is a natural one in cases of innocent misfits, and that is to make the person's occupation fit his individual nature or capacity, give him something to do that is worthy of his talent and ambition, and I will guarantee that nine out of ten will

respond with genuine appreciation and reborn enthusiasm. I have found anyway that very few people will remain inert vulgarians when once they have been aroused to the wealth of beauty, truth, goodness and possibilities of improvement which abound on every side; very few will choose to remain idle, lazy, fickle or inattentive when once given a cheerful atmosphere where they may work or be occupied with what they want to do. Even the scatter-brains, the triflers and fools and fashion-slaves who dawdle away their years in pleasure-seeking and promiscuous pastimes, are merely lost souls; they have gone into the social discard largely because of an errant educational method which did not exercise a just or effective program of restraint and redemption while there was yet time for salvage. It is thus usually because of a fallacious or inadequate system of education that we have fools and scatter-brains, knaves and spoliators. If we had used some preventive or formative measures to forestall and transfigure these human imperfections before they matured their madness or mischief, there would have been no ignorance, malice, umbrage, crime, delinquency or corruption added to the misery and tribulation already so heavily weighing upon the world.

I know there are many diverse marplots and malefactors in the drama of life, the villains always outnumbering the heroes about twenty to one. I know that the major portion of the world's inhabitants is made up of various sorts of derelicts, debauchee, degenerate, devil-may-care fools, morons, hedonists, swindlers and parasites, all for the most part (as we find them today at least) worthless men, and others who are alert only to work some mischief on the world. But are they to be ignored as absolutely valueless unsalvable material? Are they so far beyond the call of goodness that we should shun them like a plague? Are they so thoughtless and devoid of common-sense that we, too, should totally estrange them from the philosophic fold? Who knows what a subtle part they play in the negative upward reach of human evolution? Sometimes I think that no one, however dull and sour and devilish he may be, is really beyond the reach of proper inspiration and suitable cultural influences. The modern world has more civilization than ever before in all its history, but it also has means of immediate communication and we are constantly being informed of crimes and cruelties more ruthless and far-reaching than any heretofore perpetrated. True enough, all these numerous villains, fools and delinquents have a certain mass-inertia that ordinary educational motivation does not seem able to overcome; even while we realize that their education

has been sadly neglected and their secondary enlightenment has been similarly left to the skew-sight plans of a wicked social hypothesis, we stand helplessly unable to reform or re-establish them in the righteous way. It is too late then, we say, to try to bring about social efficiency through justicial education because their characters have become warped and peccable, defective and corrupt. But we do find some relief in the clumsy practice of punitive restraint, that by dealing with them in terms of strict impartial penalties and just applications of inevitable retribution their stratagems are somewhat cramped and their mischiefs somewhat curtailed. It is more an education by force of penal law that gets at such delinquents quicker and more effectively than any program of spiritual rehabilitation. The usual trouble is that your fool or knave, debauchee or criminal, never sees the purpose of the law, never sees the true discipline of bitter experience; his feeble faculty only giving him a sense of rancor and revenge. At the first opportunity then, he will try to avenge his supposed misery and mistreatment by committing some vulgar practice, malicious destruction or heinous crime.

However, I like to speak of the normal intellectual processes of sensible people; with them you can soon reach an understanding as to what a truly liberal education is, and how it includes the development of popular respect for justice, honor, sobriety, aspiration, reverence, health and socially useful occupations. Even today when a common school education is all that ninety per cent of the people in business ever get, there are many who have a liberal education so far as it means broadmindedness, tolerance, honor and justice. It is with them in mind that I will say that with the ordinarily upright men of today it is almost invariably held a good and sufficient education if they can only learn the elementary 3-R's, then something of their own natures, and take their whole after-life to study the humanities in the concrete, seeking the ever-elusive solution to the riddles of life, marking well and applying to their own careers the lessons of history and its mighty subject, evolution. But in this evolution they will give most studious attention to the course of civilization as it has painfully picked its way through savage passions and deceitful arts up to the modern world's overtures of fad and frolic, toil and tragedy, with all their subtle dramatic scores from the conflicting joys and sufferings of mankind. After several years of this sort of meditation with its attendant understanding and discipline in social feeling, there will arise the desire for friendly converse, amiable tournament and constructive programs of dissemination and instruction. They will then be ready to join others sim-

ilarly inclined, and with multiple force carry on the nobler aims of life, devoting their labors to worth-while achievements.

On the ground of this plan I see the beginnings of a truly worthy and representative democratic education, and with it will come, well to the front in popular sentiment and thought, those ideas so eternally the factors of every durable civilization, namely, honor, justice, wisdom, virtue, beauty, reverence, generosity, integrity, love and loyalty. But out of this plan we should not try to read a group-mood of organized exploit or mandatory economics nor an individualist dream of mercenary motive and rhyomistic rewards. The qualities of character and sentiments of mind which I have enumerated *do* make for an all-round social efficiency if we but cultivate and exercise them honestly, freely and without any base concessions to corrupt utility. In view of this situation then, I believe there would be a clearer recognition of justice and social efficiency if our educational methods aimed at teaching us *how to live* rather than that more worldling art, how to make a living. One thing at least in the way of a good result, the age would not be so deplorably over-ridden with fools and knaves hellbent on a vicarious livelihood, nor would our flickering torch of culture be so often snatched away and either quenched or used as a fire-brand by vandals or degenerates. But we can still have hope and faith, for we are still courageous, loyal and devout. Honest labor of hand, head and heart is always both worthy and useful; it makes for justice in one's opinions, honor in one's occupation, and benevolence in one's social relations. It gives rise to no petty rivalries, nor does it counter strange things with umbrage or misunderstanding. Umbrage is the cloud and misunderstanding is the shadow cast upon our lives by narrow flights of fancy, but they are soon dispelled by the wisdom, vision and virtue of one who really enjoys a liberal education—the complete and symmetrical education of heart and hand, mind and soul.