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Book 3 – 521 – Apostates

Ah, lieth everything already withered and gray which but lately stood green and many-hued on this meadow! And how much honey of hope did I carry hence into my beehives!

Those young hearts have already all become old—and not old even! only weary, ordinary, comfortable—they declare it: “We have again become pious.”

Of late did I see them run forth at early morn with valorous steps: but the feet of their knowledge became weary, and now do they malign even their morning valour!

Verily, many of them once lifted their legs like the dancer; to them winked the laughter of my wisdom:—then did they bethink themselves. Just now have I seen them bent down—to creep to the cross.

Around light and liberty did they once flutter like gnats and young poets. A little older, a little colder: and already are they mystifiers, and mumblers and mollycoddles.

Did perhaps their hearts despond, because lonesomeness had swallowed me like a whale? Did their ear perhaps hearken yearningly-long for me IN VAIN, and for my trumpet-notes and herald-calls?

—Ah! Ever are there but few of those whose hearts have persistent courage and exuberance; and in such remaineth also the spirit patient. The rest, however, are COWARDLY.

The rest: these are always the great majority, the common-place, the superfluous, the far too many—those all are cowardly!—

Him who is of my type, will also the experiences of my type meet on the way: so that his first companions must be corpses and buffoons.

His second companions, however—they will call themselves his BELIEVERS,—will be a living host, with much love, much folly, much unbearded veneration.

To those believers shall he who is of my type among men not bind his heart; in those spring-times and many-hued meadows shall he not believe, who knoweth the fickle faint-hearted human species!

COULD they do otherwise, then would they also WILL otherwise. The half-and-half spoil every whole. That leaves become withered,—what is there to lament about that!

Let them go and fall away, O Zarathustra, and do not lament! Better even to blow amongst them with rustling winds,—

—Blow amongst those leaves, O Zarathustra, that everything WITHERED may run away from thee the faster!—

2.

“We have again become pious”—so do those apostates confess; and some of them are still too pusillanimous thus to confess.

Unto them I look into the eye,—before them I say it unto their face and unto the blush on their cheeks: Ye are those who again PRAY!

It is however a shame to pray! Not for all, but for thee, and me, and whoever hath his conscience in his head. For THEE it is a shame to pray!

Thou knowest it well: the faint-hearted devil in thee, which would fain fold its arms, and place its hands in its bosom, and take it easier:—this faint-hearted devil persuadeth thee that “there IS a God!”

THEREBY, however, dost thou belong to the light-dreading type, to whom light never permitteth repose: now must thou daily thrust thy head deeper into obscurity and vapour!

And verily, thou chooseth the hour well: for just now do the nocturnal birds again fly abroad. The hour hath come for all light-dreading people, the vesper hour and leisure hour, when they do not —“take leisure.”

I hear it and smell it: it hath come—their hour for hunt and procession, not indeed for a wild hunt, but for a tame, lame, snuffling, soft-treaders’, soft-prayers’ hunt,—

—For a hunt after susceptible simpletons: all mouse-traps for the heart have again been set! And whenever I lift a curtain, a night-moth rusheth out of it.

Did it perhaps squat there along with another night-moth? For everywhere do I smell small concealed communities; and wherever there are closets there are new devotees therein, and the atmosphere of devotees.

They sit for long evenings beside one another, and say: “Let us again become like little children and say, ‘good God!’”—ruined in mouths and stomachs by the pious confectioners.

Or they look for long evenings at a crafty, lurking cross-spider, that preacheth prudence to the spiders themselves, and teacheth that “under crosses it is good for cobweb-spinning!”

Or they sit all day at swamps with angle-rods, and on that account think themselves PROFOUND; but whoever fisheth where there are no fish, I do not even call him superficial!

Or they learn in godly-gay style to play the harp with a hymn-poet, who would fain harp himself into the heart of young girls:—for he hath tired of old girls and their praises.

Or they learn to shudder with a learned semi-madcap, who waiteth in darkened rooms for spirits to come to him—and the spirit runneth away entirely!

Or they listen to an old roving howl- and growl-piper, who hath learnt from the sad winds the sadness of sounds; now pipeth he as the wind, and preacheth sadness in sad strains.

And some of them have even become night-watchmen: they know now how to blow horns, and go about at night and awaken old things which have long fallen asleep.

Five words about old things did I hear yester-night at the garden-wall: they came from such old, sorrowful, arid night-watchmen.

“For a father he careth not sufficiently for his children: human fathers do this better!”—

“He is too old! He now careth no more for his children,”—answered the other night-watchman.

“HATH he then children? No one can prove it unless he himself prove it! I have long wished that he would for once prove it thoroughly.”

“Prove? As if HE had ever proved anything! Proving is difficult to him; he layeth great stress on one’s BELIEVING him.”

“Ay! Ay! Belief saveth him; belief in him. That is the way with old people! So it is with us also!”—

—Thus spake to each other the two old night-watchmen and light-scarers, and tooted thereupon sorrowfully on their horns: so did it happen yester-night at the garden-wall.

To me, however, did the heart writhe with laughter, and was like to break; it knew not where to go, and sunk into the midriff.

Verily, it will be my death yet—to choke with laughter when I see asses drunken, and hear night-watchmen thus doubt about God.

Hath the time not LONG since passed for all such doubts? Who may nowadays awaken such old slumbering, light-shunning things!

With the old Deities hath it long since come to an end:—and verily, a good joyful Deity-end had they!

They did not “begloom” themselves to death—that do people fabricate! On the contrary, they—
LAUGHED themselves to death once on a time!

That took place when the unGodliest utterance came from a God himself—the utterance: “There is but one God! Thou shalt have no other Gods before me!”—

—An old grim-beard of a God, a jealous one, forgot himself in such wise:—

And all the Gods then laughed, and shook upon their thrones, and exclaimed: “Is it not just divinity that there are Gods, but no God?”

He that hath an ear let him hear.—

Thus talked Zarathustra in the city he loved, which is surnamed “The Pied Cow.” For from here he had but two days to travel to reach once more his cave and his animals; his soul, however, rejoiced unceasingly on account of the nighness of his return home.

Begin summary

Ah, lieth everything already withered and grey which but lately stood green and many-hued on this meadow! And how much honey of hope did I carry hence into my beehives!

We know later that he is addressing the residents about the higher men he left in Pied Cow but the beginning we are eavesdropping. Not knowing who he is speaking to and where. We can assume that it is in autumn in more ways than one. The second sentence is stretching the metaphor from the prologue to the breaking point. Remember that he claimed he was like a bee who had too much honey, here he implies that he brought honey to a beehive. Perhaps suggesting that he saw himself as more as the bee who taught the other bees to gather honey by showing them honey, showing them what was possible. This would match what he said earlier how he was the herald of the ubermensch not the ubermensch.

The fact that we do not know where this is happening in the first sentence is very unusual for section 3, later on who he is addressing will change as well. The effect is a bewilderment on the reader matching the bewilderment of Zarathustra on seeing his higher men lapse.

Additionally there are some structure similarities between here and Ecclesiastes. The lack of context and the shifting of who is being address and the mournful tone.

Next line

Those young hearts have already all become old—and not old even! only weary, ordinary, comfortable:—they declare it: “We have again become pious.”

he sees his former followers have achieved all the flaws of the elderly with none of the positives. Having been set free by Zarathustra’s speeches they have retreated back into mediocrity of

religion and comfort. Pay heed to the word choices here. They have grown old, not that they have grown. They have again become pious. The phrasing is inversion of our normal virtues that rank pious as higher. The higher men have become pious like an addict relapsing. Next line

Of late did I see them run forth at early morn with valorous steps: but the feet of their knowledge became weary, and now do they malign even their morning valour!

Before the higher men were bold but they grew tired and presently they even hate what they were. Subtle shifting metaphors from seasons, to age, to human movement. The section is titled Apostates another word for heresy. Indicating that the higher men of Pied Cow have committed heresy against what Zarathustra laid down. In this passage the feet of knowledge, the understanding Zarathustra has given them, has not made them stronger it has made them weaker. Or rather they allowed it to make them weaker. And now they malign what they once were. Praising their new weakness as being superior to their former strength. Strength is not weakness, to say otherwise is heresy to Zarathustra. Next line

Verily, many of them once lifted their legs like the dancer; to them winked the laughter of my wisdom:—then did they bethink themselves. Just now have I seen them bent down—to creep to the cross.

Echoing back to the Prologue where Zarathustra we are told moves like a dancer. The implication here is that even with the weight of his wisdom on their feet their strength was such that they moved with fluid grace. They danced to the music of play, the height of the 3 stages. Then it came down. They bethinked. What is normally useful, reflection became in this case crippling. Bringing them back to the herd of conformity. Now they no longer dance upright free they creep low down bent groveling in submission to religion. Next line.

Around light and liberty did they once flutter like gnats and young poets. A little older, a little colder: and already are they mystifiers, and mumblers and mollycoddles.

Gnats make a big show of buzzing around but are gone in a day. Young poets invoke images of people who can articulate beauty without depth due to inexperience. Leaning towards the idea that the author is warning us to not think just getting a brand new toy of an idea means you have mastered it, absorbed it, made it your own. Fast to pickup and fast to put down. The slightest strain, natural aging and the weather, and they regressed to their pre-zarathustra state. Mystifiers using vague ideas to make the simple difficult, mumblers speaking their prayers and mollycoddles the spoiled. Of note Zarathustra uses parables all of the time so you may wonder what the difference is. The corrupted higher men now speak in parables and so does he. The difference is Zarathustra speaks for the life-affirming, the dangerous, the demanding. The mystifiers speak evasively, wearily, and cowardly. One speaks to uplift and one speaks out of cowardice.

there is also something thematic going on. He keeps throwing metaphors/similes up. Autumn, bees, age, body movement, gnats, poets. could almost swear he is getting worked up and

throwing analogies at the problem hoping if he can find one that fits he can get a handle on the situation. Next line

Did perhaps their hearts despond, because lonesomeness had swallowed me like a whale? Did their ear perhaps hearken yearningly-long for me IN VAIN, and for my trumpet-notes and herald-calls?

A moment of doubt for Zarathustra. Maybe it is his fault. Where did the sin come from? He wasn't there. They yearned for him to return and he did not in time. The allusions are multiple with this short passage. Moses goes up the mountain and the sin of the golden calf, Jonah obviously, even Jesus to a degree in that he is to return and set things right, perhaps a reference to what the hermit said in the beginning to him "As in the sea hast thou lived in solitude ". Which would all add to the bitterness of the situation. Zarathustra points the way he does not want to lead to the way yet unsupervised the higher men relapse. And Zarathustra mission is not only a failure but his own life is a repeating failure. Next line

—Ah! Ever are there but few of those whose hearts have persistent courage and exuberance; and in such remaineth also the spirit patient. The rest, however, are COWARDLY.

It would seem persistent courage is the hinge virtue not doctrine purity that causes apostates. The Ah is a mark of resignation and discovery. He has shown them the way to freedom, they tasted it, they were terrified, they went back. Yet there are still a minority within a minority with some courage. Next line

The rest: these are always the great majority, the common-place, the superfluous, the far too many—those all are cowardly!—

just repeating himself, very un-Zarathustra. He normally makes each sentence count and shock. Here he is not only repeating himself across the sentences but within in it. Clearly this offense has rattled him. Next line

Him who is of my type, will also the experiences of my type meet on the way: so that his first companions must be corpses and buffoons.

Well here is some whiplash. Zarathustra goes from lamenting particulars to prophecy and memory. Someone like him is going to fail at first, he will attract the heavy spiritually cold unable to grow but non-resisting dead and the full of potential and active hostility of the buffoon. Also touches on the Prologue and how appropriate it happened in the same town. Next line

His second companions, however—they will call themselves his BELIEVERS,—will be a living host, with much love, much folly, much unbearded veneration.

After death and mockery you get the naive crowd. Their love is real but their maturity is not. Next line,

To those believers shall he who is of my type among men not bind his heart; in those spring-times and many-hued meadows shall he not believe, who knoweth the fickle faint-hearted human species!

Youth is all fireworks. To all would be prophets don't mistake fireworks for fuel. Next line, COULD they do otherwise, then would they also WILL otherwise. The half-and-half spoil every whole. That leaves become withered,—what is there to lament about that!

First way to understand this is just a statement of realism. They just do not have the courage to hold the Zarathustran view of life. The result is the movement non-movement is better off without them. There is no reason to mourn someone who causes more problems than they are worth no longer causing problems.

Second way to understand is the biblical passages they echo. Jonah lamenting the death of the tree after the city was spared, and Jesus repeated reminders that half faith is actually worse than none.

Also think there is a third component. If they could they will, it is FOMO. The immaturity of his followers are such that whatever is presented as an option is what they want. Next line,

Let them go and fall away, O Zarathustra, and do not lament! Better even to blow amongst them with rustling winds,—

like Ecclesiastes we see here Zarathustra making peace with the natural turn of events. Leaves wither and are scattered by the wind, such is the nature of autumn. Connection to Ecclesiastes 1:6 where the wind return according to its circuits. The prophet changed from speaking to others to addressing himself. The shifting tone perhaps suggests that the advice is to reader who assumes his role one day. We can think of the previous section and his advice about releasing resentment. Notice that Zarathustra still thinks some good came out of it. The leaves didn't just fall, he rustled them. Next line,

—Blow amongst those leaves, O Zarathustra, that everything WITHERED may run away from thee the faster!—

Connects well with the previous line. He is getting himself pumped that the more he speaks the more those not of his kind will flee. A variation of Isaiah 40:7-8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever. This concludes the prophets first lament in this section the next line,

“We have again become pious”—so do those apostates confess; and some of them are still too pusillanimous thus to confess.

Tricky line. We saw in the first lament that the apostates declared their relapse. He grasped it, he let the emotions wash over him, he made a plan of action, and he YES again it. Now he appears to be circling back. This is really not like him. He moves forward, he says only a few words with great power, now however he is ranting and raving. The trick is on the word difference. Before they “declared” it, now they “confess” it. This whole incident has deeply rattled the man and he needs to address it on multiple angles. As for the line directly some of them confess that they are cowards, some of them are so cowardly they wont even own it. Next line,

Unto them I look into the eye,—before them I say it unto their face and unto the blush on their cheeks: Ye are those who again PRAY!

Not being subtle here. They might be cowards but Zarathustra is not. He looks into them and throws it at them. They pray? Of all the people they pray? No metaphor, no parable, just a straight angry declaration of what they did. A teacher reduced to scolding. Zarathustra rarely condemns, he chooses to uplift but here he is fed up. Perhaps slight connection to Elijah Kings 1:18

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

His students were wavering between the two options. Live on earth, or grovel to their previous god. Next line,

It is however a shame to pray! Not for all, but for thee, and me, and whoever hath his conscience in his head. For THEE it is a shame to pray!

In German the structure is a bit clearer. Three people are singled out Zarathustra himself, his student, and anyone else who knows better. Might be connected to Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. In any case here we see Zarathustra at the peak of his elitism. Prayer for the herd? Not his concern. Prayer for those who have heard his words? A shameful disgrace that he is having difficulty processing.

Imagine the anguish you would feel watching someone you respect have to grovel to an employer, or client, or customer, or a government official, or anyone with the smallest power. Seeing the strong bending the knee, you would want to shake them. Tell them that it is not needed, remind them of their strength. The apostates bent the knee to a phantom, a product of human fears. This is why Zarathustra shakes with rage. Strength shall not knell to weakness. Next line,

Thou knowest it well: the faint-hearted devil in thee, which would fain fold its arms, and place its hands in its bosom, and take it easier:—this faint-hearted devil persuadeth thee that “there IS a God!”

breaking it up. “thou knowest it well” means you can not excuse it with ignorance. “the faint-hearted devil” the voice in your head that isn’t a screaming raging rebel against god, the devil of being scared and lazy. “in thee”. Not supernatural, not even external, in you. Together Zarathustra is saying you know you have a voice in your head willing you to comfort and terror. “which would fain fold its arms”. i.e. the prayer position “place its hands in its bosom”. Echoing of Paul telling us that knowledge of god is written in our hearts. “and take it easier”. No more overcoming and striving. “this faint-hearted devil persuadeth thee that “there is a god”. This thing, this nothing, this voice in your head that talks from its fear and weakness actually convinced you that an actual god exists? Even if a god did what would this voice know of it? It knows fear and confusion and how to grovel, it would know nothing of metaphysics. The rest of the line is a classic Zarathustra reversal. The devil tempts you to not follow god, this devil tempts you to follow god. While religion teaches us that the voice leads us to god, Zarathustra reveals the voice to be our cowardice. Next line,

THEREBY, however, dost thou belong to the light-dreading type, to whom light never permitteth repose: now must thou daily thrust thy head deeper into obscurity and vapour!

Light = truth, you have to avoid truth. If you are faced with it you cant rest in it. And every day you have to shove your head deeper and deeper into what isn’t real and what doesn’t make sense. The imagery here is Plato. The light hides nothing and reveals everything. Fog isn’t water or air it looks solid but it is fluid.

It is more explicit in the original German. The you in the last sentence. Implying that for people Zarathustra has not saved they can just stay where they are in terms of faith, but the ones he has set free have to go deeper into the fog and contradictions and weak ideas if they return. Once you have tasted truth of the light you will have to go even deeper into the cave. Once you are unchained from the Plato Cave and see the sun you only go back to unchain others you ought not to hide in the darkest part of the cave. Next line,

And verily, thou chooseth the hour well: for just now do the nocturnal birds again fly abroad. The hour hath come for all light-dreading people, the vesper hour and leisure hour, when they do not —“take leisure.”

God died, thus that particular sun has set. It is at that moment, in the setting of the sun of faith that the higher men crawled back to it. The line is dripping with sarcasm and followed by sardonic. The imagery is of birds that are afraid of light now able to flourish in the darkness. The types of religion that actually do better after religion has failed.

In Germany at the time families would gather in prayer and bible reading in the evening during leisure hour, and monks for vesper. He is sardonically implying that they should hide from truth with those using piety as a shield.

Roughly equivalent to a parent yelling at this child who dropped out the week before graduation “now of all times, you choose now to drop out!? Fine drop out! Go hang out with your idiot friends!”. Again this isn’t the normal Zarathustra, this incident has shaken him to his core. Next line,

I hear it and smell it: it hath come—their hour for hunt and procession, not indeed for a wild hunt, but for a tame, lame, snuffling, soft-treaders’, soft-prayers’ hunt,—

Speaking now of the local shamans. First observation, like in section 51 Passing By, the senses are now being assaulted. He sees the fog and nocturnal birds, he smells the hunt, he hears them. The hunt has the promise of meat but not a hunt for souls, food denied. Second observation the wild hunt is from German folk mythology. A conclave of demons hunting party who if a mortal saw would either be killed or abducted by them. The implication is that they aren’t hunting like demigods. They are hunting with small careful steps, they are terrified, and seeking souls to save with soft prayers. Next line,

—For a hunt after susceptible simpletons: all mouse-traps for the heart have again been set! And whenever I lift a curtain, a night-moth rusheth out of it.

The shamans are like predators in the wild, they go after the animals they think are weakest. He could almost respect a shaman that went up to him and vowed to save his soul or die trying. Cause that would be making danger his profession. These

Zarathustra is implying here getting abducted by a the cast of the movie Heavy Metal has some nobility in it. You didn’t stand a chance against demigods. There is no shame in losing to that thing with chainsaw arms. But getting abducted by a priest in the twilight of their faith? That is like getting killed in the tutorial level by a 4 year old. You lost to nothing.

Moving slowly through the sentence “for a hunt after susceptible simpletons” i.e. they go after those who are already unable to defend their values. “All mouse-traps” a hunter risks, they could be hurt, the shamans lay a trap. Not even a bear trap, a mouse trap. They don’t seek larger powerful prey. “for the heart have again been set”. They go after your emotions, confession, love, belonging, shame. “and whenever I lift a curtain” whenever Zarathustra shines light into darkness. “a night-moth rusheth out of it”. Here he finds another pious type. It is funny and disgusting. Funny as in slapstick a bug flying out of the curtain is the gag, disgusting like an insect infestation where the more you look, the more of them you find.

Really sharpening his critic of religion here. How he believed it preyed on the downtrodden of society and united them in resentment. The shamans hunt for who could never be a threat and bait their trap. Next line,

Did it perhaps squat there along with another night-moth? For everywhere do I smell small concealed communities; and wherever there are closets there are new devotees therein, and the atmosphere of devotees.

Continuing the insect metaphor. Religion doesn't spread like fire it spreads like an infestation, hidden from the light of truth. It doesn't just remain a private practice it changes the entire environment it is in. The hopeless frustration of a roach bedbug infestation. Not a wild animal that can just be dealt with, the grind of weak but numerous foe that creeps and crawls scurries and hides. It is not even worth the fight needed. Next line,

They sit for long evenings beside one another, and say: "Let us again become like little children and say, 'good God!'"—ruined in mouths and stomachs by the pious confectioners.

A romantic relationship that has gone sour. One of the couple suggests that we go back to the way things used to be, the other responds that they do not want to live in the past. Except the response wasn't here this time. One can imagine the higher men sitting together in the evening, passive not creating, depressed about Zarathustra not returning. They suggest to themselves can we just not go back? To the before-times, before Zarathustra came and spoke to us? We can become like children again and enter into the kingdom of god. The result of walking away from real food? Having their appetite spoiled with candy. The bible praises childlike faith, Zarathustra exposes prayer as junk food and religion as childishness. Next line,

Or they look for long evenings at a crafty, lurking cross-spider, that preacheth prudence to the spiders themselves, and teacheth that "under crosses it is good for cobweb-spinning!"

We begin with an exclusive OR. The higher men who reverted to children are already addressed. This is the other group. This group looks to spend much time with a lurking cross-spider. A common insect in Germany. With the cross being a reference to the church as well. The pious church leader preaches prudence to others of its kind. A circle, lecturing without real students. What does it preach? Prudence. Not daring, not being tough, not being strong, or bold. It preaches prudence. The next part the grammar gets tricky and it is quite possible the author meant it this way. "and teacheth". Whom does it teacheth? The beginning of the sentence it describes the highermen downfall the middle it says what the shamans teach one another. Is the "and teacheth" to the highermen or to other shamans?

With the assumption that it teaches other spiders it is implying that this method of attack. Of laying traps for the small minded is easy to do under the cross. A pure self-motivated means of an end. You want followers who can not resist you? Under the cross you can thrive at that.

With the assumption that it teaches the higher men a startling result appears. The author is suggesting that this is the last card organized religion has to play. The bad arguments didn't work, the love didn't work, the fear didn't work. Religion has met their strongest foe. Someone who wants to build not be enchanted, suffocated, or soothed. Fine religion says, you want to build. Tell me my child, when have you seen a spider web in the air? Have you always seen the

intricate webs attached to a support of some sort? Build under our watchful eye. We will support you. It seems Zarathustra was aware of the presupposition argument for god. Next line,

Or they sit all day at swamps with angle-rods, and on that account think themselves
PROFOUND; but whoever fisheth where there are no fish, I do not even call him superficial!

Reference to his aphorism that metaphysical truths aren't even superficial. A superficial statement covers only the surface but a swamp surface is vague and covered with scum. Reference also to Jesus calling on his followers to be fishers of men. An angle rod is for fishing fish, something you can eat. In a swamp all you are getting are toads leaches and other inedibles. In the previous section he called the stew of resentment of the Great City a swamp. As a whole this paints a rather absurd image of the priestly class.

They might have the right tools but it is the wrong job. They are looking for men but instead find toads, thinking themselves clever for buying the best tool. Indicating that even if Z grants the wisdom of what they say their method is flawed. In the previous sentences he indicates that the priests are successful in catching people now he is saying "oh yes they catch things, but not fish". Next line,

Or they learn in godly-gay style to play the harp with a hymn-poet, who would fain harp himself
into the heart of young girls:—for he hath tired of old girls and their praises.

At glance it seems to be saying the obvious. Some rereading there are more ways to understand it.

First an air of physical seduction here. A bit of how the youth are tempted away by the saccharine sweetness of religion. Not religion as it is, not Jesus and Paul demanding celibacy and to live in sackcloth barefoot. Jesus loving the little children religion.

Second, there is an argument that whenever you see women or girl in this book you should try putting the word wisdom in its place and see if the sentence still works. With this you get the idea that the priests are tired of telling people endless retellings of Jesus. So they do a sermon "what would Jesus do for [insert topical issue]". They are trying to be relevant not be being this towering thing the world must grapple with, but by finding an inroad into the new thing. It is parasitic, reactive, not creative and value creating. It is a reach but it does hold since earlier in the section Zarathustra talks about youth being all fireworks and no fuel. If the wisdom equals girls then the priests are chasing the new without depth pretty thing instead of the older deep ones.

Third a bit of a deal with the devil thing here. Religion teaming up with the musicians. It gets converts, the musicians get their pick of the pews. Every wheels gets its grease.

Next line,

Or they learn to shudder with a learned semi-madcap, who waiteth in darkened rooms for spirits to come to him—and the spirit runneth away entirely!

seances religious figures attending sessions hoping to speak to ghosts. Rising in popularity in the time of this book. Still there are layers to be read here. Spirit in English has the same multiple meanings as it does in German. Spirit can mean ghosts and it can mean mind. With that understanding its true on two levels. They are trying to summon spirits but the spirits aren't having it. Yes N is an atheist but he could still make ghost jokes. But Spirit is also Giest. So these priests basically didn't live up to their own standards of intellectual rigor or beliefs. My overall view of this scene is some religious figure desperate to feel something. The spiritual bug is there but its not clicking. So he goes visit some modern Witch of Endor. and learns the nonsense. And the respectable parts of his brain sees that and says "yeah I am out".

There is also a play on slight scene setting here. Light is wisdom it exposes what is hidden, darkness is when the sun has set. These priests are doubly ignorant, not only inside with artificial light, it is artificial light that was dimmed.

Also of note is the “learn to shudder”. Implying that they do not shudder out of transcendence as a natural reaction but out of imitation. Inauthentic awe. And why should they not? There is nothing real there so of course they must play at it and pretend there is more depth than there is.

Next line,

Or they listen to an old roving howl- and growl-piper, who hath learnt from the sad winds the sadness of sounds; now pipeth he as the wind, and preacheth sadness in sad strains.

Zarathustra seems to be addressing the apostates here no longer the religious leadership. It could be an author mistake but I think he is borrowing the OT prophet form of addressing multiple groups with a single word “Hear oh Israel!”. Is he talking about the priests, or the kings, or the householders, or the shepherds, or the merchants? He is talking to anyone this applies to. This sentence points to the Apostates it is doubtful that some powerful Bishop would be much moved by a sad bar song when their faithful sing weekly in harmony. The repeated changes from whose being addressed also has a confusing effect. No longer a simple chain of predation, a web. The priests and the devout and the apostate and the soothsayers and the musicians all bunched together. All ruling and all serving, all.

The apostate have backslid into hearing something that sounds sad and taking it in as sad. Mistaking melancholy for depth. One might picture being a teenager again and hearing a popular love song and thinking it is the highest expression of human love ever put to music.

The piper is portrayed as a pathetic figure. No longer young and traveling and playing with new songs. Worn out playing the 3 tunes he knows by heart. Next line,

And some of them have even become night-watchmen: they know now how to blow horns, and go about at night and awaken old things which have long fallen asleep.

Picture the former lapsed or the born non-affiliated feeling they must earn their place by being more religious than the pious. Night-watchmen not warriors, knowing how to blow their safety whistle. Zarathustra could respect an old school priest sword in one hand and holy water in the other, ready to die fighting the demons of his world, but not a night-watchman religious. Not someone who decides to start bringing up long settled theological concerns and calls out the imperfections of the flock. Next line,

Five words about old things did I hear yester-night at the garden-wall: they came from such old, sorrowful, arid night-watchmen.

Five words, possible allusion to 1 Corinthians 14:19 where Paul says he would rather speak five intelligible words than ten thousand in a tongue, more likely translation error and should be “five utterances”, given that 5 sentences take place in this scene. In any case he is recalling an example of the lapsed last night at the garden-wall. This is very likely allegorical with the garden-wall meaning the border between where they were and him and where they are now. Old sorrowful and dried out. The elderly who are done with life. Next line,

“For a father he careth not sufficiently for his children: human fathers do this better!”—

At the garden wall, at the borderlands of faith and atheism, they privately doubt and turn over the narrative. Not in clear day but at night, a hidden shameful thing amongst those who fake the most religious conviction. Their god is not a perfected being they seek to unite with their father provides, a petty bourgeois complaint not a fiery atheism claim. Skydaddy doesn’t kiss boo boos. Next line,

“He is too old! He now careth no more for his children,”—answered the other night-watchman.

Theology reduced to gossip. While leaders of the Christians once proclaimed that god is love these half-faithful gossip about their god diminishing capabilities. They wont do the sensible thing and understand that their god has died, they have grown attach to him, even if he can no longer even summon the impotent desire to care for them. Next line,

“HATH he then children? No one can prove it unless he himself prove it! I have long wished that he would for once prove it thoroughly.”

does he have children? Are there actually followers of the Christian god on earth? No one can know this for sure except for him. So the apostate wishes for the proof so children can exist. Slight change of tone, the previous two apologized for god this one says the neglect is justified on lack of faith, but can easily be corrected. Next line,

“Prove? As if HE had ever proved anything! Proving is difficult to him; he layeth great stress on one’s BELIEVING him.”

You want god to prove himself so he will have children? That is a challenge for him, he survives on belief not on proof. Notice the various deflections. God would have more faithful if he would show himself, evidence would remove doubt. Rather than addressing it belief is held up as a virtue instead, next line

“Ay! Ay! Belief saveth him; belief in him. That is the way with old people! So it is with us also!”—

with nothing else to point to this god depends on his last weapon, his reputation. The 5th line is the punchline to the joke. God doesn't care about his followers, God has grown to old to even care about his followers, we aren't even sure if he has followers anymore he would if he made evidence, he never produces evidence, he depends on reputation. This is not a dead god or a live god, this is a god on its last legs. And this is what the apostates forsake him for! Next line,

—Thus spake to each other the two old night-watchmen and light-scarers, and tooted thereupon sorrowfully on their horns: so did it happen yester-night at the garden-wall.

Light-scarers, scarecrows against and afraid of the light. They try to stop the light dawning across the world by pretending courage knowing fear is what motivates them. As both they and the nightwatchman of faith blow their horns sadly. These are not the righteous proclaiming the good news or the horns of the OT that once tore down walls, this is a sad puff. The meeting doesn't end with a plan of action or even a real clarification of what is going on, the meeting might as well not have happened. No lets go team rah rah, just a rehash of the old doubts and counters. It is powerlessness. And the scene ends not with a bang but with a whisper. Next line,

To me, however, did the heart writhe with laughter, and was like to break; it knew not where to go, and sunk into the midriff.

Plain-reading. Zarathustra finds the ceremony of complaint ending with a sad toot of the horn hilarious. As if the ceremony was worth even that. Next line,

Verily, it will be my death yet—to choke with laughter when I see asses drunken, and hear night-watchmen thus doubt about God.

There is a small undercurrent here. Saying it will be my death yet implies that this stuff is not just nonsense, and funny nonsense for how seriously it is taken, but it can literally get you killed. The people afraid of the progress of the world are not thinking straight and the guardians of faith are having doubts. Not a great combination to be around some people who are afraid and other people desperate to prove themselves. Its funny and you can laugh, but sticking around can get you hurt. Next line,

Hath the time not LONG since passed for all such doubts? Who may nowadays awaken such old slumbering, light-shunning things!

Even now in this day and time we are still arguing about this? Its absurd! God is dead and you are engaging with apologetics within the framework that he is a given. Earlier we discussed how it isn't clear who Zarathustra is addressing concluding that every sentence should be understood that it applies to you or it does not. If it doesn't read the next and see if you see yourself in that one. A very later OT manner of speaking. This one applies to the atheist who is still willing to debate theology. Next line,

With the old Deities hath it long since come to an end:—and verily, a good joyful Deity-end had they!

We aren't arguing about the theology of Zeus anymore. And we begin the short fable of the death of the other gods by starting with a description of their death. They died well, a possible connection to the Greek concept of the importance of a good death. The old gods had a clean end. The christian god has this half-hearted apologetics. The difference between getting knocked down in your prime and lingering until you became embarrassing. Next line,

They did not “begloom” themselves to death—that do people fabricate! On the contrary, they—LAUGHED themselves to death once on a time!

Been said that the typical way Christianity viewed paganism was joyless idol worship, this is the line that Zarathustra mocks and states the opposite in the parable. The pagan gods laughed to death not cried. Next line,

That took place when the unGodliest utterance came from a God himself—the utterance: “There is but one God! Thou shalt have no other Gods before me!”—

Author is taking poetic liberties here, the announcement of having no other gods and the denying the existing of other gods is far apart in the bible and in history. The flipping is that monotheism is usually seen as more godly, but Zarathustra argues that it is less. The old pagan gods showered the world with events and feeling and rivalries, the new god wasn't overflow. The new god demanded absolute loyalty and wasn't even that interesting. The misery nature of it was ungodly. And by denying the existences of his fellow creator gods it cut itself off from the source of strength. What god would do that? Is it not the least god like thing a being could do seek to live in a universe where no one is its equal? That is the act of a human who will allow no rivals not a superior being. Next line,

—An old grim-beard of a God, a jealous one, forgot himself in such wise:—

In such wise is an older idiom that means in such ways. The elderly sky father of the bible messed up and by denying the existence of his equals and fellows cut itself off from the divinity itself. Perhaps you can imagine a person whose art suffers because they consider themselves the only real artist in existence. Next line.

And all the Gods then laughed, and shook upon their thrones, and exclaimed: "Is it not just divinity that there are Gods, but no God?"

It is an awkward to translate part. He is saying isn't it the nature of the divine the existence of multiple gods vs one singular god? Truth is slippery and multifaceted, morality is flexible, growth and change are the norm with static perfection a transient exception. If our world is made in shadow of the divine wouldn't it be the case that this held even more up there? The absurdity of the thought of the bible god that there was one singular perfection caused the rest of the gods to laugh until they no longer existed. The parable has dark Greek turn, the prophecy was self-fulfilling. Next line,

He that hath an ear let him hear.—

there are multiple allusions in the bible here, quite possibly all of them are what is meant. Revelations deals with heresy, Mark uses this line to explain why Jesus talks in parables, Matthew uses this line at the end of the parable of the sower and as reference to Isaiah. The prophet with this manner of speaking to everyone and no one at once. The first sentence doesn't tell us when and where this is occurring, we have to read until the end to know. Only example of this in section 3. Zarathustra changes who he is addressing in the middle, from anyone who will listen to his apostles when he says it is a disgrace to pray. Next line,

Thus talked Zarathustra in the city he loved, which is surnamed "The Pied Cow." For from here he had but two days to travel to reach once more his cave and his animals; his soul, however, rejoiced unceasingly on account of the nighness of his return home.

it says in the end that "Thus talked Zarathustra in the city he loved, " this is the key. He was in the city complaining about the fall of the higher men he had left. It is almost like this is hitting him so hard he is doing a diet version of what the fool was doing in section 51. Ranting and raving and repeating himself. Struggling to articulate how bad the fall was except in the very end he rejoices that he is leaving to be alone. He doesn't do what the fool does. He was thrown in a worst situation than the fool. Presumably the city was already bad, the fool came, he ranted. Zarathustra came to a mediocre village, built something, it got corrupted. He rants but leaves. The fool curses in place while Zarathustra curses on the way out. And still can muster love for it.

Pied Cow is the city we encountered first in the Prologue. Echoing how the Buddha keeps returning to Jeta's Grove (Jetavana) near the city of Sāvathī.

Both are little towns that anchor the sage's movement between being alone or being near alone or with the crowd. Both are points on the spiral. The sage wanders and spirals back to the point. Both show the difference between lofty ideas and ordinary ears to hear them.

The two days journey is perhaps a reference to the 3 days of the Easter Miracle, but without the resurrection. Jesus was betrayed and traveled to the afterlife alone, Zarathustra was betrayed and traveled to his cave alone.

End of Book 3 Section 52.