

**QUEM DEUS VULT PERDERE DEMENTAT
PRIUS**

The proverb *Quem deus vult perdere dementat prius* is quoted with a great many variations, most of which may be represented as follows:

*Quem deus vult perdere dementat prius.
Quos Jupiter perdere vult prius dementat.*

Other variations are *Quem vult perdere Jupiter dementat prius*, and, in French authors, *Quos vult perdere deus* (or *Jupiter*) *dementat*. These are not the only forms.

The fundamental assumption of the authorities is that this proverb is a Latin version of a Greek tragic distich (*Fragmenta Adespota* 455, in August Nauck, *Fragmenta Tragicorum Graecorum*² [Leipzig, Teubner, 1889]):

*ὅταν δ' ὁ δαίμων ἀνδρὶ πορσύνῃ κακά,
τὸν νοῦν ἐβλάψε πρῶτον ᾧ βουλευέται.*

This couplet is found in the scholia to Sophocles, *Antigone* 620, and, with omission of *δ'*¹ and the last two words, in Athenagoras, *Supplicatio Pro Christianis*, Chapter 26, § 129. The passage in Athenagoras is certainly the source from which the Greek couplet was drawn by Joshua Barnes and James Duport, whose treatments will be discussed below.

The only other ancient passage which has a direct bearing on the wording of our proverb is one of the *sententiae* of Publilius Syrus, *Stultum facit Fortuna quem vult perdere*².

Until I discovered Sir Richard Jebb's comments³

¹In Stephanus's edition of Athenagoras, this *δ'*, which is essential to the meter, is inserted. Since this was no doubt the edition used by Barnes and Duport, we can understand the presence of *δ'* in the latter, of *δέ* in the former. Barnes states that Athenagoras is his source.

²This *sententia* may be found in various editions of Publilius Syrus. It is No. 612 in Otto Friedrich, *Publili Syri Mimi Sententiae* (Berlin, Theobald Grieben, 1880); No. 610 in A. Spengel, *Publili Syri Sententiae* (Berlin, Weidmann, 1874), and in Wilhelm Meyer, *Publili Syri Mimi Sententiae* (Leipzig, Teubner, 1880); and No. 671 in J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff, *Minor Latin Poets*, a volume of The Loeb Classical Library (1934).

³R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments, With Critical Notes, Commentary, and Translation in English Prose, Part III, The Antigone*² (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1891). The passage quoted is from the Appendix, pages 255-256, and is a comment on the note to verse 622.

<By quoting so fully the views of the various 'authorities', Mr. Householder has enabled his readers to engage in a very interesting study. One sees how insecure are the foundations on which some

on Sophocles, *Antigone* 622, I was unwilling to believe that any one—except such men as edit collections of proverbs—could regard the Latin proverb under discussion as a *translation* of the Greek couplet quoted above. Jebb's comment runs as follows:

The Greek verses given in the note <on verse 622, page 120>, *δταν δ' ὁ δαίμων, κ.τ.λ.*, were probably the original of 'Quem Iuppiter vult perdere, dementat prius.' They are cited, with this Latin verse added in brackets, by James Duport. . . in his *Gnomologia Homericæ* (Cambridge, 1660), p. 282. He is illustrating *Od.* 23.11, *μάρτυρ σε θεοὶ θέσαν*. Joshua Barnes, in the 'Index prior' to his Euripides (Camb., 1694), has, 'Deus quos vult perdere, dementat prius, incerta v. 436.' On that verse itself, p. 515, another version is given, viz., 'At quando numen miserias paret viro, Mens laesa primum.' And in the margin he cites 'Franciados nostrae' v. 3, 'certe ille deorum Arbitr ultricem cum vult extendere dextram Dementat prius.' It was suggested to me that the line 'Quem Iuppiter' etc. had first appeared in Canter's Euripides. I have looked through both the editions, but without finding it. His duodecimo ed. (Antwerp, 1571) has an appendix of 16 pages, 'Euripidis sententiae aliquot insigniores breviter collectae, et Latinis versibus redditae': but 'Quem Iuppiter' is not among them. His folio ed. (of 1614) does not seem to contain it either. Publius <*sic!*> Syrus 610 has 'stultum facit fortuna quem vult perdere.' This shows that part of the line, at least, was familiar *circ.* 50 B. C. The use of *dementat* as = *dementem facit* proves, of course, a post-classical origin.

Let us see what the collectors have to offer.

Arthaber⁴ implies that the Latin sentence is a translation of the Greek distich given above. He credits the distich to Sophocles, *Antigone* 620.

Büchmann⁵ refers the Latin line to the same Greek couplet. He compares Publilius Syrus, and Velleius Paterculus 2.118.4⁶. The latter passage bears no resemblance in wording to our proverb.

Benham⁷ thinks that the Latin proverb is a translation, by Joshua Barnes, of the Greek couplet.

Harbottle⁸ calls the Latin proverb anonymous. He compares Publilius Syrus and Velleius Paterculus 2.118.4.

King⁹ offers practically the same information as Jebb. He cites in addition the note of Malone in Boswell's Johnson, which will be discussed below. He asserts that the proverb was translated from the Greek couplet by Duport, and he compares Publilius Syrus and Velleius Paterculus 2.57.3¹⁰.

pronouncements rest. To be made so strikingly aware of this as Mr. Householder's quotations make us is on the one hand to be grievously discouraged; whom are we to trust? On the other hand, the experience is stimulating and really encouraging, first in that it gives us a good lesson in methodology, secondly, in that it helps us to see how much yet remains to be done in the broad field of the Classics, early and late.

Mr. Householder of course quotes exactly, errors and all. C. K. >.
⁴Augusto Arthaber, *Dizionario Comparato di Proverbi e Modi Proverbiai*, 634, No. 1266 (Milan, Ulrico Hoepli, Undated).

⁵Georg Büchmann, *Geflügelte Worte*, Twenty-seventh Edition, Revised by Bogdan Krieger (Berlin, Haude and Spensersche Buchhandlung, M. Paschke, 1925).

⁶The passage runs as follows: ita se res habet, ut plerumque cui fortunam mutaturus <est> deus consilia corrumpat.

⁷W. Gurney Benham, *Cassell's Book of Quotations*, Revised Edition, 648 (London, Cassell and Co., 1914).

⁸Thomas Benfield Harbottle, *Dictionary of Quotations* (Classical), 279 (London, Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1906).

⁹W. Francis H. King, *Classical and Foreign Quotations*, 298, No. 2359 (London, J. Whitaker and Sons, 1904).

¹⁰This passage runs as follows: Sed profecto ineluctabilis fatorum vis, cuiuscumque fortunam mutare constituit, consilia corrumpit.

Ramage¹¹ writes as follows:

In a note on a fragment of Euripides there is the following Greek proverb <here he quotes our couplet as Barnes has it>. See Duport's "Gnomologia Homericæ," p. 282. Cantab. 1660. Athenagoras quotes Greek lines, and renders them in Latin (p. 121). Oxon. 1682 <here he quotes Gesner's version of the couplet, given below>.

Walsh¹² writes:

An anonymous translation of a fragmentary line of Greek attributed to Euripides: *δν θεός θέλει ἀπολέσαι πρῶτ' ἀποφρένει*. Sophocles, however, refers to it (*Antigone*, 622) as a remarkable saying of some one unknown. It appears as Maxim 911 in Publius <*sic!*> Syrus in this form: "Whom Fortune wishes to destroy she first makes mad."

Riley¹³ agrees substantially with Benham.

Stevenson¹⁴ gives this misinformation:

Whom the gods destroy, they first make mad. (*Ὁν θεός θέλει, πρῶτ' ἀποφρένει*.) Euripides, Fragment. (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 1783. Note.)

Whom God would destroy, he first makes mad. (Quem deus vult perdere, prius dementat.)

The Latin version of the Greek maxim, based probably on Euripides, though Plutarch (*De Audiend. Poet.*, 106) has preserved the adage as a fragment of Aeschylus.

Whom Jupiter would destroy, he first drives mad. (Quem Iuppiter vult perdere, dementat primus.) Sophocles, *Antigone* (Johnson, tr.)

He also cites Publilius Syrus.

Hoyt's *Cyclopedia*¹⁵ presents a minor masterpiece of confusion.

Quem Jupiter vult perdere, dementat primus. . . . Sophocles—*Antigone*. Johnson's ed. (1758) L. 632. Sophocles quotes it as a saying. The passage in *Antigone* is explained by Tricinius <*sic!*> as "The gods lead to error him whom they intend to make miserable." Quoted by Athenagoras. . . . Found in a fragment of Aeschylus preserved by Plutarch, *De Audiend. Poet.* P. 63. Oxon ed.

Reference is then made to a number of passages in various works, all, except that in Duport, more or less irrelevant.

Hill¹⁶, in his comment on Edmond Malone's note at the relevant passage of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, points out the obvious fact that the "Greek Iambick", *δν θεός θέλει ἀπολέσαι, πρῶτ' ἀποφρένει*, is not from Euripides, or even ancient; in fact, he says, it is hardly Greek at all. He quotes the passage from Barnes's Euripides, adding that the *Franciad* is probably Barnes's uncompleted poem on Edward III.

¹¹Craufurd Tait Ramage, *Familiar Quotations from Latin Authors* (London, George Routledge and Sons, Undated), 791, or *Beautiful Thoughts from Latin Authors*, 791 (London, George Routledge and Sons, 1895).

¹²William S. Walsh, *Handy-book of Literary Curiosities*, 937 (Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1893).

¹³H. T. Riley, *A Dictionary of Latin and Greek Quotations, Proverbs, Maxims and Mottoes, Classical and Mediaeval*, 363 (London, George Bell and Sons, 1888).

¹⁴Burton Stevenson, *The Home Book of Quotations*, 1231 (1232), No. 23, 1232, No. 5 (New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1934).

¹⁵Hoyt's *New Cyclopedia of Practical Quotations, Revised and Enlarged* by Kate Roberts, 397, 11 (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Co. Undated).

¹⁶Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Edited by George Birbeck Hill, 4.209, note (New York, Harper, Undated).

The passage in Duport¹⁷ is a note on Homer, *Odyssey* 23.11-13:

μάργην σε θεοὶ θέσαν, οἱ τε δύνανται
ἀφρονα ποιῆσαι καὶ ἐπιφρονά περ μάλ' ἔδντα,
καὶ τε χαλιφρονέοντα σαοφροσύνης ἐπέβεσαν.

The note, after a discussion of Biblical parallels, and a denial of Meric Casaubon's theory that Homer borrowed the sentiment from the Bible, reads as follows:

Huic porrò *Hom.* sententiae, Deum sc. sapientes & insipientes reddere, bonam mentem dare & adimere, & sapientiam inprimis esse Dei donum, passim suffragantur Autores. *Pind.* Ol. II <10> 'Ἐκ θεοῦ δ' ἀνήρ Σοφαῖς ἀνθεὶ ἔσαιε πραπίδεςσι. *Aeschyl.* Agam. <173-177> Ζῆνα—τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοῦς ὀδῶσαντα. rursus ib. <927-928> Τὸ μὴ κακῶς φρονεῖν θεοῦ μέγιστον δῶρον. *Eurip.* Supplic. <734-735> ὦ Ζεῦ, τί δῆτα τοὺς ταλαιπῶρους βροτοῦς φρονεῖν λέγουσι; Σοῦ γὰρ ἐξηγήμεθα. Contra, "Ὅταν δ' ὁ δαίμων ἀνδρὶ πορσύνη κακὰ, τὸν νοῦν ἔβλαψε πρῶτον, (Quem Jupiter vult perdere, dementat prius) h. e. solet ἀφρονα ποιῆσαι καὶ φρενοβλαβῆ.

Several facts make it clear that the Latin in parentheses at the close of the passage just quoted is not an original translation by Duport of the preceding Greek, and was not meant by Duport as a translation at all. First, although Duport does, rarely, translate Greek that he has quoted, his versions are close, are not placed in parentheses, and serve a specific purpose, made evident in each case by the context. Secondly, there are in Duport a few other instances of italicized parenthetical sentences; these are all inserted to illustrate the preceding Greek, and are always quotations. Thirdly, Duport quotes our proverb in another context where there can be no question of translation. On page 234, in note 1, a discussion of *Odyssey* 16.278-280, he writes:

Recta monenti non parere, certissimum ruinae praesagium: aded quibus exitium jam imminet et in parato est interius, ii nec nequitiae nuntium remittent, nec salutaribus consiliis obtemperabunt, οὐδὲ παύσονται, οὐδὲ πείσονται. *Quem enim perdere vult Jupiter, dementat prius.*

It is to be observed that here also Duport uses italics, his normal device for indicating that words are not his own. Clearly in both instances he is quoting by way of illustration a Latin gnome which was familiar in his day.

Barnes¹⁸, in his *Index Prior* (page 531), under the letter D, has this entry: "Deus quos vult perdere, dementat prius. *Incerta v. 436.*" *Incerta 436* (on page 515) is, of course, our familiar fragment, given thus:

ὅταν δὲ Δαίμων ἀνδρὶ πορσύνη κακὰ
τὸν νοῦν ἔβλαψε πρῶτον. . . .

Barnes translates the Greek by "At quando Numen miserias paret viro, Mens laesa primum. . . ." In his marginal note, after a number of unimportant references, he says:

Tale quid nos in *Franciados*¹⁹ nostrae l. 3.
Certe ille Deorum
Arbiter ultricem cūm vult extendere Dextram,

¹⁷James Duport, *Homeri Gnomologia Duplici Parallelismo Illustrata*, 282, note A (Cambridge, 1660).

¹⁸Euripidis Quae Extant Omnia: Opera et Studio Josuae Barnes (Cambridge, 1694).

¹⁹The *Franciad* was an unpublished epic poem by Barnes, with Edward, the Black Prince, as its central figure. Twelve books were planned, of which eight were completed. See *Biographia Britannica*, 1.493.

Dementat prius & nostri confringere vires
Consilii gaudet: Mentis temerarius ardor
Praecurrit poenas; nec enim poena est levis ipsa.

Tale quid Paterculus de Variana clade <2.118.4>.

The *Index Prior*, in which Barnes gives our proverb, is a subject-index which presents the themes of various passages of Euripides, in compact Latin, frequently in the form of familiar proverbs. Certainly Barnes did not intend this entry as a translation, or apprehend it as a translation. The translation he does offer in the text has not a single word in common with the proverb. C. Gesner, in Henricus Stephanus's edition of Athenagoras, page 116 (Geneva[?], 1557), offers a Latin translation of the Greek fragment, which resembles Barnes very slightly, and the proverb not at all:

At daemon homini quum struit aliquod malum,
Peruertit illi primitus mentem suam.

We may now attempt to find Duport's source for the proverb. Barnes perhaps drew it from Duport; he cites this very passage of Duport's *Homeri Gnomologia* in his edition of Homer. Duport studied at Westminster School under Dr. John Wilson, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, with Dr. Robert Hitch. In the Introduction to the *Homeri Gnomologia* Duport refers to Justus Lipsius, Julius Caesar Scaliger, Isaac Casaubon, Meric Casaubon, Dominicus Baudius, Claudius Salmasius, Petrus Victorius, Wolfgang Seberus, and Richard Busby. A reasonably careful inspection of the printed works (in most cases voluminous) of these men fails to reveal any thing pertinent to our inquiry. Duport frequently quotes Erasmus's *Adagia*, and he expressly mentions Erasmus's habit of 'hammering' or 'carving' Latin proverbs out of any faintly gnomic Greek quotations. But our adage is not in Erasmus. The Grammars in use at Westminster School when Duport was there were William Lily's *Latin Grammar*²⁰, and William Camden's *Greek Grammar*²¹. Neither of these works contains the proverb, although Lily uses many examples from ancient and modern Latin, nearly all of a sententious nature.

One thing is now clear, that the origin of the proverb is earlier than Duport's *Homeri Gnomologia*, how much earlier we can not say. It is later than Publilius Syrus; if we may judge from the use of *dementat*, it is at least four hundred years later. Since it conveys a non-Christian sentiment, a clerical, and hence a medieval origin is doubtful. It may well be that the tragic distich quoted at the outset of this paper had some influence upon its author; but so may any of the half dozen other Greek and Latin passages cited by the 'authorities'.

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²⁰William Lily, *Brevissima Institutio, Seu Ratio Grammatices Cognoscendae* (London, 1755).

²¹William Camden, Editor, *Institutio Graecae Grammatices Compendiaria in Usum Regiae Scholae Westmonasteriensis* (London, 1736).

Of course the editions named in this note and note 20, above, are late editions, but their Prefaces declare them to be faithfully printed from the text of the oldest editions.