

THE WORLD OF MERCURY

PART ONE

Advertisement

Everyone knows that the surest means of instruction is to disguise the counsels of reason beneath the veil of allegory.

Rome was on the brink of doom by virtue of a popular revolt against the Senate when the apologue of the limbs that refused their ministry to the stomach snatched the weapons from the hands of the frenzied populace and averted the storm in a trice.

The Athenians, intoxicated by prosperity and neglectful of their own security, seemed to be holding out their hands to Philip's chain when Demosthenes awakened them by means of a children's tale. That innocent artifice, having rendered the people attentive, produced the salutary decrees that would save the Republic.

Aesop, who knew the power of Fables, made use of them to form the mores of humans, having speech addressed to them by animals and insensible things; they would not have listened to Socrates, but they heeded the lessons of the Hare and the Crow.

It is with the same intention that Comedy was invented, and the counsels of Epictetus never corrected as much ridiculousness as the Theater of Molière has reformed for us.

The Account of Mercury is nothing but a Fable, in which an attempt has been made to combine ideas amusing by virtue of their novelty with a few useful observations. The opinion that leads us to believe that the planets are inhabited is so familiar to us, since we have seen the ingenious description of the Worlds by Monsieur de Fontenelle, that there is no reason to fear that the Account of Mercury will pass for an absurd idea; since it seems, on the contrary, that one would be far more embarrassed seriously to deny the plurality of inhabited worlds than to sustain it in a very probable manner.

In fact, our Earth, which is swarming with inhabitants, cannot be anything but a Planet, since it fulfills all the functions of one, which are those of rotating about its center and circling around the Sun, being opaque, reflecting light and, finally, of always having one of its halves illuminated and the other in darkness. All that one can say about the Planets one can say about our Earth. If one saw it from afar, as one sees the Planets, one would find a perfect resemblance to them, and would admit that one could not imagine why the Sovereign Architect would have wanted to populate one rather than another; since there is not one of the Planets that does not merit being inhabited as much or more than our Earth, either by virtue of its far superior grandeur, by its more advantageous situation relative to the Sun, or by virtue of the more attentive care that the Author of Nature appears to have taken of the apparatus that accompanies them.

If the Planets are uninhabited, what is the point of the Sun rising and setting so regularly for them? What is the purpose of the light that is communicated to them if no one enjoys it, and why do the seasons follow one another on those Globes with the same regularity as on our Earth? Is it possible that God has made with such artistry such a great number of useless things? Is it

imaginable that in forming those prodigious masses of matter, He only deigned to create immense deserts and frightful solitudes?

It is, therefore, generally suspected that all the Globes that turn around the Sun are inhabited, no longer excepting any but the Sun itself—which is doubtless a great pity, for, Suns being distributed innumerable throughout the space of the Universe, that is a great deal of wasted space; since every individual Sun is infinitely greater in itself than all the heavenly bodies that are enclosed in its Vortex.

But what appearance is there, it is said, that the Sun, which is nothing but a liquid Globe of light and flame, can be inhabited? What body could subsist for a moment in that fiery Vortex, since light that is merely reflected burns and devours everything on our Earth, in spite of the enormous distance of several millions of leagues that separates us from it? Let us remain in repose in that regard and leave the Omnipotent be; He would have no difficulty creating beings to whom fire would be as necessary for the conservation of their life as water is to fish or air to the inhabitants of our land.

Nothing, therefore, prevents the Sun being inhabited like the other Planets; it appears, on the contrary, more worthy of that distinction than they are, by virtue of the place that it occupies at the center of the Vortex and its prodigious grandeur; for Astronomers make it a million times larger than the Earth we inhabit. What a loss it would be for the Universe if such a vast terrain, so well placed to see the symmetry of the Universe, were absolutely useless?

In any case, if one supposes our Sun to be inhabited, as well as all the other Suns that swarm in the space of the World whose limits are unknown to us, what would be the number of their inhabitants, since those bodies are themselves innumerable and they are enormous in their grandeur! The imagination is veritably confounded here, losing itself in an endless calculation; but the further that calculation is beyond our comprehension, because it approaches infinity, the more worthy we ought to find it of the unlimited power of God.

The Author of the World of Mercury has not contented himself with rendering his fiction amusing, he has also had the design of making a light sketch and a kind of Essay of the variety that Nature is capable of distributing in all the Globes that he supposes might be habited.

He describes other rational Creatures, other Birds, other Fish, and often other ideas, in order to show that if a man has been able to imagine these varieties in a world he describes as pure fantasy, the Divinity ought not to have any difficulty in finding millions of others, all simpler and more reasonable, since they are founded on His infinite knowledge and a power that knows no bounds.

Preface

Mercury is so close to the Sun that it is almost swallowed up in its light, and escapes the attention of astronomers most of the time.

One morning, when I was observing the countryside a few moments before daybreak and was lamenting the sight of that little planet, almost effaced by the nascent light, I was surprised to hear footsteps nearby. I turned round with some anxiety and perceived an individual of respectable appearance, who was holding a little telescope in his hand.

“Monsieur,” he said to me, “According to every appearance, the approach of daylight is interrupting your observation, but if you would like to continue it with this optical device, it will give you all the leisure that you need, and I hope that you will not be disappointed.”

In spite of the scant reason I found in gazing at the stars with an instrument that seemed to me ill-fitted to that purpose, at a time when the Sun was about to appear, the attitude of the individual who was speaking to me imposed itself upon me in such a way that I did not disdain trying the experiment. I was very astonished, however, to see that instead of Mercury, for which I was searching, I encountered in my telescope an inhabited world, on which I could easily distinguish the beauties of the landscape and the movement of people and animals.

I thought at first that some unknown artifice contained in the telescope was presenting images to me, and, with that idea in mind, I was about to take it apart, in order to discover the case of such an agreeable illusion.

“Stop,” said the owner of the instrument. “What you see is a philosophical microscope, in which you will only find glass and nothing more, but it is constructed with such artistry that it renders the most distant objects as visible as the nearest ones, the darkest as visible as the brightest. It is not yet perfect; I was just trying it out when I met you and I intend to finish it during the day. If you would like to test it tomorrow, not only will it enable you to see the stars and their inhabitants, but you will also discover by its means the elementary peoples, the Atoms of Epicurus, and even the movements of the soul and human intentions.”

At this speech, I fell to my knees; I adored the individual who was speaking to me almost as a God, and I begged him in the most affectionate manner in the world not to permit the fortunate hazard that had put him in my path to be entirely useless to me.

“Celestial spirit,” I said to him, “do not disdain to instruct a wretched and ignorant man, who only seeks to enlighten his reason by knowledge, and correct his mores by the study of the truth.”

He reflected for a few moments before replying to me, and suddenly assumed a graver and more majestic attitude.

“My Son,” he said to me, “for the supreme intelligence that inspires you tells me that you are not unworthy of that adoption, I am a Rosicrucian, whom my antiquity has set me almost at the head of that Order. Are you capable of entering a Society about which you have heard so many extravagant fables told?”

“Yes, my Father,” I exclaimed, delightedly, “And I would give my life, if it were necessary to acquire such a rare joy.”

“Nothing is impossible,” replied the Sage. “Some of those who compose our Society are ready to quit it, to become Citizens of the Eternal Fatherland. That is what dying is called in our society. It only depends on me whether you will receive the first vacant place. It is merely a

matter of knowing whether you have the necessary qualities. But it is dangerous to test that; your life is at stake; decide whether you want to run such a great risk.”

“Yes, undoubtedly,” I replied to him.

Then he told me to take a powder that he was carrying in a crystal phial. I obeyed, and I sneezed several times; although it was without violence, I sensed my soul separate from my body.

In fact, it remained in the arms of my Rosicrucian, who carefully laid it gently on the ground. As for my soul, it entered into a Myrtle¹ flower that was only two steps away.

What astonished me then was that the new organism did not prevent me from thinking, reasoning and even seeing objects as usual and judging them in the same way that I had done a few moments before.

While I was making these reflections a very bright flame emerged from the ground, consumed the bush on which I was, fortified my spirit and, running through my entire body, purified it in such a way that it was instantly rejuvenated, acquired an extreme lightness, became almost inalterable, and able to take on all possible forms, even the transparency of air or subtle matter.

Scarcely was it in that new state than my soul, which had emerged from it without wanting to, reentered it without thinking about it, by virtue of a kind of magnetic force.

“You have just made a perilous experiment,” said my Rosicrucian, “and you have been great strengthened by it; but know now that if your soul had chosen any other plant than the Myrtle for incorporation, you would have died without resource. The choice it made of that tree consecrated to love marks the nobility of its nature; our souls sympathize with all plants in accordance with their inclinations, and always combine with them for a time before reentering the immense mass of intelligences.

“As soon as the bonds that attach them to their bodies are broken, that of a sad and severe man favors the cypress; a drunkard seeks the vine; a poltroon the sensitive plant or the truffle; a light, weak and inconstant character attaches itself to a reed, an effeminate one to a jasmine, a presumptuous one to a pumpkin; a flatterer to a melon; a perfidious one to a rose-bush, etc. Souls of all those tempers are unsuited to our mysteries. Those whose faults we know are abandoned in the proof that you have just undergone; their bodies destroy themselves and they remain attached to the plants that are sympathetic to them, until hazard separates them in the destruction of the plants.

“That is how the fables of Dryads, Fauns and the prophetic oaks of Dodona came into the world. That is what I wanted to teach you, because there are secrets unknown on this earth where you live. Furthermore, these verities are the elements of the veritable Philosophy.

“Now I have to ask you two questions: are you in love and do you know Arabic?”

“Yes and no,” I replied.

“I understand,” he said. “You have more sentiment than doctrine; so much the better, for it will also be necessary to forget everything that you have learned without our help. Any human science whatever is always imperfect, but we provide in a moment all sorts of knowledge and the habitude of all the arts; it is only the sensibility of the soul, which we regard as the foremost of virtues, that we are unable to give. But in order not to leave you with dry instructions and without experience of our power, I shall teach you Arabic instantaneously. Pass your thumb

¹ It might be relevant that the French name of the myrtle (clearly the intended reference, given the subsequent mention of its symbolization of love), which would normally be rendered *myrte*, is given as *Mirthe* in the original, and that the English word “mirth” was occasionally spelled “mirthe” in old texts.

between the first two fingers of your right hand and place the little finger of the same hand on your forehead, turning toward the four parts of the world.”

My turn was scarcely complete when the Philosopher began speaking Arabic to me, and I understood it like my natural language. I threw myself at his feet for a second time.

“Get up,” he said, “and if you are content, begin your novitiate. There is one law from which no one can be exempt. It is necessary for everyone, before being received among us, to have done something for the good or the pleasure of the humans that he is about to quit. That task is at the discretion of the person who is our sponsor; I am yours, and I shall only order you to translate into your language an Account that I shall make in ours of the World of Mercury. You know that the language of the Sages is Arabic; the attention with which I have seen you observing the planet whose History you will transcribe assures me that the work will not be disagreeable to you, and I hope that it will be of some utility in society.”

At that moment, I took the manuscript that he gave me, and went to shut myself in my home. I then began the translation that follows.

CHAPTER I

A Description of Mercury

Mercury, which we regard as a planet, like all the heavenly bodies we perceive, is a world like our Earth, except that it is considerably smaller and, being much closer to the Sun, the Nature of which the latter is the parent seems to have taken pleasure in enriching it with all her gifts and in embellishing it with more cheerful and more numerous varieties than those with which she adorns the rest of the Universe.

Because Mercury is smaller than the Earth, the land, the mountains, the seas, the trees, the plants the animals and the people are also smaller than they are here. There are few rivers deeper than our shallow springs. The highest mountains do not much exceed our hills, but some of them nonetheless have in that modest height the lofty air of the Alps and the Pyrenees. The highest trees are similar to our potted orange-trees, and there are few flowers which rise higher above the ground than the jonquil and the narcissus.

The entire globe is strewn with little mountains that spread in the valleys they leave between them a shade that is infinitely necessary in that burning world. Those mountains are almost always covered in trees, which are laden with flowers at all times. They perfume the air, and those flowers, which do not produce any fruits, are eternal, for in the world of Mercury, the subsistence of the inhabitants is not cultivated as it is here; benevolent Nature furnishes it herself, and hides the places that serve as storehouses, in order only to leave within the range of people objects that are always cheerful and solely appropriate to pleasure.