

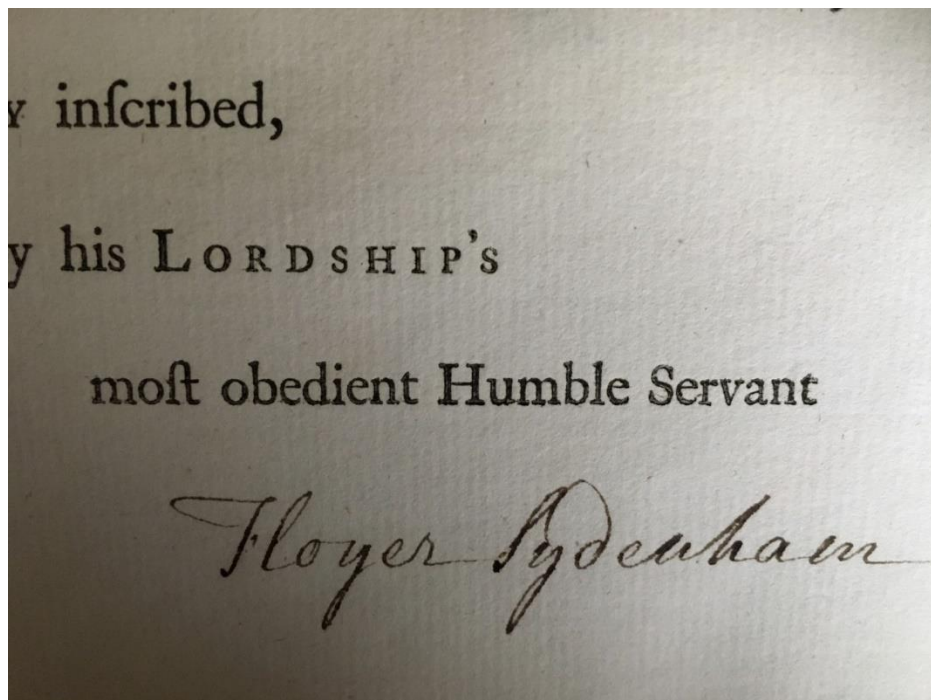
Andrew Baker

## FLOYER SYDENHAM

### An 18<sup>th</sup> century Platonic Visionary

...we perused with infinite pleasure the elegant translation of Floyer Sydenham.

(Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Vol. 1, E. Moxon, 1858, p.192)



## INTRODUCTION

I first heard of Floyer Sydenham as the forerunner of Thomas Taylor. The name was intriguing. Many years later I came across him again when I was researching the philosopher James Harris, as a patron of music, and for his connection with Thomas Anson of Shugborough and the 18<sup>th</sup> century Greek Revival. I learned that Sydenham had been Harris's friend for nearly fifty years and that their philosophical careers were closely intertwined.

There seemed to be hardly any biographical information about Sydenham. There were notes about his sad death, at the point of his entering Debtors' Prison, and its influence on the formation of the Royal Literary Fund. There were some recollection by Thomas Taylor. I found one modern scholarly article on his work.

James Harris left a huge family archive, of great interest for his musical connections. This is now in Hampshire Archives at Winchester. A search on the National Archive catalogue will discover very little about Sydenham, but I had a hunch there must be more. Hampshire Archive's own catalogue revealed that there were no letters from Sydenham to Harris, suggesting that Harris asked for what there were to be destroyed (they may have contained dangerously controversial material), but there were many from mutual friends to Harris and these contain a great deal of biographical information about the forgotten philosopher.

As will be shown, this previously unpublished material contradicts almost everything Taylor reported – but there might be reasons for this – most obviously, Sydenham's age and frailty.

I am not an academic but a retired librarian, a composer of sorts and, for some reason, a person who is fascinated by the Platonic view of the world. I am not qualified to comment on Sydenham as an editor of Plato. I see him as a Platonic visionary in his own right, and an intriguing figure who challenges a prevailing image of his century. This monograph focuses on Sydenham's life, as revealed by letters from his friends, and on his personal ideas, particularly as expressed in his unpublished epic poem *Truth*. This is very bad poetry, but it contains a very clear and original philosophy or cosmology. As far as I can discover it has been read by no-one else since the 18<sup>th</sup> century apart from the British Library cataloguer.

Sydenham's Platonism is concerned with morality, Virtue and politics but, because it is my own interest and because some of his ideas stood out to me in quite a startlingly way, I have followed a theme of Music, as a way of understanding the sacred in Creation and the Soul.

I believe Sydenham has a very individual understanding of music which is a specifically 18<sup>th</sup> century understanding, based on the musical language of his own time. This suggests that he shared Harris's musical interests.

This might seem to be a matter of my own personal indulgence but, as you will see, Floyer Sydenham makes his first appearance in the Harris letters in connection with an important musical controversy.

Andrew Baker

September 2020

# 1

## THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

The 18<sup>th</sup> century is often seen as period of materialism. God had been pushed well away from the material world by scientific developments and Deism – a religious attitude that believed in God but assumed that God had created a world which quite happily carried on following purely physical laws – but that God had provided us, through inspired scripture, with moral codes to follow. This might seem to be a reasonable way of looking at the world, but some saw that this rational approach had serious dangers. Some theology and some philosophy, such as that of John Locke (1632-1704), might be used to justify a belief that the material world existed for our use. God's gifts might be there to be exploited.

The danger of this point of view was obvious to some by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the industrial revolution began to have its effect. From about 1800 there was a reaction against materialism and an attempt to revive a philosophy that would see Nature as Divine in itself, not a thing to be exploited, and to see humanity as participating in Nature through feeling and Imagination.

There was very little support for this kind of vision from the Church, either the established Church of England or the non-conformist sects. By and large Christianity was dominated by Deist attitudes. It might believe in the influence of the Holy Spirit – which acted as an intrusion of God's influence into a fundamentally material Creation. This was not the same thing at all as seeing Creation as being sacred and meaningful in itself – and having God, whatever that might mean, somehow present within it.

The philosophy of Plato provided the alternative view – in which everything that is flowed from a Source of All Being, God if you like, which was absolute simplicity and Unity, at the same indefinably remote and present in everything.

(It is worth pointing out that some Platonists can be classified as Deists, though their understanding of the relationship of God and Nature is quite different. A Platonist Deist might believe in a God who is "outside" Nature and does not directly influence or control things, but is present in Nature through an inherent divine Law.)

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Thomas Taylor set about a project to publish the works of Plato into English, with the addition of the important texts of later Platonists. This is often as seen as key influence on the romantic movement. Taylor was strongly anti-Christian, in which he was not alone. Christianity was seen by Taylor, and some of his friends, including Thomas Love Peacock, as a baleful influence.

Though they are almost forgotten today, there had been a few who had seen the destructive dangers of Materialism and Deism long before, and who had done what they could to promote Platonism (speaking loosely) during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Pat Rogers' chapter on the 18thc in *Platonism and the English Imagination* (ed. Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton, Cambridge U.P. 1994) is a mere five pages long. It explains that Greek was barely studied in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Plato was unfashionable, his reputation "besmirched" as Pat Rogers writes, with its association with "secret society activity, equivalent to Rosicrucianism or freemasonry." In general, the mood of the time was that it was proper that religion and philosophy should be "not mysterious."

The 18<sup>th</sup> century may have seemed to be a desert as far as Platonic philosophy was concerned, but some who were materialists by day might be attending operas, full of magic and mythology, by night. Music had its power, a Platonist would say (but others might disagree) because the Soul shared the divine Harmony of the Cosmos from which all music was derived. Whether any musicians thought like this is an interesting question. The gardens of the Greek Revival are physical expressions of Platonic philosophy. There were Platonists in 18<sup>th</sup> century England and their influence can be found in those gardens. There were very few of these dreaming philosophers. Perhaps barely enough to count on one hand.

Thomas Taylor's edition of Plato included earlier translations by Floyer Sydenham. This obscures the fact that Taylor and Sydenham appear to have had very different attitudes to Plato. Sydenham saw Plato through the mindset of the philosopher Lord Shaftesbury. They belonged to different eras. I cannot judge the value of their interpretations. I simply attempt to rediscover Sydenham in his own right.

Sydenham was not a solitary advocate of Platonism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His close friend James Harris made more of a mark with his philosophical publications. The careers of the two friends are closely intertwined.

James Harris (1709-1780), MP for Christchurch, was born in Salisbury in 1709. His father's first wife had been Catherine Cocks, whose sister Margaret married Philip Yorke, later Lord Hardwicke, Lord Chancellor, father-in-law of George, Lord Anson.

James Harris's mother, Lady Elizabeth Ashley (1681-1743) was the sister of Harris's greatest inspiration and influence, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, though Shaftesbury died when Harris was only four.

Shaftesbury, as a philosopher of the Enlightenment, was an influence throughout Europe. Shaftesbury wrote rambling dialogues examining matters of morality and other philosophical topics. Importantly, he encouraged the use of "raillery" - the value of making fun of mistaken ideas and to deflate pomposity. Shaftesbury is one of the philosophers who can be classed as a Deist but who, Harris would say, was a Platonist at heart.

Shaftesbury was not the only encouragement for a young Salisbury philosopher. As Clive T Probyn writes

during the childhood and early manhood of 'Hermes' Harris the intellectual atmosphere of Salisbury was thick with Idealism.

(Clive T Probyn. *The Sociable Humanist. The Life and Works of James Harris 1709-1780*, OUP, 1991)

The west country, and the city of Salisbury in particular, already had a tradition of Platonic, idealist, philosophy in an earlier generation, in John Norris (1657-1712), an idealist opponent of Locke, and Arthur Collier (1680-1732) who published *Clavis Universalis, or A New Inquiry after Truth, being a Demonstration of the NonExistence or Impossibility of an External World* in 1713. Collier's son, Dr Arthur Collier (1707-1777) was one of the circle of the close friends of James Harris. Another west country philosopher known to Harris was John Petvin (1691-1745) whose *Letters Concerning Mind* were edited and published by Harris in 1750. The anti-materialist philosophy of these writers has echoes in the more famous idealist philosophy of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne (1685-1753) who does not appear to have had any direct connection with Harris but who was fighting, as they say, the same corner.

At Wadham College, Oxford, James Harris was a contemporary of Floyer Sydenham. Sydenham, son of Humphrey Sydenham of Dulverton, Somerset, was born in 1710 in Dulverton, He was baptised on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1710. Sydenham's father, Humphrey, died very soon after Floyer was born and was buried at Dulverton on July 8<sup>th</sup> 1710. His mother's death date is unknown, but it was, presumably, she, and his brother, whom Floyer visited on his trips to the west country.

Harris and Sydenham can only have been at Oxford together for two years before Harris left to study law. Harris soon had to abandon law when his father died in 1731. Sydenham became a BA on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1731, an MA on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1734 and a fellow the following year.

Harris was a public figure, with a wide circle of friends. He was close friend of Handel and deeply involved in musical life. Two of Harris's published books brought him a degree of fame as philosopher, *Three Treatises* (1744) and *Hermes* (1751). Though Sydenham published a far larger body of work, principally his translations of some of Plato's dialogues (and some attributed to Plato), far less is known of him.

The records of the Inner Temple show that John Floyer Esq had paid £140 for a "concurrent life" with chambers "on the west side of Inner Temple Lane" and nominated Floyer Sydenham to be admitted to that "concurrent life" on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1728/9, at the age of 18, perhaps at the same time as he entered Oxford.

John Floyer of Upway, Dorset, was a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, whose niece Catherine had married Humphrey Sydenham, Floyer's father.)

(John Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland Enjoying Territorial Possessions Or High Official Rank, But Uninvested with Heritable Honours*, Henry Colburn, 1734. Google Books.)

Sydenham was called to the bar in 1735.

The list of receipts for new admissions for November 1728 to November 1729 includes John Eardley Wilmot, a friend of Thomas Anson of Shugborough and, thirty years later, a subscriber to Sydenham's projected edition of Plato. Listed immediately after Sydenham is Roger Henry Gale, son of the antiquary Roger Gale.

These chambers are recorded as having been sold by John Floyer Esq in an entry for 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1739, though Sydenham still had rooms in the Temple as late as 1747, when Thomas Harris mentions that Sydenham had moved from the Temple in a letter to his brother, James Harris.

(Calendar of Inner Temple Records, volume 4

[https://issuu.com/theinnertemple/docs/calender\\_of\\_inner\\_temple\\_records\\_vo\\_95c04b2bd11f7a](https://issuu.com/theinnertemple/docs/calender_of_inner_temple_records_vo_95c04b2bd11f7a) accessed 21/08/2020)

Little is known about Sydenham's life, but tantalising snippets are to be found in letters to Harris from Harris's brother Thomas and mutual friends, John Upton, John Barker and Arthur Collier, the son of the Salisbury Platonist of the same name. These fragments suggests Sydenham was an eccentric and volatile character, though, despite his oddity, Harris remained a loyal friend throughout his life, giving the archetypal penniless scholar financial support, which Harris's son, the first Earl of Malmesbury, continued to pay after Harris's death in 1780.

Sydenham, though resident in London, was an occasional visitor to Harris's home in Salisbury. There are several references to him travelling to Salisbury, sometimes on his way to his west country family, in the letters from mutual friends.

This first recorded visit of Sydenham to Harris at Salisbury is linked to a philosophical discussion about the nature of music which will has interesting echoes later in Sydenham's work.

George Friderick Handel had had a long career a composer of Italian opera, but by the mid-1730s he was looking at alternative musical forms, particularly works in English that would attract a new audience, and, as they were not staged as opera, would be cheaper to perform. In 1736 he composed a setting of Dryden's poem, an ode in honour of St Cecilia, *Alexander's Feast*. This is a work about the power of music. The story, which dates from antiquity, tells of the poet Timotheus raising the passions of Alexander the Great through his songs.

James Harris and his cousin, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, (son of the philosopher) felt that Handel had gone too far in suggesting that music could not only raise emotions but describe things and communicate Ideas.

A letter from Harris's cousin, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury on 15th (?) April 1737 to James Harris in Salisbury refers to

...the complaint many persons even of judgement have made that Mr Handel has fallen short of the spirit of the Ode in setting it to music.

(Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, *Music and Theatre in Handel's World*, Oxford, 2002, p.24)

The cause of this criticism was Handel's apparent attempt to describe in music things that were beyond music's power to describe. Shaftesbury is writing about this, it appears, in response to the "ingenious performance" which Harris had enclosed in his previous letter –

almost certainly a draft of his *Treatise on Music, Painting and Poetry*, which argued that music's descriptive powers were very limited.

Harris's reply (19 April 1737) agrees that

Your Lordship's observation on the Ode is certainly very just. People came with an expectation that music was to give them a prospect of Persepolis on fire. But this was indeed to expect pomegranates from an orange tree.

(Burrows and Dunhill, op. cit, p.25)

Harris writes that music's power was in its ability to raise feelings or affections.

Tis in the affecting part only that music should be cultivated.

(ibid)

Harris is, therefore, disagreeing with Handel.

Harris expressed this idea on his *Treatise on Music, Painting and Poetry* which was published in his *Three Treatises* (the third of which is intimately concerned with Sydenham) in 1744 but, as the letter quoted above suggests, had been read by the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl as early as 1737.

Harris believed, based on ancient traditions of the power of Greek music, that music had the power to raise feelings, but he never attempts to explain this power in his writings. He might, for example, have referred to Plato's *Timaeus*, which describes the way in which the Soul is formed of the same material and proportions as the Cosmos, and therefore shares its Harmonies. The sources of the story of Alexander's Feast specify that the song that Timotheus sang to raise martial passion in Alexander's breast was in the Phrygian mode, the musical mode associated with Mars.

The story of Timotheus's singing and the effect of the modes is explained in a footnote to October in Edmund Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579).

...some of the auncient Philosophers, and those the moste wise, as Plato and Pythagoras held for opinion, that the mynd was made of a certaine harmonie and musicall numbers...

The idea that the various musical modes of the Greeks were associated with the qualities of the planets which guide the Pythagorean or Platonic cosmos had been revived in the Italian Renaissance by Marsilio Ficino, but Harris does not seem to be aware of this, only of the general emotional power of music.

Harris seems to be far more an Aristotelian than a Platonist in his discussion. It is surprising that he seems unaware of the most important arguments in support of the divine nature of music, or perhaps, that writing in his twenties, he does not value them. Harris does explain

that the mind can associate ideas with feelings, and thus appropriate feelings can create a medium in which ideas, expressed in the words of a song, can be assimilated.

And hence the genuine Charm of Music, and the Wonders which it works, thro' its great Professors. (Footnote: Such, above all, is George Frederick Handel...) A Power which consists not in Imitations, and the raising Ideas; but in the raising Affections, to which ideas may correspond.

(James Harris, *Three Treatises*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1765, p99)

The effect of the music is transitory, but the ideas of the words are retained in the memory.

Music, when alone, can only raise Affections, which soon languish and decay, if not maintained and fed by the nutritive images of Poetry.

(James Harris, *Three Treatises*, 1741)

Harris's arguments are influenced by an idea of vocal music as the highest form of musical art, something in which he was deeply experienced. The dominant musical form, the most sublime, at the time of writing was opera, and Handel was the greatest master of it. Handel knew exactly what he was doing even if he did not try to analyse it. Harris's views do not devalue music. Music is still seen as having a divine power, but that power is best experienced when combined with words, as in Ancient Greek drama. Harris's comments were echoed in the influential *Essay on Opera*, 1755, by Count Algarotti (*Saggio sopra L'Opera in Musica*) which argues that the music must follow the poetry and drama in opera and faithfully evoke the feelings of the story. Algarotti does not refer to Harris directly but his sources seem to have been imitations of Harris. Algarotti's writing influenced the operatic reforms of Gluck from 1762 (*Orfeo ed Euridice*) which tried to simplify the music to make its expression more truly Grecian in effect – though in a modern style.

These discussions supported the divine nature of music but did not support the possibility that music, as pure music without words, could communicate ideas.

(Jean-Jacques Rousseau had similar attitudes about the need for music to be simple and expressive, but saw music as a social product, developing from human communication, rather than as a result of a divine law of Harmony, as a Platonist might argue.)

In spite of his criticisms, Harris seems to have seen the importance of *Alexander's Feast*. Over the next few months he was involved in negotiations to obtain instrumental parts for a performance in Salisbury. This took place in the autumn of 1738. On 16<sup>th</sup> May 1738 James Harris's brother, Thomas, wrote to him from Lincoln's Inn that Handel's assistant, John Christopher Smith, did not have parts available for the ode. "Young Smith", mentioned in this letter, was Smith's son, of the same name, who assisted Handel in his last years and was a composer of opera and oratorio, working with David Garrick and Benjamin Stillingfleet as librettists. This letter is the earliest in the James Harris Archive to mention Floyer Sydenham:



I last night spoke with young Smith, who tells me his Father has not ye parts of ye Ode to dispose of...Sydenham desires his compliments to you and tells me He intends paying you a visit for a Week, and will be with you on Monday next by ye Coach. If you are engaged or not, pray let me know by ye Return of ye Post, yt I may tell him, otherwise he won't undertake ye Journey.

It is a remarkable sign of the efficiency of the postal service that Thomas received a reply, and was able to write to his brother again, only three days later, on the 19<sup>th</sup> May:

I ask'd young Smith wt ye Price for the Parts of ye Ode wd be, who did give me no definitive answer....I believe Sydenham will come as I mentioned, or (as I fear no coach goes on Monday) on Tuesday at farthest. By Him I send Handel's print etc.

(Hampshire Archives. 9M73/G306/12 and 13. Quoted in part in Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, *Music and Theatre in Handel's World*, Oxford, 2002, p.51)

"Handel's print &c" were a portrait and other additional items published to go with the printed score of Handel's most recent opera, *Serse*.

Just over a year later Handel visited Harris at his home in the cathedral close at Salisbury. The exact date is unknown but a letter to Harris from Katherine Knatchbull dated 29<sup>th</sup> August wishes Harris "joy of Mr Handel's Company." Handel probably also visited the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury in Dorset and was in Southampton in November.

This visit was a turning point in Handel's career. It must have been during this visit that Harris proposed to Handel that he set Milton's poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* as an oratorio in English. This was not only a step forward in Handel's development of English oratorio, which would dominate his career for the rest of his life, but it also provided the composer with a text that would allow music to express the widest possible range of cheerful and melancholy feelings – and also respond to colourfully varied imagery of nature and to test the limits of music's ability to convey Ideas.

I am sure that the question of the power of music would have been discussed on this visit. It was very much in Harris's mind and it was directly related to Handel's work *Alexander's Feast*. The key issue would have been whether or not music could convey meaning and, if so. It seems that Harris, whose Platonism was rooted in ancient texts, was so dominated by his classical sources, that he was unable to see the implications of modern music – which was not all vocal, and included instrumental forms that would have been unthinkable even two hundred years before. And yet that same Platonic tradition, if seen from a slightly different angle, could provide the terms by which music could be explained as a language communicating Ideas in the Platonic sense. As will be discussed later, Floyer Sydenham did understand music in this way, and he did indeed believe Handel's music could communicate "Images and Ideas"

Though Handel avoided discussing his music or his beliefs (though could he avoid discussing them at Salisbury?) but it seems that his visit to Harris had a direct effect, and one that I feel

is Handel's riposte to Harris, in an astonishing series of new works, all concerned with the nature and effect of music.

On September 15<sup>th</sup> 1739, which must have been within days of his leaving Salisbury, Handel began a setting of Dryden's *Ode to Cecilia*, again a celebration of music, and followed this not only with the setting of the Milton poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (with an added section *Il Moderato*, which was not always included in Handel's performances).

Curiously, Charles Avison, in his *An Essay on Musical Expression* (1752-3) quotes James Harris in support of a very limited view of music's ability to convey meaning, even though Avison was almost entirely a composer of instrumental music. In response, William Hayes, Professor of Music at Oxford, refers specifically at Handel's setting of Milton

For there is not a Scene which MILTON describes, were CLAUDE LORRAIN or POUSSIN to paint, could possibly appear in more lively Colours, or give a truer Idea of it, that our GREAT MUSICIAN has by his *picturesque* Arrangement of musical Sounds; with this Advantage, that his pictures *speak*.

(William Hayes, *Remarks on Mr. Avisons Essay on Musical Expression*, 1753. In *Charles Avison's Essay on Musical Expression, with related writings by William Hayes and Charles Avison, edited by Pierre Dubois, Routledge, 2004*)

Handel went further – speedily composing his monumental set of 12 *Concert Grossi* Op. 6, his grand demonstration of what pure instrumental music could do.

These were a deliberate challenge to Corelli's *Concerti* op. 6 which had begun the tradition of grand statements in sets of purely instrumental works that would come to a climax at the end of the century with Haydn's *London Symphonies*.

Was all this without meaning? Handel seems to be saying "Look what I can do, Mr. Harris!"

Harris's life revolved around music, as Dunhill and Burrows massive volume based on the Harris family archives shows. Thomas Harris was directly involved with Handel; Harris's cousin, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury was a close friend of the composer; John Upton, the correspondent who reveals most about Sydenham, went out of his way to become acquainted with Handel; and the other mutual friends whose letters provide information on the philosopher, John Barker and Arthur Collier, were both deeply involved in music in Salisbury and London. It is hard to imagine that Sydenham was not part of that world. Music and Harmony form a theme in his work, with some unusual variations. Sydenham can be said, at least, to have been close to Handel's orbit.

Sydenham planned another visit in 1739 but this was a month or two too late to have encountered Handel Harris's house.

Thomas Harris wrote to his brother from Lincoln's Inn on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1739:

I have just been with Sydenham, who talks of writing to you & Mr Barker this evening, but it is very uncertain. He has been much out of order, or at least imagines so and his intended journey to Salisbury is quite put off.

(Hampshire Archives 9M73 – G306 – 25)

“Mr Barker”, John Barker (1708-1748/9), was educated at Wadham College, Oxford (perhaps overlapping with Sydenham), a physician who practised in Salisbury in the late 1730s and 1740s, before becoming an army physician and dying soon after. He was actively involved in James Harris’s musical activities in Salisbury and the Harris’s stayed with him in London for a musical week in 1744.

## 2

### THREE TREATISES

James Harris’s *“Three Treatises”* is the key publication of the Greek Revival. The book was first published in 1744, but, as has been noted, the contents can be traced to a few years earlier. The treatises are, purportedly, on Art, on Music, Painting and Poetry and on Happiness, which is by far the longest, but with their extensive notes they are a compendium of Greek wisdom. The purpose of the book seems to be to expose as much Greek philosophy as possible, with English translations, to an unsuspecting audience. The connection of this book with the Greek Revival in the Arts is explicit in the second edition of 1765 which has a frontispiece by James “Athenian” Stuart, as do Harris’s later books, the key architect and designer of the artistic movement.

Each treatise has a change of tone. They were clearly written at different times. The Treatise on Music, Painting and Poetry, which examines the imitative and communicative value of each art, is a Discourse. The other two are Platonic dialogues.

The first, on Art, is an attempt to define what Art, in the broadest sense is – at its root Art is creative activity inspired by a perceived “absent good.”

*Concerning Art, A Dialogue* is addressed to the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury. Harris begins in the style of Plato by setting the scene of his imaginary conversation.

A Friend from a distant Country having by chance made me a Visit, we were tempted by the Serenity of a cheerful Morning in the Spring to walk from *Salisbury* to see Lord *Pembroke’s* at *Wilton*. The Beauties of Gardening Architecture Painting and Sculpture

belonging to that Seat were the Subject of great Entertainment to my Friend: Nor was I for my own part less delighted than he was to find that our Walk had so well answered his Expectations.

(James Harris, *Three Treatises*, London: John Nourse and Paul Vaillant, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1765. Pp 3-4)

The conversation is somewhat dry, but at the end the fictitious friend reads part of his own essay on Art. This we can imagine being declaimed at Wilton. The tone of this speech is enthusiastic and the author, in his fictional voice, seems to be embarrassed and apologetic about it. Harris, in *Three Treatises*, plays with the idea of literary detachment or distancing. The dialogue form is obviously Platonic but, it seems to me, Harris is inspired by the ideas of his uncle, the philosopher 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, who recommended that an author should divide himself, have conversations with himself, in order to pursue the Delphic instruction "Know Thyself." In *Three Treatises* the idea of the divided author is complicated by the possibility that Harris also drawing his friend Sydenham into the drama and speaking in his voice. The extravagant style of the Friend in the first Treatise is much the same as the style of Theophilus in the third treatise who is, it is supposed, a portrait of Floyer Sydenham.

The literary form of *Three Treatises* as a whole is a philosophical game.

The identification of Sydenham (or Harris acting the part of Sydenham) as the friend in the first treatise is also supported by echoes of the ideas and the setting, Wilton, as we shall see, in Sydenham's poem *Truth*.

"O ART! Thou *distinguishing Attribute* and Honour of *Human Kind*! who art not only able to *imitate Nature* in her Graces, but (what is more) even to *adorn her* with Graces of thy own..."

(Op. cit. p.38)

This third treatise gives an unusually precise date of completion on its title page.

Finished Dec. 15 A.D. 1741.

Its first section is headed with a dedication to Sydenham, though only the initials are given.

J. H. to F. S.

*Concerning Happiness* begins with an address to Sydenham, mentioning that

among the many long exploded Systems, there was one, you remember, for which I professed a great Esteem.

(Op. cit. p.109)

Harris, here, is presumably referring to Stoicism. Some years later Elizabeth Carter, whom Harris advised about her translation of Epictetus, felt he was still a Stoic at heart. Carter wrote

distinctly Platonic poetry, but she was also deeply Christian, and she disliked some aspects of Stoicism, particularly its justification of suicide.

Harris writes to his friend:

Not in the least degree convinced by all I had heard against it, I durst venture to affirm that no System was more *plausible*; that grant but its *Principles*, and the *rest followed of course*; that none approached nearer to the *Perfection of our own RELIGION*, as I could prove, were there occasion, by *Authority not to be controverted*. As you, I knew, were the Favourer of an Hypothesis somewhat *different* (Footnote: Viz. the PLATONIC); so I attempted to support my own by reciting you a certain Dialogue. Not succeeding however so happily in the Recollection, as I could wish, I have since endeavoured to transcribe what at that time I would have rehearsed.

(Op. cit. pp.109-110)

Harris's authorial distancing becomes complex and, perhaps, deliberately misleading. This introduction is, in itself, a fiction, but it clearly establishes to us, but not to any readers who did not know who "F.S." was, Floyer Sydenham in the character of a Platonist.

Harris, then, is introducing his dialogue as a fictional account of a conversation in which a version of the author is trying to persuade a friend of the value of his personally favoured philosophical system.

'T WAS at a time, when a certain Friend, whom I highly value, was my Guest.

(Op. cit. p. 110)

The confusing aspect of this dialogue is that it is the friend, who is named Theophilus, and which we assume to be Sydenham, who leads the conversation and there is no sense that the narrator (whom we take to be Harris) is trying to persuade him of anything. The conversation begins by asking what "the sovereign good" might be and what Happiness really is. It begins as a walk through the fields and extends into the evening.

We were walking, not (as now) in the chearful Face of Day, but late in the Evening, when the Sun had long been set. Circumstances of Solemnity were not wanting to affect us; the Poets could not have feigned any more happy a running Stream, an ancient Wood, a still Night, and a bright Moonshine. — I, for my own part, induced by the Occasion, fell insensibly into a Reverie about Inhabitants in the Moon. From thence I wandered to other heavenly Bodies, and talked of States there, and Empires, and I know not what. WHO lives in the Moon, said he, is perhaps more than we can well learn. It is enough, if we can be satisfied, by the help of our best Faculties, that Intelligence is not confined to this little Earth, which we inhabit ; that tho' Men were not, the World would not want Spectators, to contemplate its Beauty, and adore the Wisdom of its Author.

(Op. cit. Pp. 224-225)

The author is restrained in his manner but Theophilus is inspired to use the language, and capital letters, of enthusiasm. He launches into a lengthy speech which is as much Stoic as it is Platonic.

THIS whole UNIVERSE itself is but ONE CITY or COMMONWEALTH – a System of Substances variously formed, and variously actuated agreeably to those forms— — a System of Substances both immensely great and small, Rational, Animal, Vegetable, and Inanimate...”

(Op. cit. pp 225)

HERE let us dwell ;— — be here our Study and Delight. So shall we be enabled, in the silent Mirrour of Contemplation, to behold those Forms, which are hidden to Human Eyes’ — ...

(This is very Platonic, with its reference to “Forms” or “Ideas”.)

...Be these our Morning, these our Evening Meditations — with these may our Minds be unchangeably tinged — — that loving Thee with a Love most disinterested and sincere; enamoured of thy Polity, and thy DIVINE ADMINISTRATION...

(Op. cit. pp 233-234)

The distancing embeds the speech in a misleading web. What seems to be happening here is that Harris is posing as a restrained and dispassionate philosopher while conjuring up a fictional mask who is, I think, a hybrid of Harris and Sydenham, or Harris hiding behind Sydenham’s voice to speak in a way in which he feels he cannot be heard to speak himself.

There is no reason to doubt that the dialogues on Art and Happiness represent genuine conversations in the countryside around Salisbury and Wilton.

It appears that Sydenham was regularly at Salisbury. There is a possible reference to him having been at Salisbury in the year of the dedication of *Three Treatises* in a letter from John Upton. John Upton (1707-1760) was a clergyman. He was a Prebendary at Rochester and held various rectories which were sources of income with no real responsibilities. He edited an edition of the original Greek of Arrian’s Epictetus, and later, in the 1750s, worked on an edition of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. Sydenham may have helped Upton’s work. He refers to Spenser as “my own great master” in a cancelled passage in his epic poem, *Truth*, which also has other references to the poet.

Upton writes (undated, c1741):

We have Mr Frankland here at present. Is Dr Collr at Salisbury? ....

Has Sydm been at Salisbury, or has his Genius not consented to his going from London? Sydm had something to carry to Mrs Barker from me: but I fancy chance and the carrier had the management of my intended presents & perhaps it might be wth ye?

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G643/3)

Sydenham was, as the *Treatises* show, an enthusiast, at a time when enthusiasm could be suspect. He was, it appears, an unpredictable and volatile character. John Upton described an example of his behaviour in a letter to James Harris in April 1742. Upton was upset by the death of the son of Lord Talbot. William, Baron Talbot (1710-1782) was an independent whig and patron of the rectory of Great Rissington, Gloucestershire, which he presented to Upton.

I shall go out of town Thursday next, I have staid wth Ld & Ly T 'till they go abroad again, & try to forget their loss, a very great one indeed, & especially at this time.- I don't know how it is but Sydm is cool towards me, the whole occasion is this. He began, I thought not so right, to treat in a slight manner the concern I show'd for Lord T on the loss of his only boy. but I said nothing in answer & tried to turn off ye discourse. Wt does Syd but flings out of the coffee-house, wth the greatest passion I ever saw, & calling me fool for not giving him or not being able to give him an answer. Next day , I was resolvd still to forget all, But the moment he saw me, well says he, & how do you grieve now? With some other such sayings wch I really wonder'd to hear come from him. But still wth gravity I made a short answer, & mend the discourse, as cheerful & willing to shew I forgot his peevishness the foregoing night. He began again to grow grave, & staying about ten minutes without speaking a word, went out wth a gravely sorrowful countenance, so tht the Girls askd me wt I had done to Mr. Sydm. Since this time I have not seen him, nor do I know whether he is angry with me or no: I am quite puzzled: I value his friendship much, but such peevishness I never saw. I fancy he thought I lipt (?) the Great Man upon him, whn I did not answer him, wch piqued his pride, or perhaps he is not angry with me at all. - I don't know. - But rest perturbed Spirit.-

- manet alta mente repostum, judicium Paridis spretæque injuria formæ

(Deep seated in her mind remains the judgement of Paris and the wrong done to her slighted beauty. Virgil.)

(Hampshire Archives 9M73\_G642\_11)

This is followed by a discussion of Pope's poem *The Dunciad*. Upton hopes that his comments will not reach Mr Pope, in case he might be included in his next satire.

On May 11<sup>th</sup> 1742 Upton wrote the sequel to his story of Sydenham's odd behaviour:

When I came to Town, I was very agreeably surprizd to find tht Sydm was not in the least angry wth me, nay that he intended to have pd me a visit at Rochester, He had been bit, he told me, by a mad Dog, & was taking then Dr Mead's prescription, & using

the cold-bath, All the physns in town could not perswade him otherwise, & I did not endeavour it. So all things being thus compos'd I rejoice to find my friend friendly to me: et procipue sanus - nisicum pituita molesta est

(in general healthy, save when troubled by the flu. Horace,)

(Hampshire Archives 9M73\_G642\_16)

A letter from John Barker in London to Harris in Salisbury on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1743 shows that Harris's book, *Three Treatises*, was read and discussed by his circle of friends before its publication.

I saw Sydenham this Morning; he was going to meet your Brother in order to peruse your Notes. Your Brother will acquaint you with the Result of their Meeting – Sydenham approves very much of ye Notes in Generall, but has some Objections wth wch he will acquaint you with himself. He sets out for Oxford tomorrow morning to vote for our friend Wyndham to be Subwarden of ye College...

(Hampshire Archives 9M73 G363 4)

*Three Treatises* might be seen as the expression of the philosophy of this close-knit circle of philosophical friends rather than the thoughts of its diffident and self-distancing author.



### 3

#### **SPIRITUAL CONFLICTS**

Sydenham seems to have had no regular income. His decision to take Holy Orders may have been out of necessity, to enable him to take a position with a good income, rather than from religious conviction. *Three Treatises* establishes Sydenham as an enthusiastic Platonist. His very wide and deep knowledge of philosophy had, presumably, been accruing since his days at Wadham College. What, if any, were his religious beliefs? He lived in a world where the ministers of the church, like Arthur Collier Senior, or his friend John Upton, could be devoted Platonists at the same time as being very rational 18<sup>th</sup> century priests. They would not have seen any conflict between philosophy and religion. Philosophy gave them a rational and abstract concept of God, just as it had for Christian-Platonist theologians since the beginning of Christianity and earlier.

But Sydenham's religious convictions seem to have been mysterious, and, perhaps, unstable.

John Barker wrote to Harris in Salisbury on January 26<sup>th</sup> 1743 (1744 New Style). After some discussion of the currently passing comet (the Great Comet of 1744), which Dr Collier had been measuring, he writes:

But we'll proceed from Caelestial to some Earthly phenomena. The Dean of Salisbury, it is said, has refused an Irish Bishoprick. The Person who has accepted it, viz Dr. Bernard, will thereby vacate a very good Living, in Surrey, wch is in the Gift of Wadham College, and must be, (by the donor's Will) conferred upon a Founder's Kinsman, if there be any such in Orders - Our friend Sydenham is come to a resolution to take Orders, wch he means to do before ye the living becomes vacant, ...all his Friends here

approved his Resolution, & ...great hopes that he will make an Excellent Country Parson.

(Hampshire Archives. 9M73/G363/5)

In other words, by chance, a living (the Rectory of Esher) had become available and this was to be given, if possible, to a student of Wadham College. This was an irresistible opportunity for Sydenham, who, it has to be assumed, had no support from his family, to gain an income.

When Barker wrote to John Harris in Salisbury from Dyer's Court on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1744 Harris's *Three Treatises* had appeared in print, but another book, written with a similar purpose, was the talk of the town.

The few Whom I have heard speak of your Book profess to like it – though they seem shy of entering any Discourse about it – the Truth is that it speaks of Subjects which few have thought upon, or are qualified to talk about...Tar water indeed has had its share in all Conversations for some time past, but is growing out of Vogue...

"Tar Water" was the subject of Bishop Berkeley's very odd book *Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries Concerning the Virtues of Tar Water, and Divers Other Subjects Connected Together and Arising One from Another*. This begins as a tract promoting the use of the liquid, tar dissolved in water, as a cure all, but it follows an increasingly philosophical chain of ideas until the later pages become a discussion of Platonic philosophy. This is a parallel to Harris's *Three Treatises* in that both books are not what they seem at first sight. Berkeley would have been an ally of Harris's circle in the fight against materialism. Berkeley was using this controversial medical theory as a trojan horse with which he could smuggle his philosophy into the minds of a new audience.

I saw our friend Sydenham this morning, Who talks of going to Salisbury very soon. – I believe he will now be put into possession of his Living soon – as all the Difficulties which stood in his way are got over.

(Hampshire Archives. 9m73/G363/6)

On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1744 wrote:

Our friend Mr Sydenham dined with us yesterday & is to be ordained by ye Bishop of London to Morrow – You heard I suppose that his Uncle has got a Son.

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G363/7)

(His ordination is recorded in Lambeth Palace Library. FP XLII, f. 13v)

In a later letter, on October 20<sup>th</sup> 1744, Barker summed up his feelings about the pamphlet controversy around Berkeley's *Siris*.

I wonder that amongst such a Number as have taken up the Cudgels against the Bishop no One has ventured to attack his Philosophy – He has I think, dropt some things concerning the Corpuscularian Scheme, which is now so much in Fashion, which seem to strike at the very Foundation of it, But perhaps our present Mechanical

Philosophers may think the foundation of their System too rotten to bear their being narrowly being inquired into – if the Bishop had prosecuted this subject farther, instead of venting so many incoherencies about Tar Water, he might probably have made more Converts than he has: For I do affirm that it (would be) an easier thing to overturn the present reigning philosophy than to find out an universal Medicine.

(Hampshire Archives. 9M73/G363/8)

(The “Corpuscularian Scheme” was a theory of matter which attempted to understand how matter was formed before the discovery of chemical elements in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.)

The month before this, in August 1744, Sydenham had been presented with the living of Esher, whose patron was Henry Pye of Knotting, Bedfordshire, the father of famously bad poet laureate, Henry James Pye, of Faringdon House, Berkshire.

(Hampshire Archives 21M65/E2/1360)

This would have provided a considerable source of income, but, as rector, the philosopher need not to have expected to have any significant duties there. A curate would be employed to look after the Parish and the Rector need never visit. Sydenham’s successor at Esher was the first Rector who actually lived in the parish.

It would be easy to assume that his ordination was simply undertaken in order to be eligible for the income the living would bring him. It is curious, then, that he shortly afterwards applied for a much more adventurous post.

The records for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel show that Sydenham was appointed President and Professor of Divinity of Codrington College, Barbados in February 1744. This must be 1745 New Style.

(Lambeth Palace Archives, SPG IV)

But did he actually go to Barbados?

On 15<sup>th</sup> March 1744/5 the SPG records state

the committee reports that (Floyer) Sydenham has declined the appointment.

He was certainly in England a year later.

There seems to be no doubt that he had been appointed, and then declined, the post of President and Professor of Divinity of Codrington College in 1745.

Could there be some truth in the apparently fanciful biography of Sydenham told by Thomas Taylor, and recorded by Samuel Rodgers? This is very hard to reconcile with the facts already given. Rodgers says he heard this from Taylor who had known Sydenham in his last days, and he adds that Taylor had a scrupulous regard for truth.

Sydenham was originally a clergyman with an income of 800l per annum; but having fallen in love with a young lady whose father objected to his addresses because he was in the church, he threw up his living and had recourse to the law as his profession. After all, it appears, he did not marry the fair one for whose sake he had sacrificed so much. Having made no progress at the bar, he entered the naval service, went abroad, endured many hardships, and finally worked his way back to England as a common sailor. He was far from young when he first applied himself to the study of

(Samuel Rogers and William Maltby, *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers*, Appleton, 1856.)

Almost all of this appears to be untrue. Was any of this based on things the elderly, and possibly confused, philosopher had told Taylor?

Sydenham certainly did not take up an interest in Plato when he was “far from young”. He was only thirty-one when Harris published his treatise based on their conversations, which show him in the character of an enthusiastic Platonist. Perhaps Taylor refers to the age at which Sydenham began work as a translator of Plato, which when he was in his late forties/ He did not enter the church and throw it up to enter the law. He was introduced to the Inner Temple by his uncle at the age of 18.

The income from his living of £800 has the ring of truth, but there is no doubt that he only become an ordained minister of the Church of England in 1744, at the age of 34. He resigned from this living in 1747 and left his rooms in the Temple that same year – though the original rooms had been sold by his uncle in 1739.

There is no sign of any “fair one.”

The idea that he might have joined the navy is bizarre. When could this have happened? It is a mystery why this should end with him working his way home as a common sailor, unless he had proved incapable of serving as an officer.

Perhaps all this is a very garbled account, confused in either Sydenham’s or Taylor’s telling, with some grains of truth. It is possible that he had been to sea.

There is a comment in a letter from Arthur Collier to James Harris in 1759 that implies that Sydenham had been to the West Indies at some point. Collier wrote to Harris that as to Sydenham’s state of

mind or intellect or whatever else you please to call them, it is now and has been ever since his arrival from the Country of the Blacks as good as in his best days you ever knew him, how steady and uniform that was you can best answer for yourself...

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G346/99)

Collier clearly believes that Sydenham had been to the West Indies – though this might, of course, have been a misunderstanding based on the knowledge that he had been offered the post in Barbados. Collier was closely involved with Sydenham in the late 1750s when he controlled the publication of the Plato edition, but he had been one of the circle of friends,

with Barker, Thomas Harris and Upton from the earliest days. He would, surely, have known the truth about such an important episode?

This leaves a slight possibility that the philosopher changed his mind and did go to Codrington College, though there is no mention of him in the minutes of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel which managed the affairs of the college.

(Lambeth Palace Archives, SPG V)

If he did go to Barbados when could this have been? Why, and how, did he return?

Could Sydenham really have leaped from being a philosopher who had been ordained purely for convenience to a person with evangelical zeal?

His religious enthusiasms seem puzzling and contradictory.

On 1<sup>st</sup> February 1746 (or 1745/6) John Upton wrote to Harris:

Syd tells me has been with you. Our old friend is deep in Jacob Behmen, & commentators on the Apocalypse, so he soars above my pitch vastly: he looks on critics as enemies to the metaphysicians, & jokers as the pest of human societies.

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G646/5)

On December 8<sup>th</sup> 1746 Upton wrote:

When I was in Town I called on Sydenham why by the bye will die one day in Bedlam. He is quite a Papist & Wch is worse has not sense to keep his opinions to himself, but talks of them in Coffee houses. This is no great sign of sense you know: If I think different from the rest of mankind; wh but Vanity (& that of the lowest kind), can make me talk before children & women? This has taken air: so our friend is ruin'd. Wt if you wrote to him a Lettr, but pray let not me be mention'd. But don't let him chicane with or answer your arguments, but only reflect on them. He told me there should be a publick and & a private Rl (Religion?). This was owning a great deal. So I fancy he will commence next public Deist & then Atheist: or if any thing can be still more absurd, that absurdity he'll embrace: for our friend has a very paralogous head. Nil extra est in nice duri. But his defence to me of Popery was as low as ever I heard even? Amongst the papistical crew at John West's.

....

How do you spend yr time? About wt speculations? You are not going to turn Calvinist or Papist I suppose, or Behmenist? Are all accounts made use & adjusted within? Or are you still a seeker? As to myself I have given up all thoughts in this life about Happiness, & my seeking is after ease and quiet...

Rochester Dec 8<sup>th</sup> 1746

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G644/3)

What was Sydenham's "defence of Popery"? This, it is worth explaining, was a year after the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, but there was still a constant threat of further rebellions, with Jacobite anti-government rioting continuing in a number of cities for several years. To be talking about such things in coffee houses in 1746 was dangerous. But what was it Sydenham had been saying? What were his religious beliefs at this time?

James Harris's *Three Treatises* in 1741 had celebrated his friend as an enthusiastic Platonist. Sydenham had been ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1744 and become Rector of Esher. He had applied for the post of a Professor of Divinity in 1745. In February 1746 Upton had reported to Harris that Sydenham had been studying the mystical writings of Jacob Boehme. There is no reason to suppose that there is anything inconsistent with these things. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century a gentleman and scholar of Wadham College, Oxford, need not have had any strong religious beliefs to be ordained priest. The Church of England was dominated by Deists, seeing the mechanical world as quite separate from God. Harris and Sydenham were very clearly opposed to Deism, but their Platonic view of the universe would, in their minds, be perfectly compatible with Christianity – many of the leading theologians of the medieval church were Platonists and influenced, directly or indirectly, by the same earlier philosophers. These ideas could be accommodated within the Church of England, even if such ideas were out of fashion. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century there had been the Cambridge Platonists, with some west-country sympathisers such as John Norris. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were idealists and anti-materialists like Bishop Berkeley and the elder Collier. Of their immediate circle of friends there was John Upton happily working on Epictetus while also being an active clergyman.

Jacob Boehme might seem a more outré enthusiasm.

Jacob Boehme, a Lutheran mystic, had been influential in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was certainly an influence on Peter Sterry, one of the most interesting of the Cambridge Platonists. The late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century an informal group within the Church of England, the Philadelphian Society, had followed Boehme's mystical vision, with their own emphasis on Wisdom, personified as the Virgin Sophia. This group had faded away with the death of the London based leader Dionysius Anton Freher in 1728, but some of his followers were still alive in London in the 1740s. Freher's closed ally, Allen Leppington, died in 1769. In his will (made in 1742) he left £50 to William Law, whose interest in Boehme would be passed on to William Blake, and he also left money to pay for the publishing and translating of Boehme's works.

If Sydenham was deeply into Boehme's works in 1746 would he have met Leppington and other London followers of Boehme, or, perhaps, the catholic enthusiast for the German mystic, John Byrom?

There is no reason to consider an interest in Boehme as being incompatible with Platonism, or even, as in the case of Byrom, Catholicism.

Though the letters of Upton and Collier suggest that Sydenham was an unstable character, with possibly unjustified hints of madness in later reports, it is quite possible that he was

actually consistent in his beliefs, but what exactly what they were was hard for Upton to understand. One could speculate on what beliefs and attitudes would draw a very scholarly Platonist to Boehme and “Popery” at the same time.

What is very clear is that, though Sydenham’s published works are all rational and academic, they rigorously avoid any mention of Christianity. They warn of the dangers of religious enthusiasm. He himself may always have been a mystic and a visionary. His last book, in 1784, is described in its dedication, but not its title page, as an essay on Platonic Theology, rather than Philosophy. The mystical aspect seems to have dominated when John Upton met him in August 1747.

On August 25<sup>th</sup> 1747 Upton wrote to James Harris. He mentions that he had called at his publisher’s at St John’s Gate (the gatehouse of the Hospital of St John) and had seen

more people assembled together than I can ever remember to have seen in one place before.

This was, presumably, a Jacobite demonstration. This was the time of the siege of Bergen-op-Zoom. Those who said the town would fall to French, wrote Upton, would be taken for Jacobites. (It did, in fact, leading to a determination to bring the War of the Austrian Succession to an end.) Upton has a new house and has been buying

unphilosophical instruments – tubs & pans & pots – which have no place either in poetry or philosophy.

He continues:

Our friend Sydm is going to sell his books and then to Padua, then to commence Dr, but first he journeys into the west & intends to call on you. I spent a very agreeable morning with him very lately, & we talked for five hours together. Papisticality seems vanished and in its room is a sort of mysticity.

(Hampshire Archives. [9M73/G644/9](#))

“Commence Dr.” is a term meaning to take a Doctorate. Padua was famous particularly as a centre for medicine (pioneering human dissection for the study of anatomy) and had a long tradition of welcoming students from the rest of Europe, regardless of religious tradition.

Upton continues his letter with

Dr Barker has writ a sensible book...

This must have been the as yet unpublished *An Essay on the Agreement between Ancient and Modern Physicians, or a Comparison between the Practice of Hippocrates, Galen, Sydenham, and Boerhaave*. The Sydenham discussed in the book was Thomas Sydenham (1624-1689), great-great-uncle of Floyer.

Though Floyer Sydenham's reasons for contemplating travelling might have had much to do with his poverty (self-inflicted when he resigned from the living) and his creditors, there are signs that he was making plans for a change in his life seriously. He resigned from the living of Esher on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1747. This would have been a loss of income. Rectors were often absent from their parishes, sometimes permanently. Resigning the living when he was so hard up might imply that this was due to religious considerations – his “papisticality” or “mysticality”.

Sydenham's successor as rector at Esher was John Gould Floyer, the first rector to live there and serve the church. He was from Athelhampton, Dorset, and presumably a distant cousin of Sydenham.

Had he experienced some religious doubt, or a sense of guilt over his apparently mercenary decision to become ordained in order to be eligible for the living of Esher?

What would be a strong enough motive to encourage him to abandon a comfortable life and launch himself into what would become forty years of eventually fatal poverty?

It is impossible to know what drove him to the drastic decision of resigning the living. There is the slight possibility that he had got as far as Barbados and had a change of heart, perhaps a shocking experience. This would not explain the immersion in Boehme and the Catholicism. There seems to be no doubt that he did abandon the Church of England and consider himself a Roman Catholic as he is reported to have made serious moves to return to the Church of England six years later.

Upton could not understand why Sydenham believed himself to be a Catholic but, if we assume that he was not actually irrational (on the basis that all his writings are consistent) it might be possible to speculate about the issues that drew him to the Church of Rome.

There is no suggestion anywhere that the motive was political, at this dangerous time of Jacobite threat, which continued for several years after the defeat of the 1745 rebellion.

There is no reason to suppose that his enthusiastically anti-materialist Platonism ever wavered. He was probably aware that one of the aims of Arthur Collier Senior in his philosophy had been to argue that the Roman Catholic concept of Transubstantiation was a philosophical impossibility. It is, surely, unlikely that Sydenham could have had a literal belief in this aspect of Catholic doctrine.

If his antipathy to Deism was strong enough, he might well have decided that he could not be part of a Church which was dominated by such views, even though he had friends who were clergymen.

Jacob Boehme's attraction might have lain in his imagery, which was partly alchemical. If Sydenham knew the writings of Boehme's English disciples, such as John Pordage and Jane Leade, he might have been attracted by the figure of the Virgin Wisdom, Sophia. This, I feel, is a possibility, as there might be reflections of this image of Wisdom in his poem “Truth”.



A more general possibility, which is still no more than a speculation, is that the attraction towards “mysticality” or “papisticality” was to do with an interest in images and imagination. A Platonist who appreciated Plotinus would be aware that the images of mythology could all contain Truth, or be projections of Truth, as could the created Images of Art. This could be a thread, running from the possibly-Sydenham voice in the *Three Treatises*, through *Truth*, as we will see, and into the Plato commentaries.

It might well be an illusion, but it is easy to imagine he was someone well ahead of his time, pursuing a vision which could not be explained in the language that was available.

What does seem clear is that it was as a Roman Catholic that Sydenham planned to abandon London and travel to Padua.

On 5<sup>th</sup> November Thomas Harris wrote to his brother:

Heath told me today that Sydenham was removed from the Temple to a lodging in Gloucester Street, & was about to sell his books, so I called on him immediately but he was gone out; however I will be with him again very soon to speak to him about your having the choice of such books as you want.

(Hampshire Archives. 9M73 – G310 – 12)

John Upton wrote to Harris in Salisbury on 17<sup>th</sup> November:

Sydm I have talked wth but his case is desperate. & to use the phrase of yr college he is to be given over.

On 15<sup>th</sup> December 1747 Thomas Harris wrote:

The direction to Sydenham is at number (10?) Gloucester Street, Bloomsbury. I have seen nothing of him for a great while: I dare say the sale of his books is no forwarder than when I last saw him, nor will be till some of his creditors actually force him to it.

(Hampshire Archives. 9M73 – G310 – 15)

There is no trace of Sydenham from that date to July 1751. He does not appear to have gone to Padua. He is not listed in the matriculation registers of the university.

(I thank Francesco Piovan of Padua University for checking their matriculation registers and Horatio F Brown, *Ingesi e Scozzesi all'Università di Padova dall'anno 1618 sino al 1765*, in *Monografie storiche sullo Studio di Padova*, Venezia 1922, p. 137-213.

When Sydenham’s name appears on one of his editions it is given simply as “Floyer Sydenham” with no title, qualification, or “Esq.” He was certainly an MA (Oxon). The only suggestions that he had a doctorate is a letter after his death to James’s Harris’s son (see below) which refers to him as “Dr Sydenham” and Thomas Taylor’s memorial poem *Panegyric to the late Dr. Sydenham* as it is titled in its 1805 publication.

(Thomas Taylor. Miscellanies in prose and verse; containing the triumph of the wise man over fortune according to the doctrine of the Stoics and Platonists; the Creed of the Platonic philosopher; a panegyric on Sydenham, etc, The Author 1805. Google Books.)

Padua university was a centre of both scientific and medical research and of Platonism. Particularly interesting is that this was the period during which the composer and violinist Tartini was exploring his Platonic theories of music as a form of communication by playing solos in services in honour of the miraculous preaching of Saint Anthony of Padua. These things might have had an attraction, but it has to be concluded that he did not travel to Italy and that he did not earn the title of Doctor given in the letter from "A. Scott" (unidentified) to Lord Malmesbury and in Taylor's *Panegyric*. Both writers perhaps assumed that a man of such learning was a Doctor of Philosophy.

What did happen to Sydenham between these references in 1747 and 1751?

4

#### A TOUCH OF MADNESS?

On 5<sup>th</sup> July 1751 John Upton wrote to Harris for advice on "Pythagorean numbers" in Spenser's "Faerie Queene" and asked:

What does your bp (bishop) do? Can he read and write?...

Upton then passed on the latest from Sydenham:

But the worst of all, or best of all, I know not wt to call it, He is no more a papist than you or I am; and so I told him, He seem'd displeas'd: but he has all the tricks to cheat himself, as ever a cunning Jesuit did to cheat others. Syd heads more from me than he would from any one else , because I presume on the priviledge of a Critic to call in question his tenets: and he spins his cobwebs as fast as a spider & as flimsy: I come wth my critical broom & sweep away. I think he cannot well leave the papists. Who will like him? No one for a politician.

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G645/8)

"No more a papist than you or I am" could imply that Sydenham's attitudes do not match Upton's view of what being a papist is about.

It is also worth noting that the earliest date for the first work on Sydenham's unpublished epic poem on Platonic philosophy *Truth* is 1751 or 1752, as is shown by a reference to the Earl of Harcourt as Guardian of the Prince of Wales. His reappearance might have been connected with the beginning of work on this potentially enormous project.

James Harris published another important, and puzzling, book *Hermes, or a philosophical enquiry concerning universal grammar* in 1751. The second edition, revised and corrected, appeared in 1765, and included a frontispiece by James Stuart, as did the second edition of *Three Treatises*. This is, on the surface, a very abstract account of the building blocks of language, but a glance at the layout of the publication shows that it is also a compendium of quotations from Greek writers, with translations, in footnotes that sometimes greatly exceed the amount of text.

By Book the Third the footnotes take over altogether and there are pages with only one or two lines of text – but this is, surely, a visual and dramatic device, as by page 383 onwards a climax is reached with the crucial discussion of Platonic Forms and Ideas, as having reality beyond the world of matter, and the outstandingly Platonic statement –

The WHOLE VISIBLE WORLD exhibits nothing more, than so many *passing pictures* of these same immutable archetypes.”

(James Harris, *Hermes*, Second edition, 1765 pp 383-4)

Harris’s Preface explains that the purpose of this odd book is

...to excite his readers to curiosity and inquiry...to become Teachers to themselves...

He hopes that the variety of sources, Greek and Roman, will help the reader understand that

there is ONE TRUTH, like one Sun, that has enlightened human Intelligence through every age, and saved it from the darkness both of Sophistry and Error.

(James Harris, *ibid*, Preface,)

By “One Truth” Harris is referring to the “TRUTH” which is also the source of all being, which, soon after, became the subject of his friend’s unfinished epic poem, *Truth, or the Nature of Things*.

In the same year, 1751, Harris published a poem, *Concord*, which looks at the idea of harmony both socially and cosmically:

Ere yet creation was, ere Sun, and Moon,  
And Stars, bedeck’d the splendid Vault of Heav’n,  
Was GOD; and GOD was MIND; and MIND was *Beauty*  
And *Truth*, and *Form*, and *Order*: for all these  
In Mind’s profound Recess, and Union pure.  
Together dwelt, involv’d, inexplicate.  
Then Matter (if then Matter was) devoid,  
Formless, indefinite, and passive lay;  
Mysterious Being, in one Instant found  
Nor any thing, nor nothing; but at once

Both all and none; none by *Privation*, all  
By vast *Capacity*, and pregnant *Pow'r*,  
This passive Nature th'active Almighty Mind  
Deeming fit Subject for his Art, at once  
Expell'd *Privation*, and pour'd forth Himself...

(Clive T Probyn. *The Sociable Humanist. The Life and Works of James Harris 1709-1780*, OUP, 1991)

The poem was dedicated to, and included flattering lines, to Lord Radnor, a near neighbour of Harris's friend Richard Owen Cambridge, and next-door neighbour of Horace Walpole, at Twickenham. Harris and Sydenham are fond of referring to each other's works, and those of their friends. Sydenham has a footnote about *Concord* in his edition of Plato's *Symposium* (1761).

But such as have a Taste for Philosophic Poetry may be obliged to Us for informing them, that they may see this Subject finely illustrated in a very elegant Poem, intituled CONCORD, inscribed to the late *Earl of Radnor*, about ten Years since; but of which so few Copys were printed, or at least made public, that 'tis little known even amongst the Few able Judges of its Merit. Posterity will be inquisitive after every Work, penned by the Author of HERMES.

(Floyer Sydenham, *The Banquet*, 1761, p.74)

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1753 Thomas Harris wrote to his brother:

Sydenham called on me this morning in his boots, and said he was just going to take horses for his brother's house in Devonshire: He has a servant to attend him, but I am not certain whether he may set out so soon or not, tho' I wish he may as I believe the country may be of service to him: He talked of going as far as Esher today, and of taking Salisbury in his way; and this is the reason of my writing today to let you know it; he seems at present very well in his head and converses as rationally as ever he did.

(Hampshire Archives. 9M73/G311/31)

(Thomas mentions that John Upton is with him and the letter includes a recipe in another hand for seed cake.)

It is intriguing that the penniless Sydenham would be travelling with a servant. Perhaps the servant was provided by his wealthy brother, Humphrey. His first overnight stop, at Esher, would presumably have been with his successor as rector, John Gould Floyer.

In the autumn of 1753 a religious crisis seems to have come to a head and Sydenham decided to return to the Church of England. This decision might, in part, have been based on his

poverty, just as his ordination appears to have been in 1744, when he briefly became the Rector of Esher with a considerable income. Perhaps he had hopes of another living or stipendiary post in the church.

Upton wrote from his Oxfordshire family home, Barrington in Oxfordshire, on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1753:

I want much to tell you that Sydm has been with the Bp of Exeter & publicly renounced his papistical errors, & desired to be received back again to the bosom of his good mother the Church of England; not indeed such an old woman or so garishly flaunting as the church of Rome, but of a more benevolent spirit; - when want of reason leads a man astray, quare, what leads him right again? Is it the same want of reason, is it whim, or is it reason herself? A chance but chance it is & nothing else.

(Hampshire Archives. 9M73/G345/8)

This makes it clear that Sydenham had indeed left the Church of England in 1747.

Thomas Harris, writing to James Harris's wife, Elizabeth, on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1753, considered the philosopher to be insane – but in a very limited way. Was Sydenham's "dread of the Jesuits" a fear that they might be after him for renouncing Rome?

With regard to my friend Sydenham, I have long been highly concerned for him; and by what you now say of his dread of the Jesuits, am fully convinced he is now, and will continue, mad: his talking sensibly in general is not the least proof to the contrary; for so he did at all times, except that one night when he was quite raving at my chambers: I mention this that you and my brother may still keep it in mind and I believe the new moon will convince you of it; not that I think you need to be under any apprehensions of mischief, for he never seemed that way inclined; but he'll soon show himself so as not to be treated as a person in their senses. I hope therefore you'll consider of this with my brother. He is in a miserable state, I am afraid without money, and I am sure without relations; for his uncle Floyer has absolutely (and I think basely) thrown him off, and his orthodox and religious brother very little less. But too much of such a disagreeable subject.

(Hampshire Archives.9M73/G311/39)

Uncle Floyer must be the John Floyer Esq who had paid for the chambers at the Inner Temple, actually Sydenham's mother's uncle. The "orthodox and religious" brother was his half-brother (son of his father's first wife) Humphrey (1694-1757), MP for Exeter, who lost his money in the South Sea Bubble but then, in 1723, inherited a fortune from his great-great-uncle Sir John St Barbe, 1st Baronet (died 1723), MP, of Broadlands in Hampshire. Humphrey sold the Broadlands estate to the 1st Viscount Palmerston to pay off his losses. Humphrey was also a lawyer of the Inner Temple. According to Horace Walpole he was "a mad High Church zealot" though he also described him as "an honest devout gentleman, who always

talked out of the Common Prayer Book.” The Sydenham family seat was Combe House, Dulverton. Humphrey’s Devon house was Kerswell Priory, his wife’s family seat.

(Horace Walpole, *The Correspondence of Horace Walpole*. Volume 30. Yale University Press, 1977, p.292, n.23. Quoted in the Wikipedia article on Humphrey Sydenham,)

The wealthy half-brother does not appear to have supported Floyer. When Humphrey died in 1757 he was succeeded by his son, St Barbe, who died childless in 1799. The estate of Combe was then inherited by quite distant cousins.

On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1754 John Upton wrote:

But who do you guess I was with several times – Sydenham – he has renounced popery, or popery has renounced him (I know not whether). & he has commenced more protestant than ever. Collr told me he has a mind to be my curate. Ld have mercy on us both, & deliver me from the dilemma of taking him or refusing him, wt can be done for those who will act their doubts and paradoxes? They draw in all who come within their Vortex. – Collier very wisely I thought advised Sydm to write to you & to apologise for part of his conduct at your house, as putting the whole affair (as indeed it was) on a feverish indisposition wch got into his head. But Syd’s pride (wch was is and will always be uppermost whether drunk or sober) made him turn about & whistle to the dog, & afterwards to keep a sullen silence till the discourse was changed. – my discourses with Syd were as usual, but I doubt much, or rather don’t doubt at all, of things being right within his own pale? He is like our Pembroke man of war, at Chatham, all sail high masts & no balance, no wonder as soon as out of the haven if it oversetts.

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G645/11)

This “keep a sullen silence” is consistent with Upton’s descriptions of Sydenham’s behaviour over the death of Lord Talbot’s son twelve years earlier.

## 5

### TRUTH

From the available evidence there appears to be a clear trajectory to Sydenham's life.

Though placed in the Inner Temple to study law by his uncle at the age of 18 in 1728/9 by the late 1730s he was an enthusiastic Platonist, as recorded by James Harris in his *Three Treatises*. His decision to become ordained in the Church of England in 1744, his appointment as Rector of Esher and his application for the post in Barbados suggest a degree of Christian conviction, but this might never have been orthodox. By 1746 he was studying Jacob Boehme and claiming to be a Roman Catholic.

By 1747 the letters suggest he did indeed leave the Church of England, resigning from Esher in 1747 and planning to go to Padua.

Whatever might have happened in the next few years he does seem to have thought of himself as a Catholic – though Upton saw his religious attitude as “mysticality” – but he returned to the Church of England in late 1753.

It must have been very shortly after this that, as a mystical Platonist, he began writing a massive statement of his personal vision in his unpublished epic poem *Truth, or the Nature of Things*. If it had been completed in the twenty or twenty-four books it promises, this would have been something like 400 pages of print. As it is, eight books exist in two bound volumes, and these include references to other books that are lost.

It is certainly an eccentric project for the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and it may not be of any value as poetry, but what survives is coherent, if long-winded.

His friend must have seen this as an impractical project. Eventually John Upton persuaded the penniless author (presumably living on Harris's monthly allowance) to focus his attentions on a translation of Plato's dialogues. This new project probably led to the abandonment of *Truth*, though the very thorough British Library cataloguer suggests that there were alterations to,

at least, dedicatory addresses as late as 1778. The philosopher's personal interests, which include some original and visionary ideas, are occasionally detectable in his notes to his translations and more clearly stated in his last book, *Onomasticon Theologicum*, in 1784. These views are completely consistent and rational throughout these writings, and, it seems to me, are astonishing for 18<sup>th</sup> century England.

*Truth* is written as an explanation of the Nature of Things, a statement of fact rather than a dialogue or argument. There are no references to authorities or sources. The poem avoids any religious language. It speaks entirely in its own terms.

The poet is guided by the muses, but these are not the more familiar muses, but the "syrens" which Plato describes in the "Myth of Er", in "The Republic", who sing the Music of the Spheres, the harmonies which permeate the whole cosmos.

(The manuscript is British Library Add MS 45181-45182.)

(Book 1. Lines 43ff)

Come all ye Muses, lead the song; not ye  
Parnassian, vulgar, various, of your Aid  
To every Rhymer liberal; but ye  
Celestial, sitting on the radiant Spheres;  
Who rule in Rhythm their Motions, as they roll,  
Now leading, & now following, each by turns;  
Who tune them, as they sound, for Consonance;  
And with their varying Motions while they change  
Their Sounds, form All one perfect Melody,  
Grateful to the Ear of Intellect, compose;  
Ye Syren-Sisters Nine, whom at a Birth  
The Abyss of Things, pregnant by Truth, produc'd;

Come joyn with Me, to celebrate your Sire;  
To celebrate of all-victorious Truth  
The Triumphs; of fair Truth the Beauty bright  
To blaz'n; of blissful Truth to sing the Joys,  
That from his own Life-giving Well spring up,  
Ceaseless supply'd to Those who ceaseless draw.

Sydenham's dedication to the muses shows that he has a far more Pythagorean and Platonic understanding of the importance of music than his friend, James Harris, had shown in the discussions about Handel's *Alexander's Feast*. What is important here for an understanding of the way in which music works in the creation of the material world is that, as he explains, the muses or syrens sing together. They have their individual qualities, as reflections of the planets which guide the formation of things, and these might be experienced, like



Timotheus's songs or Marsilio Ficino's planetary hymns, raising individual passions, but in creation they sing together and "form All one perfect Melody".

This material world is made of all the songs of the syrens woven into one unified work.

The fundamental law which the Muses represent is a Unity, they are individuals as the colours of the rainbow are apparently individual aspects of one pure light, and from this flows Knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge, to Sydenham, is unified. The Seven Liberal Arts flow from the Muses.

The Liberal Arts are, at their heart, the study of the fundamental Harmony in its various forms.

Sydenham, in *Truth*, describes the Quadrivium, the four Arts based on number:

- Of the essential Forms - Numbers... (ARITHMETIC)
- The Science of Forms as shapes and dimensions (GEOMETRY)
- The Science of celestial Forms (ASTRONOMY)

And MUSIC –

(*Truth*. Book 18. Lines 89ff)

...So in Sounds;  
Their several Combinations, & what Sounds  
Agree in Concord; of what Sounds the Train  
Makes Harmony; & what Harmonious Parts,  
In Sequel, the harmonious Tunefull Whole  
Lead up, bring on, or close, to comprehend;  
Of Musick is the Science: & in Sounds,  
Sameness & Difference together joyn'd:  
For Difference unmix'd with Sameness makes  
Discord; & Sameness sole is Unison,  
Nought other in Effect than Simple Sound.  
And Form, Identity and Diversity,  
Were of all Science the sole Principles...

Music, to Sydenham, is not simply the study of Harmony, but the study of Formation.

what Sounds the Train  
Makes Harmony; & what Harmonious Parts,  
In Sequel, the harmonious Tunefull Whole  
Lead up, bring on, or close, to comprehend...

This is an idea of music, as it was developing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as a language in which ideas combined to make complex works, as a language, and as a parallel with the way that all things Form in Nature from many parts.

Music, as he explains in his notes to Plato's *Io* (1759) concerns all the muses and all the creative arts. Music, bearing these words from *Truth* in mind, is also, therefore, the study of the way in which all things form, according to Harmony. And in this world, it is important to note, things form in time, as does music - the combination of "harmonious parts in sequel."

This is a far more sophisticated and true Platonic understanding of Music (as distinct from Harmony) than any I have come across in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or from earlier years, with the exception of the similar and equally Platonic ideas of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Cambridge Platonist, Peter Sterry.

One could imagine an 18<sup>th</sup> century Platonist who understood music in this way spending many hours studying the score of Handel's *Concerti Grossi*, op. 6.

This Pythagorean/Platonic concept of music as the forming principle of Nature will appear over twenty years later in Sydenham's notes on *Philebus* and, in his last book, there is a passing comment that seems to echo the debate on the meaning of music from the 1730s.

All things touched by the ill of the material world are transient, even Arcadia.

(Book 1. Lines 206ff)

Thy word divine in all-consuming Fire,  
Goes forth & Fancy's vast Creation, sprung  
Newly out of Nothing, into Nothing turns:  
Those happy Plains of Arcady, the Land,  
Where Love is Life's whole Business, its sole Bliss  
Amorous Enjoyment; there, where Lovers find  
From their Belov'd equal Return of Love,  
Uninterrupted, unremitting Love,  
Untir'd, unchanging, elsewhere sought in vain:  
And all the Realms of Fairy, ravel'd o'er  
In Revery grave by many a musing Mind;  
When th'inward World in Conflagration wide,  
Kindled by Reason, burns and purifys,  
They in a Flash fly; & are seen no more.

This passage inevitably brings to mind the elegiac mood of Thomas Anson's "Shepherds Monument" at Shugborough, with its relief of Poussin's "Et in Arcadia Ego", which probably dates from 1750, and certainly no later than 1756.

The poet's guide to the sublunary world of change and the working of Good is Virtue.

Virtue speaks:

(Book 2, lines 202ff)

.... A charm  
I bring thee, Words divine, whose gentle Sound  
Can turn to peaceful Calm the loudest Storms  
Within, & make soft Air breath thro the Soul:  
Whose Musick can the jarring Passions tune  
To Harmony, & move in Measure just  
Their wild Disorder: sacred Syllables  
Of Virtue to restore Strength to the Weak,  
The Lamp of Light relumine to the Blind,  
And thought extinguish'd in dead Minds revive.

His guide to the higher world of Forms is Wisdom. Virtue is not described visually. Wisdom is described, and reminds the poet of Queen Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup>.

(Book 19, Lines 37ff)

I saw; her Body saw, of Human Shape,  
But above Human glorious to behold.  
For white with snowy Purity her skin  
Shone silvery, soft-lucid like the Moon:  
But her strong Limbs with Hair of auburn Hue  
Were grac'd: the Sunny Brightness of whose Gloss  
Emitted golden Beams: so happily  
Was Female Softness mix'd with Manly Force:  
Mixture, that shew'd the Temper of her Mind;  
Stable, tho Placid; vigorous, yet mild  
And gentle: founded on so solid Base  
Stands the Tranquillity of Wisdom, fix'd  
And safely seated in a Calm of Air,  
Always the Same, where of true Greatness breaths  
The Spirit.

The source of all things is “the All Alone”, the absolute Unity. From this shines the “Ray of Truth” which touches everything. Unity produces Mind, in which the Forms of all things are contained. The human Mind is an exact copy of Mind and contains the same Forms. In the world of change and matter the Forms are expressed in infinite variety.

Much of the poem, being an Enlightenment view of Platonism, inspired by Lord Shaftesbury, is about the working of Virtue. Virtue is not only good activity, of Man, animals, or the quality of good in even stones and fossils (inanimate natural materials), but the Law of Truth within all things. Virtue and Wisdom are daughters of Truth. Virtue, in this world, is, in fact, indistinguishable from Wisdom in the higher.

Though Wisdom is an allegorical, or symbolic figure, in the style of Sydenham’s favourite poet, Spenser, it is hard not to imagine that the author had in mind the Virgin Sophia, or Wisdom, of Jacob Boehme and his followers. This has to be speculation, of course, but the description of Wisdom reminds me of descriptions of Sophia in the mystical writings of Jane Leade.

(See: Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom’s Book, a Sophia Anthology*, Paragon House Publishers, 2000)

Wisdom is more than a symbol. She is an Image, a glass through which the Light of Truth shines. Sydenham’s Wisdom, Boehme’s Sophia and the biblical Wisdom, and Virgin Mary, might all be Images of one Truth – a hierarchy of Images like Proclus’s hierarchies of mythological deities.

This epic poem is rational, but I suspect that “mysticality” is always at work in Sydenham’s writings. However Shaftesburian he and his writings seem to be on the surface there is a visionary shining within.

The most striking imagery of this very abstract poem is Sydenham’s vision of the Forms.

The poet sees these as globes of light. First, in his own mind, he sees the multi-coloured globes which are the Forms or Ideas of everything. Globes merge with each other and separate. Globes contain smaller globes. He is, himself, a globe. In other words, an Idea is a reflection of Unity, or the One (the original globe), but Ideas combine to form new Ideas which also have Unity.

Every globe is an image of the one sphere, the All Alone. Every globe has those globes in it which it has in common with other globes of the same species. Every globe has globes within it which make it particular, or individual.

An individual thing’s Unity is expressed in its globularity.

This is a clear image with which to explain the relationship of all things to their source. It is, I believe, derived from Proclus and Iamblichus. There is no doubt that Sydenham had a deep knowledge of the later Platonists and this way of imagining the working of Forms, and of Formation, is inspired by these late Platonists rather than from anything in Plato. It is also a personal vision, which, with his Images of Virtue and Wisdom, creates a personal Platonic cosmology.

Virtue lifts the poet so that he can look down on two sublunar worlds – the world of Memory, which contains all that has been (and, perhaps, will be), and the world of Imagination, in which Forms are combined in infinite creativity.

Man can withdraw into this world and awaken these potential works through the Sciences and Arts.

(Book 4. Lines 260ff)

From there retiring inward, oft to hold  
Converse with Forms Ideal, mental Beings,  
Which, with his Essence, he derives from Mind  
Eternal: for in Mind they always are;  
But in Man's Mind, lye dormant, till awak'd  
By her fair handmaids, Sciences & Arts;  
The prime, the fundamental Sciences  
Of Number & Figure, those sole Founts  
Of Harmony and Beauty; the fine Arts,  
Which, on the Basis of those Sciences,  
Raise rude Materials up to beauteous Forms  
Of the Mind's own Conception; or select  
From every Part of Nature what is found  
In each the fairest, in the Artist's Mind  
Assemble them, still following Nature's Rules,  
And copying thence, exhibit fairer Scenes  
Than Nature ever yielded, fairer Forms  
Than Nature e'er created;...

The role of Imagination and its relationship to innate ideas is the theme of an important passage in James Harris's *Hermes*, and I suspect a Platonic view of Imagination can be traced back through the earlier philosophers of Mind in the west country circle, Arthur Collier senior and John Petvin.

(James Harris, *Hermes*, pp 391ff)

The first works of the union of Imagination and Nature which spring to Floyer Sydenham's mind are gardens, both literary and real. This is a philosophical justification for the 18<sup>th</sup> century idea of "improving" landscapes. If the mind can participate in Universal Forms through the Arts, it follows that it is possible to work with Nature to draw things closer to the Ideal.

...Spencer's Bow'r,  
Virgil's Elysium, Milton's Paradise,  
Alcina's gardens, or the Groves of Stow;

Forms, for Pembroke's or for Orford's Hall,  
Forms, that would Badminton or Blenheim grace.  
That Radnor, Bruce, & Richmond would admire;...

This is an astonishing passage. The poet moves seamlessly from four literary gardens of the imagination to a real garden. Imagination works with Nature to create works which touch divine Truth, and these include the landscape gardens and houses of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to Sydenham's philosophy these places could be seen as points of access to the higher world and charged with meaning.

Spenser's "Bower of Bliss" has first mention. Spenser was particularly important to the poet. The Bower of Bliss, in Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene* is a garden in which nature is excessively improved by artifice. Alcina's garden is from Ariosto's 18<sup>th</sup> century epic poem *Orlando Furioso*, the source of many operas. Was Sydenham thinking about Handel's masterpiece *Alcina*?

By "forms" he means here sculpture. "Pembroke's Hall" is Wilton, where Sydenham and Harris probably did stroll and converse on such matters, a house always associated with the Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, and, curiously, where the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl, Philip Herbert (1619-1669) studied Jacob Boehme and entertained Dr Pordage and other followers of the German mystic. It must have been a house and landscape with many meanings for the two Platonists.

"Orford" is Robert Walpole, not his son Horace, who did not inherit the title until 1791. His Norfolk house, Houghton, is famous for its sculpture. Lord Radnor was the dedicatee of James Harris's *Concord* and Horace Walpole's neighbour in Twickenham. John Robartes, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Radnor, died without an heir in 1757, which helps date this section of the poem. Radnor left his Canaletto of Old Horse Guards, now in Tate Britain, to Harris.

Richmond is the Duke of Richmond. Assuming that this text was written in the 1750s this would have been Charles Lennox, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Richmond (1735-1806), who succeeded to the title in 1750. He completed the Richmond country house, Goodwood, and was a great patron of the Arts.

Bruce is Thomas Brudenell-Bruce (1729-1814), 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Ailesbury in a new creation. He was the nephew of Charles Bruce. From 1747 to 1776, when the new Earldom of Ailesbury was created, he was known as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Bruce of Tottenham. Tottenham House had been the seat of the Earls of Ailesbury in Savernake Park, which Thomas Brudenell-Bruce had inherited from his uncle. It was a Palladian house designed by Lord Burlington in 1721. In 1761 he married Susannah, the daughter of Henry Hoare of Stourhead. There are mentions of music at Bruce's London house and his presence at Dr Burney's in the Harris correspondence. Between 1751-3 Lord Bruce made a long grand tour of Italy.

(John Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, Yale, 1997.)

It seems the house and, presumably, its statuary, were familiar to Sydenham, not being far from Salisbury. Lord Bruce and both the Earl and Countess of Pembroke were subscribers to Sydenham's Plato edition.

This is all remarkable enough, but Sydenham also speaks of what we might today call the Imaginal world, the world that lies close to the divine Ideas, directly influencing this world. Myths and stories are fixed on the earth and places become sacred:

*(Book 2 Lines 341ff)*

Nor only have great Bards the pow'rful Skill,  
With Beings of Fancy-Land to people Earth;  
...  
The mighty Magick of the Muse can draw  
Down from the Sky this Fancy Land itself;  
Can seat it where she pleases; or in  
Parts divide, & scatter like the Cyclades,  
O'er the vast Ocean: Like Latona's Isle,  
The floating Delos; where the Goddess' Womb,  
After long Wandrings & much Labour, oped  
And gave to smiling heav'n & joyous Earth  
A Phoebus & a Diana...

These mythic characters can be brought to places on Earth, such as the stories of Bacchus and Calypso, and these real material places can be "this Fancy Land", the Imaginal World fixed on Earth.

It seems likely that the patrons of the arts that Sydenham mentions were all personally known to him, or at least their houses. Elsewhere in the poem other inhabitants of the material world are mentioned, perhaps in the hope of flattering them into patronage. These include Lord Chesterfield, as a lover of Truth, and William Pitt, (the elder, Lord Chatham), but most flattering is an address to Lord Lyttelton, who, the poet hopes "wilt deign to attend"...

*(Book 5. Lines 28ff)*

And for the Subject's sake, approve the Song.  
Tho of harmonious Numbers be compos'd  
Thy Soul, & tho in Harmony it breathes;  
Thy Heart, inspir'd with the pure Love of Truth,  
And Liberty, best friend of Truth below,...

The philosopher was certainly not a lone eccentric in this materialistic period. He was one of a small circle of friends who must have shared these ideas. It is an interesting question to

what extent these ideas were discussed and had influence in a wider circle of acquaintances, including the patrons mentioned in this poem. There is evidence that they did.

George Lyttelton was also the dedicatee of the first volume of Sydenham's Plato edition, *Io* in 1759.

Virtue flies with the poet to the "Intelligible World", the region of perfect Forms.

Then the poet's "fair Patroness" turned to Wisdom to give "this daring mortal" into her care, so they could ascend to the regions of the intelligible world. All is illumined by the intellectual light. Wisdom declares:

(Book 19. Lines 115ff)

"Hail Light original, archetypal!  
Eternal Reason, Intellectual Sun!  
I recognise & bless my Source: Hail Sire!  
The Parent-Voice of every Muse divine!"

The poet sees that the realm of Intelligible Forms, the Universal Mind, is, like his own mind, composed of Ideas, which he sees, as he does in his own mind, as globes of light...

I could distinguish little spheres of Light  
Mixing and parting at will  
And these were full of lesser globes  
Tinged with various colour...

These colours, like jewels...

Seem'd Juno's darling Sapphire; th'Emerald  
The Nereids Favourite; fiery Carbuncles,  
And heav'nly-roseate Rubys; Phoebus' Love  
The Topaz, and Aurora's Amethyst.

The globes break into lesser globes, which reveals to the poet the relationship of his own Mind with the realm of Intellectual Forms –

While this the Glorys of the Scene I gaz'd  
Delighted, suddenly I found my Self  
One of those Spheres; whether to such transform'd



Or whether, loosen'd from my Body, now  
First I discover'd my own proper Form:  
I found my Self to be all Mind.

Every individual Mind was like his, containing all the same Ideas as the Intelligible World.

Every Mental Sphere resembled me in all things.

And yet, though all Minds contain the same Ideas...

Again, One Mind was not the Other, Each  
Its self alone remaining

Differed as individuals of the same species  
Minds separate are all of Universal Mind particulars...

I saw my self all Diamond, of pure  
Uncolor'd Brightness: of my Being I saw  
The rude Simplicity. But when my Sire  
I 'gan contemplate, Universal Mind,  
Ocean of Beauty; ev'n my Brother-Orbs  
I saw not...  
...Alone with The Alone  
I found my Self...& thought I was Him, Himself  
Eternal All things...

Knowing the "All Alone" is alarming. Solitariness seems to be opposed to human virtue. The poet understands that we delight in diversity, but we can also know a higher love, which is the love of "Sameness", which, in this context, means the love of that which all things have in common, the Unity through which they partake of the highest Truth, the Source, the "All Alone."

While the poet has been contemplating this vision of the Forms Wisdom has wandered away to visit the souls with whom she has an eternal affinity. Wisdom, he writes,

...took her private Solaces  
In the select Society of Minds,  
That in the blest Ages of the lower World  
Bodys inhabiting, had spread her fame  
And uncorrupted Worship in the Earth:

... the Porch of Athens, or the Walks  
Surrounding, or the Grove far from the Croud;  
To Social Feasts, or Goals & poison'd Draughts (??)  
From Samos' isle to the Calabrian Shore.  
Near These now finding, as I after learn'd,  
Lately from Exile in the World of Sense  
Return'd, her Shaftsbury; with Him, who wrote  
Mysteriously of Mind, & gave dark Hints  
Of Highest Truths, so strange to modern Days  
And novel Doctrines;...

Sydenham saw Shaftesbury as a Platonist and his interpretation of Plato, in the introductions and extensive notes of his translations, is inspired by Shaftesbury. As Kyriakos N. Demetriou writes -

In effect, Sydenham argued, Plato's method of writing would appear intelligible only to those who have 'a right Taste for the Writings of the late Earl of Shaftesbury; ... who is a Copier of Plato's Manner of Composition; and all whose Writings, excepting what regards the different Circumstances of the Times in which they severally lived, and the different Opinions prevailing in those Times, so distant one from the other, are as it were a Transcript of Plato's Mind'

(Kyriakos N Demetrio, *Asking for Plato's Forgiveness. Floyer Sydenham: A Platonic Visionary of Eighteenth-Century Britain*. From Academia.edu. Quoting Floyer Sydenham, *The First Alcibiades, a dialogue concerning Human Nature*, London 1773, p. 8.)

## 6

### SYDENHAM'S PLATO

*Truth* may have been a pastime, a project of such a scope that it would occupy the poet for many years in his garret, or whatever poor habitation he may have had. His friends were concerned that he needed a regular income, and all the later references to him in letters from John Upton and Arthur Collier to James Harris, are about their efforts to encourage his project to translate Plato. Upton and Collier do not seem to have been aware that Harris was supporting Sydenham financially.

It appears that Upton proposed the scheme of translating Plato, and he suggested which of the dialogues to begin with. Upton's plan was that Sydenham should make a deal with a bookseller who would pay him by the sheet as the work continued. This would encourage regular work and ensure a regular income. Arthur Collier, on the other hand, suggested that the edition should be by subscription, hoping that interested customers would promise a larger amount ahead of the publication.

By December 10<sup>th</sup> 1757 Upton and Collier had

had a grievous quarrel about Sydm...

I made choice of Plato for him to translate, Sydm with great alacrity undertook it, & began his work, being to enter upon pay & good quarters, as he behav'd.

I called today on Sydm and found him translating but with a face wch seethed (?) Or rather with a fallen countenance, he told me he would have nothing to do with the booksellers, that he had talked wth Dr Collier, who had put him on a better scheme & he would probably be by subscription. I told him I would come into any scheme for his advantage: & that I would tell the booksellers that I had spoken to, our former scheme was over.

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G645/31)

On 20<sup>th</sup> December 1757 Upton elaborated:

I saw the consequence of thr Doctrs suggestions to Sydm: he is alarm'd at the name of a Bookseller, & the tribe of Booksellers, Authors, & Jesuits, will be complicated soon and confounded in his Brains. I could have got him quietly under the Pay (such as it is, & as it is, 'tis better than no pay) of those same roguish Booksellers, (but) now he is at large, projecting & scheming with the Doctor. - Pray have you not some books of his? If you have & if you will pay me for them, I will take care, that it shall be laid out for present subsistence. I have spoken to Dick Warner, who liked my former scheme of delivering him over to the secular power of the Booksellers so well, as to promise me something till our scheme was completed. - I will tell you a Fable.

A Cat & a Fox were talking over the miseries to wch they were exposed, & thinking of various expedients to avoid them, when the Cat very frankly owned, she had but one way of getting out of the jaws of the same cursed Dogs, that indeed, she said, was the

chief misery to wch she was exposed, & which if she could avoid, she little card'd for all the rest. The Fox laughed at her having only one way, & asked her what that was. - why to jump up into the next Tree, says the Cat. Nay, replies the Fox, your one way is trite & obvious; cunning creatures, as we are reputed, should have a thousand projects, & schemes, & tricks - whilst the Fox was haranguing they heard a cry of Dogs: mean time the Cat Juno's up into a Tree: & saw at a distance poor Reynard with all his schemes, projects, turnings, doubling, be torn into a thousand pieces.

(Hampshire Archives.9m73-G345-72)

Collier's plan won the day. Upton's concern was to provide Sydenham with some immediate financial relief. The subscription scheme was a risk and was, indeed, a failure, as many of the subscribers did not actually pay as they had promised. Collier was one of this close group of friends, one of the Salisbury circle, and it is possible that Harris supported Collier's plan rather than Upton's.

On June 10<sup>th</sup> 1758 Arthur Collier sent James Harris the proposal and hoped he would send the money for his subscription. Sydenham had made an arrangement with Samuel Richardson to print the dialogues, which would appear in individual slim volumes. The work was going very well – in fact remarkably well, as

The dialogues already finished are The Io, the Greater Hippias – The Symposium – The Meno – The Minos and the Philebus

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G346/99)

(The Minos, possibly not by Plato, did not appear in the edition.)

Less positive news was that there were only thirty subscribers so far. Collier hoped for 100. This would prove a serious problem for the rest of Sydenham's life. There were simply too few people who were interested in Plato.

Two weeks later, on June 24<sup>th</sup>, Collier wrote to Harris that the first volume would cost 1 shilling, the second 18d, and that there were some "grander subscribers", including

My Lord Grace of Canterbury, Ld Macclesfield, the Bishops of Oxford Bristol Norwich and the Ld Prsdt of the Council...

Upton was clearly unhappy about Collier's scheme. There is a note of despair in his letter of 17<sup>th</sup> July 1758:

Sydm is whole & sole under the direction of Dr C, who is as a kind of keeper & director: I know tis in vain to interfere, if my advice is plain & obvious, I know he will be slighted. But the Dr is vastly sanguine, Sydm is employed & somewhat easy in his – no prosperous view of things. I really had got the Booksellers to take him: but our friend the Dr has taken him out of their heads.

(Hampshire Archives. 9M73-G346-3)

He wrote on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1758:

Syd goes on very well...

Dr Collier will not have his scheme broken in upon in the least particle: one chain of his scheme broken is like breaking a link of the chain of the universe, all would tumble about your ears and we should be reduced to our pristine chaos & confusion

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G646/4)

The first volumes of the project appeared at the beginning of 1759, the *Synopsis* and *Io*, but the problems continued. On 13<sup>th</sup> February Upton wrote to Harris:

Our friend Dr C has quarrelled with poor S & he is adrift again. He has left Richardson & has gone to Woodfall whom he has nominated and appointed his printer.

(Hampshire Archives 9M73/G646/8)

The *Synopsis* was printed by Richardson, *Io* by Woodfall.

John Upton does appear to have been Sydenham's most good humoured and generous supporter over many years. Unfortunately, he died in 1760 and is marked on the list of subscribers for the translations as John Upton, A. M. Prebendary of Rochester, dec. (Deceased.)

The list of subscribers (which must have been compiled in 1760 at the earliest) gives over 200 names. There are personal friends and family, several Bishops, and members of the aristocracy. A few interesting names include James Stuart, the architect, Hon. Horatio Walpole (Horace Walpole), Mark Akenside, M. D. (author of *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 1744), and David Garrick.

It is unclear whether Garrick had the complete set but, according to the Victoria and Albert Museum's website:

In 1917, while the V&A was fundraising for the acquisition of a suite of bedroom furniture belonging to Garrick's collateral descendent Major Henry Trevor (23 books from Garrick's library in his ownership were listed in Charles Sawyer Ltd's catalogue in 1929), the Shakespearean actor, Henry Ainley (1879-1945) revealed that he

owned 'a very good edition of Plato, and D.G's bookplate on the inside', which he offered to donate to the Museum.

(<https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/caring-for-our-collections/calling-all-book-detectives-garricks-plato>)

Surprisingly, the V&A did not accept the offer and in 2014 the museum posted an article in an attempt to track the books down.

The series of translations would appear, with various printers, until 1780, which, perhaps significantly, is the year of James Harris's death. Sydenham would live another seven years, the last survivor of the circle.

Demetriou's article emphasises the influence of Shaftesbury on Sydenham's interpretation of Plato, which shows the closeness in ideas and objectives of Sydenham and Harris. Demetriou also makes the differences between Sydenham and Taylor clear. Sydenham's emphasis is on Truth in Nature and Virtue. He sees Plato as being concerned with these absolute realities and detached from what Sydenham calls "the vulgar religion" of the time. Taylor has an interest in the ancient mystery cults, which he interprets from a Platonic point of view in his *A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (1790). Sydenham avoids interpreting Plato through the eyes later Platonists, unlike Taylor, who draws on Plotinus and Proclus, who lived eight hundred years later.

Though he was, for a short time, a clergyman, Sydenham also avoids any reference to Christianity. He is certainly not an atheist, and, like the other classicist clergyman of the time, he could accommodate Christianity to this Platonism. There are Christian doctrines which he rejects. He dismisses any idea of divine rewards and punishments, though souls who have achieved a knowledge of Wisdom remain her friends, as in the case of Lord Shaftesbury. He does not agree with the idea of Creation "ex nihilo."

The object of life is the pursuit of taste and virtue, which should lead to a good life, and God, but a Platonic kind of God.

Sydenham enjoys Plato's "pleasant good humour" and sees the dialogues as dramatic works that can be funny, and, indeed, actually are funny at times in his translations. This use of a "fine turn of ridicule and raillery" is also an echo of Shaftesbury.

(See Demetriou *ibid*)

Sydenham's *A Synopsis or General View of the Works of Plato*, published at the same time as *I*", in 1759, gives a clear indication of what Sydenham saw as the key elements of the Platonic philosophy. This is completely consistent with the themes of *Truth*.

The End of all the Writings of *Plato* is That, which is the END of all true PHILOSOPHY or Wisdom, the Perfection and the HAPPINESS of MAN.

(Floyer Sydenham, *A Synopsis or General View of the Works of Plato*, printed by S (Samuel) Richardson, 1759 p. 13)

Now the Power of so governing and so moving is Man's *Virtue*; the *Virtue* of Every Thing being its *Power* to produce or procure some certain *Good*. Thus the Two great Objects of the *Platonic* Philosophy are TRUTH and VIRTUE; Truth, the Good of *all Mind*; and Virtue, the Good of the *Whole Man*."

(Ibid p. 14)

The knowledge of Truth is possible because we have within us "exact Copies or perfect Images" of the real essences of things – the Platonic Ideas.

It is the Nature of the *Human Soul* to have these *Ideas generated* in her, and to *partake* of MIND Eternal and Immutable.

(Ibid p. 15)

None of this is airy-fairy or mystical as this pursuit of Truth is firmly connected to moral and social attitudes.

But since every Man is a Member of some *Civil Community*, is linked with the Fellows of his *own Species*, is related to every Nature *Superior* and *Divine*, and is a *Part* also of *Universal* Nature; he must always of Necessity participate of the Good and Evil of every Whole, greater as well as less, to which he belongs; and has an Interest in the well-being of every Species, with which he is connected.

(Ibid p. 16)

This is very close to the sentiments of Theophilus, who may be Sydenham, in Harris's Third Treatise, *Concerning Happiness*.

In this encapsulation of Platonic philosophy we can see that the enthusiasm of a Greek Revival patron, such as Thomas Anson, or Lord Lyttelton, for collecting ancient art, relics of an ancient quest for ideal beauty, is part of an all-embracing philosophy, and not at all abstract or divorced from the "real" world.

Thus all Virtue is Order and Proportion...the Rule, according to which the Mind by her Will then governs is Beauty Itself; and the Science through which She governs, is the Science of that Beauty. For TRUTH and BEAUTY concur in One; and where-ever They are, there is also GOOD. The LOVE of BEAUTY then is nothing different from that First and Leading Motive in all minds to the Pursuit of every Thing, That from whence the Philosopher sets out in his Inquiry after wisdom, the DESIRE of GOOD. Thus the *Perfection* of Man consists in his Similitude to this SUPREME BEAUTY; and in his *Union* with it is found his SUPREME GOOD.

(Ibid pp 17-18)

*Io* seems to connect the translator to a wider Platonic movement which, like Sydenham himself, has not been fully recognised. This is the Greek Revival in art and architecture. The key moment in this movement was the building of the Temple of Theseus at Hagley, by George, Lord Lyttelton, in 1759, the year *Io* appeared, dedicated to Lyttelton. This was the first building in England in authentic Greek style. It was designed by James “Athenian” Stuart who had travelled to Greece with Nicholas Revett and returned with drawings that would inspire art and architecture in the authentic “Grecian taste.”

The first mention of the Hagley Temple as a concept is in a letter from Lord Lyttelton to Mrs Montagu, the leading hostess of intellectual and artistic London society. Stuart was at Hagley with his patron Thomas Anson, who seems to have played a mysterious role in promoting the Greek Revival. In October 1758, Lyttelton writes:

Mr. Anson and Mr. Stewart who were with me last week are true lovers of Hagley, but their Delight in it was disturbed by a blustering Wind, which gave them colds and a little chilld their Imagination itself. Yet Stewart seems almost as fond of my Vale, as of the Thessala Tempe, which I believe you heard him describe when I brought him to see you. Nor could the East Wind deter him from mounting the Hills. He is going to embellish one of the Hills with a true Attick building, a portico of six pillars, which will make a fine effect to my new house, and command a most beautiful view of the country.

(Susan Weber Soros (Ed.), *James “Athenian” Stuart, 1713-1788: The Rediscovery of Antiquity*. Yale University Press, 2006, p.324.)

The Greek Revival has a distinctly different tone to the Roman and Italian classical style that had been popular in the preceding century or so. A Greek temple, such as the Doric temple at Hagley, was not an expression of grandeur but an expression of purity and simplicity and a place in which to sit and to contemplate Nature – in this case it would provide a commanding view of Lyttelton’s Vale.

Lyttelton was a friend of Harris, and, at least at a later date, they engaged on philosophical conversations at Hagley.

Harris reminds Lyttelton of a conversation at Hagley which probably took place during Harris’s six day visit there in 1767, in a dedication to Lyttelton in a manuscript copy of his *Essay on Criticism* -

...that striking one in particular, when I heard you with such attention, as we were walking together in the groves of Hagley, during the calm silence of a starry night. Yr Lordship remembers the time, & knows wt I relate to be no poetical reverie. The scene was actual nature exquisite in its kind; the subject founded not in fiction, but in truth, and such a one, as might well become a wise & good man, the nature of whence those Beautys were derived.



(Clive T Probyn, *The Sociable Humanist. The Life and Works of James Harris 1709-1780*, OUP, 1991, p. 69.)

These rare hints suggest that there was a culture of Platonic illumination in these circles in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and it must be at least a possibility that the theurgic nature of a landscape garden would have been understood by Lyttelton and some of the others named in *Truth*.

The lines praising Lyttelton in *Truth* might suggest that Sydenham was also personally acquainted with him – “the best friend of Truth.”

Sydenham’s personal voice can be found in his footnotes.

Plato, in “Meno” and other works, argues that only true law is the law within Nature. Societies can make laws but they can never be the true law. The True Law is, to Plato, the Good in Nature, which flows from what we might call God. This is Virtue. Virtue cannot be taught, but only discovered from within. Sydenham’s final note shows that there is a point where philosophy gives way to contemplation.

Faith and Opinion are, we find, and must be, unstable and slippery Foundations of Virtue. There is therefore a Necessity for Man, who lives in this World of Sense, if he would continue Good and Happy, amidst all the Sensible Objects, which surround him, and never cease to invite and draw his Attention to them, that he should, as frequently as possible, introvert his Attention, and retire into himself, to converse and hold Communion with the Fountain of his Being, the Author of all Good to him...

(Plato, *Meno*, translated and edited by Floyer Sydenham, 1769)

This is Sydenham the Neo-Platonist mystic.

The last of Sydenham’s Plato translations to appear in print was *Philebus* in two parts, 1779 and 1780. 1780 was the year in which James Harris died and lengthy notes in this edition support the idea that Sydenham shared his old friend’s enthusiasm.

Some might imagine that the Renaissance enthusiasm for the sacredness of music, in Platonic terms, had been lost by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Platonic magic of music, of course, was, I would say, growing in its power as the language of music developed, but Sydenham must be one of the very few who could explain music in Platonic terms in a way that James Harris had seemed unwilling to do in his *Three Treatises*.

According to Sydenham Music itself is sacred. Music is an aspect of the Harmony in all Nature which flows from the muses, as he described in the invocation to the muses or Syrens in *Truth*. In a lengthy footnote to Plato’s *Philebus* Sydenham explains that the music sung by different voices, or produced by different instruments, has an effect on all human listeners because we have Harmony within us.

For *Harmony* and *Mind* are *con-natural*: whatever Beings therefore partake of Either, partake of the same time, of Both. – Hence it is that *Musical Sounds*, uttered by *Human Voices*, or issued from any Musical Instrument of *Man’s Contrivance*, proceed from what is of *Divine Origin* within him; and the Force of them is felt only by what is of the same Origin in Others, namely *Harmony and Mind*. – Sound is nothing more than the (*hule*) or *Subject-Matter* of Musick, in the partial and modern Meaning of the word *Musick*: it is *Harmony*, which gives *Form* to this *Matter*, and makes *Sounds* to be *Musical*....

(Plato, *Philebus*, edited by Floyer Sydenham, printed for the author, p. 136)

Sydenham reveals that he has deep understanding of the relationship of Music and Nature. The many works of Nature are formed of Harmony, as sung by the Syrens in *Truth*, and together form one single work.

Sydenham shows that he is thinking in terms of modern music (that of his own time) rather than the music of the ancients. The Greeks and the Renaissance philosopher Ficino thought in terms of individual musical modes which had a particular quality that could raise a specific emotion, as in the story of *Alexander’s Feast*, told in Handel’s choral work. This ancient idea of music having one particular mood developed into the 18<sup>th</sup> century concept of affects, or feelings, and in James Harris’s theory that music could express an emotion in which the meaning of the words could be assimilated.

Sydenham is thinking about the complex music of the material world as a whole, formed by the interweaving of all the Syrens’ songs, of which our music was a reflection. Music, as it increasingly was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the development of the classical style, was a complex language of the combination of many affects and moods – like the world. In this music Concord and Discord play necessary parts:

For Nature’s Self (as it were) *sings* continually whilst she *operates*; putting *Rhythm* into her *Motions*, *Measure* into her *Materials*, and *Harmony* into all her *Forms*; tempering the lulling smoothness of *Concords* with the rousing Roughness of well-timed *Discords*; framing many *Systems*, correspondent to each other, and composing and composing all of them in One stupendous *Whole* (*panharmonion*), *comprehensive of all Harmonic Numbers*. – But farther; the Human Nature, by partaking of *Mind*, partakes of *Truth*, as well as *Harmony*.

(Plato, *Philebus*, edited by Floyer Sydenham, published for the author, 1779. P. 173)

“Panharmonion” refers to an instrument mentioned by Plato in his *Republic* which is able to play all the various modes of music. Nature’s music combines all the modes, the songs of the “syren-sisters” into one complex symphony.

This is, it seems to me, a Platonic theory of music which comes from a far deeper understanding of music, and of the way in which Nature is formed into new works, than the

more conservative and ancient views of Harris. This is a theory of Music, in the modern sense, rather than Harmony.

Such a view seems to be rare in this period. It would not have been possible to think in these terms before the development of musical harmony and expression of the late Renaissance and early Baroque period. There are precedents, as unnoticed as Sydenham, in the writings of the 17<sup>th</sup> century English Platonist Peter Sterry. Sterry was clearly a practising musician and knew the intensely expressive world of 17<sup>th</sup> century English consort music.

Every single Note in this sacred Musicke is a particular and singular Forme in the Divine Works ... These single Notes are contrary to another, are distinguished into flatts, and sharpes, Concords and Discords ... like to the Dancings of Witches, or howlings of Devills ... the Divine Harmony ... reconciles, and marries them into answering, and suitable Notes ... Thus they become the sweetest Rellishes of the Musicke, most necessary, and delighfull Parts of it, which bear the Universall Harmony Itselfe, as a Pearle-seed in their Bosomes, and a Crowne of Dyamonds upon their Heads.

(N. I. Matar (Editor), *Peter Sterry: Select Writings*. New York, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1995)

The importance of this view of music is that considers music itself (as distinct from Harmony) as having meaning and power. Music, without words, is a language woven from the Syrens' songs, with the concord and discord that gives it life and meaning – an Art of Combination. In terms of Sydenham's *Truth* we can see that music is a language of Ideas, the notes and harmonies taking the place of the jewels (or globes) of the vision of *Truth*, that combine to form everything.

There is a passing remark in Sydenham's last book which has immense implications for the Platonic understanding of music. He writes about the development of language and of the possibility of language -

...the Sound of which may have, like Handel's Musical Compositions, the Power of raising in the Soul Ideas, or Images...

(Sydenham *Onomasticon Theologicum* 1784, p.288)

This is an extraordinary statement and sets the seal on this Platonic understanding of music. Music, this affirms, not only raises Ideas in the Soul (and music is a language of Ideas) but Images. The quotations from *Truth* and *Philebus* show that this not a careless use of words. It means what it says. The musical theories of Harris, Algarotti and Rousseau (all focusing on feeling) are superceded. This is not an abstract philosophy but a reality which experience, surely, shows us is true, but of which 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers did not have the language to speak.

The idea that music could raise Images in the mind would be explored enthusiastically in the romantic era.

The second part of Plato's *Banquet* (1769) included *Proposals for a new subscription*. This explained the delays in the publication of the series.

Some Persons, who had given in the Author's Friends their Names as Subscribers, whether thro' Forgetfulness or Change of Mind, refused to take the first Dialogues which were sent them. – Very Many, after taking the First and Second which were published, were pleased to discontinue their Subscription; so Many, that whereas the First and Second are now out of Print, a great many of the subsequent ones lye upon the Author's Hands...Some also, tho but a few, have been so ungenerous, as to take them all without paying for any.

Though Sydenham had been turned against the booksellers by Arthur Collier he explains that it was the bookseller Mr Sandby in Fleet Street who had undertaken to print at his own cost the second part of *The Banquet*.

The author proposed that those who "are disposed to favour the continuance of the work" should pay the author or one of the booksellers a guinea towards the printing of what he refers to as the second volume, in which he plans to include the *Rivals*, the *Meno*, the *Theages* (which did not appear) and the *Philebus*.

This plan appears to have been a success as three more bound volumes did appear, including new translations and lo which had been the first dialogue to be published but which was not included in the first volume. Perhaps it had to be reprinted. On the other hand, it does seem a reasonable conjecture that the rest of the project depended on support from elsewhere. The dedications to important political figures become increasingly obsequious. They probably depended on suggestions by James Harris who, as a politician, moved in high circles. There is a possibility that Harris himself funded the remaining publications. The Plato series comes to an end with his death. He was obviously a generous man. Not only did he pay Sydenham a monthly allowance but his other friends casually ask for loans in their letters.

The only one of the grand dedicatees who was also a friend, at least of James Harris, was George, Lord Lyttelton.

Puzzlingly, the first volume of the four bound volumes that appeared, has a title page giving W Sandby as the publisher and the date of 1767. This includes the *Synopsis*, the *Greater and Lesser Hippias* and *the Banquet*, though Part 2 of *the Banquet* is dated 1769.

Sydenham's *Banquet* quietly censors Plato's original by making the lover female rather than male. This would have been necessary in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. The editor also explains that he feels it is appropriate to omit the section of the speech of Alcibiades as it might be thought offensive. It is very interesting, though, that Sydenham planned to publish a new edition of the unexpurgated original Greek text. Sydenham, in his proposal, writes that, if successful

The Interval will be employed in printing and publishing a new Edition of the Symposium in its Original Language.

In that period anyone who read Greek would happily cope with the implications of Plato's original text, even ladies. The poet Elizabeth Carter refers more than once to ideas from the *Symposium* in her works in the 1740s, which she would have read in Greek.

*A Dissertation concerning the Doctrine of Heraclitus so far as it is mentioned, or alluded to, by Plato*, 1775 is an exception in the Plato edition because it is not a translation of a Plato dialogue. Though published earlier than *the Philebus* (1779/80) it is, significantly, bound last in the fourth and final volume of the collected edition.

The dedication is distinctive:

TO JAMES HARRIS Esq; SECRETARY OF HER MAJESTY'S HOUSEHOLD, IS INSCRIBED THIS DISSERTATION, TO WHICH HE HATH THE JUSTEST CLAIM, FROM HIS DEEP KNOWLEDGE IN THE SUBJECT OF IT, FROM THE AGREEMENT OF HIS OWN MIND WITH THE MAIN DOCTRINE OF IT, AND FROM HIS ANCIENT FRIENDSHIP, DEIGNED TO THE AUTHOR OF IT, AND (FROM THE MOTIVES OF GRATITUDE AND HIGH ESTEEM) HIS MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT, FLOYER SYDENHAM.

This re-affirms the very close relationship of the two philosophers towards the end of Harris's life. The *Dissertation* (and the complete edition of the unfinished project) ends thus:

*That which knows, (that is, Intellect in Energy,) always is; (or, is eternal;) so is That also which is known; (that is, the Object of Intelligence or Knowledge;) the Essence of The Beautifull also always is; and so is the Essence of the Good;- and These Things, of which we are now speaking, are in nothing like to Those, which are perpetually in Flow, or in their Passage from Place to Place. This fine and just Sentiment of PLATO seems in the best manner to finish our Undertaking; as it expresses the chief End, at which we aim, fully and concisely; and also as it may dismiss every Platonic Reader of our Dissertation, after such homely Fare, as our own slender Store-Room affords, con la bocca dolce.*

(Floyer Sydenham, *A Dissertation on the Doctrine of Heraclitus*, 1775, pp. 82-3)

## 7

### THE DIVINE NAMES

The second of only two mentions of Sydenham in Burrows and Dunhill's epic collection from the Harris archives is from Harris's London Journal for 25<sup>th</sup> March 1779.

Sydenham spent the evening with me.

(Burrows and Dunhill, op. cit., p.1020)

Harris was suffering with gout and his wife and daughter had gone to the opera.

James Harris died on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1780. This was the year of the last of the Plato translations, part 2 of *Philebus*.

There are suggestions that Sydenham continued the work on the Plato edition but his only publication after 1780 was more personal and, perhaps, reveals more of his personal view of Platonism. As will be explained later it is possible that the ageing writer had found himself in a new and different social and intellectual circle, where he might even have had some influence – and disciples.

*Onomasticon Theologicum; or, an essay on the divine names, according to the Platonic philosophy* was published in 1784.

This has an unusually elaborate dedication to Frederick Montague, Esquire. The book is referred to in the dedication as "an essay on the Platonic Theology", which is, surely, a direct allusion to Proclus's text of that name. Sydenham's work

is, from a deep sense of his shining virtues, and in testimony of the author's gratitude, on whom those virtues have shone so benignly, with the utmost respect presented by his much obliged and obedient servant, Floyer Sydenham.

This implies that Montague had been a genuine supporter in the author's later years.

Frederick Montague (1733-1800) had been a friend, at Cambridge University, of the poets Thomas Gray and William Mason. Gray was a keen student of Plato, but published nothing on the subject and stands apart from the philosophical group connected with Harris and Sydenham. Montague was MP for Northampton from 1759-1767 and for Higham Ferrers from 1768-1790. He retired to Papplewick Hall, Nottinghamshire, where Mason wrote part of his poem *The English Garden*.

Plato's philosophy, says Sydenham, teaches that...

...the whole created *Universe* is a *Manifestation* of the *Divine Mind*, a distinct *Declaration*, or as it were an open *Evolution* of those *Ideas*, which at the same time abide in that Mind, inwardly inwrapped and comprehended as having there their natural and eternal Seat.

(p.1)

This philosophy has high antiquity harking back to the

...*Orphic* Theologers, who introduced the Eastern Learning into Greece, and whose Followers in Theology were the *Pythagorean* Philosophers...

(p.5)

The book covers a broad range of topics, with an emphasis on the social and moral. Some points stand out, to me, as particularly important, or as continuations of themes which have already emerged in this study.

Part IV Section II discusses

...the names, characteristic of the *Divine Nature*, relatively to its continual Influence on the *Created Universe*. Of these Relative Names the most incontestably proper, and universally acknowledged is GOODNESS.

(p.232)

The explanation of Goodness is based on the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus (412-485AD), "the greatest of the *Alexandrian Platonists*", which Sydenham calls "his wonderfully ingenious and fine-spun Treatise." Goodness is the very nature of the Divine Mind and this means that God must be creative and that every created thing must share in Goodness.

GOOD ITS SELF is the same as the ONE ITS SELF; and is the Cause of Union and Good at the same time; - he (Proclus) concludes, the *Goodness is an Uniting of Things together*, and that the *Uniting of Things together is Goodness*.

(p. 236)

This Goodness is also the source of Happiness. He says of the Divine Mind that

in contemplating *Himself*, he views the *Happiness* of his whole *Creation*.

(p.238)

Sydenham argues that this is true regardless of the familiar evils of the world and he criticises dualism, the belief in opposed forces of good and evil.

But how narrow was the Reasoning of these *Persian Magi* on the Subject...

(p.241)

Sydenham is particularly enthused by Proclus, who was one of the last of the pagan philosophers, but whose ideas were absorbed into Christian philosophy via Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Boethius, both mentioned by Sydenham.

In the following section Sydenham has a distinct change of tone as if he is approaching a climactic and significant subject.

The *Divine Names*, hitherto treated of in this *Essay*, had, as far as we have been able to search into Antiquities so remote, their *Origin* amongst a Few *Philosophic Theologers*, in *Nations* styled by the Greeks *Barbarian*. – In process of Time, a Daughter of *Theology* and *Natural Philosophy* travelled from *Egypt* into *Thrace*, under the Auspices of *Orpheus*. But this wonderful Man, who is supposed to have been the Founder of all *Civilisation* throughout *Europe*, by means of *Religious* and *Civil Politys*, kept the Fair one from Vulgar Eyes, till he had contrived an *Appearance* and a *Garb* for her, agreeable to the Vulgar Taste; painting her Face with Artificial Colours, and dressing her up her whole Person with *Figurative*, *Allegorical*, and *Emblematical* Vestments, hung around with *Images* and other factitious Ornaments; some of which he had brought with him from *Egypt*, and Others perhaps were invented by Himself.

(pp.250-1)

This “fair one” is a personification of the Eleusian Mysteries, the secret initiatory rituals which Sydenham believes communicated the most ancient wisdom, cloaked in allegory so that only a few would understand the true meaning.

At this point the rational enlightenment philosopher, Sydenham, departs from Thomas Taylor, whose treatise on the mysteries would be published only six years after this, in 1790.

Sydenham writes of an intellectual approach to Truth but his footnote to *Meno* shows that he believed that there was a point where philosophy had to give way to contemplation. Taylor is more attracted by the mythological. Sydenham sees the mythological as “emblematical vestments” disguising abstract truths. Taylor is also an enthusiast for polytheism, whereas



Sydenham would see the idea of many deities as a distraction from Unity. Taylor saw the key to the Mysteries as the idea of the immortal soul escaping from the material body. Sydenham, the enlightenment Platonism, thinks more in terms of rational knowledge of eternal things – though this does not contradict his enthusiasm for the Imagination.

Sydenham believes that the knowledge of the key ideas of his Platonic philosophy came from a very distant past and that Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato were passing on something very ancient and of the deepest significance, spiritually and morally. Sydenham writes as much of the moral and political implications of Virtue as of the mystical.

The secrets of the Mysteries, Sydenham presumes, were the knowledge of certain truths -

*...That of the Infinity of Time past, as well as of Time future; - That of the Immensity of Space, Extension, or the First Matter...That of the World's Eternity, or rather its everlasting Existence:...*

(p.252)

...though everything within

the Corporeal World is incessantly *diversified*; every particle is in perpetual *Flow*...

(p.253)

Most dangerous of the truths is

*...the Doctrine of GOD HIMSELF present within the Soul of Man, and ready to impart himself, to converse with, and to counsel those Human Minds, who consult him with Simplicity of Heart, and a Love of Truth above all things beside.*

(P.255)

This sounds like a Christian Platonist speaking, though it is clear that much of what is discussed in this book is common to Platonism and Christian theology.

Misunderstanding of these Truths can lead to the false idea that the stars are deities, or the dualism of belief in opposed good and evil forces, or it could lead people into

*Fanaticism, filling them with Conceits of their being Better Men than all Others, and Favourites of Heaven, - divinely inspired in an extraordinary way, and divinely commissioned to follow the immediate Dictates of the All-Wise Being; tho they are all the while conversing with their own predominant Passions, and inflamed Imaginations.*

(pp.255-256)

Sydenham is clearly thinking of the religious sects of his own time.

Another danger is the idea that only certain people, heroes or rulers, are sons of God, which debases the populace and can lead them into tyranny.

By the time *Onomasticon Theologicum* was published Sydenham's close friends and supporters had all died – John Upton in 1760, Arthur Collier in 1777 and James Harris in 1780. The dedication of the book suggests that he still had one patron in Frederick Montague, but there is no evidence of what kind of relationship the author had with the patron.

There is a remarkable passage in this last book which might suggest how important these old friendships were. It is impossible to read this without remembering the divided and interwoven characters in Harris's Three Treatises. Sydenham explains how two minds, when united, can reach higher truths than any mind can alone.

The Interchange of Thoughts will frequently produce an amicable Collision of their Ideas, their Judgements and their Reasonings: and from this Collision, new Sparks of Celestial Fire will be, as it were, stricken out between them; Ideas hitherto latent in the Mind of Each singly, will start up at once in the Minds of Both conjointly: and if while they are conversing thus together, they consult, Each of them, the *Divine Fountain of Truth* within them, - concerning what they say themselves, as well as what they hear from Each Other, - their former Judgements and Reasonings, if right, will be confirmed, if wrong, corrected; - and profound Truths, new to them Both, will spring up from the secret and deep Center of their Souls. These truths they will, Both of them, equally enjoy; in embracing these Truths, they will embrace Each Other; till at length they become so intimately united, that only one Mind will be in Two Souls.

(Op. cit. pp.83-84)

For such friends...

...together with their *Souls*, their *Persons*, their *Fortunes*, and their *Ways of Living*, will of Course unite, as far as Nature admits, and the Customs of their Country authorise or allow.

(Op. cit. p.86)

This is possible because, according to this philosophy, there is one universal Mind. This idea is reminiscent of a passing remark on John Petvin's Notes Concerning Mind which James Harris edited from a shorthand manuscript and published in 1750. Petvin, thinking about the relationship of individual minds and Mind suggests that individual minds might live in Mind as fish in the sea. Many years later Coleridge read this and wrote marginalia in the book.

What in the name of Plato can Mr. Petvin have meant by all this *fishery*? A Fish is not here, there and everywhere but one here and one there.

(Brinkley, R. Florence, and S. T. Coleridge. "Coleridge on John Petvin and John Locke." *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1945, pp. 277–292. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3815675](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3815675). Accessed 10 Sept. 2020.)

I would guess that Petvin means that individual minds are united in Mind, while remaining individual fish – in the same way that Sydenham’s globes are individual but also united with the All Alone.

I suspect, and this is a very vague suspicion, that there is a theme of shared or united minds, or Souls, running through 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century English mysticism. If Sydenham had known the followers of Jacob Boehme in London, those who survived after the death of Dionysius Anton Freher, he might have known the classic Boehmian Puritan mystic text, *The Way to the Sabbath of Rest* by Thomas Bromley in which purified souls “feel a mutual in-dwelling”. The often-reproduced frontispiece of this book which shows the three worlds of Sophia (wisdom), the cosmos and Satan, appears to originate with the 1744 edition and to be in the style of Freher.

In this state there will be a sympathizing in Joy and Sorrow; and where the Union is eminently great, there may be some knowledge of each others Conditions, at a distance, which comes from their being essenced in each others Spirits and Tinctures, which is the cause of this invisible Sympathy: And they that are in this near Union, feel a mutual in-dwelling in the pure Tincture and Life of each other; and so, the further we come out of the animal Nature, the more universal we are, and nearer both to Heaven, and to one another in the Internal;...

(Thomas Bromley, *the Way to the Sabbath of Rest*, printed and sold by Randal Taylor, 1692, p. 31)

## 8

### FRIENDS AND DISCIPLES

In spite of an attempt to raise a second subscription the edition of Plato was a failure. No more volumes appeared after 1780, though Sydenham produced a four volume collected edition, with the fourth volume dated 1780. This is a rare set. The British Library does not have the fourth volume. Even with the financial support of his friend Harris Sydenham was destitute.

According to Samuel Rogers account, which he implies came from Thomas Taylor, Sydenham

...at that time lodged in the house of a statuary in the Strand. He was in very distressed circumstances, & regularly received two guineas a month from Harris (the author of *Hermes*). He used to dine at a neighbouring eating house, where he had run up a bill of 40£. This, as well as several other debts, he was unable to pay, & his acquaintances refused to discharge his debts, though they consented to maintain him during his abode in the Fleet Prison, where he was about to be confined. The night preceding the day on which he was to be carried to jail he was found dead, - having undoubtedly, as Taylor asserted, put an end to his existence. For some time before his death, he had been partially insane.

(Samuel Rogers and William Maltby, *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers*, Appleton, 1856.)

Harris's "two guineas a month", over £24 a year, was equivalent to over four thousand pounds today.

Rodger's account of Taylor's recollections (which might in itself be inaccurate) says:

On their first meeting Sydenham shook Taylor warmly by the hand, and said he reckoned himself truly fortunate in having at last met a real Platonist – deeply regretting his own want of familiarity with Proclus and Plotinus.

This might be true to a point, but Sydenham was certainly familiar with both Proclus and Plotinus. He quotes Proclus' commentaries on Plato's *Parmenides* in Greek in his unpublished poem *Truth*, which shows the influence of both Proclus and Plotinus, and he praises Proclus in his last book, *Onomasticon Theologicum*.(1784). In his Plato translations he avoids mentioning later Platonists in order to focus on Plato's own ideas rather than the interpretations of his successors. Perhaps Sydenham had simply regretted that he had not had time to do more on Proclus and Plotinus.

According to *Chalmers' Dictionary* (1816) Floyer Sydenham died on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1787. He was buried in the churchyard of St Mary-le-Strand on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1787.

Thomas Taylor's own introduction to his Plato, tells that he knew Sydenham in his last days:

I personally knew him only in the decline of his life, when his mental powers were not only considerably impaired by age, but greatly injured by calamity.

Taylor writes that he tried to remove Sydenham's "prejudices against his best disciples", and lamented that due to his infirmity and troubles

it was not to be expected that he would fathom the profundity of Plato's conceptions, and arrive at the summit of philosophical attainments.

He might have succeeded

if he had not nourished such baneful prejudices and if he had not neglected philosophy in the early part of his life.

(*Thomas Taylor, the Platonist, selected writings, edited, with introductions, by Kathleen Raine and George Mills Harper, Princeton University Press, 1969 pp 16-17*)

This misunderstanding is hard to explain. Sydenham seems to have been devoted to philosophy from his student days at Oxford with James Harris. His life might have been unfocussed until his friends suggested the Plato project, but he worked on that for thirty years, despite the lack of financial reward. Perhaps these comments are evidence that Taylor and Sydenham did not see eye to eye in their view of Plato. One area for disagreement might be Taylor's support for pagan religion and Sydenham's (possible) Christian position.

An identified "A Scott" wrote to Harris's son, Lord Malmesbury, on April 27<sup>th</sup> 1801:

The Primature & much lamented Death of Floyer Sydenham whose friend I was in the strictest sense during many Years, first suggested an Idea at a Trio dinner, which gave

rise to forming a Society to establish a Literary Fund for the relief of distressed Authors & their families....

As your Lordship was, much to your credit, the kind Benefactor annually of Dr Sydenham in imitation of his great inseparable friend the celebrated Author of Hermes – many moieties I received from the hands of the late honest Tom Payne & delivered accordingly to the immaculate & grateful Dr Sydenham I could not but look up to your Lordship from the commencement of the Institution as the most suitable Personage to take the lead & preside over us....

(Hampshire Archives 9M/73/169)

More information about Sydenham's last years and the foundation of The Literary Fund can be found in Stephen Jones' *A New Biographical Dictionary*. The dates given in this are awry but the details sound convincing. The first part of this is taken from an account of the foundation of the Literary Fund in *The British Critic, Volume 6*, F. and C. Rivington, 1795, but the entry in Jones' book adds interesting details about the philosopher's friends.

A learned and diligent man, who undertook, and in part executed, a "Translation of the works of Plato," which was published between the years 1753 and 1767. He was revered for his knowledge, and beloved for the candour of his temper and the gentleness of his manners; but, for want of patronage, he lived long in the extremest indigence, a disgrace to English opulence and humanity, and died at last (1788) in consequence of having been arrested and detained for a debt to a victualler who had for some time furnished his frugal dinner....His acquaintance with the Greek language, and his profound knowledge of the Platonic philosophy, procured him many friends and disciples. Among the latter was Mr. Isaac Swainson, then in trade, and on that account familiarly termed the Greek woollen-drapeer (now proprietor of a well-known medicine called Velnos' Vegetable Syrup). Mr. S. introduced him to the Rev. David Williams, on whose ardent mind the impression made by the intensive knowledge and infantile simplicity of Sydenham was instantaneous, but indelible. Unfortunately, the delicacy of Sydenham concealed from Mr. W. the state of his finances; and his distress was not known, until the fatal arrest took place, which, by inducing strong paralytic affections, soon terminated his life.

David Williams, the article goes on to say, encouraged eight friends to join him in creating The Literary Fund.

(Stephen Jones, *A New Biographical Dictionary: Containing a Brief Account of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons and Remarkable Characters in Every Age and Nation*, Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1805. Google Books.)

The 1795 account includes the detail that the club began at the Prince of Wales coffee house in Conduit St. A poem in honour of the Literary Fund includes the lines:

No longer shall the Child of Genius smart  
Gall'd by the Wounds of keen affliction's Dart.  
No future Savage ask but to be fed  
Or Floyer Sydenham die for Want of Bread!

(Edward Digby (Formerly of Magdelene College, Cambridge), *The Singular Trial of Mr. Jones [the Name Assumed by Edward Digby for His Trial], a Medical Gentleman, at the Old Bailey, for a Foot-pad Robbery, Near Primrose Hill, on Monday, October 11, 1802; Including Also a Full Account of His Apprehension, Examination at Bow Street, Acquittal, &c. To which are Prefixed Letters to the Author from Various Elevationed Characters. And His Poetical Address to the Members of the Literary Fund, Read Before the Committee, August 3, 1803, at the Crown and Anchor, in the Strand, Benefit of the Author, 1805*)

Isaac Swainson (1746-1812) was born in Lancashire. He was originally a woollen-draper in London and an assistant to Dr Mercier in Frith Street, Soho, who sold him the recipe of "Velnos' Vegetable Syrup." This was a purported cure for venereal disease, and other things, which was, at least, harmless. as it did not contain mercury. This made Swainson a fortune, enabling him to move to a large house in Twickenham where he created a botanical garden. Botany was his principal interest.

(<http://www.twickenham-museum.org.uk/detail.php?aid=231&ctid=1&cid=10>,  
Accessed 29/08/2020)

David Williams (1738-1816) was a Welsh dissenting minister with radical ideas.

According to his own autobiographical notes he founded a radical "Club of Thirteen" with Benjamin Franklin and others.

Franklin, Dawson, Thomas Bentley & myself, commenced a club over a Neck of Veal & Potatoes at the old Slaughter Coffee House, which soon amounted to thirteen and never was permitted to exceed that number.

The club also include Josiah Wedgwood (Bentley was his business partners, the architect and leading figure of the Greek Revival, James "Athenian" Stuart, and members of the Birmingham Lunar Society.

The earliest idea of the Literary Fund came from this group, but more extraordinary was the suggestion, which came from Benjamin Franklin, of producing a "rational form of worship" suited to philosophers, who, as Franklin observed, were not church goers. David Williams' autobiographical notes say that 12 out of the 13 members perused the text which was then published as *A Liturgy on the Universal Principles of Religion and Morality*, 1776. The Club ended when the American Revolution.

The radical members of the club may have been disillusioned by the revolution. Anti-slavery campaigner Josiah Wedgwood would have agreed with another of the thirteen, Thomas Day, who wrote

If there be an object truly ridiculous in nature, it is an American patriot, signing resolutions of independency with the one hand, and with the other brandishing a whip over his affrighted slaves.

(Stuart, Gilbert, ed., *The English Review, Or, An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature*. Vol. 3. London, England: John Murray, 1784. p. 470.)

The Liturgy, which might have been thought of as the basis for a new American religion, was used in an independent chapel set up by Williams.

(Extracts from David Williams's Autobiography, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 43, Issue 4, July 1938, Pages 810–813, accessed on <https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article-abstract/43/4/810/70231?redirectedFrom=fulltext> 29<sup>th</sup> August 2020)

(See also the entry on David Williams in *Dictionary of National Biography 1885-1900*, Volume 61, accessible on Wikisource.)

The Liturgy is prefaced by an address to Zeus from the Orphic Fragments, given in Greek:

Zeus is the first. Zeus the thunderer, is the last.  
Zeus is the head. Zeus is the middle, and by Zeus all things were fabricated.  
Zeus is male, Immortal Zeus is female.  
Zeus is the foundation of the earth and of the starry heaven.  
Zeus is the breath of all things. Zeus is the rushing of indefatigable fire.  
Zeus is the root of the sea: He is the Sun and Moon.  
Zeus is the king; He is the author of universal life;

(Translation from I P Cory, *Ancient Fragments*, 1832. Accessed on <https://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/af/index.htm>)

Williams' story (as told by the Dictionary of National Biography) is decidedly odd. He is said to have reduced the Creed to "I believe in God", to have argued for complete liberty of religion, and yet to have been too strict himself for the members of his congregation, which included people like the botanist Joseph Banks. His religion seems to have been antipathetic to Christianity, a kind of Deism, based on ideas of Natural Religion. It affirms a belief in a Deity, a Source of All Being, but denies anything that can be said beyond this.

The Liturgy is not intended to be the basis of a sect but to provide something in which philosophers can share

without insulting their understandings or corrupting their hearts.



The fundamental principal is that

In the frail composition of mortals there is no principle implanted, either of consciousness or sensation, which is not equally diffused through the beautiful and expanded system of nature...

The Deity is unknowable beyond this natural law, as the congregation respond:

In whom we live and have our being.

The Liturgy warns that religious fanaticism and superstition create a supreme being that is modelled on human tyrants, in language that is reminiscent to that of *Onomasticon Theologicum*, quoted above.

Above all things let us avoid the delusions of fanaticism. As it is absurd to deny the existence of God; because that existence may be incomprehensible; it is folly and extravagance to ascribe qualities to him, which exist only in our own nature.

(David Williams, *An Apology for Professing the Religion of Nature: In the Eighteenth Century Century of the Christian Era; Addressed to the Right Reverend Dr. Watson, Lord Bishop of Landaff*, J. Ridgway, 1789)

The article in Jones' *New Biographical Dictionary* says that Swainson introduced Sydenham to David Williams. A lampoon on Williams, *Orpheus, Priest of Nature, and prophet of Infidelity, or the Eleusinian Mysteries Revived, a Poem in Three Cantos* (1781), claims that the epithet "Priest of Nature" originated with a "Socratic woollen-Draper of Covent Garden", who, according to the 1805 article, must be Swainson. Swainson is identified as a disciple rather than a friend of Sydenham in the Jones article. This suggests that he had imbibed his Platonism from the elderly philosopher, and this earned him the title.

If Swainson's enthusiasm for Greek philosophy owed its origins to the influence of Sydenham the date of the lampoon would imply that Swainson's connection with Sydenham went back at least as far as 1781. This would mean that the period of Sydenham's contact with Swainson, and possibly also Williams, would be the time that he was working on his last book, *Onomasticon Theologicum* (1784).

It is possible that Williams' rational natural religion would have appealed to Sydenham but it does seem very severe and perhaps lacking the Imagination, Art and the contemplative and even visionary qualities that can be found in *Truth*. Williams is attempting to base his Liturgy on a concept of Deity and Nature that would accommodate the various ideas of many philosophers. Sydenham's theology, in *Truth*, is dynamic and, in effect, trinitarian.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Tim Addey for his comments Sydenham's view of the First Principle which support, I think, my feeling that Sydenham holds maintains a Trinitarian idea of the One, or God – which is the One itself, the Unity within things (the Word) and the Ray of Truth (as if the Holy Spirit.) Tim Addey

To me the distinctive feature of Sydenham's vision, as distinct from Sydenham's Plato, is that he sees the world as dynamic. New works are constantly being created. The Ray of Truth inspires creativity and the pursuit of Virtue, in Nature, in the individual (whether a poet or a statesman) and in the works of Nature and humanity combined. The multi-coloured globes, in which many smaller globes are combined within their globularity, combine, separate and recombine.

I would like to think that this dynamic understanding of the work of Formation (or Creation if you like) is closely related to his understanding of music. There are only a few hints that he might have moved in Handel's orbit and that he might have shared the musical enthusiasm of James Harris, Thomas Harris and John Upton. His comments on Harmony and Nature in *Philebus* are ways of looking at the same dynamic universe, in which Nature is

framing many *Systems*, correspondent to each other, and composing and composing all of them in One stupendous *Whole*...

(Plato, *Philebus*, edited by Floyer Sydenham, published for the author, 1779. P. 173)

This might be one aspect of his thinking which he identified as Catholic in his years of apparent religious wandering. One could speculate about others. It is certainly a long way from the kind of Deism which he and Harris disliked. He does not believe in a "Creator God" in the sense of a God who designs and controls but he believes strongly in a God who is the Cause of Causes, which is Good, who drives the creative universe, guided by Nature's laws, or Harmony. He quotes Proclus;

Good its self is the very first Principle and Cause of All Things which are.

And this is

Nearly synonymous with that FOUNTAIN OF FOUNTAINS.

(Floyer Sydenham, *Onomasticon Theologicum*, 1784, pp.226 and 227)

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wrote to me 16/11/2020: *The theology/philosophy quoted on your page 55 seems to conflate The Good with goodness - which means that one will run the risk of thinking that the First Principle - truly God - is the same as the Creator God who is characterized by goodness. This runs counter to the theology of the Timaeus where the Creator God looks to a prior divinity (Autozoon, or Animal Itself), both of which are participants in goodness, and therefore inferior to The Good Itself.*

*Exactly what Sydenham's attitude to Proclus was is difficult to say: he clearly appreciated him in many respects, but since almost every page of Proclus requires the reader to hold in mind a polytheistic view of divinity, if Sydenham really did consider "the idea of many deities as a distraction from Unity" - rather than, as Proclus would claim, the only scientific way of understanding how Unity can produced multiplicity then he seems to have misread Proclus. For Proclus the Gods are an essential part of metaphysics - not primarily mythological.*

This, too, is a phrase from Proclus, from his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* – evidence again that Taylor's comment about Sydenham's "want of familiarity" with Proclus and Plotinus was not entirely true.

Thomas Taylor refers to Sydenham's "prejudices against his best disciples". This and the Jones comment about "friends and disciples" show that he was not working alone, completely forgotten and without influence. If Taylor's comment means that Sydenham did not agree with the disciples of whom Taylor approved it is easy to see that this might make sense in the context of the world of Swainson and Williams.

The "Club of Thirteen" was extremely radical. Later Williams went to France to support the French Revolution but returned to England after the execution of the king and queen. Sydenham relished the idea (if not the reality) of aristocratic patronage and the gardens and halls of the Earl of Pembroke, the Duke of Richmond, Lord Bruce and others. He was certainly a liberal and wrote of the causes and effects of tyranny in *Onomasticon Theologicum* but it is easy to imagine that he would have differences with the radical circle, and Williams' religious ideas. It is also very possible that Taylor saw himself as one of the disciples about whom Sydenham was prejudiced.

In *Truth* Sydenham prophesied that there would be return of Platonic wisdom – here personified as Celestial Venus (Aphrodite Urania), seated with Truth rather reminiscently of Michelangelo's Wisdom at God's shoulder

.....for with Thee (Truth) on starry Throne  
Seated, thy daughter, without Mother born,  
Shall reign, Celestial Venus: while her Son,  
His Ivory Sceptre heading with pure Fire,  
Atherial-pure (less pow'rful strikes the Soul  
He with his flame-tip'd Arrows,) soft shall touch,  
Shall charm his Psyche; & as now the Gods,  
Then Mortal Hearts no less shall captivate,  
To serve true Beauty. Under thee shall reign  
Liberty godlike, as in golden Days  
Of Saturn...

In thy blest Reign Heav'n-sprung Philosophy  
Shall flourish, as of old in her first Spring;  
When taught by the learned Pipe of Samos' Sage,  
The Grecian Songsters warbled Airs divine.  
Then the Platonic Muse, in loftier strains,  
Thy Conquests & triumphant Joy shall sing  
Then the Platonic Muse, in loftier strains,  
Thy Conquests & triumphant Joy shall sing....

(*Truth, Book 1, lines 401ff*)

The false world will vanish – the rubbish of books - the solemn Lecture, & the spritely Ball.

For lo! Things Earthly vanish'd, Heav'n on high  
Wide opens o'er me to my wondering View;  
The real archetypal ideal World;  
Never to end, for never it began;  
On Mind's immovable Foundation fix'd,  
Through Unity compact, encompass'd round  
By Eternity's strong Fences, and by Thee,  
O Truth, illum'd with ever-during Day.

(*Truth, Book 1, lines 486ff*)

Sydenham might have thought of Spenser's Sapience, from his *Hymne of Divine Beauty* – but here is an image of Celestial Venus with her son, Cupid, or Love, charming mortal souls (Psyche) to serve true Beauty. The Christian parallels are obvious. In Platonic language we might think we are in the same world as Francesco Giorgi with his Franciscan musical mysticism – especially when we remember that Sydenham's view of Truth, or the One, seems to be Trinitarian.

The return of Platonism at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century owed a great deal to the work of Thomas Taylor. There are signs that Sydenham himself had a certain influence in the world of radical religion in the late eighteenth century and in the Romantic period he was, at least in a very particular place, appreciated. Thomas Jefferson Hogg, in his *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, explains that Shelley and his friends were already inspired by Plato when they were at Oxford University in 1810/11.

But enough of the philosopher's doctrine and principles may be, and in fact were, imbibed at Oxford, and at an early age, without consulting the Greek text to convince him of the incorrectness and inconclusiveness, of the dangers indeed, of the reasonings and conclusions of Locke and his disciples. The English version of the French translation by Dacier we had of the "Phaedo", and several other dialogues of Plato, was the first book we had, and this we read together several times very attentively at Oxford. We had a French translation of "The Republic"; and we perused with infinite pleasure the elegant translations of Floyer Sydenham.

(Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Vol. 1, E. Moxon, 1858, p.192)

This is exactly what James Harris and Floyer Sydenham were about – to persuade people of the dangers of Locke and his disciples. Sydenham would have been delighted to know that his translations played a part in the development of one of the great Platonic poets – in particular *Io*, which discusses the nature of poetic inspiration.

(James Whitehead, *Madness and the Romantic Poet: A Critical History*, Oxford University Press, 2017. Accessed on GoogleBooks.)

If, as seems likely, this was the version Shelley knew we might imagine that the poet kept Sydenham's words in mind until he made his own translation in 1840.

For they (the poets) assure us, that out of certain Gardens and flowery Vales belonging to the Muses, from Fountains flowing there with Honey, gathering the Sweetness of their songs, they bring it to us, like the Bees; and in the same Manner withal, flying.

Nor do they tell us any Untruth. For a poet is a Thing light, and volatile, and sacred: nor is he able to write Poetry, till the Muse entring into him, he is transported out of Himself, and has no longer the Command of his Understanding.

(Floyer Sydenham, *Io*, 1759)

Hogg goes on to mention that

We had several publications of the learned and eccentric Platonist, Thomas Taylor.

(*Ibid.*)

Sydenham and Taylor lived in different eras and they had different attitudes to Plato, but their aims, to combat materialism, were shared. Taylor's warning from 1792 (still true today), though in more dramatic language, comes from exactly the same motivation as drove the Harris and Sydenham circle over fifty years earlier:

Materialism, and its attendant Sensuality, have darkened the eyes of the many, with mists of error...Impetuous ignorance is thundering at the bulwarks of philosophy, and her sacred retreats are in danger of being demolished...Rise, then, my friends and the victory will be ours.

(Thomas Taylor, *Concerning the Beautiful*, 1792)

I like to imagine Sydenham's Platonic heir to have been not Thomas Taylor but Taylor's friend "Greekie-Peakie", Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866). Peacock was also a close friend of Shelley and Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Peacock's novels carry a classical and Platonic attitude into the high Victorian world. His first novel, *Headlong Hall*, satirises, amongst others, improvers of landscape who go far further than building classical temples (having, as Pope says, consulted the Spirit of the Place) and blow up hills to create a more perfect view. James Harris's friend (and subscriber to Sydenham's Plato) Richard Owen Cambridge once said he hoped to die before Capability Brown so he could see heaven before Brown improved it.

Peacock was more of a Platonist than his novels show. He wrote a (mostly lost) Greek poem which was a startling attack on Christianity.

(Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in His Context*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979)

His last novel, *Gryll Grange* (1860), though, shows his love of the Roman Catholic imagery of saints, taking the place of classical deities perhaps, which might echo Sydenham's attraction to Catholicism. It also has a visionary chapter attacking enclosure and the loss of Spirit of Place, and fairies, from the woods. Peacock combines the Platonic dialogue with knock-about comedy. He is, perhaps, the last Georgian classicist, able to combine serious purpose with the wit, raillery and theatricality which Sydenham enjoyed in Plato. He writes of *The Greater Hippias*:

Besides this, our Author conceals the Importance of his Meaning still more, by a Vein of Humour and drollery which runs throughout the Dialogue...

The Character of its Composition is so perfectly Dramatic, that...it might be presented on the stage by good Comedians with great Advantage...

(Floyer Sydenham, *The Greater Hippias*,

p.11 and p.13)

Today, I fear, the idea that things can be both funny and serious at the same time seems to be almost lost. Even in 1759, in *Io*, Sydenham felt that Plato was often misunderstood because readers did not understand the tone. He quotes the words of Horace, which, as he says,

...a Reader of Plato ought always to have in Mind,

- Ridentem dicere Verum

Quid vetat? –

*What hinders, but that Serious Truth be spoke  
In Humour gay, with Pleasantry and Joke?*

(Floyer Sydenham, *Io*, 1759, p. 6-7)

The importance of raillery or humour was, of course, a theme of the admired Lord Shaftesbury.

There is a note in the *Annual Register* 1794 which quotes an unpublished dialogue by James Harris, which the author, possibly its editor, Edmund Burke, says he had read in manuscript thirty years earlier. It is a conversation, set in St James' Park. One person says:

There goes a man eminent for his knowledge of the world.

His companion asks if this man can answer a succession of questions about the nature of the universe. Of course not.

Oh then, he confines his knowledge perhaps merely to our own planet.

This is slightly prophetic of the tone of Peacock, and influenced, as always, by Shafetesbury.

The author of the article concludes by saying, tantalisingly -

Mr Harris delighted much in writing dialogues. Those in David Simple are his, and exquisite they in their kind. There are some in the world of his and Floyer Sydenham's, both, I believe which have never been printed – perhaps never destroyed.

(Edmund Burke (editor), *The Annual Register*, 1794, 1806 edition accessed on Google Books.)

(Harris's manuscript dialogue *Knowledge of the World* survived. See Probyn op. cit. p.83)

(Minos had been mentioned by Arthur Collier in one of his letters but did not appear. There may have been others.)

Floyer Sydenham and his friends were not without influence in their own time. We can enjoy our own philosophical conversations in the gardens of the Greek Revival and contemplate Nature from its temples. We can share in the same pursuit of Truth, Virtue, Meaning and the Divine when we listen to the operas of Gluck or the Symphonies of Haydn.

## **FLOYER SYDENHAM'S PUBLISHED WORKS**

### **And their dedicatees**

A Synopsis, or a general view of the works of Plato. London: Printed by S. (Samuel) Richardson, 1759

Dedication:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOHN EARL GRANVILLE, PRESIDENT OF HIS MAJESTY'S PRIVY COUNCIL: THIS ESSAY ON THE WORKS OF PLATO, ONE OF THE GREATEST MASTERS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN ANCIENT TIMES, is, with the HIGHEST RESPECT and veneration, duly inscribed by his LORDSHIP'S most obedient Humble Servant

(Anonymous)

IO, a Dialogue of Plato, Concerning Poetry, London: Printed by H. Woodfall, 1759.

Dedication:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE GEORGE, LORD LITTLETON. BARON OF FRANKLRY, ONE OF THE LORDS OF HIS MAJESTY'S PRIVY COUNCIL; THIS TRANSLATION OF THE IO OF PLATO IS, With the HIGHEST RESPECT, JUSTLY inscribed by his LORDSHIP'S most obedient humble Servant.

(Anonymous in the original printing, FLOYER SYDENHAM in the reprint in Volume 4.)

The Greater Hippias A Dialogue of Plato Concerning the Beautifull. London: Printed by H. Woodfall, 1759

Dedication:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE PHILIP, EARL OF CHESTERFIELD, KNIGHT of the MOST NOBLE ORDER of the GARTER; THIS TRANSLATION OF THE GREATER HIPPIAS of PLATO Is inscribed. With the most PROFOUND RESPECT by his LORDSHIP'S most obedient humble servant FLOYER SYDENHAM.

The Lesser Hippias a dialogue of Plato concerning voluntary and involuntary error. London: Printed by H. Woodfall, 1761

Dedication:

TO THE MOST NOBLE WILLIAM, DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE, LORD CHAMBERLAIN OF HIS MAJESTY'S HOUSHOLD; THIS TRANSLATION OF THE LESSER HIPPIAS of PLATO Is inscribed with ALL POSSIBLE RESPECT by HIS GRACE'S most obedient and most humble Servant, FLOYER SYDENHAM.

The Banquet a dialogue of Plato concerning love. London. Printed by H, Woodfall, Part 1 1761, Part 2 1769.

Dedication:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE GEORGE, EARL OF HALIFAX, LORD LIEUTENANT OF IRELAND; THIS TRANSLATION OF THE BANQUET OF PLATO Is offered, with ALL BECOMING HUMILITY, by HIS EXCELLENCY'S most obedient humble Servant, FLOYER SYDENHAM.

The Rivals a dialogue concerning Philosophy (No full title page in the bound volume, no publisher or publication date known on BL catalogue.)

Dedication:

TO THE MOST NOBLE HUGH, DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND, KNIGHT OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER; THIS TRANSLATION OF THE RIVALS OF PLATO IS, With the most PROFOUND RESPECT, Offered, by his GRACE'S most obedient and most humble Servant, FLOYER SYDENHAM.

Meno a Dialogue concerning virtue. London: Printed by W. and J. Richardson, 1769



Dedication:

TO THE MOST HONOURABLE CHARLES, MARQUIS OF ROCKINGHAM, KNIGHT OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER; THIS TRANSLATION of THE MENO OF PLATO is most respectfully offered and to his high Worth is justly consecrated by his LORDSHIP'S most devoted humble Servant, FLOYER SYDENHAM.

The first Alcibiades a dialogue concerning human nature. London: Printed and sold by Baker and Leigh, York Street, Covent Garden; T. Payne, at the Mews Gate; and J Walter, Charing Cross, 1773.

Dedication:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE CHARLES, LORD CAMDEN, BARON CAMDEN, OF CAMDEN-PLACE, ONE OF THE LORDS, APPOINTED PRIVY COUNSELLORS TO THE KING, THIS TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST ALCIBIADES OF PLATO IS PRESENTED, as a just offering to his firm Integrity, founded on the Principles of this Dialogue, by his LORDSHIP'S most obedient humble Servant, FLOYER SYDENHAM.

A Dissertation on the Doctrine of Heraclitus, so far as it is mentioned, or alluded to, by Plato. London: Printed by William Richardson, 1775.

Dedication:

TO JAMES HARRIS Esq; SECRETARY OF HER MAJESTY'S HOUSEHOLD, IS INSCRIBED THIS DISSERTATION, TO WHICH HE HATH THE JUSTEST CLAIM, FROM HIS DEEP KNOWLEDGE IN THE SUBJECT OF IT, FROM THE AGREEMENT OF HIS OWN MIND WITH THE MAIN DOCTRINE OF IT, AND FROM HIS ANCIENT FRIENDSHIP, DEIGNED TO THE AUTHOR OF IT, AND (FROM THE MOTIVES OF GRATITUDE AND HIGH ESTEEM) HIS MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT, FLOYER SYDENHAM.

The second Alcibiades, a dialogue concerning prayer. London: Printed by William Richardson, 1776.

Dedication:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE WILLIAM, EARL OF SHELBURNE, ONE OF THE LORDS, APPOINTED PRIVY COUNSELLORS TO THE KING, THIS TRANSLATION OF THE SECOND ALCIBIADES OF PLATO IS MOST RESPECTFULLY OFFERED by his LORDSHIP'S most obedient humble Servant, FLOYER SYDENHAM.

Philebus, a dialogue concerning the chief good of man. The First Part. London: Printed by R Hett, 1779. Part 2 1780)

Dedication:

TO THE HONOURABLE MR TOWNSHEND, AND TO HIS SONS (WORTHY OF THEIR FATHER AND THEIR NOBLE ANCESTRY,) THE RIGHT HON. Mr. THOMAS TOWNSHEND, AND CHARLES TOWNSHEND, Esq; THIS TRANSLATION OF THE PHILEBUS OF PLATO IS

MOST RESPECTFULLY OFFERED BY their much oblig'd and most obedient Servant,  
FLOYER SYDENHAM.

At neque nos agere haec, patriai tempore iniquo,  
Possumus aequo animo; neque Memmi clara propago,  
Talibus in rebus, communi d'esse saluti.

Note:

The quotation (haec should be hoc) is from Lucretius' *De Rerum Naturam*.

For neither can we, in our country's day of trouble with untroubled mind think only of our work, nor can the illustrious offset of Memmius in times like these be wanting to the general weal.

(Titus Lucretius Carus, *De Rerum Naturam*, Libri Sex, with a translation and notes, by H.A.J. Munro, MA, Bell, 1864. Google Books.)

There are four collected volumes.

Volume 1, The Synopsis, the Greater Hippias, the Lesser Hippias and Symposium gives the publisher as W. Sandby, 1767.

Volume 2, Meno, the first Alcibiades and the Rivals is Printed for the Author, 1773

Volume 3, Philebus, 1779

Volume 4, The Second Alcibiades, Io, A Dissertation concerning the doctrine of Heraclitus is Printed for the author, 1780.

Onomasticon Theologicum, or an essay on the divine names, according to the Platonic philosophy. London: Printed by Joseph Cooper, 1784.

Dedication:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE FREDERICK MONTAGUE, ESQUIRE THIS ESSAY ON THE PLATONIC THEOLOGY (Quae regnum recte facientibus offert) IS FROM A DEEP SENSE OF HIS SHINING VIRTUES AND IN TESTIMONY OF THE AUTHOR'S GRATITUDE, ON WHOM THOSE VIRTUES HAVE SHONE SO BENIGNLY, WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT PRESENTED BY HIS MUCH OBLIGED AND OBEDIENT SERVANT, FLOYER SYDENHAM.

The British Library catalogue description of the manuscript of *Truth*:

- **Title:** 'TRUTH: OR, OF THE NATURE OF THINGS' by Floyer Sydenham (d. 1787), the translator of Plato: books i-iv and v ( imperfect ) (45181) and books xviii, xix and xxi (45182) of a poem in

blank verse expounding Platonic philosophy; circ . 1751-aft. 1778 (see below). Autograph, with autograph revisions. The numbering and arrangement of the books appear to be provisional. The title-pages preceding books i and ii (45181, ff. 17, 34) describe the poem as consisting of twenty-four books (on f. 34 this number has been amended from eighteen), but those preceding books xviii and xix (45182, ff. 1, 27) reduce this total to twenty. The numbering of books xviii, xix and xxi (45182, ff. 1, 28, 57) has been altered more than once. There are frequent marginal references to lines in the missing books vi-xvii and xx, but none to books xxii-xxiv. The latter part of book iii (45181, ff. 85-103) is cancelled with the text breaking off in mid-sentence on f. 103. (Notes on f. 130b, now facing the title-page of book iv, f. 104, apparently relate to a continuation of the same text.) A draft of the argument of books i and ii has been placed before book i (45181, ff. 1-16) and shorter summaries of books i and iv are also included (45181, ff. 18-18b, 105). Terminal dates for the composition or revision of parts of the poem are indicated by (1) a complimentary reference in book iii (45181, f. 71b) to Granville (John Carteret, 2nd Earl Granville 1744, d. Jan. 1763), whose name is deleted in favour of Chatham (William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham Aug. 1766, d. 1778) whose name is in turn deleted in favour of 'Campden' (Charles Pratt, 1st Baron Camden July 1765, and 1st Earl 1786); (2) an allusion in book xix (45182, f. 31) to the recent death (June 1757) of Sophia Dorothea, daughter of George I; (3) an allusion in book xxi (45182, f. 59) to the 1st Earl Harcourt as governor of the Prince of Wales (1751-1752). There are also in books i and iv (45181, ff. 20b, 124b) appeals for patronage to the 4th Earl of Chesterfield (d. 1773) and to the 1st Baron Lyttelton (d. 1773) to whom, respectively, Sydenham dedicated his translations of Plato's dialogues *Hippias Major* and *Io*, published in 1759. Paper; ff. i + 139, i + 90. Quarto. Circ . 1751-aft. 1778. Written on loose quires and subsequently (probably in the early 19th cent.) bound in half-russia, the spines (45181, f. i; 45182, f. i) being lettered 'Sydenham MSS.' Presented by Dr Mabel Day.

- **Collection Area:** Western Manuscripts
- **Reference:** Add MS 45181-45182
- **Creation Date:** c 1751-after 1778
- **Extent and Access:**
  - Extent:**  
2 items
- **Language:** English
- **Contents and Scope:**
  - Contents:**

