

LION OF EPICURUS



Lucian and his Epicurean Passages

Cassius Amicus

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My object, dear friend, in making this small selection from a great mass of material has been twofold. First, I was willing to oblige a friend and comrade who is for me the pattern of



wisdom, sincerity, good humor, justice, tranquillity, and geniality. But secondly I was still more concerned (a preference which you will be very far from resenting) to strike a blow for Epicurus, that great man whose holiness and divinity of nature were not shams, who alone had and imparted true insight into the good, and who brought deliverance to all that consorted with him. Yet I think casual readers too may find my essay not unserviceable, since it is not only destructive, but, for men of sense, constructive also.

Lucian – Alexander The Oracle-Monger



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Lucian: Lion of Epicurus



There is a story that some sculptor, Phidias, I think, seeing a single claw, calculated from it the size of the lion, if it were modeled proportionally. So, if some one were to let you see a man's hand, keeping the rest of his body concealed, you would know at once that what was behind was a man, without seeing his whole body. ...

Well, but tell me; when Phidias saw the claw, would he ever have known it for a lion's if he had never seen a lion? Could you have said the hand was a man's, if you had never known or seen a man? Why are you dumb? Let me make the only possible answer for you—that you could not; I am afraid Phidias has modeled his lion all for nothing; for it proves to be neither here nor there. What resemblance is there? What enabled you and Phidias to recognize the parts was just your knowledge of the wholes—the lion and the man. But in philosophy—the Stoic, for instance—how will the part reveal the other parts to you, or how can you conclude that they are beautiful? You do not know the whole to which the parts belong.

Lucian – [from Hermotimus, Or, The Rival Philosophies](#)

Lucian of Samosata lived from about 125 AD to 180 AD, and during that time he traveled throughout the Greek and Roman world, producing a body of commentary of such wit and insight that his fame has lasted for almost two thousand years. Although Lucian's reputation is well known today, he is generally considered a "skeptic" whose trademark was wholly satire and other negative commentary. Such a view holds that Lucian offered little if anything that was positive in the place of the hypocrisy he criticized.

It is one point of this book to assert that this view is false: Lucian is viewed today purely as critic because the unifying thread of his criticisms is very difficult for the modern reader to identify. This difficulty in turn stems from the fact that the pattern of thought which unifies Lucian's work has been the target of two thousand years of misrepresentation, which has succeeded so well that his point of view can hardly be recognized today. As the works included here will illustrate, that point of view – that unifying thread – that pattern of thought – is **Epicureanism**.

In contrast to the body of work of another famous ancient writer, Lucretius, whose entire literary output seems to have been devoted to the promotion of Epicureanism, history has preserved a wide variety of Lucian's works on subjects other than philosophy and religion. In part because he trained his satirical skills on so many different subjects, it is an easy error to consider Lucian as a professional skeptic who was equally cynical on every topic.

But this is not so – Lucian was **not** equally cynical about every topic. In order to see this, however, we must first arm ourselves with a basic knowledge of competing views of the time, and of a school that has almost been lost to history. Only then can we see that there is one school, and one philosopher, whose arguments Lucian adopts and whose founder Lucian praises; the school of **Epicurus**.

Throughout Lucian's work, the classic enemies of the Epicureans – the Platonists, the Stoics, the Academics, and others – are the prime targets of his biting words. But Epicurus himself is never treated with less than courtesy, and rarely if ever is a later Epicurean a target of derision.

In general, Lucian refers to Epicurus in tones that can only be described as reverential, such in the following passage from [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#):

In this connection Alexander once made himself supremely ridiculous. Coming across Epicurus's Accepted Maxims, the most admirable of his books, as you know, with its terse presentment of his wise conclusions, he brought it into the middle of the market-place, there burned it on a fig-wood fire for the sins of its author, and cast its ashes into the sea. He issued an oracle on the occasion: "The dotard's maxims to the flames be given."

The fellow had no conception of the blessings conferred by that book upon its readers, of the peace, tranquillity, and independence of mind it produces, of the protection it gives against terrors, phantoms, and marvels, vain hopes and inordinate desires, of the judgment and candor that it fosters, or of its true purging of the spirit, not with torches and squills and such rubbish, but with right reason, truth, and frankness.

In addition to this explicit ringing endorsement, Lucian's Epicureanism can be seen clearly in the arguments he employs against his targets. Here, however, we confront the issue referenced in the title of this book and in the passage from [Hermetimus](#). Epicureanism has been denounced by the religious, academic, and political establishments for two thousand years, and the Epicurean school has long been cowed into silence. As a result, who can say with any authority that he has "seen an Epicurean?" And if we have never seen an Epicurean, how can we judge whether Lucian should be considered one? As Lucian himself answers in [Hermetimus](#), the only way we can reach reliable conclusions is to devote ourselves to the study of the facts that are available to us.

It is beyond the scope of this work to provide an exhaustive discussion of the entire sweep of Epicurean philosophy (for that discussion, see the author's *Ante Oculos – Epicurus and the Evidence-Based Life*), but for our purposes here it is essential to consider at least the basic principles which Epicurus emphasized in his first four doctrines:

Doctrine 1. Any being which is happy and imperishable neither has trouble itself, nor does it cause trouble to anything else. A perfect being does not have feelings either of anger or gratitude, for these feelings only exist in the weak.

Doctrine 2. Death is nothing to us, because that which is dead has no sensations, and that which cannot be sensed is nothing to us.

Doctrine 3. Life affords continuous pleasure so long as nothing is present to cause us to feel pain. The highest possible state of pleasure that can be achieved is experienced at the removal of every cause of pain.

Doctrine 4. Bodily pain does not last continuously. The most intense pain is present only for a very short time, and pain which outweighs the body's pleasures does not continue for long. Even chronic pain permits a predominance of pleasure over pain.

Let us consider each of these propositions more closely, as the reader will find many applications of them in the material that follows.

First and foremost, Epicureanism is based on the proposition that the universe is not subject to the government or the whims of supernatural gods. Epicurus did not consider it necessary to conclude that "gods" do not exist, and in fact he held that "gods" of a type do exist, much as we believe today that life in the universe is not confined to this world. But the essential point is that any "god" worthy of the name which may exist is "perfect," and therefore has no need of anger or gratitude. This means that men should live their lives as unconcerned about the doings of the gods as the gods are unconcerned about the doings of men. Just as there are no meddling gods, there is no "Fate" that controls men's lives, nor is there any supernatural "Fortune" which blesses the lucky and punishes the unfortunate. Epicurus always held that firm evidence is the test of truth, and he recognized the limits of the evidence available to men. His emphasis was therefore not on ridiculing those who claim merely to have seen gods themselves, for those persons might after all have witnessed "images" which could not otherwise be explained. But the necessary implication of the first doctrine is that those who claim *special access* to gods, and *special abilities to communicate* with gods, are doubtless frauds and charlatans.

This first doctrine of Epicurus pervades Lucian's work, and this attitude toward the gods is the trademark for which Lucian is best remembered. The folly of those who believe that gods govern the workings of the universe is portrayed at its height in [Zeus Tragoedus](#), where the [argument of Damis](#) forcefully conveys the Epicurean view.

Epicurus' second most famous doctrine is condensed in the phrase "death is nothing to us." As in most condensations, however, the meaning of this phrase must be considered carefully in order to avoid confusion. Its meaning is certainly **not** that death is something to be dismissed cavalierly as of no significance to man. In fact, the meaning of this doctrine is the opposite of that proposition. The meaning is not that death is *insignificant* to us, for death **is** significant to us – critically so – for if we are to live happily we must always remember that death is coming and with it our lives will be at an end. Thus the phrase is true in this specific sense: death is a **state of nothingness** to us because our consciousness – that which we consider to be our mind, our intelligence, our "*us*" – *ceases to exist at death*, and after death what we formerly considered the "we" no longer exists to experience anything – and so experiences **nothing**. Epicurus held that there is no evidence that men have immortal souls which somehow survive the death of the body and remain conscious to experience punishment or reward in some other world after death. Because there is no evidence of any existence after death, it makes no sense to order one's life in fear of punishment, or in hope of reward, in some after-death world which does not exist. Lucian's scorn for elaborate theories of the continued existence of the soul after death is clear in many of the passages throughout this work, and the issue is directly addressed in words delivered fictionally by Epicurus himself in [The Double](#).

[Indictment.](#)

Epicurus' third principle observation about human life was that Nature – not gods, not religion, not false philosophers – has set the standard for the highest good possible to man: a “pleasurable” or “happy” life. Because there is no evidence for the existence of any “life after death,” otherworldly “forms,” or any other mandates outside of or superior to the Natural universe, man's only standard of conduct is that provided by Nature. The only evidence that does exist – Nature's evidence – leads to the conclusion that the highest possible goal for a man is to live his natural lifespan in happiness. This goal is possible for all men, within the limits prescribed by Nature, because the only thing that a man *requires* in order to be happy is the absence of pain. This is a view embraced in part, and roughly, in the modern phrase that “the best things in life are free.” As with each of Epicurus' doctrines, this is a principle of wide application, but it requires the acknowledgement that Nature is our only guide. The best things in life are, if not totally “free,” at least readily obtainable with reasonable effort, if we will but employ and heed the faculties which Nature has provided to men for this purpose. Lucian incorporates this insight into a number of passages, such as that in which Epicurus points out [nonsense of those who denounce pleasure](#).

Epicurus' fourth principle observation regarded the role of pain in man's life. Epicurus observed that just as death warrants our attention as the ultimate limitation on man's life, pain warrants our attention as Nature's guide warning us away from paths that are destructive. The essential point is that pain is a fact of life, but manageable, and the fact that pain exists is no more a negation of life than the fact that death exists. We must all order our lives giving the avoidance of pain the attention that it deserves, just as Lucian conveys through Dionysius in [the argument of Epicurus](#).

Applications of the views of Epicurus abound in the selections included here, but one work deserves special attention: [Hermetimus, Or, The Rival Philosophies](#). In this work, the longest of Lucian's dialogs, Lucian (under the name of “Lycinus” engages a friend “Hermetimus” who belongs to the Stoic school in an exchange that is superficially about the difficulty of knowing which, if any, of the philosophic schools is correct. As we look for Lucian's ultimate position on these issues, we should first start with a number of observations:

Although Hermetimus is identified as a Stoic, the positions of the Stoic school that are relevant to this discussion are essentially the same as those of the Platonists (the Academy) in regard to there existing a “higher truth” that is above the senses and the reality of this world. To a significant but somewhat lesser degree this position was also shared by the Aristotelians (the Peripatetics), and the lesser schools. All but the Epicureans essentially shared the theory that “Virtue” should be sought and could be found through a kind of reasoning “superior” to the senses and the evidence of Nature. In contrast, Epicurus held that nothing exists except reality (“matter and void”) and that the search for some higher truth above Nature was bound to be fruitless because no such dimension exists.

The non-Epicurean philosophers held that happiness, wealth, glory, and pleasures have nothing to do with the virtuous life, and that in fact (to varying degrees) each of these is a hindrance, obstacle, or even an evil in the effort to lead a virtuous life. Of course Epicurus held otherwise, identifying pleasure as a guide given by Nature for proper living, and evaluating wealth and even glory as not **intrinsically** improper. Epicurus developed his famous classification of desires into the natural and necessary, natural but not necessary, and neither natural nor necessary as a means of evaluating when a desire was appropriate to pursue, and when a desire may properly be pursued, according to the guidelines established by Nature.

A significant part of the dialog is devoted to a series of specific difficulties that must be confronted by any new student who wishes to choose which of the competing philosophies to follow. In a series of insightful exchanges, Lycinus shows Hermetimus that it is impossible to be “certain” that one or the other path is correct until the student has devoted great effort and time to studying **each** of the alternative paths. It is in this section that Lucian employs the “lion analogy” – pointing out that if the only part of the body that one saw was the foot, it would be impossible to know that the foot belonged to a lion unless one had previously seen a complete lion.

Lucian demolishes the Stoic's pretense to know that his school was “the correct one,” and in so doing appears to set the stage for concluding that no knowledge of “the truth” is possible. Here, however, if one knows the position of Epicurus, we see the dialog turn even more clearly into a brilliant exposition of Epicureanism. Doctrines twenty-two through twenty-six of Epicurus' principle maxims set forth Epicurus' view that while there are definite Natural limits to a man's knowledge, such as are inevitable in an infinite universe that has and will exist for an eternity of time, it is ridiculous to take the position that “no” knowledge is possible.

An even clearer statement of this proposition was contained in Book IV of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, and the point that true knowledge is grounded in the evidence of the senses is so important that Lucretius is worth quoting here at length:

Many are the other marvels ... we see which seek to shake the credit of the senses. But such efforts are quite in vain, since the greatest part of these cases deceive us on account of the opinions which we add ourselves, taking things as seen which have not been seen by the senses. For nothing is harder than to separate those facts that are clearly true from those that are doubtful, which the mind adds itself.

And if a man contends that nothing can be known, he knows not whether this contention itself can be known, since he admits that he knows nothing. I will therefore decline to argue the question against him who places his head where his feet should be. And yet granting that he knows his contention to be true, I would still put this question: Since he has never yet seen any truth in things, how does he know what "knowing" and "not knowing" are? What has produced his knowledge of the difference between the true and the false, and between the doubtful and the certain?

You will find that it is from the senses that comes all knowledge of the true, and that the senses cannot be refuted. For that which is of itself able to distinguish the false from the true must from the Nature of the case be proved with a higher certainty. Well, then, what can fairly be accounted of higher certainty than the senses? Shall reasoning founded on the senses be able to contradict those same senses, when that reasoning is wholly founded on the senses? If the senses are not true, then all reasoning based on them is rendered false. Shall the ears be able to take the eyes to task, or the sense of touch take ears to task? Shall the sense of taste call in question the sense of touch, or the nostrils refute it or the eyes controvert it? Not so, for each separately has its own distinct office, each its own power. We therefore must perceive what is soft and cold or hot by one distinct faculty, and by another perceive the different colors of things and thus see all objects which have color. Taste too is a separate faculty; smells spring from one source, sounds from another. It therefore must follow that any one sense cannot confute any other. Nor can any sense take itself to task, since equal credit must be assigned to it at all times. What therefore has at any time appeared true to each sense, is true.

And so if you find your reason is unable to explain the cause why things which, seen close at hand, are square, but at distance appear round, it is better, if you are at a loss for a reason, to state an erroneous cause, than to let slip from your grasp on any side those things which are manifestly true, and in so doing ruin the groundwork of belief and wrench up all the foundations on which life and existence rest. For not only would all reason give way, but life itself would at once fall to the ground unless you choose to trust the senses, shunning the precipices and errors of this sort that are to be avoided, and pursuing the opposite. All that host of words drawn out in array against the senses is quite without meaning.

Once more: As in a building, if the rule first applied by the builder is awry, and the square is untrue and swerves from its straight lines, and if there is the slightest hitch in any part of the level, all the construction must be faulty, all must be awry, crooked, sloping, leaning forwards, leaning backwards, without symmetry, so that some parts seem ready to fall, and others do fall, all ruined by the first erroneous measurements. So too, all reasoning of things which is founded on false interpretations of the senses will prove to be distorted and false.

Lycinus emphasizes that the error of the non-Epicurean schools is to seek a "higher truth" which they can never grasp. This argument is attributed in other ancient texts to Epicurus himself, who stated that "it is not good to desire the impossible."

Next, Lycinus diagnoses the deadly disease of all variants of Platonism, which essentially includes all non-Epicurean schools, as the "basing of hopes on a dream-vision" or on one's "own wild fancy" without ever asking whether these aspirations are "realizable or consistent with humanity." If you read but one section of Lucian's work, read this diagnosis in full:¹

... Practically all who pursue philosophy do no more than disquiet themselves in vain. Who could conceivably go through all the stages I have rehearsed? You admit the impossibility yourself. As to your present mood, it is that of the man who cries and curses his luck because he cannot climb the sky,

or plunge into the depths of the sea at Sicily and come up at Cyprus, or soar on wings and fly within the day from Greece to India; what is responsible for his discontent is his basing of hopes on a dream-vision or his own wild fancy, without ever asking whether his aspirations were realizable or consistent with humanity. You too, my friend, have been having a long and marvelous dream; and now reason has stuck a pin into you and startled you out of your sleep; your eyes are only half open yet, you are reluctant to shake off a sleep which has shown you such fair visions, and so you scold. It is just the condition of the day-dreamer; he is rolling in gold, digging up treasure, sitting on his throne, or somehow at the summit of bliss; for dame How-I-Wish is a lavish facile Goddess, that will never turn a deaf ear to her votary, though he have a mind to fly, or change statures with Colossus, or strike a gold-reef. Well, in the middle of all this, in comes his servant with some every-day question, wanting to know where he is to get bread, or what he shall say to the landlord, tired of waiting for his rent; and then he flies into a temper, as though the intrusive questioner had robbed him of all his bliss, and is ready to bite the poor fellow's nose off.

As you love me, do not treat me like that. I see you digging up treasure, spreading your wings, nursing extravagant ideas, indulging impossible hopes; and I love you too well to leave you to the company of a life-long dream—a pleasant one, if you will, but yet a dream; I beseech you to get up and take to some every-day business, such as may direct the rest of your life's course by common sense. Your acts and your thoughts up to now have been no more than Centaurs, Chimeras, Gorgons, or what else is figured by dreams and poets and painters, chartered libertines all, who reek not of what has been or may be. Yet the common folk believe them, bewitched by tale and picture just because they are strange and monstrous.

I fancy you hearing from some teller of tales how there is a certain lady of perfect beauty, beyond the Graces themselves or the Heavenly Aphrodite, and then, without ever an inquiry whether his tale is true, and such a person to be found on earth, falling straight in love with her, like Medea in the story enamored of a dream-Jason. And what most drew you on to love, you and the others who worship the same phantom, was, if I am not mistaken, the consistent way in which the inventor of the lady added to his picture, when once he had got your ear. That was the only thing you all looked to, with that he turned you about as he would, having got his first hold upon you, averring that he was leading you the straight way to your beloved. After the first step, you see, all was easy; none of you ever looked round when he came to the entrance, and inquired whether it was the right one, or whether he had accidentally taken the wrong; no, you all followed in your predecessors' footsteps, like sheep after the bell-wether, whereas the right thing was to decide at the entrance whether you should go in.

Perhaps an illustration will make my meaning clearer: when one of those audacious poets affirms that there was once a three-headed and six-handed man, if you accept that quietly without questioning its possibility, he will proceed to fill in the picture consistently—six eyes and ears, three voices talking at once, three mouths eating, and thirty fingers instead of our poor ten all told; if he has to fight, three of his hands will have a buckler, wicker targe, or shield apiece, while of the other three one swings an axe, another hurls a spear, and the third wields a sword. It is too late to carp at these details, when they come; they are consistent with the beginning; it was about that that the question ought to have been raised whether it was to be accepted and passed as true. Once grant that, and the rest comes flooding in, irresistible, hardly now susceptible of doubt, because it is consistent and accordant with your initial admissions. That is just your case; your love-yearning would not allow you to look into the facts at each entrance, and so you are dragged on by consistency; it never occurs to you that a thing may be self-consistent and yet false; if a man says twice five is seven, and you take his word for it without checking the sum, he will naturally deduce that four times five is fourteen, and so on ad libitum. This is the way that weird geometry proceeds: it sets before beginners certain strange assumptions, and insists on their granting the existence of inconceivable things, such as points having no parts, lines without breadth, and so on, builds on these rotten foundations a superstructure equally rotten, and pretends to go on to a demonstration which is true, though it starts from premises which are false.

Just so you, when you have granted the principles of any school, believe in the deductions from them, and take their consistency, false as it is, for a guarantee of truth. Then with some of you, hope travels through, and you die before you have seen the truth and detected your deceivers, while the rest, disillusioned too late, will not turn back for shame: what, confess at their years that they have been

abused with toys all this time? So they hold on desperately, putting the best face upon it and making all the converts they can, to have the consolation of good company in their deception; they are well aware that to speak out is to sacrifice the respect and superiority and honor they are accustomed to; so they will not do it if it may be helped, knowing the height from which they will fall to the common level. Just a few are found with the courage to say they were deluded, and warn other aspirants. Meeting such a one, call him a good man, a true and an honest; nay, call him philosopher, if you will; to my mind, the name is his or no one's; the rest either have no knowledge of the truth, though they think they have, or else have knowledge and hide it, shamefaced cowards clinging to reputation.

Had Lucian been a true skeptic or cynic, the dialog would have ended destructively, which nothing but a cynical observation that no truth is possible. But in case the point is not already clear, Lucian was no skeptic, and after diagnosing the disease he offered the Epicurean prescription in the guise of an Aesop fable:

*A man sat on the shore and counted the waves breaking; missing count, he was excessively annoyed. But the fox came up and said to him: 'Why vex yourself, good sir, over the past ones? You should let them go, and begin counting afresh.' So you, since this is your mind, had better **reconcile yourself now to living like an ordinary man; you will give up your extravagant haughty hopes and put yourself on a level with the commonalty; if you are sensible, you will not be ashamed to unlearn in your old age, and change your course for a better.***

Consider this prescription in the older and purer form, as rendered by Cicero in his Defense of Epicurus in *De Finibus*:

*You amuse yourself by thinking that Epicurus was uneducated. The truth is that Epicurus refused to consider any education to be worthy of the name if it did not teach us the means to live happily. Was Epicurus to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, perusing the poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but only childish amusement? Was Epicurus to occupy himself like Plato, with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which are at best mere tools, and which, if they start from false premises, can never reveal truth or contribute anything to make our lives happier and therefore better? Was Epicurus to study the limited arts such as these, and neglect **the master art, so difficult but correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living? No! It was not Epicurus who was uninformed. The truly uneducated are those who ask us to go on studying until old age the subjects that we ought to be ashamed not to have learned when we were children!***

In sum, the works of Lucian collected here are invaluable fragments of the Epicurean mosaic which has been all but lost to the world. From them, and from the words and ideas of Epicurus collected by Diogenes Laertius, Lucretius, and other writers, it is possible to assemble the pieces and gain our own view of philosophy's greatest "lion" of which we formerly were able to observe only the paws.

Peace and Safety!

On The Works Included Here



All content in this ebook was prepared from the translation of H. W. and F. G. Fowler, published in 1905, which is now in the public domain. The cover art for this book was prepared from a section of a mosaic discovered in Herculaneum.

Alexander the Oracle-Monger



Characters: Lucian, writing a letter to a friend.

Context: Lucian relates the story of a famous fraud.

You, my dear Celsus, possibly suppose yourself to be laying upon me quite a trifling task: *Write me down in a book and send me the life and adventures, the tricks and frauds, of the impostor Alexander of Abonutichus.* In fact, however, it would take as long to do this in full detail as to reduce to writing the achievements of Alexander of Macedon; the one is among villains what the other is among heroes. Nevertheless, if you will promise to read with indulgence, and fill up the gaps in my tale from your imagination, I will essay the task. I may not cleanse that Augean stable completely, but I will do my best, and fetch you out a few loads as samples of the unspeakable filth that three thousand oxen could produce in many years.

I confess to being a little ashamed both on your account and my own. There are you asking that the memory of an arch-scoundrel should be perpetuated in writing; here am I going seriously into an investigation of this sort—the doings of a person whose deserts entitled him not to be read about by the cultivated, but to be torn to pieces in the amphitheater by apes or foxes, with a vast audience looking on. Well, well, if any one does cast reflections of that sort upon us, we shall at least have a precedent to plead. Arrian himself, disciple of Epictetus, distinguished Roman, and product of lifelong culture as he was, had just our experience, and shall make our defense. He condescended, that is, to put on record the life of the robber Tilliborus. The robber we propose to immortalize was of a far more pestilent kind, following his profession not in the forests and mountains, but in cities; *he* was not content to overrun a Mysia or an Ida; *his* booty came not from a few scantily populated districts of Asia; one may say that the scene of his depredations was the whole Roman Empire.

I will begin with a picture of the man himself, as lifelike (though I am not great at description) as I can make it with nothing better than words. In person—not to forget that part of him—he was a fine handsome man with a real touch of divinity about him, white-skinned, moderately bearded; he wore besides his own hair artificial additions which matched it so cunningly that they were not generally detected. His eyes were piercing, and suggested inspiration, his voice at once sweet and sonorous. In fact there was no fault to be found with him in these respects.

So much for externals. As for his mind and spirit—well, if all the kind Gods who avert disaster will grant a prayer, it shall be that they bring me not within reach of such a one as he; sooner will I face my bitterest enemies, my country's foes. In understanding, resource, acuteness, he was far above other men; curiosity, receptiveness, memory, scientific ability—all these were his in overflowing measure. But he used them for the worst purposes. Endowed with all these instruments of good, he very soon reached a proud pre-eminence among all who have been famous for evil; the Cercopes, Eurybatus, Phrynonidas, Aristodemus, Sostratus—all thrown into the shade. In a letter to his father-in-law Rutilianus, which puts his own pretensions in a truly modest light, he compares himself to Pythagoras.

Well, I should not like to offend the wise, the divine Pythagoras; but if he had been Alexander's contemporary, I am quite sure he would have been a mere child to him. Now by all that is admirable, do not take that for an insult to Pythagoras, nor suppose I would draw a parallel between their achievements. What I mean is: if any one would make a collection of all the vilest and most damaging slanders ever vented against Pythagoras—things whose truth I would not accept for a moment—the sum of them would not come within measurable distance of Alexander's cleverness. You are to set your imagination to work and conceive a temperament curiously compounded of falsehood, trickery, perjury, cunning; it is versatile, audacious, adventurous, yet dogged in execution; it is plausible enough to inspire confidence; it can assume the mask of virtue, and seem to eschew what it most desires. I suppose no one ever left him after a first interview without the impression that this was the best and kindest of men, aye, and the simplest and most unsophisticated. Add to all this a certain greatness in his objects; he never made a small plan; his ideas were always large.

While in the bloom of his youthful beauty, which we may assume to have been great both from its later remains and from the report of those who saw it, he traded quite shamelessly upon it. Among his other patrons was one of the charlatans who deal in magic and mystic incantations; they will smooth your course of love, confound your enemies,

find you treasure, or secure you an inheritance. This person was struck with the lad's natural qualifications for apprenticeship to his trade, and finding him as much attracted by rascality as attractive in appearance, gave him a regular training as accomplice, satellite, and attendant. His own ostensible profession was medicine, and his knowledge included, like that of Thoon the Egyptian's wife, *Many a virtuous herb, and many a bane*; to all which inheritance our friend succeeded. This teacher and lover of his was a native of Tyana, an associate of the great Apollonius, and acquainted with all his heroics. And now you know the atmosphere in which Alexander lived.

By the time his beard had come, the Tyanean was dead, and he found himself in straits; for the personal attractions which might once have been a resource were diminished. He now formed great designs, which he imparted to a Byzantine chronicler of the strolling competitive order, a man of still worse character than himself, called, I believe, Cocconas. The pair went about living on occult pretensions, shearing 'fat-heads,' as they describe ordinary people in the native Magian lingo. Among these they got hold of a rich Macedonian woman; her youth was past, but not her desire for admiration; they got sufficient supplies out of her, and accompanied her from Bithynia to Macedonia. She came from Pella, which had been a flourishing place under the Macedonian kingdom, but has now a poor and much reduced population.

There is here a breed of large serpents, so tame and gentle that women make pets of them, children take them to bed, they will let you tread on them, have no objection to being squeezed, and will draw milk from the breast like infants. To these facts is probably to be referred the common story about Olympias when she was with child of Alexander; it was doubtless one of these that was her bed-fellow. Well, the two saw these creatures, and bought the finest they could get for a few pence.

And from this point, as Thucydides might say, the war takes its beginning. These ambitious scoundrels were quite devoid of scruples, and they had now joined forces; it could not escape their penetration that human life is under the absolute dominion of two mighty principles, fear and hope, and that any one who can make these serve his ends may be sure of a rapid fortune. They realized that, whether a man is most swayed by the one or by the other, what he must most depend upon and desire is a knowledge of futurity. So were to be explained the ancient wealth and fame of Delphi, Delos, Clarus, Branchidae; it was at the bidding of the two tyrants aforesaid that men thronged the temples, longed for foreknowledge, and to attain it sacrificed their hecatombs or dedicated their golden ingots. All this they turned over and debated, and it issued in the resolve to establish an oracle. If it were successful, they looked for immediate wealth and prosperity; the result surpassed their most sanguine expectations.

The next things to be settled were, first the theater of operations, and secondly the plan of campaign. Cocconas favoured Chalcedon, as a mercantile center convenient both for Thrace and Bithynia, and accessible enough for the province of Asia, Galatia, and tribes still further east. Alexander, on the other hand, preferred his native place, urging very truly that an enterprise like theirs required congenial soil to give it a start, in the shape of 'fat-heads' and simpletons. That was a fair description, he said, of the Paphlagonians beyond Abonutichus; they were mostly superstitious and well-to-do; one had only to go there with some one to play the flute, the tambourine, or the cymbals, set the proverbial mantic sieve a-spinning, and there they would all be gaping as if he were a God from heaven.

This difference of opinion did not last long, and Alexander prevailed. Discovering, however, that a use might after all be made of Chalcedon, they went there first, and in the temple of Apollo, the oldest in the place, they buried some brazen tablets, on which was the statement that very shortly Asclepius, with his father Apollo, would pay a visit to Pontus, and take up his abode at Abonutichus. The discovery of the tablets took place as arranged, and the news flew through Bithynia and Pontus, first of all, naturally, to Abonutichus. The people of that place at once resolved to raise a temple, and lost no time in digging the foundations. Cocconas was now left at Chalcedon, engaged in composing certain ambiguous crabbed oracles. He shortly afterwards died, I believe, of a viper's bite.

Alexander meanwhile went on in advance; he had now grown his hair and wore it in long curls; his doublet was white and purple striped, his cloak pure white; he carried a scimitar in imitation of Perseus, from whom he now claimed descent through his mother. The wretched Paphlagonians, who knew perfectly well that his parentage was obscure and mean on both sides, nevertheless gave credence to the oracle, which ran: *Lo, sprung from Perseus, and to Phoebus dear, High Alexander, Podalirius' son!*

Podalirius, it seems, was of so highly amorous a complexion that the distance between Tricca and Paphlagonia was no bar to his union with Alexander's mother, Hermes. A Sibylline prophecy had also been found:

Hard by Sinope on the Euxine shore

*Th' Italic age a fortress prophet sees.
To the first monad let thrice ten be added,
Five monads yet, and then a triple score:
Such the quaternion of th' alexic name.*

This heroic entry into his long-left home placed Alexander conspicuously before the public; he affected madness, and frequently foamed at the mouth—a manifestation easily produced by chewing the herb soap-wort, used by dyers; but it brought him reverence and awe. The two had long ago manufactured and fitted up a serpent's head of linen; they had given it a more or less human expression, and painted it very like the real article; by a contrivance of horsehair, the mouth could be opened and shut, and a forked black serpent tongue protruded, working on the same system. The serpent from Pella was also kept ready in the house, to be produced at the right moment and take its part in the drama—the leading part, indeed.

In the fullness of time, his plan took shape. He went one night to the temple foundations, still in process of digging, and with standing water in them which had collected from the rainfall or otherwise. Here he deposited a goose egg, into which, after blowing it, he had inserted some new-born reptile. He made a resting-place deep down in the mud for this, and departed. Early next morning he rushed into the market-place, naked except for a gold-spangled loin-cloth; with nothing but this and his scimeter, and shaking his long loose hair, like the fanatics who collect money in the name of Cybele, he climbed on to a lofty altar and delivered a harangue, felicitating the city upon the advent of the God now to bless them with his presence. In a few minutes nearly the whole population was on the spot, women, old men, and children included; all was awe, prayer, and adoration. He uttered some unintelligible sounds, which might have been Hebrew or Phoenician, but completed his victory over his audience, who could make nothing of what he said, beyond the constant repetition of the names Apollo and Asclepius.

He then set off at a run for the future temple. Arrived at the excavation and the already completed sacred fount, he got down into the water, chanted in a loud voice hymns to Asclepius and Apollo, and invited the God to come, a welcome guest, to the city. He next demanded a bowl, and when this was handed to him, had no difficulty in putting it down at the right place and scooping up, besides water and mud, the egg in which the God had been enclosed; the edges of the aperture had been joined with wax and white lead. He took the egg in his hand and announced that here he held Asclepius. The people, who had been sufficiently astonished by the discovery of the egg in the water, were now all eyes for what was to come. He broke it, and received in his hollowed palm the hardly developed reptile; the crowd could see it stirring and winding about his fingers; they raised a shout, hailed the God, blessed the city, and every mouth was full of prayers—for treasure and wealth and health and all the other good things that he might give. Our hero now departed homewards, still running, with the new-born Asclepius in his hands—the twice-born, too, whereas ordinary men can be born but once, and born moreover not of Coronis, nor even of her namesake the crow, but of a goose! After him streamed the whole people, in all the madness of fanatic hopes.

He now kept the house for some days, in hopes that the Paphlagonians would soon be drawn in crowds by the news. He was not disappointed; the city was filled to overflowing with persons who had neither brains nor individuality, who bore no resemblance to men that live by bread, and had only their outward shape to distinguish them from sheep. In a small room he took his seat, very imposingly attired, upon a couch. He took into his bosom our Asclepius of Pella (a very fine and large one, as I observed), wound its body round his neck, and let its tail hang down. There was enough of this not only to fill his lap, but to trail on the ground also; the patient creature's head he kept hidden in his armpit, showing the linen head on one side of his beard exactly as if it belonged to the visible body.

Picture to yourself a little chamber into which no very brilliant light was admitted, with a crowd of people from all quarters, excited, carefully worked up, all aflutter with expectation. As they came in, they might naturally find a miracle in the development of that little crawling thing of a few days ago into this great, tame, human-looking serpent. Then they had to get on at once towards the exit, being pressed forward by the new arrivals before they could have a good look. An exit had been specially made just opposite the entrance, for all the world like the Macedonian device at Babylon when Alexander was ill. He was *in extremis*, you remember, and the crowd round the palace were eager to take their last look and give their last greeting. Our scoundrel's exhibition, though, is said to have been given not once, but many times, especially for the benefit of any wealthy new-comers.

And at this point, my dear Celsus, we may, if we will be candid, make some allowance for these Paphlagonians and Pontics. The poor uneducated 'fat-heads' might well be taken in when they handled the serpent—a privilege conceded to all who choose—and saw in that dim light its head with the mouth that opened and shut. It was an

occasion for a Democritus, nay, for an Epicurus or a Metrodorus, perhaps, a man whose intelligence was steeled against such assaults by scepticism and insight, one who, if he could not detect the precise imposture, would at any rate have been perfectly certain that, though this escaped him, the whole thing was a lie and an impossibility.

By degrees Bithynia, Galatia, Thrace, came flocking in, every one who had been present doubtless reporting that he had beheld the birth of the God, and had touched him after his marvelous development in size and in expression. Next came pictures and models, bronze or silver images, and the God acquired a name. By divine command, metrically expressed, he was to be known as Glycon. For Alexander had delivered the line: *Glycon my name, man's light, son's son to Zeus.*

And now at last the object to which all this had led up, the giving of oracular answers to all applicants, could be attained. The cue was taken from Amphiloehus in Cilicia. After the death and disappearance at Thebes of his father Amphiarus, Amphiloehus, driven from his home, made his way to Cilicia, and there did not at all badly by prophesying to the Cilicians at the rate of threepence an oracle. After this precedent, Alexander proclaimed that on a stated day the God would give answers to all comers. Each person was to write down his wish and the object of his curiosity, fasten the packet with thread, and seal it with wax, clay, or other such substance. He would receive these, and enter the holy place (by this time the temple was complete, and the scene all ready), whither the givers should be summoned in order by a herald and an acolyte. He would learn the God's mind upon each, and return the packets with their seals intact and the answers attached, the God being ready to give a definite answer to any question that might be put.

The trick here was one which would be seen through easily enough by a person of your intelligence (or, if I may say so without violating modesty, of my own), but which to the ordinary imbecile would have the persuasiveness of what is marvelous and incredible. He contrived various methods of undoing the seals, read the questions, answered them as seemed good, and then folded, sealed, and returned them, to the great astonishment of the recipients. And then it was, 'How could he possibly know what I gave him carefully secured under a seal that defies imitation, unless he were a true God, with a God's omniscience?'

Perhaps you will ask what these contrivances were; well, then—the information may be useful another time. One of them was this. He would heat a needle, melt with it the under part of the wax, lift the seal off, and after reading warm the wax once more with the needle—both that below the thread and that which formed the actual seal—and re-unite the two without difficulty. Another method employed the substance called collyrium; this is a preparation of Bruttian pitch, bitumen, pounded glass, wax, and mastich. He kneaded the whole into collyrium, heated it, placed it on the seal, previously moistened with his tongue, and so took a mould. This soon hardened; he simply opened, read, replaced the wax, and reproduced an excellent imitation of the original seal as from an engraved stone. One more I will give you. Adding some gypsum to the glue used in book-binding he produced a sort of wax, which was applied still wet to the seal, and on being taken off solidified at once and provided a matrix harder than horn, or even iron. There are plenty of other devices for the purpose, to rehearse which would seem like airing one's knowledge. Moreover, in your excellent pamphlets against the magicians (most useful and instructive reading they are) you have yourself collected enough of them—many more than those I have mentioned.

So oracles and divine utterances were the order of the day, and much shrewdness he displayed, eking out mechanical ingenuity with obscurity, his answers to some being crabbed and ambiguous, and to others absolutely unintelligible. He did however distribute warning and encouragement according to his lights, and recommend treatments and diets; for he had, as I originally stated, a wide and serviceable acquaintance with drugs. He was particularly given to prescribing 'cytmides,' which were a salve prepared from goat's fat, the name being of his own invention. For the realization of ambitions, advancement, or successions, he took care never to assign early dates; the formula was, *'All this shall come to pass when it is my will, and when my prophet Alexander shall make prayer and entreaty on your behalf.'*

There was a fixed charge of a shilling the oracle. And, my friend, do not suppose that this would not come to much; he made something like £3,000 *per annum*; people were insatiable—would take from ten to fifteen oracles at a time. What he got he did not keep to himself, nor put it by for the future; what with accomplices, attendants, inquiry agents, oracle writers and keepers, amanuenses, seal-forgers, and interpreters, he had now a host of claimants to satisfy.

He had begun sending emissaries abroad to make the shrine known in foreign lands; his prophecies, discovery of runaways, conviction of thieves and robbers, revelations of hidden treasure, cures of the sick, restoration of the dead to life—all these were to be advertised. This brought them running and crowding from all points of the compass;

victims bled, gifts were presented, and the prophet and disciple came off better than the God; for had not the oracle spoken?—

Give what ye give to my attendant priest; My care is not for gifts, but for my priest.

A time came when a number of sensible people began to shake off their intoxication and combine against him, chief among them the numerous Epicureans; in the cities, the imposture with all its theatrical accessories began to be seen through. It was now that he resorted to a measure of intimidation; he proclaimed that Pontus was overrun with atheists and Christians, who presumed to spread the most scandalous reports concerning him. He exhorted Pontus, as it valued the God's favor, to stone these men. Touching Epicurus, he gave the following response. An inquirer had asked how Epicurus fared in Hades, and was told: *Of slime is his bed, And his fetters of lead.*

The prosperity of the oracle is perhaps not so wonderful, when one learns what sensible, intelligent questions were in fashion with its votaries. Well, it was war to the knife between him and Epicurus, and no wonder. What fitter enemy for a charlatan who patronized miracles and hated truth, than the thinker who had grasped the nature of things and was in solitary possession of that truth? As for the Platonists, Stoics, Pythagoreans, they were his good friends; he had no quarrel with them. But the unmitigated Epicurus, as he used to call him, could not but be hateful to him, treating all such pretensions as absurd and puerile. Alexander consequently loathed Amastris beyond all the cities of Pontus, knowing what a number of Lepidus's friends and others like-minded it contained. He would not give oracles to Amastrians; when he once did, to a senator's brother, he made himself ridiculous, neither hitting upon a presentable oracle for himself, nor finding a deputy equal to the occasion. The man had complained of colic, and what he meant to prescribe was pig's foot dressed with mallow. The shape it took was: *In basin hallowed, Be pigments mallowed.*

I have mentioned that the serpent was often exhibited by request; he was not completely visible, but the tail and body were exposed, while the head was concealed under the prophet's dress. By way of impressing the people still more, he announced that he would induce the God to speak, and give his responses without an intermediary. His simple device to this end was a tube of cranes' windpipes, which he passed, with due regard to its matching, through the artificial head, and, having an assistant speaking into the end outside, whose voice issued through the linen Asclepius, thus answered questions. These oracles were called *autophones*, and were not vouchsafed casually to any one, but reserved for officials, the rich, and the lavish.

It was an autophone which was given to Severian regarding the invasion of Armenia. He encouraged him with these lines:

*Armenia, Parthia, cowed by thy fierce spear,
To Rome, and Tiber's shining waves, thou com'st,
Thy brow with leaves and radiant gold encircled.*

Then when the foolish Gaul took his advice and invaded, to the total destruction of himself and his army by Othryades, the adviser expunged that oracle from his archives and substituted the following:

*Vex not th' Armenian land; it shall not thrive;
One in soft raiment clad shall from his bow
Launch death, and cut thee off from life and light.*

For it was one of his happy thoughts to issue prophecies after the event as antidotes to those premature utterances which had not gone right. Frequently he promised recovery to a sick man before his death, and after it was at no loss for second thoughts:

No longer seek to arrest thy fell disease; Thy fate is manifest, inevitable.

Knowing the fame of Clarus, Didymus, and Mallus for sooth-saying much like his own, he struck up an alliance with them, sending on many of his clients to those places. So *Hie thee to Clarus now, and hear my sire.* And again, *Draw near to Branchidae and counsel take.* Or *Seek Mallus; be Amphilocheus thy counsellor.*

So things went within the borders of Ionia, Cilicia, Paphlagonia, and Galatia. When the fame of the oracle traveled to Italy and entered Rome, the only question was, who should be first; those who did not come in person sent messages, the powerful and respected being the keenest of all. First and foremost among these was Rutilianus. He was in most respects an excellent person, and had filled many high offices in Rome; but he suffered from religious mania, holding the most extraordinary beliefs on that matter. Show him a bit of stone smeared with unguents or

crowned with flowers, and he would incontinently fall down and worship, and linger about it praying and asking for blessings. The reports about our oracle nearly induced him to throw up the appointment he then held, and fly to Abonutichus; he actually did send messenger upon messenger. His envoys were ignorant servants, easily taken in. They came back having really seen certain things, relating others which they probably thought they had seen and heard, and yet others which they deliberately invented to curry favor with their master. So they inflamed the poor old man and drove him into confirmed madness.

He had a wide circle of influential friends, to whom he communicated the news brought by his successive messengers, not without additional touches of his own. All Rome was full of his tales; there was quite a commotion, the gentlemen of the Court being much fluttered, and at once taking measures to learn something of their own fate. The prophet gave all who came a hearty welcome, gained their goodwill by hospitality and costly gifts, and sent them off ready not merely to report his answers, but to sing the praises of the God and invent miraculous tales of the shrine and its guardian.

This triple rogue now hit upon an idea which would have been too clever for the ordinary robber. Opening and reading the packets which reached him, whenever he came upon an equivocal, compromising question, he omitted to return the packet. The sender was to be under his thumb, bound to his service by the terrifying recollection of the question he had written down. You know the sort of things that wealthy and powerful personages would be likely to ask. This blackmail brought him in a good income.

I should like to quote you one or two of the answers given to Rutilianus. He had a son by a former wife, just old enough for advanced teaching. The father asked who should be his tutor, and was told, *Pythagoras, and the mighty battle-bard.*

When the child died a few days after, the prophet was abashed, and quite unable to account for this summary confutation. However, dear good Rutilianus very soon restored the oracle's credit by discovering that this was the very thing the God had foreshown – he had not directed him to choose a living teacher; Pythagoras and Homer were long dead, and doubtless the boy was now enjoying their instructions in Hades. Small blame to Alexander if he had a taste for dealings with such specimens of humanity as this.

Another of Rutilianus's questions was, Whose soul he had succeeded to, and the answer:

*First thou wast Peleus' son, and next Menander;
Then thine own self; next, a sunbeam shalt be;
And nine score annual rounds thy life shall measure.*

At seventy, he died of melancholy, not waiting for the God to pay in full.

That was an autophone too. Another time Rutilianus consulted the oracle on the choice of a wife. The answer was express: *Wed Alexander's daughter and Selene's.*

He had long ago spread the report that the daughter he had had was by Selene: she had once seen him asleep, and fallen in love, as is her way with handsome sleepers. The sensible Rutilianus lost no time, but sent for the maiden at once, celebrated the nuptials, a sexagenarian bridegroom, and lived with her, propitiating his divine mother-in-law with whole hecatombs, and reckoning himself now one of the heavenly company.

His finger once in the Italian pie, Alexander devoted himself to getting further. Sacred envoys were sent all over the Roman Empire, warning the various cities to be on their guard against pestilence and conflagrations, with the prophet's offers of security against them. One oracle in particular, an autophone again, he distributed broadcast at a time of pestilence. It was a single line: *Phoebus long-tressed the plague-cloud shall dispel.*

This was everywhere to be seen written up on doors as a prophylactic. Its effect was generally disappointing; for it somehow happened that the protected houses were just the ones to be desolated. Not that I would suggest for a moment that the line was their destruction; but, accidentally no doubt, it did so fall out. Possibly common people put too much confidence in the verse, and lived carelessly without troubling to help the oracle against its foe. Were there not the words fighting their battle, and long-tressed Phoebus discharging his arrows at the pestilence?

In Rome itself he established an intelligence bureau well manned with his accomplices. They sent him people's characters, forecasts of their questions, and hints of their ambitions, so that he had his answers ready before the messengers reached him.

It was with his eye on this Italian propaganda, too, that he took a further step. This was the institution of mysteries,

with hierophants and torch-bearers complete. The ceremonies occupied three successive days. On the first, proclamation was made on the Athenian model to this effect:

'If there be any atheist or Christian or Epicurean here spying upon our rites, let him depart in haste; and let all such as have faith in the God be initiated and all blessing attend them.' He led the litany with, 'Christians, avaunt!' and the crowd responded, 'Epicureans, avaunt!'

Then was presented the child-bed of Leto and birth of Apollo, the bridal of Coronis, Asclepius born.

The second day, the epiphany and nativity of the God Glycon.

On the third came the wedding of Podalirius and Alexander's mother; this was called Torch-day, and torches were used. The finale was the loves of Selene and Alexander, and the birth of Rutilianus's wife. The torch-bearer and hierophant was Endymion-Alexander. He was discovered lying asleep; to him from heaven, represented by the ceiling, enter as Selene one Rutilia, a great beauty, and wife of one of the Imperial procurators. She and Alexander were lovers off the stage too, and the wretched husband had to look on at their public kissing and embracing. If there had not been a good supply of torches, things might possibly have gone even further. Shortly after, he reappeared amidst a profound hush, attired as hierophant; in a loud voice he called, 'Hail, Glycon!', whereto the Eumolpidae and Ceryces of Paphlagonia, with their clod-hopping shoes and their garlic breath, made sonorous response, 'Hail, Alexander!'

The torch ceremony with its ritual skippings often enabled him to bestow a glimpse of his thigh, which was thus discovered to be of gold; it was presumably enveloped in cloth of gold, which glittered in the lamp-light. This gave rise to a debate between two wiseacres, whether the golden thigh meant that he had inherited Pythagoras's soul, or merely that their two souls were alike; the question was referred to Alexander himself, and King Glycon relieved their perplexity with an oracle:

*Waxes and wanes Pythagoras' soul: the seer's
Is from the mind of Zeus an emanation.
His Father sent him, virtuous men to aid,
And with his bolt one day shall call him home.*

I will now give you a conversation between Glycon and one Sacerdos of Tius; the intelligence of the latter you may gauge from his questions. I read it inscribed in golden letters in Sacerdos's house at Tius.

'Tell me, lord Glycon,' said he, 'who you are.'

'The new Asclepius.'

'Another, different from the former one? Is that the meaning?'

'That it is not lawful for you to learn.'

'And how many years will you sojourn and prophesy among us?'

'A thousand and three.'

'And after that, whither will you go?'

'To Bactria; for the barbarians too must be blessed with my presence.'

'The other oracles, at Didymus and Clarus and Delphi, have they still the spirit of your grandsire Apollo, or are the answers that now come from them forgeries?'

'That, too, desire not to know; it is not lawful.'

'What shall I be after this life?'

'A camel; then a horse; then a wise man, no less a prophet than Alexander.'

Such was the conversation. There was added to it an oracle in verse, inspired by the fact that Sacerdos was an associate of Lepidus: *Shun Lepidus; an evil fate awaits him.*

As I have said, Alexander was much afraid of Epicurus, and the solvent action of his logic on imposture.

On one occasion, indeed, an Epicurean got himself into great trouble by daring to expose him before a great

gathering. He came up and addressed him in a loud voice.

'Alexander, it was you who induced So-and-so the Paphlagonian to bring his slaves before the governor of Galatia, charged with the murder of his son who was being educated in Alexandria. Well, the young man is alive, and has come back, to find that the slaves had been cast to the beasts by your machinations.'

What had happened was this. The lad had sailed up the Nile, gone on to a Red Sea port, found a vessel starting for India, and been persuaded to make the voyage. He being long overdue, the unfortunate slaves supposed that he had either perished in the Nile or fallen a victim to some of the pirates who infested it at that time; so they came home to report his disappearance. Then followed the oracle, the sentence, and finally the young man's return with the story of his absence.

All this the Epicurean recounted. Alexander was much annoyed by the exposure, and could not stomach so well deserved an affront. He directed the company to stone the man, on pain of being involved in his impiety and called Epicureans. However, when they set to work, a distinguished Pontic called Demostratus, who was staying there, rescued him by interposing his own body. The man had the narrowest possible escape from being stoned to death—as he richly deserved to be; what business had he to be the only sane man in a crowd of madmen, and needlessly make himself the butt of Paphlagonian infatuation?

This was a special case; but it was the practice for the names of applicants to be read out the day before answers were given. The herald asked whether each was to receive his oracle; and sometimes the reply came from within, To perdition! One so repulsed could get shelter, fire or water, from no man; he must be driven from land to land as a blasphemer, an atheist, and—lowest depth of all—an Epicurean.

In this connection Alexander once made himself supremely ridiculous. Coming across Epicurus's *Accepted Maxims*, the most admirable of his books, as you know, with its terse presentment of his wise conclusions, he brought it into the middle of the market-place, there burned it on a fig-wood fire for the sins of its author, and cast its ashes into the sea. He issued an oracle on the occasion: *The dotard's maxims to the flames be given.*

The fellow had no conception of the blessings conferred by that book upon its readers, of the peace, tranquillity, and independence of mind it produces, of the protection it gives against terrors, phantoms, and marvels, vain hopes and inordinate desires, of the judgment and candor that it fosters, or of its true purging of the spirit, not with torches and squills and such rubbish, but with right reason, truth, and frankness.

Perhaps the greatest example of our rogue's audacity is what I now come to. Having easy access to Palace and Court by Rutilianus's influence, he sent an oracle just at the crisis of the German war, when M. Aurelius was on the point of engaging the Marcomanni and Quadi. The oracle required that two lions should be flung alive into the Danube, with quantities of sacred herbs and magnificent sacrifices. I had better give the words:

*To rolling Ister, swoln with Heaven's rain,
Of Cybelean thralls, those mountain beasts,
Fling ye a pair; therewith all flowers and herbs
Of savour sweet that Indian air doth breed.
Hence victory, and fame, and lovely peace.*

These directions were precisely followed: the lions swam across to the enemy's bank, where they were clubbed to death by the barbarians, who took them for dogs or a new kind of wolves; and our forces immediately after met with a severe defeat, losing some twenty thousand men in one engagement. This was followed by the Aquileian incident, in the course of which that city was nearly lost. In view of these results, Alexander warmed up that stale Delphian defense of the Croesus oracle: *the God had foretold a victory, forsooth, but had not stated whether Romans or barbarians should have it.*

The constant increase in the number of visitors, the inadequacy of accommodation in the city, and the difficulty of finding provisions for consultants, led to his introducing what he called *night oracles*. He received the packets, slept upon them, in his own phrase, and gave answers which the God was supposed to send him in dreams. These were generally not lucid, but ambiguous and confused, especially when he came to packets sealed with exceptional care. He did not risk tampering with these, but wrote down any words that came into his head, the results obtained corresponding well enough to his conception of the oracular. There were regular interpreters in attendance, who made considerable sums out of the recipients by expounding and unriddling these oracles. This office contributed to his revenue, the interpreters paying him L250 each.

Sometimes he stirred the wonder of the silly by answers to persons who had neither brought nor sent questions, and in fact did not exist. Here is a specimen:

*Who is't, thou askst, that with Calligenia
All secretly defiles thy nuptial bed?
The slave Protogenes, whom most thou trustest.
Him thou enjoyedst: he thy wife enjoys—
The fit return for that thine outrage done.
And know that baleful drugs for thee are brewed,
Lest thou or see or hear their evil deeds.
Close by the wall, at thy bed's head, make search.
Thy maid Calypso to their plot is privy.*

The names and circumstantial details might stagger a Democritus, till a moment's thought showed him the despicable trick.

He often gave answers in Syriac or Celtic to barbarians who questioned him in their own tongue, though he had difficulty in finding compatriots of theirs in the city. In these cases there was a long interval between application and response, during which the packet might be securely opened at leisure, and somebody found capable of translating the question. The following is an answer given to a Scythian:

*Morphi ebargulis for night
Chnenchicrank shall leave the light.*

Another oracle to some one who neither came nor existed was in prose. *'Return the way thou earnest,'* it ran; *'for he that sent thee hath this day been slain by his neighbour Diocles, with aid of the robbers Magnus, Celer, and Bubalus, who are taken and in chains.'*

I must give you one or two of the answers that fell to my share. I asked whether Alexander was bald, and having sealed it publicly with great care, got a night oracle in reply: *Sabardalachu malach Attis was not he.*

Another time I did up the same question—*What was Homer's birthplace?*—in two packets given in under different names. My servant misled him by saying, when asked what he came for, a cure for lung trouble; so the answer to one packet was: *Cytmid and foam of steed the liniment give.*

As for the other packet, he got the information that the sender was inquiring whether the land or the sea route to Italy was preferable. So he answered, without much reference to Homer: *Fare not by sea; land-travel meets thy need.*

I laid a good many traps of this kind for him; here is another. I asked only one question, but wrote outside the packet in the usual form, So- and-so's eight queries, giving a fictitious name and sending the eight shillings. Satisfied with the payment of the money and the inscription on the packet, he gave me eight answers to my one question. This was, *When will Alexander's imposture be detected?* The answers concerned nothing in heaven or earth, but were all silly and meaningless together. He afterwards found out about this, and also that I had tried to dissuade Rutilianus both from the marriage and from putting any confidence in the oracle; so he naturally conceived a violent dislike for me. When Rutilianus once put a question to him about me, the answer was: *Night-haunts and foul debauch are all his joy.*

It is true his dislike was quite justified. On a certain occasion I was passing through Abonutichus, with a spearman and a pikeman whom my friend the governor of Cappadocia had lent me as an escort on my way to the sea. Ascertaining that I was the Lucian he knew of, he sent me a very polite and hospitable invitation. I found him with a numerous company; by good luck I had brought my escort. He gave me his hand to kiss according to his usual custom. I took hold of it as if to kiss, but instead bestowed on it a sound bite that must have come near disabling it. The company, who were already offended at my calling him Alexander instead of Prophet, were inclined to throttle and beat me for sacrilege. But he endured the pain like a man, checked their violence, and assured them that he would easily tame me, and illustrate Glycon's greatness in converting his bitterest foes to friends. He then dismissed them all, and argued the matter with me: he was perfectly aware of my advice to Rutilianus; why had I treated him so, when I might have been preferred by him to great influence in that quarter? By this time I had realized my dangerous position, and was only too glad to welcome these advances; I presently went my way in all friendship with him. The rapid change wrought in me greatly impressed the observers.

When I intended to sail, he sent me many parting gifts, and offered to find us (Xenophon and me, that is; I had sent

my father and family on to Amastris) a ship and crew—which offer I accepted in all confidence. When the passage was half over, I observed the master in tears arguing with his men, which made me very uneasy. It turned out that Alexander's orders were to seize and fling us overboard; in that case his war with me would have been lightly won. But the crew were prevailed upon by the master's tears to do us no harm.

'I am sixty years old, as you can see,' he said to me; 'I have lived an honest blameless life so far, and I should not like at my time of life, with a wife and children too, to stain my hands with blood.' And with that preface he informed us what we were there for, and what Alexander had told him to do.

He landed us at Aegiali, of Homeric fame, and thence sailed home. Some Bosphoran envoys happened to be passing, on their way to Bithynia with the annual tribute from their king Eupator. They listened kindly to my account of our dangerous situation, I was taken on board, and reached Amastris safely after my narrow escape. From that time it was war between Alexander and me, and I left no stone unturned to get my revenge. Even before his plot I had hated him, revolted by his abominable practices, and I now busied myself with the attempt to expose him. I found plenty of allies, especially in the circle of Timocrates the Heracleot philosopher. But Avitus, the then governor of Bithynia and Pontus, restrained me, I may almost say with prayers and entreaties. He could not possibly spoil his relations with Rutilianus, he said, by punishing the man, even if he could get clear evidence against him. Thus arrested in my course, I did not persist in what must have been, considering the disposition of the judge, a fruitless prosecution.

Among instances of Alexander's presumption, a high place must be given to his petition to the Emperor: the name of Abonutichus was to be changed to Ionopolis; and a new coin was to be struck, with a representation on the obverse of Glycon, and, on the reverse, Alexander bearing the garlands proper to his paternal grandfather Asclepius, and the famous scimitar of his maternal ancestor Perseus.

He had stated in an oracle that he was destined to live to a hundred and fifty, and then die by a thunderbolt. He had in fact, before he reached seventy, an end very sad for a son of Podalirius, his leg mortifying from foot to groin and being eaten of worms. It then proved that he was bald, as he was forced by pain to let the doctors make cooling applications to his head, which they could not do without removing his wig.

So ended Alexander's heroics. Such was the catastrophe of his tragedy; one would like to find a special providence in it, though doubtless chance must have the credit. The funeral celebration was to be worthy of his life, taking the form of a contest—for possession of the oracle. The most prominent of the impostors his accomplices referred it to Rutilianus's arbitration which of them should be selected to succeed to the prophetic office and wear the hierophantic oracular garland. Among these was numbered the grey-haired physician Paetus, dishonoring equally his grey hairs and his profession. But Steward-of-the-Games Rutilianus sent them about their business ungarlanded, and continued the defunct in possession of his holy office.

My object, dear friend, in making this small selection from a great mass of material has been twofold. First, I was willing to oblige a friend and comrade who is for me the pattern of wisdom, sincerity, good humor, justice, tranquillity, and geniality. But secondly I was still more concerned (a preference which you will be very far from resenting) to strike a blow for Epicurus, that great man whose holiness and divinity of nature were not shams, who alone had and imparted true insight into the good, and who brought deliverance to all that consorted with him. Yet I think casual readers too may find my essay not unserviceable, since it is not only destructive, but, for men of sense, constructive also.



Zeus Tragedus

Characters: Hermes. Hera. Colossus. Heracles. Athene. Poseidon. Momus. Hermagoras. Zeus. Aphrodite. Apollo, Timocles. Damis.

Context: Zeus summons the gods to consider assisting a Stoic in presenting his side of a debate with by an Epicurean by the name of Damis, who is successfully arguing that the gods take no part in human affairs.

Hermes. Wherefore art thou brooding, Zeus? Wherefore art thou apart, and palely pacing, as Earth's sages use? Let me thy counsel know, thy cares partake; and find thy comfort in a faithful fool.

Athene. Cronides, lord of lords, and all our sire, I clasp thy knees; grant thou what I require; A boon the lightning-eyed Tritonia asks: Speak, rend the veil thy secret thought that masks; Reveal what care thy mind within thee gnaws, Blanches thy cheek, and this deep moaning draws.

Zeus. Speech hath no utterance of surpassing fear, tragedy holds no misery or woe, but our divinest essence soon shall taste.

Athene. Alas, how dire a prelude to thy tale!

Zeus. O brood maleficent, teemed from Earth's dark womb! And thou, Prometheus, how hast thou wrought me woe!

Athene. Possess us; are not we thine own familiars?

Zeus. With a whirr and a crash, Let the levin-bolt dash — Ah, whither?

Hera. A truce to your passion, Zeus. *We* have not these good people's gift for farce or recitation; *we* have not swallowed Euripides whole, and cannot play up to you. Do you suppose we do not know how to account for your annoyance?

Zeus. Thou knowst not; else thy wailings had been loud.

Hera. Don't tell me; it's a love affair; that's what's the matter with you. However, you won't have any 'wailings' from me; I am too much hardened to neglect. I suppose you have discovered some new Danae or Semele or Europa whose charms are troubling you; and so you are meditating a transformation into a bull or satyr, or a descent through the roof into your beloved's bosom as a shower of gold. All the symptoms—your groans and your tears and your white face—point to love and nothing else.

Zeus. Happy ignorance, that sees not what perils now forbid love and such toys!

Hera. Is your name Zeus, or not? And, if so, what else can possibly annoy you but love?

Zeus. Hera, our condition is most precarious; it is touch- and-go, as they call it, whether we are still to enjoy reverence and honor from the earth, or be utterly neglected and become of no account.

Hera. Has Earth produced a new brood of giants? Have the Titans broken their chains, overpowered their guards, and taken up arms against us once more?

Zeus. Nay, fear not that; Hell threatens not the Gods.

Hera. What can the matter be, then? To hear you, one might think it was Polus or Aristodemus, not Zeus; and why, pray, if something of that sort is not bothering you?

Zeus. My dear, a discussion somehow arose yesterday between Timocles the Stoic and Damis the Epicurean. There was a numerous and respectable audience (which particularly annoyed me), and they had an argument on the subject of Providence. Damis questioned the existence of the Gods, and utterly denied their interest in or government of events, while Timocles, good man, did his best to champion our cause. A great crowd gathered round; but no conclusion was reached. They broke up with an understanding that the inquiry should be completed another day; and now they are all agog to see which will win and prove his case. You all see how parlous and precarious is our

position, depending on a single mortal. These are the alternatives for us: to be dismissed as mere empty names, or (if Timocles prevails) to enjoy our customary honors.

Hera. This is really a serious matter; your ranting was not so uncalled-for, Zeus.

Zeus. You fancied me thinking of some Danae or Antiope; and this was the dread reality. Now, Hermes, Hera, Athene, what is our course? We await your contribution to our plans.

Hermes. My opinion is that an assembly be summoned and the community taken into counsel.

Hera. And I concur.

Athene. Sire, I dissent entirely; you should not fill Heaven with apprehensions, nor let your own uneasiness be visible, but take private measures to assure Timocles's victory and Damis's being laughed out of court.

Hermes. It cannot be kept quiet, Zeus; the philosophers' debate is public, and you will be accused of despotic methods, if you maintain reserve on a matter of so great and general interest.

Zeus. Make proclamation and summon all, then. I approve your judgment.

Hermes. Here, assemble, all ye Gods; don't waste time, come along, here you are; we are going to have an important meeting.

Zeus. What, Hermes? So bald, so plain, so prosy an announcement—on this momentous occasion?

Hermes. Why, how would you like it done?

Zeus. Some metre, a little poetic sonority, would make the style impressive, and they would be more likely to come.

Hermes. Ah, Zeus, that is work for epic poets or reciters, and I am no good at poetry. I should be sure to put in too many feet, or leave out some, and spoil the thing; they would only laugh at my rude verses. Why, I've known Apollo himself laughed at for some of his oracles; and prophecy has the advantage of obscurity, which gives the hearers something better to do than scanning verses.

Zeus. Well, well, Hermes, you can make lines from Homer the chief ingredient of your composition; summon us in his words; you remember them, of course.

Hermes. I cannot say they are exactly on the tip of my tongue; however, I'll do my best:

*Let ne'er a God (tum, tum), nor eke a Goddess,
Nor yet of Ocean's rivers one be wanting,
Nor nymphs; but gather to great Zeus's council;
And all that feast on glorious hecatombs,
Yea, middle and lower classes of Divinity,
Or nameless ones that snuff fat altar-fumes*

Zeus. Good, Hermes; that is an excellent proclamation: see, here they come pell-mell; now receive and place them in correct precedence, according to their material or workmanship; gold in the front row, silver next, then the ivory ones, then those of stone or bronze. A cross-division will give precedence to the creations of Phidias, Alcamenes, Myron, Euphranor, and artists of that calibre, while the common inartistic jobs can be huddled together in the far corner, hold their tongues, and just make up the rank and file of our assembly.

Hermes. All right; they shall have their proper places. But here is a point: suppose one of them is gold, and heavy at that, but not finely finished, quite amateurish and ill proportioned, in fact—is he to take precedence of Myron's and Polyclitus's bronze, or Phidias's and Alcamenes's marble? Or is workmanship to count most?

Zeus. It should be by rights. Never mind, put the gold first.

Hermes. I see; property qualification, comparative wealth, is the test, not merit.—Gold to the front row, please.—Zeus, the front row will be exclusively barbarian, I observe. You see the peculiarity of the Greek contingent: they have grace and beauty and artistic workmanship, but they are all marble or bronze—the most costly of them only ivory with just an occasional gleam of gold, the merest surface-plating; and even those are wood inside, harbouring whole colonies of mice. Whereas Bendis here, Anubis there, Attis next door, and Mithras and Men, are all of solid gold, heavy and intrinsically precious.

Poseidon. Hermes, is it in order that this dog-faced Egyptian person should sit in front of me, Poseidon?

Hermes. Certainly. You see, Earth-shaker, the Corinthians had no gold at the time, so Lysippus made you of paltry bronze; Dog-face is a whole gold-mine richer than you. You must put up with being moved back, and not object to the owner of such a golden snout being preferred.

Aphrodite. Then, Hermes, find me a place in the front row; I am golden.

Hermes. Not so, Aphrodite, if I can trust my eyes; I am purblind, or you are white marble; you were quarried, I take it, from Pentelicus, turned by Praxiteles's fancy into Aphrodite, and handed over to the Cnidians.

Aphrodite. Wait; my witness is unexceptionable—Homer. 'The Golden Aphrodite' he calls me, up and down his poems.

Hermes. Oh, yes, no doubt; *he* called Apollo rich, 'rolling in gold'; but now where will you find Apollo? Somewhere in the third-class seats; his crown has been taken off and his harp pegs stolen by the pirates, you see. So *you* may think yourself lucky with a place above the fourth.

Colossus. Well, who will dare dispute *my* claim? Am I not the Sun? And look at my height. If the Rhodians had not decided on such grandiose dimensions for me, the same outlay would have furnished forth a round dozen of your golden Gods; I ought to be valued proportionally. And then, besides the size, there is the workmanship and careful finish.

Hermes. What shall I do, Zeus? Here is a difficulty again—too much for me. Going by material, he is bronze; but, reckoning the talents his bronze cost, he would be above the first class.

Zeus. What business has he here dwarfing the rest and blocking up all the bench?—Why, my excellent Rhodian, you may be as superior to the golden ones as you will; but how can you possibly go in the front row? Every one would have to get up, to let you sit; half that broad beam of yours would fill the whole House. I must ask you to assist our deliberations standing; you can bend down your head to the meeting.

Hermes. Now here is another problem. Both bronze, equal aesthetically, being both from Lysippus's studio, and, to crown all, nothing to choose between them for birth—two sons of yours, Zeus—Dionysus and Heracles. Which is to be first? You can see for yourself, they mean to stand upon their order.

Zeus. We are wasting time, Hermes; the debate should have been in full swing by now. Tell them to sit anyhow, according to taste; we will have an *ad hoc* meeting another day, and then I shall know how to settle the question of precedence.

Hermes. My goodness, what a noise! What low vulgar bawling! Listen—'Hurry up with that carving!' 'Do pass the nectar!' 'Why no more ambrosia?' 'When are those hecatombs coming?' 'Here, shares in that victim!'

Zeus. Call them to order, Hermes; this nonsense must cease, before I can give them the order of the day.

Hermes. They do not all know Greek; and I haven't the gift of tongues, to make myself understood by Scythians and Persians and Thracians and Celts. Perhaps I had better hold up my hand and signal for silence.

Zeus. Do.

Hermes. Good; they are as quiet as if they were so many teachers of elocution. Now is the time for your speech; see, they are all hanging on your lips.

Zeus. Why—there is something wrong with me—Hermes, my boy—I will be frank with you. You know how confident and impressive I always was as a public speaker?

Hermes. I know; I used to be in such a fright; you threatened sometimes to let down your golden cord and heave up earth and sea from their foundations, Gods included.

Zeus. But today, my child—it may be this terrible crisis—it may be the size of the audience—there is a vast number of Gods here, isn't there—anyhow, my thoughts are all mixed, I shiver, my tongue seems tied. What is most absurd of all, my exordium is gone clean out of my head; and I had prepared it on purpose to produce a good impression at the start.

Hermes. You have spoiled everything, Zeus. They cannot make out your silence; they are expecting to hear of some terrible disaster, to account for your delay.

Zeus. What do you think? Reel off the exordium in Homer?

Hermes. Which one?

Zeus. Lend me your ears, Gods all and Goddesses.

Hermes. Rubbish! You made quite exhibition enough of yourself in that vein in our cabinet council. However, you might, if you like, drop your metrical fustian, and adapt any one of Demosthenes's Philippics with a few alterations. That is the fashionable method with speakers nowadays.

Zeus. Ah, that is a royal road to eloquence—simplifies matters very much for a man in difficulties.

Hermes. Go ahead, then.

Zeus. Men of—Heaven, I presume that you would be willing to pay a great price, if you could know what in the world has occasioned the present summons. Which being so, it is fitting that you should give a ready hearing to my words. Now, whereas the present crisis, Heavenians, may almost be said to lift up a voice and bid us take vigorous hold on opportunity, it seems to me that we are letting it slip from our nerveless grasp. And I wish now (I can't remember any more) to exhibit clearly to you the apprehensions which have led to my summoning you.

As you are all aware, Mnesitheus the ship's-captain yesterday made his votive offering for the narrow escape of his vessel off Caphereus, and those of us whom he had invited attended the banquet in Piraeus. After the libations you went your several ways. I myself, as it was not very late, walked up to town for an afternoon stroll in Ceramicus, reflecting as I went on the parsimony of Mnesitheus. When the ship was driving against the cliff, and already inside the circle of reef, he had vowed whole hecatombs: what he offered in fact, with sixteen Gods to entertain, was a single cock—an old bird afflicted with catarrh—and half a dozen grains of frankincense. These were all mildewed, so that they at once fizzled out on the embers, hardly giving enough smoke to tickle the olfactories. Engaged in these thoughts I reached the Poecile, and there found a great crowd gathered; there were some inside the Portico, a large number outside, and a few seated on the benches vociferating as loud as they could. Guessing correctly that these were philosophers of the militant variety, I had a mind to stop and hear what they were saying. I was enveloped in a good thick cloud, under cover of which I assumed their habit, lengthened my beard, and so made a passable philosopher; then I elbowed my way through the crowd and got in undetected. I found an accomplished scoundrel and a pattern of human virtue at daggers drawn; they were Damis the Epicurean and Timocles the Stoic. The latter was bathed in perspiration, and his voice showed signs of wear, while Damis goaded him on to further exertions with mocking laughter.

The bone of contention was ourselves. Damis—the reptile!—maintained that we did not concern ourselves in thought or act with human affairs, and practically denied our existence; that was what it came to. And he found some support. Timocles was on our side, and loyally, passionately, unshrinkingly did he champion the cause. He extolled our Providence, and illustrated the orderly discerning character of our influence and government. He too had his party; but he was exhausted and quite husky; and the majority were inclining to Damis. I saw how much was at stake, and ordered Night to come on and break up the meeting. They accordingly dispersed, agreeing to conclude the inquiry next day. I kept among the crowd on its way home, heard its commendations of Damis, and found that his views were far the more popular, though some still protested against condemning Timocles out of hand, and preferred to see what he would say for himself to-morrow.

You now know the occasion of this meeting—no light one, ye Gods, if you reflect how entirely our dignity, our revenue, our honour, depend on mankind. If they should accept as true either our absolute non-existence or, short of that, our indifference to them, farewell to our earthly sacrifices, attributes, honors; we shall sit starving and ineffectual in Heaven; our beloved feasts and assemblies, games and sacrifices, vigils and processions—all will be no more. So mighty is the issue; believe me, it behooves us all to search out salvation; and where lies salvation? In the victory and acceptance of Timocles, in laughter that shall drown the voice of Damis. For I doubt the unaided powers of Timocles, if our help be not accorded him.

Hermes, make formal proclamation, and let the debate commence.

Hermes. Hear, keep silence, clamor not. Of full and qualified Gods, speak who will. Why, what means this? Doth none rise? Cower ye confounded at these momentous tidings?

Momus. Away, ye dull as earth, as water weak! But *I* could find plenty to say, Zeus, if free speech were granted me.

Zeus. Speak, Momus, and fear not. You will use your freedom, surely, for the common good.

Momus. Hear, then, ye Gods; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. You must know, I foresaw all this clearly—our difficulty—the growth of these agitators; it is ourselves who are responsible for their impudence. I swear to you, we need not blame Epicurus nor his friends and successors, for the prevalence of these ideas. Why, what can one expect men to think, when they see all life topsy-turvy—the good neglected, pining in poverty, disease, and slavery, detestable scoundrels honored, rolling in wealth, and ordering their betters about, temple-robbers undetected and unpunished, the innocent constantly crucified and bastinadoed? With this evidence before them, it is only natural they should conclude against our existence. All the more when they hear the oracles saying that some one *The Halys crossed, o'erthrows a mighty realm, but not specifying whether that realm is his own or his enemy's*; or again *O sacred Salamis, thou shalt slay full many a mother's son*.

The Greeks were mothers' sons as well as the Persians, I suppose. Or again, when they hear the ballads about our loves, our wounds, captivities, thraldoms, quarrels, and endless vicissitudes (mark you, we claim all the while to be blissful and serene), are they not justified in ridiculing and belittling us? And then we say it is outrageous if a few people who are not quite fools expose the absurdity and reject Providence. Why, we ought to be glad enough that a few still go on sacrificing to blunderers like us.

And at this point, Zeus—this meeting is private; the human element is not represented among us (except by Heracles, Dionysus, Ganymede, and Asclepius, and they are naturalized)—at this point, answer me a question frankly: did your interest in mankind ever carry you so far as to sift the good from the bad? The answer is in the negative, I know. Very well, then; had not a Theseus, on his way from Troezen to Athens, exterminated the malefactors as an incidental amusement, Sciron and Pityocampes and Cercyon and the rest of them might have gone on battenning on the slaughter of travelers, for all you and your Providence would have done. Had not an old-fashioned thoughtful Eurystheus, benevolently collecting information of local troubles, sent this energetic enterprising servant of his about, the mighty Zeus would never have given a thought to the Hydra or the Stymphalian birds, the Thracian horses and the drunken insolence of Centaurs.

If the truth must out, we sit here with a single eye to one thing—does a man sacrifice and feed the altars fat? Everything else drifts as it may. We get our deserts, and shall continue to get them, when men open their eyes by degrees and find that sacrifices and processions bring them no profit. Before long you will find we are the laughing-stock of people like Epicurus, Metrodorus, Damis, who will have mastered and muzzled our advocates. With whom does it lie to check and remedy this state of things? Why, with you, who have brought it on. As for Momus, what is dishonour to him? He was never among the recipients of honor, while you were still prosperous; your banquetings were too exclusive.

Zeus. He was ever a cross-grained censor; we need not mind his maundering, Gods. We have it from the admirable Demosthenes: imputations, blame, criticism, these are easy things; they tax no one's capacity: what calls for a statesman is the suggesting of a better course; and that is what I rely upon the rest of you for; let us do our best without his help.

Poseidon. As for me, I live ordinarily under water, as you know, and follow an independent policy in the depths. That policy is to save sailors, set ships on their way, and keep the winds quiet, as best I may. However, I do take an interest in your politics too, and my opinion is that this Damis should be got rid of before the debate. The thunderbolt would do it, or some means could be found; else he might win—you say he is a plausible fellow, Zeus. It would teach them that there is a reckoning for telling such tales about us, too.

Zeus. You must be jesting, Poseidon; you cannot have forgotten that we have no say in the matter? It is the Fates that spin a man's thread, whether he be destined to the thunderbolt or the sword, to fever or consumption. If it had depended on me, do you suppose I should have let those temple-robbers get off unblasted from Pisa the other day?—two of my curls shorn off, weighing half a dozen pounds apiece. Would *you* have stood it, when that fisherman from Oreus stole your trident at Geraestus? Moreover, they will think we are sensitive and angry; they will suspect that the reason why we get the man out of the way without waiting to see him matched with Timocles is that we are afraid of his arguments; they will say we are just securing judgment by default.

Poseidon. Dear, dear! I thought I had hit upon a good short cut to our object.

Zeus. Nonsense, there is something fishy about it, Poseidon; and it is a dull notion too, to destroy your adversary beforehand. He dies unvanquished, and leaves his argument behind him still debatable and undecided.

Poseidon. Then the rest of you must think of something better, if 'fishy' is the best word you have for me.

Apollo. If we beardless juniors were competent to address the meeting, *I* might perhaps have contributed usefully to the discussion.

Momus. Oh, Apollo, the inquiry is so important that seniority may be waived, and any one allowed his say. A pretty thing to split hairs about legal competence at a supreme crisis! But *you* are surely qualified by this time; your minority is prehistoric, your name is on the Privy-Council roll, your senatorial rank dates back almost to Cronus. Pray spare us these juvenile airs, and give us your views freely; you need not be bashful about your smooth chin. You have a father's rights in Asclepius's great bush of a beard. Moreover, you never had a better opportunity of showing your wisdom, if your philosophic *seances* with the Muses on Helicon have not been thrown away.

Apollo. Why, it does not lie with you to give me leave, Momus; Zeus must do that; and if he bids, I may find words that shall be not all uncultured, but worthy of my Heliconian studies.

Zeus. Speak, son; thou hast my leave.

Apollo. This Timocles is a good pious man, and an excellent Stoic scholar. His learning has gained him a wide and paying connection among young men; in private lessons his manner is indeed very convincing. But in public speaking he is timid, cannot produce his voice, and has a provincial accent. The consequence is, he gets laughed at in company, lacks fluency, stammers and loses his thread—especially when he emphasizes these defects by an attempt at flowers of speech. As far as intelligence goes, he is extremely acute and subtle, so the Stoic experts say. But he spoils it all by the feebleness of his oral explanations; he is confused and unintelligible, deals in paradoxes, and when he is interrogated, explains *ignotum per ignotius*. His audience does not grasp his meaning, and therefore laughs at him. I think lucidity a most important point; there is nothing one should be so careful about as to be comprehensible.

Momus. You praise lucidity, Apollo; your theory is excellent, though your practice does not quite conform. Your oracles are crooked and enigmatic, and generally rely upon a safe ambiguity; a second prophet is required to say what they mean. But what is your solution of the problem? How are we to cure Timocles of the impediment in his speech?

Apollo. If possible, we should provide him with an able counsel (there are plenty such) to be inspired by him and give adequate expression to his ideas.

Momus. Your sapience is beardless indeed—in *statu pupillari*, one may say. A learned gathering: Timocles with counsel by his side to interpret his ideas. Damis speaking *in propria persona* with his own tongue, his opponent employing a go-between into whose ears he privately pours inspiration, and the go-between producing ornate periods, without, I dare say, understanding what he is told—most entertaining for the listeners! We shall get nothing out of that device.

But, reverend sir, you claim the gift of prophecy, and it has brought you in good pay—golden ingots on one occasion?—Why not seize this opportunity of exhibiting your art? You might tell us which of the disputants will win; a prophet knows the future, of course.

Apollo. I have no tripod or incense here; no substitute for the divining-well of Castaly.

Momus. Aha! you are caught! you will not come to the scratch.

Zeus. Speak, my son, in spite of all; give not this enemy occasion to blaspheme; let him not flout thy powers with tripod and water and frankincense, as though thine art were lost without them.

Apollo. Father, it were better done at Delphi or at Colophon, with all the customary instruments to hand. Yet, bare and unprovided as I am, I will essay to tell whether of them twain shall prevail.—If the metre is a little rough, you must make allowances.

Momus. Go on, then; but remember, Apollo: lucidity; no 'able counsel,' no solutions that want solving themselves. It is not a question of lamb and tortoise boiling in Lydia now; you know what we want to get at.

Zeus. What will thine utterance be? How dread, even now, is the making ready! The altered hue, the rolling eyes, the floating locks, the frenzied gesture—all is possession, horror, mystery.

Apollo.

*Who lists may hear Apollo's soothfast rede
Of stiff debate, heroic challenge ringing
Shrill, and each headpiece lined with fence of proof.
Alternate clack the strokes in whirling strife;
Sore buffeted, quakes and shivers heart of oak.
But when grasshopper feels the vulture's talons,
Then the storm-boding ravens croak their last,
Prevail the mules, butts his swift foals the ass.*

Zeus. Why that ribald laughter, Momus? It is no laughing matter. Stop, stop, fool; you'll choke yourself.

Momus. Well, such a clear simple oracle puts one in spirits.

Zeus. Indeed? Then perhaps you will kindly expound it.

Momus. No need of a Themistocles this time; it is absolutely plain. The oracle just says in so many words that he is a quack, and we pack-asses (quite true) and mules to believe in him; we have not as much sense, it adds, as a grasshopper.

Heracles. Father, I am only an alien, but I am not afraid to give my opinion. Let them begin their debate. Then, if Timocles gets the best of it, we can let the meeting go on, in our own interest. On the other hand, if things look bad, I will give the Portico a shake, if you like, and bring it down on Damis; a confounded fellow like that is not to insult us.

Zeus. Now by Heracles—I can swear by you, I certainly cannot swear by your plan—what a crude—what a shockingly philistine suggestion! What! Destroy all those people for one man's wickedness? And the Portico thrown in, with the Miltiades and Cynaegirus on the field of Marathon? Why, if these were ruined, how could the orators ever make another speech, with the best of their stock-in-trade taken from them? Besides, while you were alive, you might possibly have done a thing like that; but now that you are a God, you surely understand that only the Fates are competent, and we cannot interfere?

Heracles. Then when I slew the lion or the Hydra, was I only the Fates' instrument?

Zeus. Of course you were.

Heracles. And now, suppose any one insults me, or robs my temple, or upsets an image of me, am I not to pulverize him, just because the Fates have not decreed it long ago?

Zeus. Certainly not.

Heracles. Then allow me to speak my mind; I'm a blunt man; I call a spade a spade.

If this is the state of things with you, good-bye for me to your honors and altar-steam and fat of victims; I shall be off to Hades. There, if I show my bow ready for action, the ghosts of the monsters I have slain will be frightened, at least.

Zeus. Oh, splendid! 'Thine own lips testify against thee,' says the book; you would have saved Damis some trouble by putting this in his mouth.

But who is this breathless messenger? Bronze—a nice clean figure and outline—*chevelure* rather out of date. Ah, he must be your brother, Hermes, who stands in the Market by the Poecile; I see he is all over pitch; that is what comes of having casts taken of you every day. My son, why this haste? Have you important news from Earth?

Hermagoras. Momentous news, calling for infinite energy.

Zeus. Speak, tarry not, if any peril else hath escaped our vigilance.

Hermagoras.

*It chanced of late that by the statuaries
My breast and back were plastered o'er with pitch;
A mock cuirass tight-clinging hung, to ape
My bronze, and take the seal of its impression.
When lo, a crowd! therein a pallid pair*

*Sparring amain, vociferating logic;
'Twas Damis and—*

Zeus. Truce to your iambics, my excellent Hermagoras; I know the pair. But tell me whether the fight has been going on long.

Hermagoras. Not yet; they were still skirmishing—slinging invective at long range.

Zeus. Then we have only, Gods, to look over and listen. Let the Hours unbar, draw back the clouds, and open the doors of Heaven.

Upon my word, what a vast gathering! And I do not quite like the looks of Timocles; he is trembling; he has lost his head; he will spoil everything; it is perfectly plain, he will not be able to stand up to Damis. Well, there is one thing left us: we can pray for him

Inwardly, silently, lest Damis hear.

Timocles. What, you miscreant, no Gods? No Providence?

Damis. No, no; you answer *my* question first; what makes *you* believe in them?

Timocles. None of that, now; the onus of proof is with you, scoundrel.

Damis. None of that, now; it is with you.

Zeus. At this game ours is much the better man—louder-voiced, rougher-tempered. Good, Timocles; stick to invective; that is your strong point; once you get off that, he will hook and hold you up like a fish.

Timocles. I solemnly swear I will not answer first.

Damis. Well, put your questions, then; so much you score by your oath. But no abuse, please.

Timocles. Done. Tell me, then, and be damned to you, do you deny that the Gods exercise providence?

Damis. I do.

Timocles. What, are all the events we see uncontrolled, then?

Damis. Yes.

Timocles. And the regulation of the universe is not under any God's care?

Damis. No.

Timocles. And everything moves casually, by blind tendency?

Damis. Yes.

Timocles. Gentlemen, can you tolerate such sentiments? Stone the blasphemer.

Damis. What do you mean by hounding them against me? Who are you, that you should protest in the Gods' name? They do not even protest in their own; they have sent no judgment on me, and they have had time enough to hear me, if they have ears.

Timocles. They do hear you; they do; and some day their vengeance will find you out.

Damis. Pray when are they likely to have time to spare for me? They are far too busy, according to you, with all the infinite concerns of the universe on their hands. That is why they have never punished you for your perjuries and—well, for the rest of your performances, let me say, not to break our compact about abuse. And yet I am at a loss to conceive any more convincing proof they could have given of their Providence, than if they had trounced you as you deserve. But no doubt they are from home—t'other side of Oceanus, possibly, on a visit to 'the blameless Ethiopians.' We know they have a way of going there to dinner, self-invited sometimes.

Timocles. What answer is possible to such ribaldry?

Damis. The answer I have been waiting for all this time; you can tell me what made you believe in divine Providence.

Timocles. Firstly, the order of nature—the sun running his regular course, the moon the same, the circling seasons,

the growth of plants, the generation of living things, the ingenious adaptations in these latter for nutrition, thought, movement, locomotion; look at a carpenter or a shoemaker, for instance; and the thing is infinite. All these effects, and no effecting Providence?

Damis. You beg the question; whether the effects are produced by Providence is just what is not yet proved. Your description of nature I accept; it does not follow that there is definite design in it. It is not impossible that things now similar and homogeneous have developed from widely different origins. But you give the name 'order' to mere blind tendency. And you will be very angry if one follows your appreciative catalogue of nature in all its variety, but stops short of accepting it as a proof of detailed Providence. So, as the play says, *Here lurks a fallacy; bring me sounder proof.*

Timocles. I cannot admit that further proof is required; nevertheless, I will give you one. Will you allow Homer to have been an admirable poet?

Damis. Surely.

Timocles. Well, *he* maintains Providence, and warrants my belief.

Damis. Magnificent! Why, every one will grant you Homer's poetic excellence; but not that he, or any other poet for that matter, is good authority on questions of this sort. *Their* object, of course, is not truth, but fascination; they call in the charms of metre, they take tales for the vehicle of what instruction they give, and in short all their efforts are directed to pleasure.

But I should be glad to hear which parts of Homer you pin your faith to. Where he tells how the daughter, the brother, and the wife of Zeus conspired to imprison him? If Thetis had not been moved to compassion and called Briareus, you remember, our excellent Zeus would have been seized and manacled; and his gratitude to her induced him to delude Agamemnon with a lying dream, and bring about the deaths of a number of Greeks. Do you see? The reason was that, if he had struck and blasted Agamemnon's self with a thunderbolt, his double dealing would have come to light. Or perhaps you found the Diomedea story most convincing?— Diomedea wounded Aphrodite, and afterwards Ares himself, at Athene's instigation; and then the Gods actually fell to blows and went a-tilting—without distinction of sex; Athene overthrew Ares, exhausted no doubt with his previous wound from Diomedea; and *Hermes the stark and stanch 'gainst Leto stood.*

Or did you put your trust in Artemis? She was a sensitive lady, who resented not being invited to Oeneus's banquet, and by way of vengeance sent a monstrous irresistible boar to ravage his country. Is it with tales like these that Homer has prevailed on you?

Zeus. Goodness me, what a shout, Gods! They are all cheering *Damis.* And our man seems posed; he is frightened and trembles; he is going to throw up the sponge, I am certain of it; he looks round for a gap to get away through.

Timocles. And will you scout Euripides too, then? Again and again he brings Gods on the stage, and shows them upholding virtue in the Heroes, but chastising wickedness and impiety (like yours).

Damis. My noble philosopher, if that is how the tragedians have convinced you, you have only two alternatives: you must suppose that divinity is temporarily lodged either in the actor—a Polus, an Aristodemus, a Satyrus—, or else in the actual masks, buskins, long tunics, cloaks, gloves, stomachers, padding, and ornamental paraphernalia in general of tragedy—a manifest absurdity. For when Euripides can speak his own sentiments unfettered by dramatic necessity, observe the freedom of his remarks:

*Dost see this aether stretching infinite,
And girdling earth with close yet soft embrace?
That reckon thou thy Zeus, that name thy God.*

And again,

*Zeus, whatever Zeus may be (for, save by hearsay,
I know not)—;*

and there is more of the same sort.

Timocles. Well, but all men—ay, all nations—have acknowledged and, feted Gods; was it all delusion?

Damis. Thank you; a timely reminder; national observances show better than anything else how vague religious

theory is. Confusion is endless, and beliefs as many as believers. Scythia makes offerings to a scimitar, Thrace to the Samian runaway Zamolxis, Phrygia to a Month-God, Ethiopia to a Day-Goddess, Cyllene to Phales, Assyria to a dove, Persia to fire, Egypt to water. In Egypt, though, besides the universal worship of water, Memphis has a private cult of the ox, Pelusium of the onion, other cities of the ibis or the crocodile, others again of baboon, cat, or monkey. Nay, the very villages have their specialities: one deifies the right shoulder, and another across the river the left; one a half skull, another an earthenware bowl or platter. Come, my fine fellow, is it not all ridiculous?

Momus. What did I tell you, Gods? All this was sure to come out and be carefully overhauled.

Zeus. You did, Momus, and your strictures were justified; if once we come safe out of this present peril, I will try to introduce reforms.

Timocles. Infidel! Where do you find the source of oracles and prophecies, if not in the Gods and their Providence?

Damis. About oracles, friend, the less said the better; I shall ask you to choose your instances, you see. Will Apollo's answer to the Lydian suit you? That was as symmetrical as a double-edged knife; or say, it faced both ways, like those Hermae which are made double, alike whether you look at front or back. Consider; will Croesus's passage of the Halys destroy his own realm, or Cyrus's? Tet the wretched Sardinian paid a long price for his ambidextrous hexameter.

Momus. The man is realizing just my worst apprehensions. Where is our handsome musician now? Ah, there you are; go down and plead your own cause against him.

Zeus. Hush, Momus; you are murdering our feelings; it is no time for recrimination.

Timocles. Take care, Damis; this is sacrilege, no less; what you say amounts to razing the temples and upsetting the altars.

Damis. Oh, not *all* the altars; what harm do they do, so long as incense and perfume is the worst of it? As for Artemis's altar at Tauri, though, and her hideous feasts, I should like it overturned from base to cornice.

Zeus. Whence comes this resistless plague among us? There is none of us he spares; he is as free with his tongue as a tub orator, *And grips by turns the innocent and guilty.*

Momus. The innocent? You will not find many of those among us, Zeus. He will soon come to laying hands upon some of the great and eminent, I dare say.

Timocles. Do you close your ears even to Zeus's thunder, atheist?

Damis. I clearly cannot shut out the thunder; whether it is Zeus's thunder, you know better than I perhaps; you may have interviewed the Gods. Travelers from Crete tell another story: there is a tomb there with an inscribed pillar, stating that Zeus is long dead, and not going to thunder any more.

Momus. I could have told you that was coming long ago. What, Zeus? pale? and your teeth chattering? What is the matter? You should cheer up, and treat such manikins with lofty contempt.

Zeus. Contempt? See what a number of them there is—how set against us they are already—and he has them fast by the ears.

Momus. Well, but you have only to choose, and you can let down your golden cord, and then every man of them *with earth and sky and all thou canst draw up.*

Timocles. Blasphemer, have you ever been on a voyage?

Damis. Many.

Timocles. Well, then, the wind struck the canvas and filled the sails, and it or the oars gave you way, but there was a person responsible for steering and for the safety of the ship?

Damis. Certainly.

Timocles. Now that ship would not have sailed, without a steersman; and do you suppose that this great universe drifts unsteered and uncontrolled?

Zeus. Good, this time, Timocles; a cogent illustration, that.

Damis. But, you pattern of piety, the earthly navigator makes his plans, takes his measures, gives his orders, with a single eye to efficiency. There is nothing useless or purposeless on board; everything is to make navigation easy or possible. But as for the navigator for whom you claim the management of this vast ship, he and his crew show no reason or appropriateness in any of their arrangements; the forestays, as likely as not, are made fast to the stern, and both sheets to the bows; the anchor will be gold, the beak lead, decoration below the water-line, and unsightliness above.

As for the men, you will find some lazy awkward coward in second or third command, or a fine swimmer, active as a cat aloft, and a handy man generally, chosen out of all the rest to—pump. It is just the same with the passengers: here is a jailbird accommodated with a seat next the captain and treated with reverence, there a debauchee or parricide or temple-robber in honorable possession of the best place, while crowds of respectable people are packed together in a corner and hustled by their real inferiors. Consider what sort of a voyage Socrates and Aristides and Phocion had of it, on short rations, not venturing, for the filth, to stretch out their legs on the bare deck; and on the other hand what a comfortable, luxurious, contemptuous life it was for Callias or Midias or Sardanapalus.

That is how things go on board your ship, sir wiseacre; and who shall count the wrecks? If there had been a captain supervising and directing, in the first place he would have known the difference between good and bad passengers, and in the second he would have given them their deserts. The better would have had the better accommodation above by his side, and the worse gone below; with some of the better he would have shared his meals and his counsels. So too for the crew: the keen sailor would have been made look-out man or captain of the watch, or given some sort of precedence, and the lazy shirker have tasted the rope's end half a dozen times a day. The metaphorical ship, your worship, is likely to be capsized by its captain's incompetence.

Momus. He is sweeping on to victory, with wind and tide.

Zeus. Too probable, Momus. And Timocles never gets hold of an effective idea; he can only ladle out trite commonplaces higgledy-piggledy—no sooner heard than refuted.

Timocles. Well, well; my ship leaves you unconvinced; I must drop my sheet-anchor, then; that at least is unbreakable.

Zeus. I wonder what it is.

Timocles. See whether this is a sound syllogism; can you upset it?— If there are altars, there are Gods: there *are* altars; *therefore, there are Gods. Now then.*

Damis. Ha, ha, ha! I will answer as soon as I can get done with laughing.

Timocles. Will you never stop? At least tell me what the joke is.

Damis. Why, you don't see that your anchor (sheet-anchor, too) hangs by a mere thread. You depend on connection between the existence of Gods and the existence of altars, and fancy yourself safe at anchor! As you admit that this was your sheet-anchor, there is nothing further to detain us.

Timocles. You retire; you confess yourself beaten, then?

Damis. Yes; we have seen you take sanctuary at the altars under persecution. At those altars I am ready (the sheet-anchor be my witness) to swear peace and cease from strife.

Timocles. You are playing with me, are you, you vile body-snatcher, you loathsome well-whipped scum! As if we didn't know who your father was, how your mother was a harlot! You strangled your own brother, you live in fornication, you debauch the young, you unabashed lecher! Don't be in such a hurry; here is something for you to take with you; this broken pot will serve me to cut your foul throat.

Zeus. Damis makes off with a laugh, and the other after him, calling him names, mad at his insolence. He will get him on the head with that pottery, I know. And now, what are we to do?

Hermes. Why, the man in the comedy was not far out: *Put a good face on 't, and thou hast no harm.*

It is no such terrible disaster, if a few people go away infected. There are plenty who take the other view — a majority of Greeks, the body and dregs of the people, and the barbarians to a man.

Zeus. Ah, Hermes, but there is a great deal in Darius's remark about Zopyrus — I would rather have had one ally like Damis than be the lord of a thousand Babylons.

Sale of Creeds



Characters: Zeus, Hermes, Several Dealers, Creeds.

Context: Zeus conducts an auction of competing philosophies for sale. This excerpt makes a brief mention of the tastes of the Epicureans.

Hermes. Take him, and much good may he do you. Now I want Epicureanism. Who offers for Epicureanism? He is a disciple of the laughing creed and the drunken creed, whom we were offering just now. But he has one extra accomplishment—impiety. For the rest, a dainty, lickerish creed.

Sixth Dealer. What price?

Hermes. Eight pounds.

Sixth Dealer. Here you are. By the way, you might let me know what he likes to eat.

Hermes. Anything sweet. Anything with honey in it. Dried figs are his favourite dish.



The Fisher

Characters: Parrhesiades, Philosophy. Platonist, Pythagorean, Stoics, Epicurean, Academics

Context: This is a tale of the philosophers returning from Hades and accusing their accusers. First, Lucian defends himself from the attacks of the philosophers he has ridiculed in past compositions. Philosophy herself is the judge, and Lucian is acquitted, as he has only pointed out that the philosophers have failed to live out the virtues that they preached, and that they have really sought money and prestige rather than wisdom. After Lucian is acquitted, Philosophy then turns to examine others who have defamed the philosophers. These are philosophers themselves, and they are first called to the trial by Syllogism, who announces that they are to come and defend themselves before Virtue, Philosophy, and Justice. When they fail to heed this call, Parrhesiades (Lucian) raises a new call to them – tempting them with money and food! The entire dialogue is well worth reading; note that none of the fish caught in the final sequence are Epicureans.

Parrhesiades. Quite a simple matter. Oyez, oyez! All who profess philosophy and hold themselves entitled to the name of philosopher shall appear on the Acropolis for largesse; eight pounds, with a sesame cake, to each. A long beard shall qualify for a square of compressed figs, in addition. Every applicant to have with him, of temperance, justice, and self-control, any that he is in possession of, it being clearly understood that these are not indispensable, and, of syllogisms, a complete set of five, these being the condition precedent of wisdom.

*Two golden talents in the midst are set,
His prize who wrangles best amongst his peers.*

Just look! The ascent packed with a pushing crowd, at the very first sound of my eight pounds. More of them along the Pelasgicum, more by the temple of Asclepius, a bigger crowd still over the Areopagus. Why, positively there are a few at the tomb of Talos; and see those putting ladders against the temple of Castor and Pollux; up they climb, buzzing and clustering like a swarm of bees. In Homeric phrase, on this side are exceeding many, and on that

Ten thousand, thick as leaves and flowers in spring.

Noisily they settle, the Acropolis is covered with them in a trice; everywhere wallet and beard, flattery and effrontery, staves and greed, logic and avarice. The little company which came up at the first proclamation is swamped beyond recovery, swallowed up in these later crowds; it is hopeless to find them, because of the external resemblance. That is the worst of it, Philosophy; you are really open to censure for not marking and labelling them; these impostors are often more convincing than the true philosophers.

Philosophy. It shall be done before long; at present let us receive them.

Platonist. Platonists first!

Pythagorean. No, no; Pythagoreans first; our master is senior.

Stoics. Rubbish! the Porch is the best.

Peripatetic. Now, now, this is a question of money; Peripatetics first there!

Epicurean. Hand over those cakes and fig-squares; as to the money, Epicureans will not mind waiting till the last.

Academic. Where are the two talents? None can touch the Academy at a wrangle; we will soon show you that.

Stoics. Not if we know it.

Philosophy. Cease your strife. Cynics there, no more pushing! And keep those sticks quiet. You have mistaken the nature of this summons. We three, Philosophy, Virtue, and Truth, are about to decide which are the true philosophers; that done, those whose lives are found to be in accord with our pleasure will be made happy by our award; but the impostors who are not truly of our kin we shall crush as they deserve, that they may no more make vain claims to what is too high for them. Ha! you fly? In good truth they do, jumping down the crags, most of them. Why, the Acropolis is deserted, except for—yes, a few have stood their ground and are not afraid of the judgment.

Attendants, pick up the wallet which yonder flying Cynic has dropped. Let us see what it contains—beans? A book? Some coarse crust?

Parrhesiades. Oh dear no. Here is gold; some scent; a mirror; dice.

Philosophy. Ah, good honest man! Such were his little necessities for the philosophic life, such his title to indulge in general abuse and instruct his neighbors.

Parrhesiades. There you have them. The problem before you is, how the general ignorance is to be dispersed, and other people enabled to discriminate between the genuine and the other sort. Find the solution, Truth; for indeed it concerns you; Falsehood must not prevail; shall Ignorance shield the base while they counterfeit the good, and you never know it?

Truth. I think we had better give Parrhesiades this commission; he has been shown an honest man, our friend and your true admirer, Philosophy. Let him take Exposure with him and have interviews with all who profess philosophy; any genuine scion that he finds let him crown with olive and entertain in the Banqueting Hall; and for the rascals—ah, how many!—who are only costume philosophers, let him pull their cloaks off them, clip their beards short with a pair of common goatshears, and mark their foreheads or brand them between the eyebrows; the design on the branding iron to be a fox or an ape.

Philosophy. Well planned, Truth. And, Parrhesiades, here is a test for you; you know how young eagles are supposed to be tested by the sun; well, our candidates have not got to satisfy us that they can look at light, of course; but put gold, fame, and pleasure before their eyes; when you see one remain unconscious and unattracted, there is your man for the olive; but when one looks hard that way, with a motion of his hand in the direction of the gold, first off with his beard, and then off with him to the brander.

Parrhesiades. I will follow your instructions, Philosophy; you will soon find a large majority ornamented with fox or ape, and very few with olive. If you like, though, I will get some of them up here for you to see.

Philosophy. What do you mean? Bring them back after that stampede?

Parrhesiades. Oh yes, if the priestess will lend me the line I see there and the Piraeen fisherman's votive hook; I will not keep them long.

Priestess. You can have them; and the rod to complete the equipment.

Parrhesiades. Thanks; now quickly, please, a few dried figs and a handful of gold.

Priestess. There.

Philosophy. What is all this about?

Priestess. He has baited his hook with the figs and gold, and is sitting on the parapet dangling it over the city.

Philosophy. What are you doing, Parrhesiades? Do you think you are going to fish up stones from the Pelasgicum?

Parrhesiades. Hush! I wait till I get a bite. Poseidon, the fisherman's friend, and you, dear Amphitrite, send me good fishing! Ah, a fine bass; no, it is not; it is a gilthead.

Exposure. A shark, you mean; there, see, he is getting near the hook, open-mouthed too. He scents the gold; now he is close—touching—he has it; up with him!

Parrhesiades. Give me a hand with the line, Exposure; here he is. Now, my best of fishes, what do we make of you? Salmo Cynicus, that is what you are. Good gracious, what teeth! Aha, my brave fish, caught snapping up trifles in the rocks, where you thought you could lurk unobserved? But now you shall hang by the gills for every one to look at you. Pull out hook and bait. Why, the hook is bare; he has not been long assimilating the figs, eh? And the gold has gone down too.

Diogenes. Make him disgorge; we want the bait for some more.

Parrhesiades. There, then. Now, Diogenes, do you know who it is? Has the fellow anything to do with you?

Diogenes. Nothing whatever.

Parrhesiades. Well, what do you put him at? Threepence was the price fixed the other day.

Diogenes. Too much. His flavor and his looks are intolerable—a coarse worthless brute. Drop him head first over the rock, and catch another. But take care your rod does not bend to breaking point.

Parrhesiades. No fear; they are quite light—about the weight of a gudgeon.

Diogenes. About the weight and about the wit. However, up with them.

Parrhesiades. Look; what is this one? A sole? Flat as a plate, thin as one of his own fillets; he gapes for the hook; down it goes; we have him; up he comes.

Diogenes. What is he?

Exposure. His plateship would be a Platonist.

Plato. You too after the gold, villain?

Parrhesiades. Well, Plato? What shall we do with him?

Plato. Off with him from the same rock.

Diogenes. Try again.

Parrhesiades. Ah, here is a lovely one coming, as far as one can judge in deep water, all the colours of the rainbow, with gold bars across the back. Do you see, Exposure? This is the sham Aristotle. There he is; no, he has shied. He is having a good look round; here he comes again; his jaws open; caught! Haul up.

Aristotle. You need not apply to me; I do not know him.

Parrhesiades. Very well, Aristotle; over he goes. Hullo! I see a whole school of them together, all one colour, and covered with spines and horny scales, as tempting to handle as a hedgehog. We want a net for these; but we have not got one. Well, it will do if we pull up one out of the lot. The boldest of them will no doubt try the hook.

Exposure. You had better sheathe a good bit of the line before you let it down; else he will gorge the gold and then saw the line through.

Parrhesiades. There it goes. Poseidon grant me a quick catch! There now! They are fighting for the bait, a lot of them together nibbling at the figs, and others with their teeth well in the gold. That is right; one soundly hooked. Now let me see, what do you call yourself? And yet how absurd to try and make a fish speak; they are dumb. Exposure, tell us who is his master,

Exposure. Chrysippus. [Ed.: the leader of the Stoics]

Parrhesiades. Ah, he must have a master with gold in his name, must he? Chrysippus, tell me seriously, do you know these men? Are you responsible for the way they live?

Chrysippus. My dear Parrhesiades, I take it ill that you should suggest any connection between me and such creatures.

Parrhesiades. Quite right, and like you. Over he goes head first like the others; if one tried to eat him, those spines might stick in one's throat.

Philosophy. You have fished long enough, Parrhesiades; there are so many of them, one might get away with gold, hook and all, and you have the priestess to pay. Let us go for our usual stroll; and for all you it is time to be getting back to your place, if you are not to outstay your leave. Parrhesiades, you and Exposure can go the rounds now, and crown or brand as I told you.

Parrhesiades. Good, Philosophy. Farewell, ye best of men. Come, Exposure, to our commission. Where shall we go first? The Academy, do you think, or the Porch?

Exposure. We will begin with the Lyceum.

Parrhesiades. Well, it makes no difference. I know well enough that wherever we go there will be few crowns wanted, and a good deal of branding.

A Slip of The Tongue In Salutation



Context: This brief excerpt is part of a much longer composition devoted to a discussion of manners of speech used in greeting and parting. Epicurus' manner of greeting is mentioned in passing:

But I need hardly go so far back. Epicurus assuredly rejoiced in joy— pleasure was the chief Good in his eyes; yet in his most earnest letters (which are not very numerous), and in those to his most intimate friends, he starts with Hail. And in tragedy and the old comedy you will constantly find it used quite at the beginning. You remember,

Hail to thee, joy be thine—

which puts health before rejoicing clearly enough.

The True History



Context: In this composition, Lucian weaves a clearly imaginary tale of a fantastic Odyssey-like voyage in which he and his shipmates are lifted up by a whirlwind to the moon where a number of adventures take place before they return to earth and into the belly of an enormous whale. The part of this journey of philosophical interest occurs when Lucian arrives on a heavenly island reigned over by Rhadamanthus, where we pick up the narrative. As usual Epicurus receives praise and other philosophers receive far different treatment.

Character: Lucian narrates his experience on the voyage.

I should now like to name the famous persons I saw. To begin with, all the demi-gods, and the besiegers of Troy, with the exception of Ajax the Locrian; he, they said, was undergoing punishment in the place of the wicked. . . . I heard that Rhadamanthus was dissatisfied with Socrates, and had several times threatened him with expulsion, if he insisted on talking nonsense, and would not drop his irony and enjoy himself. Plato was the only one I missed, but I was told that he was living in his own Utopia, working the constitution and laws which he had drawn up.

For popularity, Aristippus and Epicurus bore the palm, in virtue of their kindness, sociability, and good-fellowship. Aesop the Phrygian was there, and held the office of jester. Diogenes of Sinope was much changed; he had married Lais the courtesan, and often in his cups would oblige the company with a dance, or other mad pranks. The Stoics were not represented at all; they were supposed to be still climbing the steep hill of Virtue; and as to Chrysippus himself, we were told that he was not to set foot on the island till he had taken a fourth course of hellebore.

The Academics contemplated coming, but were taking time for consideration; they could not yet regard it as a certainty that any such island existed. There was probably the added difficulty that they were not comfortable about the judgment of Rhadamanthus, having themselves disputed the possibility of judgment. It was stated that many of them had started to follow persons traveling to the island, but, their energy failing, had abandoned the journey half-way and gone back.

I have mentioned the most noteworthy of the company, and add that the most highly respected among them are, first Achilles, and second Theseus.

Before many days had passed, I accosted the poet Homer, when we were both disengaged, and asked him, among other things, where he came from; it was still a burning question with us, I explained. He said he was aware that some brought him from Chios, others from Smyrna, and others again from Colophon; the fact was, he was a Babylonian, generally known not as Homer, but as Tigranes; but when later in life he was given as a homer or hostage to the Greeks, that name clung to him. Another of my questions was about the so-called spurious lines; had he written them, or not? He said they were all genuine; so I now knew what to think of the critics Zenodotus and Aristarchus, and all their lucubrations. Having got a categorical answer on that point, I tried him next on his reason for starting the Iliad at the wrath of Achilles; he said he had no exquisite reason; it had just come into his head that way. Another thing I wanted to know was whether he had composed the Odyssey before the Iliad, as generally believed. He said this was not so. As to his reported blindness, I did not need to ask; he had his sight, so there was an end of that. It became a habit of mine, whenever I saw him at leisure, to go up and ask him things, and he answered quite readily—especially after his acquittal. A libel suit had been brought against him by Thersites, on the ground of the ridicule to which he is subjected in the poem; Homer had briefed Odysseus, and been acquitted.

It was during our sojourn that Pythagoras arrived; he had undergone seven transmigrations, lived the lives of that number of animals, and completed his psychic travels. It was the entire right half of him that was gold. He was at once given the franchise, but the question was still pending whether he was to be known as Pythagoras or Euphorbus. Empedocles also came, scorched all over and baked right through; but not all his entreaties could gain him admittance.

The progress of time brought round the Games of the Dead. The umpires were Achilles, holding that office for the fifth, and Theseus for the seventh time. A full report would take too long; but I will summarize the events. The wrestling went to Carus the Heraclid, who won the garland from Odysseus. The boxing resulted in a tie; the pair being the Egyptian Areus, whose grave is in Corinth, and Epeus. For mixed boxing and wrestling they have no

prize. Who won the flat race, I have forgotten. In poetry, Homer really did much the best, but the award was for Hesiod. All prizes were plaited wreaths of peacock feathers.

Just after the Games were over, news came that the Damned had broken their fetters, overpowered their guard, and were on the point of invading the island, the ringleaders being Phalaris of Agrigentum, Busiris the Egyptian, Diomedes the Thracian, Sciron, and Pityocampes. Rhadamanthus at once drew up the Heroes on the beach, giving the command to Theseus, Achilles, and Ajax Telamoniuss, now in his right senses. The battle was fought, and won by the Heroes, thanks especially to Achilles. Socrates, who was in the right wing, distinguished himself still more than in his lifetime at Delium, standing firm and showing no sign of trepidation as the enemy came on. He was afterwards given as a reward of valor a large and beautiful park in the outskirts, to which he invited his friends for conversation, naming it the Post-mortem Academy.

The defeated party were seized, re-fettered, and sent back for severer torments. Homer added to his poems a description of this battle, and at my departure handed me the manuscript to bring back to the living world; but it has unfortunately lost with our other property. It began with the line:

Tell now, my Muse, how fought the mighty Dead.

According to their custom after successful war, they boiled beans, held the feast of victory, and kept high holiday. From this Pythagoras alone held aloof, fasting and sitting far off, in sign of his abhorrence of bean-eating.

We were in the middle of our seventh month, when an incident happened. Scintharus's son, Cinyras, a fine figure of a man, had fallen in love with Helen some time before, and it was obvious that she was very much taken with the young fellow. There used to be nods and becks and takings of wine between them at table, and they would go off by themselves for strolls in the wood. At last love and despair inspired Cinyras with the idea of an elopement. Helen consented, and they were to fly to one of the neighbouring islands, Cork or Cheese Island. They had taken three of the boldest of my crew into their confidence; Cinyras said not a word to his father, knowing that he would put a stop to it. The plan was carried out; under cover of night, and in my absence—I had fallen asleep at table—they got Helen away unobserved and rowed off as hard as they could.

About midnight Menelaus woke up, and finding his wife's place empty raised an alarm, and got his brother to go with him to King Rhadamanthus. Just before dawn the look-outs announced that they could make out the boat, far out at sea. So Rhadamanthus sent fifty of the Heroes on board a boat hollowed out of an asphodel trunk, with orders to give chase. Pulling their best, they overtook the fugitives at noon, as they were entering the milky sea near the Isle of Cheese; so nearly was the escape effected. The boat was towed back with a chain of roses. Helen shed tears, and so felt her situation as to draw a veil over her face. As to Cinyras and his associates, Rhadamanthus interrogated them to find whether they had more accomplices, and, being assured to the contrary, had them whipped with mallow twigs, bound, and dismissed to the place of the wicked.

It was further determined that we should be expelled prematurely from the island; we were allowed only one day's grace. This drew from me loud laments and tears for the bliss that I was now to exchange for renewed wanderings. They consoled me for their sentence, however, by telling me that it would not be many years before I should return to them, and assigning me my chair and my place at table—a distinguished one—in anticipation. I then went to Rhadamanthus, and was urgent with him to reveal the future to me, and give me directions for our voyage. He told me that I should come to my native land after many wanderings and perils, but as to the time of my return he would give me no certainty. He pointed, however, to the neighboring islands, of which five were visible, besides one more distant, and informed me that the wicked inhabited these, the near ones, that is, 'from which you see the great flames rising. The sixth yonder is the City of Dreams; and beyond that again, but not visible at this distance, is Calypso's isle. When you have passed these, you will come to the great continent which is opposite your own; there you will have many adventures, traverse divers tribes, sojourn among inhospitable men, and at last reach your own continent.' That was all he would say.

But he pulled up a mallow root and handed it to me, bidding me invoke it at times of greatest danger. When I arrived in this world, he charged me to abstain from stirring fire with a knife, from lupines, and from the society of boys over eighteen; these things if I kept in mind, I might look for return to the island. That day I made ready for our voyage, and when the banquet hour came, I shared it. On the morrow I went to the poet Homer and besought him to write me a couplet for inscription; when he had done it, I carved it on a beryl pillar which I had set up close to the harbor; it ran thus:

This island, ere he took his homeward way,

The blissful Gods gave Lucian to survey.

I stayed out that day too, and next morning started, the Heroes attending to see me off. Odysseus took the opportunity to come unobserved by Penelope and give me a letter for Calypso in the isle Ogygia. Rhadamanthus sent on board with me the ferryman Nauplius, who, in case we were driven on to the islands, might secure us from seizure by guaranteeing that our destination was different. As soon as our progress brought us out of the scented air, it was succeeded by a horrible smell as of bitumen, brimstone, and pitch all burning together; mingled with this were the disgusting and intolerable fumes of roasting human flesh; the air was dark and thick, distilling a pitchy dew upon us; we could also hear the crack of whips and the yelling of many voices.

We only touched at one island, on which we also landed. It was completely surrounded by precipitous cliffs, arid, stony, rugged, treeless, unwatered. We contrived to clamber up the rocks, and advanced along a track beset with thorns and snags—a hideous scene. When we reached the prison and the place of punishment, what first drew our wonder was the character of the whole. The very ground stood thick with a crop of knife-blades and pointed stakes; and it was ringed round with rivers, one of slime, a second of blood, and the innermost of flame. This last was very broad and quite impassable; the flame flowed like water, swelled like the sea, and teemed with fish, some resembling firebrands, and others, the small ones, live coals; these were called lamplets.

One narrow way led across all three; its gate was kept by Timon of Athens. Nauplius secured us admission, however, and then we saw the chastisement of many kings, and many common men; some were known to us; indeed there hung Cinyras, swinging in eddies of smoke. Our guides described the life and guilt of each culprit; the severest torments were reserved for those who in life had been liars and written false history; the class was numerous, and included Ctesias of Cnidus, and Herodotus. The fact was an encouragement to me, knowing that I had never told a lie.

I soon found the sight more than I could bear, and returning to the ship bade farewell to Nauplius and resumed the voyage. Very soon we seemed quite close to the Isle of Dreams, though there was a certain dimness and vagueness about its outline; but it had something dreamlike in its very nature; for as we approached it receded, and seemed to get further and further off. At last we reached it and sailed into Slumber, the port, close to the ivory gates where stands the temple of the Cock. It was evening when we landed, and upon proceeding to the city we saw many strange dreams. But I intend first to describe the city, as it has not been done before; Homer indeed mentions it, but gives no detailed description.

Incaromenippus, An Aerial Expedition



Characters: Menippus and a Friend

Context: A discussion of a trip supposedly made to Olympus; the theme is the absurdity of the common religion.

Menippus. Well, a very short survey of life had convinced me of the absurdity and meanness and insecurity that pervade all human objects, such as wealth, office, power. I was filled with contempt for them, realized that to care for them was to lose all chance of what deserved care, and determined to grovel no more, but fix my gaze upon the great All. Here I found my first problem in what wise men call the universal order. I could not tell how it came into being, who made it, what was its beginning, or what its end. But my next step, which was the examination of details, landed me in yet worse perplexity. I found the stars dotted quite casually about the sky, and I wanted to know what the sun was. Especially the phenomena of the moon struck me as extraordinary, and quite passed my comprehension; there must be some mystery to account for those many phases, I conjectured. Nor could I feel any greater certainty about such things as the passage of lightning, the roll of thunder, the descent of rain and snow and hail.

In this state of mind, the best I could think of was to get at the truth of it all from the people called philosophers; they of course would be able to give it me. So I selected the best of them, if solemnity of visage, pallor of complexion and length of beard are any criterion—for there could not be a moment's doubt of their soaring words and heaven-high thoughts—and in their hands I placed myself. For a considerable sum down, and more to be paid when they should have perfected me in wisdom, I was to be made an airy metaphysician and instructed in the order of the universe. Unfortunately, so far from dispelling my previous ignorance, they perplexed me more and more, with their daily drenches of beginnings and ends, atoms and voids, matters and forms. My greatest difficulty was that, though they differed among themselves, and all they said was full of inconsistency and contradiction, they expected me to believe them, each pulling me in his own direction.

Friend. How absurd that wise men should quarrel about facts, and hold different opinions on the same things!

Menippus. Ah, but keep your laughter till you have heard something of their pretentious mystifications. To begin with, their feet are on the ground; they are no taller than the rest of us 'men that walk the earth'; they are no sharper-sighted than their neighbors, some of them purblind, indeed, with age or indolence. And yet they say they can distinguish the limits of the sky, they measure the sun's circumference, take their walks in the supra-lunar regions, and specify the sizes and shapes of the stars as though they had fallen from them. Often one of them could not tell you correctly the number of miles from Megara to Athens, but has no hesitation about the distance in feet from the sun to the moon. How high the atmosphere is, how deep the sea, how far it is round the earth—they have the figures for all that. Moreover, they have only to draw some circles, arrange a few triangles and squares, add certain complicated spheres, and lo, they have the cubic contents of Heaven.

Then, how reasonable and modest of them, dealing with subjects so debatable, to issue their views without a hint of uncertainty; thus it must be and it shall be; *contra gentes* they will have it so. They will tell you on oath the sun is a molten mass, the moon inhabited, and the stars water-drinkers, moisture being drawn up by the sun's rope and bucket and equitably distributed among them.

How their theories conflict is soon apparent; next-door neighbors? No, they are miles apart. In the first place, their views of the world differ. Some say it had no beginning, and cannot end; others boldly talk of its creator and his procedure. What particularly entertained me was that these latter set up a contriver of the universe, but fail to mention where he came from, or what he stood on while about his elaborate task, though it is by no means obvious how there could be place or time before the universe came into being.

Friend. You really do make them out very audacious conjurers.

Menippus. My dear fellow, I wish I could give you their lucubrations on ideas and incorporeals, on finite and infinite. Over that point, now, there is fierce battle; some circumscribe the All, others will have it unlimited. At the

same time they declare for a plurality of worlds, and speak scornfully of others who make only one. And there is a bellicose person who maintains that war is the father of the universe.

As to Gods, I need hardly deal with that question. For some of them God is a number; some swear by dogs and geese and plane-trees. [note: Socrates made a practice of substituting these for the names of Gods in his oaths.] Some again banish all other Gods, and attribute the control of the universe to a single one; I got rather depressed on learning how small the supply of divinity was. But I was comforted by the lavish souls who not only make many, but classify; there was a First God, and second and third classes of divinity. Yet again, some regard the divine nature as unsubstantial and without form, while others conceive it as a substance. Then they were not all disposed to recognize a Providence; some relieve the Gods of all care, as we relieve the superannuated of their civic duties; in fact, they treat them exactly like supernumeraries on the stage. The last step is also taken, of saying that Gods do not exist at all, and leaving the world to drift along without a master or a guiding hand.

Well, when I heard all this, I dared not disbelieve people whose voices and beards were equally suggestive of Zeus. But I knew not where to turn for a theory that was not open to exception, nor combated by one as soon as propounded by another. I found myself in the state Homer has described; many a time I would vigorously start believing one of these gentlemen; "*But then came second thoughts.*"

So in my distress I began to despair of ever getting any knowledge about these things on earth. The only possible escape from perplexity would be to take to myself wings and go up to Heaven. Partly the wish was father to the thought; but it was confirmed by Aesop's Fables, from which it appears that Heaven is accessible to eagles, beetles, and sometimes camels. It was pretty clear that I could not possibly develop feathers of my own. But if I were to wear vulture's or eagle's wings—the only kinds equal to a man's weight—I might perhaps succeed. I caught the birds, and effectually amputated the eagle's right, and the vulture's left wing. These I fastened together, attached them to my shoulders with broad thick straps, and provided grips for my hands near the end of the quill-feathers. Then I made experiments, first jumping up and helping the jump by flapping my hands, or imitating the way a goose raises itself without leaving the ground and combines running with flight. Finding the machine obedient, I next made a bolder venture, went up the Acropolis, and launched myself from the cliff right over the theatre.

Getting safely to the bottom that time, my aspirations shot up aloft. I took to starting from Parnes or Hymettus, flying to Geranea, thence to the top of the Acrocorinthus, and over Pholoe and Erymanthus to Taygetus. The training for my venture was now complete; my powers were developed, and equal to a lofty flight; no more fledgeling essays for me. I went up Olympus, provisioning myself as lightly as possible. The moment was come; I soared skywards, giddy at first with that great void below, but soon conquering this difficulty. When I approached the Moon, long after parting from the clouds, I was conscious of fatigue, especially in the left or vulture's wing. So I alighted and sat down to rest, having a bird's-eye view of the Earth, like the Homeric Zeus,

Surveying now the Thracian horsemen's land, Now Mysia, and again, as the fancy took me, Greece or Persia or India. From all which I drew a manifold delight.

Friend. Oh well, Menippus, tell me all about it. I do not want to miss a single one of your travel experiences; if you picked up any stray information, let me have that too. I promise myself a great many facts about the shape of the Earth, and how everything on it looked to you from your point of vantage.

Menippus. And you will not be disappointed there, friend. So do your best to get up to the Moon, with my story for traveling companion and showman of the terrestrial scene.

Imagine yourself first descriing a tiny Earth, far smaller than the Moon looks; on turning my eyes down, I could not think for some time what had become of our mighty mountains and vast sea. If I had not caught sight of the Colossus of Rhodes and the Pharos tower, I assure you I should never have made out the Earth at all. But their height and projection, with the faint shimmer of Ocean in the sun, showed me it must be the Earth I was looking at. Then, when once I had got my sight properly focused, the whole human race was clear to me, not merely in the shape of nations and cities, but the individuals, sailing, fighting, ploughing, going to law; the women, the beasts, and in short every breed *'that feedeth on earth's foison.'*

Friend. Most unconvincing and contradictory. Just now you were searching for the Earth, it was so diminished by distance, and if the Colossus had not betrayed it, you would have taken it for something else; and now you develop suddenly into a Lynceus, and distinguish everything upon it, the men, the beasts, one might almost say the gnat-swarms. Explain, please.

Menippus. Why, to be sure! how did I come to leave out so essential a particular? I had made out the Earth, you see, but could not distinguish any details; the distance was so great, quite beyond the scope of my vision; so I was much chagrined and baffled. At this moment of depression—I was very near tears—who should come up behind me but Empedocles the physicist? His complexion was like charcoal variegated with ashes, as if he had been baked. I will not deny that I felt some tremors at the sight of him, taking him for some lunar spirit.

But he said: 'Do not be afraid, Menippus; A mortal I, no God; how vain thy dreams. I am Empedocles the physicist. When I threw myself into the crater in such a hurry, the smoke of Etna whirled me off up here; and now I live in the Moon, doing a good deal of high thinking on a diet of dew. So I have come to help you out of your difficulty; you are distressed, I take it, at not being able to see everything on the Earth.'

'Thank you so much, you good Empedocles,' I said; 'as soon as my wings have brought me back to Greece, I will remember to pour libations to you up the chimney, and salute you on the first of every month with three moonward yawns.'

'Endymion be my witness,' he replied, 'I had no thought of such a bargain; I was touched by the sight of your distress. Now, what do you think is the way to sharpen your sight?'

'I have no idea, unless you were to remove the mist from my eyes for me; the sight seems quite bleared.'

'Oh, you can do without me; the thing that gives sharp sight you have brought with you from Earth.'

'Unconsciously, then; what is it?'

'Why, you know that you have on an eagle's right wing?'

'Of course I do; but what have wings and eyes to do with one another?'

'Only this,' he said; 'the eagle is far the strongest-eyed of all living things, the only one that can look straight at the sun; the test of the true royal eagle is, his meeting its rays without blinking.'

'So I have heard; I wish I had taken out my own eyes when I was starting, and substituted the eagle's. I am an imperfect specimen now I am here, not up to the royal standard at all, but like the rejected bastards.'

'Well, you can very soon acquire one royal eye. If you will stand up for a minute, keep the vulture wing still, and work the other, your right eye, corresponding to that wing, will gain strength. As for the other, its dimness cannot possibly be obviated, as it belongs to the inferior member.'

'Oh, I shall be quite content with aquiline vision for the right eye only,' I said; 'I have often observed that carpenters in ruling their wood find one better than two.'

So saying, I proceeded to carry out my instructions at once. Empedocles began gradually to disappear, and at last vanished in smoke.

I had no sooner flapped the wing than a flood of light enveloped me, and things that before I had not even been aware of became perfectly clear. I turned my eyes down earthwards, and with ease discerned cities, men, and all that was going on, not merely in the open, but in the fancied security of houses. There was Ptolemy in his sister's arms, the son of Lysimachus plotting against his father, Seleucus's son Antiochus making signs to his step-mother Stratonice, Alexander of Pherae being murdered by his wife, Antigonus corrupting his daughter-in-law, the son of Attalus putting the poison in his cup; Arsaces was in the act of slaying his mistress, while the eunuch Arbaces drew his sword upon him. The guards were dragging Spatinus the Mede out from the banquet by the foot, with the lump on his brow from the golden cup. Similar sights were to be seen in the palaces of Libya and Scythia and Thrace—adulteries, murders, treasons, robberies, perjuries, suspicions, and monstrous betrayals.

Such was the entertainment afforded me by royalty; private life was much more amusing; for I could make that out too. I saw Hermodorus the Epicurean perjuring himself for 40 pounds, Agathocles the Stoic suing a pupil for his fees, lawyer Clinias stealing a bowl from the temple of Asclepius, and Herophilus the cynic sleeping in a brothel. Not to mention the multitude of burglars, litigants, usurers, duns; oh, it was a fine representative show!

Friend. I must say, Menippus, I should have liked the details here too; it all seems to have been very much to your taste.

Menippus. I could not go through the whole of it, even to please you; to take it in with the eyes kept one busy. But the main divisions were very much what Homer gives from the shield of Achilles: here junketings and marriages,

there courts and councils, in another compartment a sacrifice, and hard by a mourning. If I glanced at Getica, I would see the Getae at war; at Scythia, there were the Scythians wandering about on their wagons. Half a turn in another direction gave me Egyptians at the plough, or Phoenicians chaffering, Cilician pirates, Spartan flagellants, Athenians at law.

All this was simultaneous, you understand; and you must try to conceive what a queer jumble it all made. It was as if a man were to collect a number of choristers, or rather of choruses, and then tell each individual to disregard the others and start a strain of his own. If each did his best, went his own way, and tried to drown his neighbor, can you imagine what the musical effect would be?

Friend. A very ridiculous confusion.

Menippus. Well, friend, such are the earthly dancers; the life of man is just such a discordant performance. Not only are the voices jangled, but the steps are not uniform, the motions not concerted, the objects not agreed upon—until the impresario dismisses them one by one from the stage, with a 'not wanted.' Then they are all alike, and quiet enough, confounding no longer their undisciplined rival strains. But as long as the show lasts in its marvelous diversity, there is plenty of food for laughter in its vagaries.

The people who most amused me, however, were those who dispute about boundaries, or pride themselves on cultivating the plain of Sicyon, or holding the Oenoe side of Marathon, or a thousand acres at Acharnae. The whole of Greece, as I then saw it, might measure some four inches; how much smaller Athens on the same scale. So I realized what sort of sized basis for their pride remains to our rich men. The widest-acred of them all, methought, was the proud cultivator of an Epicurean atom. Then I looked at the Peloponnese, my eyes fell on the Cynurian district, and the thought occurred that it was for this little plot, no broader than an Egyptian lentil, that all those Argives and Spartans fell in a single day. Or if I saw a man puffed up by the possession of seven or eight gold rings and half as many gold cups, again my lungs would begin to crow; why, Pangaeus with all its mines was about the size of a grain of millet.

Friend. You lucky man! what a rare sight you had! And how big, now, did the towns and the people look from there?

Menippus. You must often have seen a community of ants, some of them a seething mass, some going abroad, others coming back to town. One is a scavenger, another a bustling porter loaded with a bit of bean-pod or half a wheat grain. They no doubt have, on their modest myrmecic scale, their architects and politicians, their magistrates and composers and philosophers. At any rate, what men and cities suggested to me was just so many ant-hills. If you think the similitude too disparaging, look into the Thessalian legends, and you will find that the most warlike tribe there was the Myrmidons, or ants turned men. Well, when I had had enough of contemplation and laughter, I roused myself and soared *to join the Gods, where dwells the Lord of storms.*

I had only flown a couple of hundred yards, when Selene's feminine voice reached me:

'Menippus, do me an errand to Zeus, and I will wish you a pleasant journey.'

'You have only to name it,' I said, 'provided it is not something to carry.'

'It is a simple message of entreaty to Zeus. I am tired to death, you must know, of being slandered by these philosophers; they have no better occupation than impertinent curiosity about me—What am I? How big am I? Why am I halved? Why am I gibbous? I am inhabited; I am just a mirror hung over the sea; I am—whatever their latest fancy suggests. It is the last straw when they say my light is stolen, sham, imported from the sun, and keep on doing their best to get up jealousy and ill feeling between brother and sister. They might have been contented with making him out a stone or a red-hot lump.'

'These gentry who in the day look so stern and manly, dress so gravely, and are so revered by common men, would be surprised to learn how much I know of their vile nightly abominations. I see them all, though I never tell; it would be too indecent to make revelations, and show up the contrast between their nightly doings and their public performances. So, if I catch one of them in adultery or theft or other nocturnal adventure, I pull my cloud veil over me; I do not want the vulgar to see old men disgracing their long beards and their virtuous calling. But they go on giving tongue and worrying me all the same, and, so help me Night, I have thought many a time of going a long, long way off, out of reach of their impertinent tongues. Will you remember to tell Zeus all this? And you may add that I cannot remain at my post unless he will pulverize the physicists, muzzle the logicians, raze the Porch, burn the Academy, and put an end to strolling in the Lyceum. That might secure me a little peace from these daily

mensurations.'

'I will remember,' said I, and resumed my upward flight to Heaven, through a region where nor ox nor man had wrought.

For the Moon was soon but a small object, with the Earth entirely hidden behind it. Three days' flight through the stars, with the Sun on my right hand, brought me close to Heaven; and my first idea was to go straight in as I was. I should easily pass unobserved in virtue of my half-eagleship; for of course the eagle was Zeus's familiar. On second thoughts, though, my vulture wing would very soon betray me. So, thinking it better not to run any risks, I went up to the door and knocked. Hermes opened, took my name, and hurried off to inform Zeus. After a brief wait I was asked to step in; I was now trembling with apprehension, and I found that the Gods, who were all seated together, were not quite easy themselves. The unexpected nature of the visit was slightly disturbing to them, and they had visions of all mankind arriving at my heels by the same conveyance.

But Zeus bent upon me a Titanic glance, awful, penetrating, and spoke: *Who art thou? Where thy city? Who thy kin?*

At the sound, I nearly died of fear, but remained upright, though mute and paralyzed by that thunderous voice. I gradually recovered, began at the beginning, and gave a clear account of myself—how I had been possessed with curiosity about the heavens, had gone to the philosophers, found their accounts conflicting, and grown tired of being logically rent in twain; so I came to my great idea, my wings, and ultimately to Heaven; I added Selene's message. Zeus smiled and slightly unbent his brow.

'What of Otus and Ephialtes now?' he said; 'here is Menippus scaling Heaven! Well, well, for to-day consider yourself our guest. To-morrow we will treat with you of your business, and send you on your way.'

And therewith he rose and walked to the acoustic center of Heaven, it being prayer time.

As he went, he put questions to me about earthly affairs, beginning with, What was wheat a quarter in Greece? had we suffered much from cold last winter? and did the vegetables want more rain? Then he wished to know whether any of Phidias's kin were alive, why there had been no Diasia at Athens all these years, whether his Olympieum was ever going to be completed, and had the robbers of his temple at Dodona been caught?

I answered all these questions, and he proceeded:—'Tell me, Menippus, what are men's feelings towards me?'

'What should they be, Lord, but those of absolute reverence, as to the King of all Gods?'

'Now, now, chaffing as usual,' he said; 'I know their fickleness very well, for all your dissimulation. There was a time when I was their prophet, their healer, and their all, "*And Zeus filled every street and gathering-place.*"'

In those days Dodona and Pisa were glorious and far-famed, and I could not get a view for the clouds of sacrificial steam. But now Apollo has set up his oracle at Delphi, Asclepius his temple of health at Pergamum, Bendis and Anubis and Artemis their shrines in Thrace, Egypt, Ephesus; and to these all run; theirs the festal gatherings and the hecatombs. As for me, I am superannuated; they think themselves very generous if they offer me a victim at Olympia at four-year intervals. My altars are cold as Plato's Laws or Chrysippus's Syllogisms.'

So talking, we reached the spot where he was to sit and listen to the prayers. There was a row of openings with lids like well-covers, and a chair of gold by each. Zeus took his seat at the first, lifted off the lid and inclined his ear. From every quarter of Earth were coming the most various and contradictory petitions; for I too bent down my head and listened. Here are specimens.

'O Zeus, that I might be king!'

'O Zeus, that my onions and garlic might thrive!'

'Ye Gods, a speedy death for my father!'

Or again, 'Would that I might succeed to my wife's property!'

'Grant that my plot against my brother be not detected.'

'Let me win my suit.'

'Give me an Olympic garland.'

Of those at sea, one prayed for a north, another for a south wind; the farmer asked for rain, the fuller for sun. Zeus listened, and gave each prayer careful consideration, but without promising to grant them all; *Our Father this bestowed, and that withheld.*

Righteous prayers he allowed to come up through the hole, received and laid them down at his right, while he sent the unholy ones packing with a downward puff of breath, that Heaven might not be defiled by their entrance. In one case I saw him puzzled; two men praying for opposite things. Promising the same sacrifices, he could not tell which of them to favor, and experienced a truly Academic suspense of judgment, showing a reserve and equilibrium worthy of Pyrrho himself.

The prayers disposed of, he went on to the next chair and opening, and attended to oaths and their takers. These done with, and Hermodorus the Epicurean annihilated, he proceeded to the next chair to deal with omens, prophetic voices, and auguries. Then came the turn of the sacrifice aperture, through which the smoke came up and communicated to Zeus the name of the devotee it represented. After that, he was free to give his wind and weather orders: —Rain for Scythia today, a thunderstorm for Libya, snow for Greece. The north wind he instructed to blow in Lydia, the west to raise a storm in the Adriatic, the south to take a rest; a thousand bushels of hail to be distributed over Cappadocia.

His work was now pretty well completed, and as it was just dinner time, we went to the banquet hall. Hermes received me, and gave me my place next to a group of Gods whose alien origin left them in a rather doubtful position—Pan, the Corybants, Attis, and Sabazius. I was supplied with bread by Demeter, wine by Dionysus, meat by Heracles, myrtle-blossoms by Aphrodite, and sprats by Posidon. But I also got a sly taste of ambrosia and nectar; good-natured Ganymede, as often as he saw that Zeus's attention was engaged elsewhere, brought round the nectar and indulged me with a half-pint or so. The Gods, as Homer (who I think must have had the same opportunities of observation as myself) somewhere says, neither eat bread nor drink the ruddy wine; they heap their plates with ambrosia, and are nectar-bibbers; but their choicest dainties are the smoke of sacrifice ascending with rich fumes, and the blood of victims poured by their worshippers round the altars. During dinner, Apollo harped, Silenus danced his wild measures, the Muses uprose and sang to us from Hesiod's Birth of Gods, and the first of Pindar's odes. When we had our fill and had well drunken, we slumbered, each where he was.

Slept all the Gods, and men with plumed helms, that livelong night; but me kind sleep forsook;

For I had much upon my mind; most of all, how came it that Apollo, in all that time, had never grown a beard? And how was night possible in Heaven, with the sun always there taking his share of the good cheer? So I had but a short nap of it. And in the morning Zeus arose, and bade summon an assembly.

When all were gathered, he thus commenced:—'The immediate occasion of my summoning you is the arrival of this stranger yesterday. But I have long intended to take counsel with you regarding the philosophers, and now, urged by Selene and her complaints, I have determined to defer the consideration of the question no longer. There is a class which has recently become conspicuous among men; they are idle, quarrelsome, vain, irritable, lickerish, silly, puffed up, arrogant, and, in Homeric phrase, vain cumberers of the earth. These men have divided themselves into bands, each dwelling in a separate word-maze of its own construction, and call themselves Stoics, Epicureans, Peripatetics, and more farcical names yet. Then they take to themselves the holy name of Virtue, and with uplifted brows and flowing beards exhibit the deceitful semblance that hides immoral lives. Their model is the tragic actor, from whom if you strip off the mask and the gold-spangled robe, there is nothing left but a paltry fellow hired for a few shillings to play a part.

'Nevertheless, quite undeterred by their own characters, they scorn the human and travesty the divine. They gather a company of guileless youths, and feed them with solemn chatter upon Virtue and quibbling verbal puzzles; in their pupils' presence they are all for fortitude and temperance, and have no words bad enough for wealth and pleasure. When they are by themselves, there is no limit to their gluttony, their lechery, their licking of dirty pence. But the head and front of their offending is this: they neither work themselves nor help others' work; they are useless drones, *of no avail in council nor in war*; which notwithstanding, they censure others. They store up poisoned words, they con invectives, they heap their neighbors with reproaches; their highest honors are for him who shall be loudest and most overbearing and boldest in abuse.

'Ask one of these brawling bawling censors, And what do you do? In God's name, what shall we call your contribution to progress? And he would reply, if conscience and truth were anything to him: "I consider it superfluous to sail the sea or till the earth or fight for my country or follow a trade; but I have a loud voice and a

dirty body; I eschew warm water and go barefoot through the winter. I am a Momus who can always pick holes in other people's coats. If a rich man keeps a costly table or a mistress, I make it my business to be properly horrified; but if my familiar friend is lying sick, in need of help and care, I am not aware of it." Such, your Godheads, is the nature of this vermin.

'There is a special insolence in those who call themselves Epicureans; these go so far as to lay their hands on our character; we take no interest in human affairs, they say, and in fact have nothing to do with the course of events. And this is a serious question for you; if once they infect their generation with this view, you will learn what hunger means. Who will sacrifice to you, if he does not expect to profit by it? As to Selene's complaints, you all heard them yesterday from this stranger's lips. And now decide upon such measures as shall advantage mankind and secure your own safety.'

Zeus had no sooner closed his speech than clamor prevailed, all crying at once: Blast! burn! annihilate! To the pit with them! To Tartarus! To the Giants! Zeus ordered silence again, and then,

'Your wishes,' he said, 'shall be executed; they shall all be annihilated, and their logic with them. But just at present chastisement is not lawful. You are aware that we are now in the four months of the long vacation; the formal notice has lately been issued. In the spring of next year, the baleful levin-bolt shall give them the fate they deserve.'

He spake, and sealed his word with lowering brows.

'As to Menippus,' he added, 'my pleasure is this. He shall be deprived of his wings, and so incapacitated for repeating his visit, but shall today be conveyed back to Earth by Hermes.'

So saying, he dismissed the assembly.

The Cyllenian accordingly lifted me up by the right ear, and yesterday evening deposited me in the Ceramicus. And now, friend, you have all the latest from Heaven. I must be off to the Poecile, to let the philosophers loitering there know the luck they are in.

The Double Indictment



Characters: Zeus. Hermes. Justice. Pan.

Several Athenians. The Academy. The Porch. Epicurus. Virtue. Luxury. Diogenes. Rhetoric. A Syrian. Dialogue

Context: Zeus convenes a court to answer the criticism of those who say the gods do not deliver speedy justice.

Zeus. A curse on all those philosophers who will have it that none but the Gods are happy! If they could but know what we have to put up with on men's account, they would not envy us our nectar and our ambrosia. They take Homer's word for it all,— the word of a blind quack. 'Tis he who pronounces us blessed, and expatiates on heavenly glories, he who could not see in front of his own nose.

Look at the Sun, now. He yokes that chariot, and is riding through the heavens from morn till night, clothed in his garment of fire, and dispensing his rays abroad; not so much breathing-space as goes to the scratching of an ear. Once let his horses catch him napping, and they have the bit between their teeth and are off 'cross country, with the result that the Earth is scorched to a cinder.

The Moon is no better off: she is kept up into the small hours to light the reveler and the diner-out upon their homeward path. And then Apollo,—*he* has his work cut out for him: with such a press of oracular business, it is much if he has any ears left to hear with. He is wanted at Delphi; the next minute, he must be off to Colophon; then away to Xanthus; then back at a trot to Clarus; then it is Delos, then Branchidae;—in short, he is at the beck of every priestess who has taken her draught of holy water, munched her laurel-leaf, and made the tripod rock. It is now or never; if he is not there that minute to reel off the required oracle, his credit is gone. The traps they set for him too! He must have a dog's nose for lamb and tortoise in the pot, or his Lydian customer departs, laughing him to scorn.

As for Asclepius, he has no peace for his patients: his eyes are acquainted with horror, and his hands with loathsomeness; another's sickness is his pain. To say nothing of the work that the Winds have to get through, what with sowing and winnowing and getting the ships along; or of Sleep, always on the wing, with Dream at his side all night giving a helping hand. Men have to thank us for all this: every one of us contributes his share to their well-being.

And the others have an easy time of it, compared to me, to me the King and Father of all. The annoyances I have to put up with! The worry of thinking of all these things at once! I must keep an eye on all the rest, to begin with, or they would be making some silly mistake; and as for the work I have to do with my own hands, there is no end to it; such complications! It is all I can do to get through with it. It is not as if I had only the main issues to attend to, the rain and hail and wind and lightning, and as soon as I had arranged them could sit down, feeling that my own particular work was over. No, besides all that, I must be looking every way at once, Argus-eyed for theft and perjury, as for sacrifice; the moment a libation has been poured, it is for me to locate the savory smoke that rises; for me it is to hear the cry of the sick man and of the sailor; at one and the same moment, a hecatomb demands my presence at Olympia, a battle in the plain of Babylon; hail is due in Thrace, dinner in Ethiopia; 'tis too much!

And do what I may, it is hard to give satisfaction. Many is the time that all besides, both Gods and men of plumed helm, have slept the long night through, while unto Zeus sweet slumber has not come nigh. If I nod for a moment, behold, Epicurus is justified, and our indifference to the affairs of Earth made manifest. And if once men lend an ear to that doctrine, the consequences will be serious: our temples will go ungarlanded; the streets will be redolent no longer of roast meat, the bowl no longer yield us libation; our altars will be cold, sacrifice and oblation will be at an end, and utter starvation must ensue.

Hence like a pilot I stand up at the helm all alone, tiller in hand, while every soul on board is asleep, and probably drunk. No rest, no food for me, while I ponder in my mind and breast on the common safety; and my reward? To be called the Lord of all! I should like to ask those philosophers who assign us the monopoly of blessedness, when they suppose we find time for nectar and ambrosia among our ceaseless occupations. Look at the mildewed, cob-webbed stack of petitions moldering on their files in our chancery, for want of time to attend to them: look only at the cases pending between men and the various Arts and Sciences; venerable relics, some of them! Angry protests against the delays of the law reach me from all quarters; men cannot understand that it is from no neglect of ours that these judgments have been postponed; it is simply pressure of business—pressure of blessedness, if they will

have it so.

Hermes. I myself, father, have heard a great deal of dissatisfaction expressed on Earth, only I did not like to mention it to you. However, as you have introduced the subject yourself, I may say that the discontent is general. Men do not venture to express their resentment openly, but there are mutterings in corners about the delay. It is high time they were all put out of their suspense, for better or for worse.

Zeus. And what would you have me do, my boy? Hold a session at once? Or shall we say next year?

Hermes. Oh, at once, by all means.

Zeus. To work, then: fly down, and make proclamation in the following terms:

All litigant parties to assemble this day on Areopagus: Justice to assign them their juries from the whole body of the Athenians, the number of the jury to be in proportion to the amount of damages claimed; any party doubting the justice of his sentence to have the right of appeal to me.

And you, my daughter, take your seat by the side of the Dread Goddesses, cast lots for the order of the trials, and superintend the formation of juries.

Justice. You would have me return to Earth, once more to be driven thence in ignominious flight by the intolerable taunts of Injustice?

Zeus. Hope for better things. The philosophers have quite convinced every one by this time of your superiority. The son of Sophroniscus [Ed. Note: Socrates] was particularly strong on your merits. He laid it down that Justice was the highest Good.

Justice. Yes; and very serviceable his dissertations on Justice were to him, were they not, when he was handed over to the Eleven, and thrown into prison, and drank the hemlock? Poor man, he had not even time to sacrifice the cock he owed to Asclepius. His accusers were too much for him altogether, and *their* philosophy had Injustice for its object.

Zeus. But in those days philosophy was not generally known, and had but few exponents; it is not surprising that the scale turned in favor of Anytus and Meletus. But now it is different: look at the number of cloaks and sticks and wallets that are about; everywhere philosophers, long-bearded, book in hand, maintain your cause. The public walks are filled with their contending hosts, and every man of them calls Virtue his nurse. Numbers have abandoned their former professions to pounce upon wallet and cloak; these ready-made philosophers, carpenters once or cobblers, now duly tanned to the true Ethiopian hue, are singing your praises high and low. *'He that falls on shipboard strikes wood,'* says the proverb; and the eye, wheresoever it fall, will light on philosophers.

Justice. Yes, father, but they frighten me: they quarrel so among themselves; and when they talk about me, they only expose their own little minds. And, from what I hear, most of those who make so free with my name show no inclination at all to put my principles into practice. I may count upon finding their doors closed to *me*: Injustice has been beforehand with me.

Zeus. Come, child, they are not all so bad, and if you can find a few honest men it will be something. Now, off with you both, and see if you can't get a few cases settled up today.

Hermes. Well, Justice: yonder is our road: straight in the line for Sunium, to the foot of Hymettus, taking Parnes on our right; you see those two hills? You have quite forgotten the way, I suppose, in all this time? Now, now: weeping? Why so vexed? There is nothing to fear. Things are quite different in these days: the Scirons and Pityocampses and Busirises and Phalarises who used to frighten you so are all dead: Wisdom, the Academy, the Porch, now hold sway everywhere. They are all your admirers; their talk is all of you; they yearn to see you descend to them once more.

Justice. Tell me, Hermes,—you if any one must know the truth; you are generally busy either in the Gymnasium or else in the Market, making proclamation to the Assembly,—what are the Athenians like now? Shall I be able to live with them?

Hermes. We are brother and sister, it is only right that I should tell you the truth. Well then, Philosophy has made a considerable change for the better in most of them; at the worst, their respect for the cloth is some check on their misdeeds. At the same time—not to conceal anything—you will find villains amongst them; and you will find some who are neither quite philosophers nor quite knaves.

The fact is, Philosophy's dyeing process is still going on. Some have absorbed the full quantity of dye; these are perfect specimens of her art, and show no admixture of other colors; with them you will find a ready reception. But others, owing to their original impurities, are not yet completely saturated; they are better than the generality of mankind, but they are not all they should be; they are piebald or spotted or dappled. Others again there are who have contented themselves with merely rubbing a fingertip in the soot on the outside of the cauldron, and smearing themselves with that; after which they consider the dyeing process complete. But you, of course, will only live with the best. Meanwhile, here we are, close to Attica; we must now leave Sunium on our right, and diverge towards the Acropolis. Good: *terra firma*. You had better sit down somewhere here on the Areopagus, in the direction of the Pnyx, and wait whilst I make Zeus's proclamation. I shall go up into the Acropolis; that will be the easiest way of making every one hear the summons.

Justice. Before you go, Hermes, tell me who this is coming along; a man with horns and a pipe and shaggy legs.

Hermes. Why, you must know Pan, most festive of all Dionysus's followers? He used to live on Mount Parthenius; but at the time of the Persian expedition under Datis, when the barbarians landed at Marathon, he volunteered in the Athenian service. Ever since then he has had the cave yonder at the foot of the Acropolis, a little past the Pelasgicum, and pays his taxes like any other naturalized foreigner. Seeing us so near at hand, I suppose he is coming up to make his compliments.

Pan. Hail, Justice and Hermes!

Justice. Hail, Pan; chief of Satyrs in dance and song, and most gallant of Athens' soldiers!

Pan. But what brings you here, Hermes?

Hermes. Justice will explain; I must be off to the Acropolis on my errand.

Justice. Zeus has sent me down, Pan, to preside in the law-court.—And how do you like Athens?

Pan. Well, the fact is, I am a good deal disappointed. They do not treat me with the consideration to which I am entitled, after repelling that tremendous barbarian invasion. All they do is to come up to my cave two or three times a year with a particularly high-scented goat, and sacrifice him: I am permitted to look on whilst they enjoy the feast, and am complimented with a perfunctory dance. However, there is some joking and merrymaking on the occasion, and that I find rather fun.

Justice. And, Pan,—have they become more virtuous under the hands of the philosophers?

Pan. Philosophers? Oh! People with beards just like mine; sepulchral beings, who are always getting together and jabbering?

Justice. Those are they.

Pan. I can't understand a word they say; their philosophy is too much for me. I am mountain-bred; smart city-language is not in my line; sophists and philosophers are not known in Arcadia. I am a good hand at flute or pipe; I can mind goats, I can dance, I can fight at a pinch, and that is all. But I hear them all day long, bawling out a string of hard words about virtue, and nature, and ideas, and things incorporeal. They are good enough friends when the argument begins, but their voices mount higher and higher as they go on, and end in a scream; they get more and more excited, and all try to speak at once; they grow red in the face, their necks swell, and their veins stand out, for all the world like a flute-player on a high note.

The argument is turned upside down, they forget what they are trying to prove, and finally go off abusing one another and brushing the sweat from their brows. Victory rests with him who can show the boldest front and the loudest voice, and hold his ground the longest. The people, especially those who have nothing better to do, adore them, and stand spellbound under their confident bawlings. For all that I could see, they were no better than humbugs, and I was none too pleased at their copying my beard. If there were any use in their noise, if the talking did any good to the public, I should not have a word to say against them. But, to tell you the plain unvarnished truth, I have more than once looked out from my peep-hole yonder and seen them—

Justice. Hush, Pan: was not that Hermes making the proclamation?

Pan. I thought so.

Hermes. Be it known to all men that we purpose on this seventh day of March to hold a court of justice, and Fortune

defend the right! All litigant parties to assemble on Areopagus, where Justice will assign the juries and preside over the trials in person. The juries to be taken from the whole Athenian people; the pay to be sixpence for each case; the number of jurors to vary with the nature of the accusation. Any parties who had commenced legal proceedings and have died in the interim to be sent up by Aeacus. Any party doubting the justice of his sentence may appeal; the appeal to be heard by Zeus.

Pan. Talk about noise! How they shout! And what a hurry they are in to get here! See how one hales another up the hill! Here comes Hermes himself. Well, I leave you to your juries and your evidence; you are accustomed to it. I will return to my cave, and there play over one of those amorous ditties with which I love to upbraid Echo. As to rhetoric and law-pleadings, I hear enough of those every day in this very court of Areopagus.

Hermes. We had better summon the parties, Justice.

Justice. True. Only look at the crowd, bustling and buzzing about the hilltop like a swarm of wasps!

First Athenian. I've got you, curse you.

Second Athenian. Pooh! A trumped-up charge.

Third Athenian. At last! you shall get your deserts this time.

Fourth Athenian. Your villainy shall be unmasked.

Fifth Athenian. My jury first, Hermes.

Sixth Athenian. Come along: into court with you, rascal.

Seventh Athenian. You needn't throttle me.

Justice. Do you know what I think we had better do, Hermes? Put off all the other cases for tomorrow, and only take today the charges brought by Arts, Professions, and Philosophies. Pick me out all of that kind.

Hermes. Drink *v.* the Academy, *re* Polemon, kidnapped.

Justice. Seven jurors.

Hermes. Porch *v.* Pleasure. Defendant is charged with seducing Dionysius, plaintiff's admirer.

Justice. Five will do for that.

Hermes. Luxury *v.* Virtue, *re* Aristippus.

Justice. Five again.

Hermes. Bank *v.* Diogenes, alleged to have run away from plaintiff's service.

Justice. Three only.

Hermes. Painting *v.* Pyrrho. Desertion from the ranks.

Justice. That will want nine.

Hermes. What about these two charges just brought against a rhetorician?

Justice. No, those can stand over; we must work off the arrears first.

Hermes. Well, these cases are of just the same kind. They are not old ones, it is true, but they are very like those you have taken, and might fairly be heard with them.

Justice. That looks rather like favoritism, Hermes. However, as you like; only these must be the last; we have got quite enough. What are they?

Hermes. Rhetoric *v.* a Syrian, for neglect; Dialogue *v.* the same, for assault.

Justice. And who is this Syrian? There is no name given.

Hermes. That is all: the Syrian rhetorician; he can have a jury without having a name.

Justice. So! Here on Areopagus I am to give juries to outsiders, who ought to be tried on the other side of the Euphrates? Well, give him eleven, and they can hear both cases.

Hermes. That's right; it will save a lot of expense.

Justice. First case: the Academy *versus* Drink. Let the jury take their seats. Mark the time,' Hermes. Drink, open the case.... Not a word? Can you do nothing but nod?—Hermes, go and see what is the matter with Hermes.

Hermes. She says she cannot plead, she would only be laughed at; wine has tied her tongue. As you see, she can hardly stand.

Justice. Well, there are plenty of able counsel present, ready to shout themselves hoarse for sixpence; let her employ one of them.

Hermes. No one will have anything to do with such a client in open court. But she makes a very reasonable proposal.

Justice. Yes?

Hermes. The Academy is always ready to take both sides; she makes a point of contradicting herself plausibly. 'Let her speak first on my behalf,' says Drink, 'and then on her own.'

Justice. A novel form of procedure. However, go on, Academy; speak on both sides, if you find it so easy.

Academy. First, gentlemen of the jury, let me state the case for Drink, as her time is now being taken.

My unfortunate client, gentlemen, has been cruelly wronged: I have torn from her the one slave on whose loyalty and affection she could rely, the only one who saw nothing censurable in her conduct. I allude to Polemon, whose days, from morning to night, were spent in revel; who in broad daylight sought the publicity of the Market in the company of music—girls and singers; ever drunk, ever headachy, ever garlanded. In support of my statements, I appeal to every man in Athens to say whether he had ever seen Polemon sober. But in an evil hour for him, his revels, which had brought him to so many other doors, brought him at length to my own. I laid hands on him, tore him away by brute force from the plaintiff, and made him my own; giving him water to drink, teaching him sobriety, and stripping him of his garlands. He, who should have been sitting over his wine, now became acquainted with the perverse, the harassing, the pernicious quibbles of philosophy. Alas! The ruddy glow has departed from his cheek; he is pale and wasted; his songs are all forgotten; there are times when he will sit far on into the night, tasting neither meat nor drink, while he reels out the meaningless platitudes with which I have so abundantly supplied him. I have even incited him to attack the character of my client, and to utter a thousand base insinuations against her good fame.

The case of Drink is now complete. I proceed to state my own. Let my time be taken.

Justice. What will the defendant have to say to that, I wonder? Give her the same time allowance.

Academy. Nothing, gentlemen of the jury, could sound more plausible than the arguments advanced by my learned friend on her client's behalf. And yet, if you will give me your favorable attention, I shall convince you that the plaintiff has suffered no wrong at my hands. This Polemon, whom plaintiff claims as her servant, so far from having any natural connection with her, is one whose excellent parts entitle him to claim kinship and affinity with myself. He was still a boy, his powers were yet unformed, when plaintiff, aided and abetted by Pleasure—ever her partner in crime—seized upon him, and delivered him over into the clutches of debauchery and dissipation, under whose corrupt influence the unfortunate young man utterly lost all sense of shame. Those very facts that plaintiff supposed to be so many arguments in her favor will be found, on the contrary, to make for my own case. From early morning (as my learned friend has just observed) did the misguided Polemon, with aching head and garlanded, stagger through the open market to the noise of flutes, never sober, brawling with all he met; a reproach to his ancestors and his city, a laughing-stock to foreigners.

One day he reached my door. He found it open: I was discoursing to a company of my disciples, as is my wont, upon virtue and temperance. He stood there, with the flute-girl at his side and the garlands on his head, and sought at first to drown our conversation with his noisy outcry. But we paid no heed to him, and little by little our words produced a sobering effect, for Drink had not entire possession of him: he bade the flute-girl cease, tore off his garlands, and looked with shame at his luxurious dress. Like one waking from deep sleep, he saw himself as he was, and repented of his past life. The flush of drunkenness faded and vanished from his cheek, and was succeeded by a blush of shame; at last, not (as plaintiff would have you believe) in response to any invitation of mine, nor under any compulsion, but of his own free will, and in the conviction of my superiority, he renounced his former mistress there and then, and entered my service.

Bring him into court. You shall see for yourselves, gentlemen, what he has become under my treatment. Behold that Polemon whom I found drunk, unable to speak or stand upright, an object of ridicule: I turned him from his evil ways; I taught him sobriety; and I present him to you, no longer a slave, but a decent and orderly citizen, a credit to his nation. In conclusion let me say that the change I have wrought in him has won me the gratitude not only of Polemon himself but of all his friends. Which of us has been the more profitable companion for him, it is now for the jury to decide.

Hermes. Come, gentlemen, get up and give your votes. There is no time to be lost; we have other cases coming on.

Justice. Academy wins, by six votes to one.

Hermes. I am not surprised to find that Drink has one adherent. Jurors in the case of Porch *v.* Pleasure *re* Dionysius take their seats! The lady of the frescoes may begin; her time is noted.

Porch. I am not ignorant, gentlemen, of the attractions of my adversary. I see how your eyes turn in her direction; she has your smiles, I your contempt, because my hair is close-cropped, and my expression stern and masculine. Yet if you will give me a fair hearing, I fear her not; for justice is on my side. Nay, it is with these same meretricious attractions of hers that my accusation is concerned: it was by her specious appearance that she beguiled the virtuous Dionysius, my lover, and drew him to herself.

The present case is in fact closely allied with that of Drink and the Academy, with which your colleagues have just dealt. The question now before you is this: are men to live the lives of swine, wallowing in voluptuousness, with never a high or noble thought? Or are they to set virtue above enjoyment, and follow the dictates of freedom and philosophy, fearing not to grapple with pain, nor seeking the degrading service of pleasure, as though happiness were to be found in a pot of honey or a cake of figs?

These are the baits my adversary throws out for fools, and toil the bugbear with which she frightens them. Her artifices seldom fail; and among her victims is this unfortunate whom she has constrained to rebel against my authority. She had to wait till she found him on a sick-bed; never while he was himself would he have listened to her proposals. Yet what right have *I* to complain? She spares not even the Gods; she impugns the wisdom of Providence; she is guilty of blasphemy. You have a double penalty to impose, if you would be wise.

I hear that she has not even been at the pains of preparing a defense: Epicurus is to speak for her! She does not stand upon ceremony with you, gentlemen.—Ask her what Heracles would have been, what your own Theseus would have been, if they had listened to the voice of pleasure, and shrunk back from toil: their toils were the only check upon wickedness, which else must have overrun the whole Earth. And now I have done; I am no lover of long speeches. Yet if my adversary would consent to answer a few questions, her worthlessness would soon appear. Let me remind you, gentlemen, of your oath: give your votes in accordance with that oath, and believe not Epicurus, when he tells you that the Gods take no thought for the things of Earth.

Hermes. Stand down, madam. Epicurus will now speak on behalf of pleasure.

Epicurus. I shall not detain you long, gentlemen of the jury; there is no occasion for me to do so. If it were true, as the plaintiff asserts, that Dionysius was her lover, and that my client by means of drugs or incantations had constrained him to withdraw his affections from the plaintiff and transfer them to herself,— if this were true, then my client might fairly be accused of witchcraft, nor could her wicked practices upon her rival's admirers escape condemnation.

On the other hand, if a free citizen of a free state, deciding for himself in a matter where the law is silent, takes a violent aversion to this lady's person, concludes that the blessedness with which she promises to crown his labors is neither more nor less than moonshine, and accordingly makes the best of his way out of her labyrinthine maze of argument into the attractive arms of Pleasure, bursts the bonds of verbal subtlety, exchanges credulity for common sense, and pronounces, with great justice, that toil is toilsome, and that pleasure is pleasant,— I ask, is this shipwrecked mariner to be excluded from the calm haven of his desire, and hurled back headlong into a sea of toil? Is this poor suppliant at the altar of Mercy— in other words of Pleasure — Is he to be delivered over into the power of perplexity,—and all on the chance that his hot climb up the steep hill of Virtue may be rewarded with a glimpse of that celebrated lady on the top, and his life of toil followed by a hereafter of happiness?

We could scarcely ask for a better judge of the matter than Dionysius himself. He was as familiar with the Stoic doctrines as any man, and held at one time that virtue was the only Good: but he presently discovered that toil was an evil: he then chose what seemed to him the better course. He would no doubt observe that those philosophers

who had so much to say on the subject of patience and endurance under toil were secretly the servants of Pleasure, carefully abiding by her laws in their own homes, though they made so free with her name in their discourses. They cannot bear to be detected in any relaxation, or any departure from their principles: but, poor men, they lead a Tantalus life of it in consequence, and when they *do* get a chance of sinning without being found out, they drink down pleasure by the bucketful.

Depend on it, if some one would make them a present of Gyges's ring of invisibility, or Hades's cap, they would cut the acquaintance of toil without further ceremony, and elbow their way into the presence of Pleasure; they would all be Dionysiuses then. As long as Dionysius was well, he thought that there was some good in all this talk about endurance. But when he fell ill, and found out what pain really was, he perceived that his body was of another school than the Porch, and held quite other tenets. He was converted, realized that he was flesh and blood, and from that day ceased to behave as if he were made of marble. He knew now that the man who talks nonsense about the iniquity of pleasure but toys with words: his thoughts are bent elsewhere.

And now, gentlemen, I leave you to your vote.

Porch. Not yet! Let me ask him a few questions.

Epicurus. Yes? I am ready.

Porch. You hold toil to be an evil?

Epicurus. I do.

Porch. And pleasure a good?

Epicurus. Unquestionably.

Porch. Do you recognize the distinction between *differentia* and *indifferentia*? Between *praeposita* and *rejecta*?

Epicurus. Why, certainly.

Hermes. Madam, this discussion must cease; the jury say they do not understand word-chopping. They will now give their votes.

Porch. Ah; I should have won, if I could have tried him with my third figure of *self-evidents*.

Justice. Who wins?

Hermes. Unanimous verdict for Pleasure.

Porch. I appeal to Zeus.

Justice. By all means. Next case, Hermes.

Hermes. Luxury v. Virtue, *re* Aristippus; Aristippus must appear in person.

Virtue. I ought to speak first. Aristippus is mine; his words and his deeds alike proclaim him mine.

Luxury. On the contrary, any one who will observe his garlands and his purple robes and his perfumes will agree that he is mine.

Justice. Peace! This suit must stand over, until Zeus has decided the appeal *re* Dionysius. The cases are similar. If Porch wins her appeal, Aristippus shall be adjudged to Virtue: if not, Luxury must have him. Bring the next case. By the way, those jurors must not have their fee; they have not earned it.

Hermes. So the poor old gentlemen have climbed up all this way for nothing!

Justice. Well, they must be content with a third. Now go away, all of you, and don't be cross; you shall have another chance.

Hermes. Diogenes of Sinope wanted! Bank, it is for you to speak.

Diogenes. Look here, Madam Justice, if she doesn't stop bothering, I shall have assault and battery to answer for before long, instead of desertion; my stick is ready.

Justice. What is the meaning of this? Bank has run away, and Diogenes after her, with his stick raised. Poor Bank! I am afraid she will be roughly handled. Call Pyrrho.

Hermes. Here is Painting, but Pyrrho has never come up. I knew how it would be.

Justice. And what was his reason?

Hermes. He holds that there is no such thing as a true decision.

Justice. Then judgment goes against him by default. Now for the Syrian advocate. The indictments were only filed a day or two ago; there was no such hurry. However— We will first take the case in which Rhetoric is plaintiff. How people crowd in to hear it!

Hermes. Just so: the case has not had time to get stale, you see; it has the charm of novelty, the indictment, as you say, having only been filed yesterday. The prospect, too, of hearing the Syrian defend himself against two such plaintiffs as Rhetoric and Dialogue, one after the other, is a great attraction. Well, Rhetoric, when are you going to begin?

Rhetoric. Before all things, men of Athens, I pray the Gods that you may listen to me throughout this trial with feelings not less warm than those that I have ever entertained towards my country and towards each one of you, my countrymen. And if, further, I pray them so to dispose your hearts that you will suffer me to conduct my case in accordance with my original intention and design, without interruption from my adversary, I shall be asking no more than justice. When I listen to the defendant's words, and then reflect upon the treatment I have received from him, I know not how I am to reconcile the two. You will presently find him holding a language scarcely distinguishable from my own: yet examine into his conduct, and you will see, from the lengths to which he has already gone, that I am justified in taking steps to prevent his going yet further. But enough of preamble: I am wasting time that might be better employed in accusing my adversary.

Gentlemen, the defendant was no more than a boy—he still spoke with his native accent, and might at any moment have exhibited himself in the garb of an Assyrian—when I found him wandering up and down Ionia, at a loss for employment. I took him in hand; I gave him an education; and, convinced of his capabilities and of his devotion to me (for he was my very humble servant in those days, and had no admiration to spare for any one else). I turned my back upon the many suitors who sought my hand, upon the wealthy, the brilliant and the high-born, and betrothed myself to this monster of ingratitude. Upon this obscure pauper boy I bestowed the rich dowry of my surpassing eloquence, brought him to be enrolled among my own people, and made him my fellow citizen, to the bitter mortification of his unsuccessful rivals. When he formed the resolution of traveling, in order to make his good fortune known to the world, I did not remain behind: I accompanied him everywhere, from city to city, shedding my lustre upon him, and clothing him in honor and renown. Of our travels in Greece and Ionia, I say nothing: he expressed a wish to visit Italy: I sailed the Ionian Sea with him, and attended him even as far as Gaul, scattering plenty in his path.

For a long time he consulted my wishes in everything, was unflinching in his attendance upon me, and never passed a night away from my side. But no sooner had he secured an adequate provision, no sooner did he consider his reputation established, than his countenance changed towards me: he assumed a haughty air, and neglected, nay, utterly abandoned me; having conceived a violent affection for the bearded old person yonder, whom you may know from his dress to be Dialogue, and who passes for a son of Philosophy. With this Dialogue, in spite of the disparity of age, he is now living; and is not ashamed to clip the wings of free, high-soaring eloquence, and submit himself to the comedian's fetters of bald question and answer. He, whose thoughts should have found utterance in thundering oratory, is content to weave a puny network of conversation.

Such things may draw a smile from his audience, a nod, an unimpassioned wave of the hand, a murmur of approbation: they can never hope to evoke the deafening uproar of universal applause. And this, gentlemen, is the fascination under which he looks coldly upon me; I commend his taste! They say, indeed, that he is not on the best of terms even with his beloved Dialogue; apparently I am not the only victim of his overweening pride. Does not such ingratitude as this render him liable to the penalties imposed by the marriage-laws? He leaves me, his lawful wife, to whom he is indebted alike for wealth and reputation, leaves me to neglect, and goes off in pursuit of novelty; and that, at a time when all eyes are turned upon me, when all men write me their protectress. I hold out against the entreaties of countless suitors: they knock, and my doors remain closed to them; they call loudly upon my name, but I scorn their empty clamors, and answer them not. All is in vain: he will not return to me, nor withdraw his eyes from this new love. In Heaven's name, what does he expect to get from him? What has Dialogue but his cloak?

In conclusion, gentlemen: should he attempt to employ my art in his defense, suffer him not thus unscrupulously to

sharpen my own sword against me. Bid him defend himself, if he can, with the weapons of his adored Dialogue.

Hermes. Now there, madam, you are unreasonable: how can he possibly make a dialogue of it all by himself? No, no; let him deliver a regular speech, just the same as other people.

Syrian. In view, gentlemen, of the indignation that plaintiff has expressed at the idea of my employing her gift of eloquence in order to maintain my cause at large, I shall confine myself to a brief and summary refutation of her charges, and shall then leave the whole matter to your discernment.

Gentlemen, all that the plaintiff has said is true. She educated me; she bore me company in my travels; she made a Greek of me. She has each of these claims to a husband's gratitude. I have now to give my reasons for abandoning her, and cultivating the acquaintance of Dialogue: and, believe me, no motive of self-interest shall induce me to misrepresent the facts.

I found, then, that the discreet bearing, the seemly dress, which had distinguished her in the days of her union with the illustrious demesman of Paeania [Demosthenes], were now thrown aside. I saw her tricked out and bedizened, rouged and painted like a courtesan. My suspicions were aroused, and I began to watch the direction of her eyes. To make a long story short, our street was nightly infested with the serenades of her tipsy gallants, some of whom, not content with knocking at our doors, threw aside all restraint, and forced their way into the house. These attentions amused and delighted my wife: she was commonly to be seen leaning over the parapet and listening to the loose ditties that were bawled up from below; and when she thought she was unobserved, she would even open the door, and admit the gallant to her shameless embraces. Such things were not to be endured: I was loth to bring her into the divorce-court, and accordingly sought the hospitality of Dialogue, who was my near neighbor.

Such, gentlemen, are the grievous wrongs that plaintiff has suffered at my hands. Even had the provocation I have described been wanting, my age (I was then nearly forty years old) called upon me to withdraw from the turmoil of the law-courts, and suffer the 'gentlemen of the jury' to rest in peace. Tyrants enough had been arraigned, princes enough been eulogized: it was time to retreat to the walks of Academy or the Lyceum, there to enjoy, in the delightful society of Dialogue, that tranquil discourse which aims not at noisy acclamations. I might say much more, but I forbear: you, gentlemen, will give your votes in accordance with the dictates of conscience.

Justice. Who wins?

Hermes. The Syrian has all votes but one.

Justice. And that one a rhetorician's, I suppose. Dialogue will now address the same jury. Gentlemen, you will remain and hear this second case, and will receive a double fee.

Dialogue. If I had had my choice, gentlemen, I should have addressed you in the conversational style to which I am accustomed, instead of delivering a long harangue. However, I must conform to the custom of the law-courts, though I have neither skill nor experience in such matters. So much by way of exordium: and now for the outrage committed on me by the defendant.

In former days, gentlemen, I was a person of exalted character: my speculations turned upon the Gods, and Nature, and the *Annus Magnus*. I trod those aerial plains wherein Zeus on winged car is borne along through the heights. My flight had actually brought me to the heavenly vault; I was just setting foot upon the upper surface of that dome, when this Syrian took it upon himself to drag me down, break my wings, and reduce me to the common level of humanity.

Whisking off the seemly tragic mask I then wore, he clapped on in its place a comic one that was little short of ludicrous. His next step was to huddle me into a corner with Jest, Lampoon, Cynicism, and the comedians Eupolis and Aristophanes, persons with a horrible knack of making light of sacred things, and girding at all that is as it should be. But the climax was reached when he unearthed a barking, snarling old Cynic, Menippus by name, and thrust *his* company upon me; a grim bulldog, if ever there was one; a treacherous brute that will snap at you while his tail is yet wagging. Could any man be more abominably misused? Stripped of my proper attire, I am made to play the buffoon, and to give expression to every whimsical absurdity that his caprice dictates. And, as if that were not preposterous enough, he has forbidden me either to walk on my feet or to rise on the wings of poesy: I am a ridiculous cross between prose and verse; a monster of incongruity; a literary Centaur.

Hermes. Now, Syrian: what do you say to that?

Syrian. Gentlemen of the jury, I am surprised. Nothing could be more unexpected than the charge Dialogue has

brought against me. When I first took him in hand, he was regarded by the world at large as one whose interminable discussions had soured his temper and exhausted his vitality. His labors entitled him to respect, but he had none of the attractive qualities that could secure him popularity. My first step was to accustom him to walk upon the common ground like the rest of mankind; my next, to make him presentable, by giving him a good bath and teaching him to smile. Finally, I assigned him Comedy as his yokefellow, thus gaining him the confidence of his hearers, who until then would as soon have thought of picking up a hedgehog as of venturing into the thorny presence of Dialogue.

But I know what the grievance is: he wants me to sit and discourse subtle nothings with him about the immortality of the soul, and the exact number of pints of pure homogeneous essence that went to the making of the universe, and the claims of rhetoric to be called a shadow of a fraction of statecraft, or a fourth part of flattery. He takes a curious pleasure in refinements of this kind; it tickles his vanity most deliciously to be told that not every man can see so far into the ideal as he. Evidently he expects *me* to conform to his taste in this respect; he is still hankering after those lost wings; his eyes are turned upwards; he cannot see the things that lie before his feet. I think there is nothing else he can complain of. He cannot say that I, who pass for a barbarian, have torn off his Greek dress, and replaced it with one like my own: that would have been another matter; to deprive him of his native garb were indeed a crime.

Gentlemen, I have made my defense, as far as in me lies. I trust that your present verdict will confirm the former one.

Hermes. Well I never! All ten are for you again. Only one dissentient, and he the same one as before. True to his envious principles, he must ever give his vote against his betters. The jurors may now leave the court. The remaining cases will come on tomorrow.

The Parasite, A Demonstration That Sponging Is A Profession



Characters: Tychiades. Simon

Context: A farcical discussion of living as a parasite off one's neighbors. Such a life is distinguished from Epicureanism, but a number of other philosophers are indicted for living lives as "spongers."

Tychiades. I am curious about you, Simon. Ordinary people, free and slaves alike, have some trade or profession that enables them to benefit themselves and others; you seem to be an exception.

Simon. I do not quite see what you mean, Tychiades; put it a little clearer.

Tychiades. I want to know whether you have a profession of any sort; for instance, are you a musician?

Simon. Certainly not.

Tychiades. A doctor?

Simon. No.

Tychiades. A mathematician?

Simon. No.

Tychiades. Do you teach rhetoric, then? I need not ask about philosophy; you have about as much to do with that as sin has.

Simon. Less, if possible. Do not imagine that you are enlightening me upon my failings. I acknowledge myself a sinner — worse than you take me for.

Tychiades. Very well. But possibly you have abstained from these professions because nothing great is easy. Perhaps a trade is more in your way; are you a carpenter or cobbler? Your circumstances are hardly such as to make a trade superfluous.

Simon. Quite true. Well, I have no skill in any of these.

Tychiades. But in——?

Simon. An excellent one, in my opinion; if you were acquainted with it you would agree, I am sure. I can claim to be a practical master in the art by this time; whether I can give an account of my faith is another question.

Tychiades. What is it?

Simon. No, I do not think I have got up the theory of it sufficiently. For the present, rest assured that I have a profession, and cease your strictures on that head. Its nature you shall know another time.

Tychiades. No, no; I will not be put off like that.

Simon. Well, I am afraid my profession would be rather a shock to you.

Tychiades. I like shocks.

Simon. Well, I will tell you some day.

Tychiades. Now, I say; or else I shall know you are ashamed of it.

Simon. Well, then, I sponge.

Tychiades. Why, what sane man would call sponging a profession?

Simon. I, for one. And if you think I am not sane, put down my innocence of other professions to insanity, and let that be my sufficient excuse. My lady Insanity, they say, is unkind to her votaries in most respects; but at least she excuses their offenses, which she makes herself responsible for, like a schoolmaster or tutor.

Tychiades. So sponging is an art, eh?

Simon. It is; and I profess it.

Tychiades. So you are a sponger?

Simon. What an awful reproach!

Tychiades. What! you do not blush to call yourself a sponger?

Simon. On the contrary, I should be ashamed of not calling myself so.

Tychiades. And when we want to distinguish you for the benefit of any one who does not know you, but has occasion to find you out, we must say 'the sponger,' naturally?

Simon. The name will be more welcome to me than 'statuary' to Phidias; I am as proud of my profession as Phidias of his Zeus.

Tychiades. Ha, ha, ha! Excuse me—just a particular that occurred to me.

Simon. Namely——?

Tychiades. Think of the address of your letters—Simon the Sponger!

Simon. Simon the Sponger, Dion the Philosopher. I shall like mine as well as he his.

Tychiades. Well, well, your taste in titles concerns me very little. Come now to the next absurdity.

Simon. Which is——?

Tychiades. The getting it entered on the list of arts. When any one asks what the art is, how do we describe it? Letters we know, Medicine we know; Sponging?

Simon. My own opinion is, that it has an exceptionally good right to the name of art. If you care to listen, I will explain, though I have not got this properly into shape, as I remarked before.

Tychiades. Oh, a brief exposition will do, provided it is true.

Simon. I think, if you agree, we had better examine Art generically first; that will enable us to go into the question whether the specific arts really belong under it.

Tychiades. Well, what is Art? Of course you know that?

Simon. Quite well.

Tychiades. Out with it, then, as you know.

Simon. An art, as I once heard a wise man say, is a body of perceptions regularly employed for some useful purpose in human life.

Tychiades. And he was quite right.

Simon. So, if sponging has all these marks, it must be an art?

Tychiades. If, yes.

Simon. Well, now we will bring to bear on sponging each of these essential elements of Art, and see whether its character rings true, or returns a cracked note like bad pottery when it is tapped. It has got to be, like all art, a body of perceptions. Well, we find at once that our artist has to distinguish critically the man who will entertain him satisfactorily and not give him reason to wish that he had sponged elsewhere. Now, in as much as assaying—which is no more than the power of distinguishing between false and true coin—is a recognized profession, you will hardly refuse the same status to that which distinguishes between false and true men; the genuineness of men is more obscure than that of coins; this indeed is the gist of the wise Euripides's complaint:

But among men how tell the base apart? Virtue and vice stamp not the outward flesh.

So much the greater the sponger's art, which beats prophecy in the certainty of its conclusions upon problems so difficult.

Next, there is the faculty of so directing your words and actions as to effect intimacy and convince your patron of your devotion: is that consistent with weak understanding or perception?

Tychiades. Certainly not.

Simon. Then at table one has to outshine other people, and show the difference between amateur and professional: is that to be done without thought and ingenuity?

Tychiades. No, indeed.

Simon. Or perhaps you fancy that any outsider who will take the trouble can tell a good dinner from a bad one. Well, the mighty Plato says, if the guest is not versed in cookery, the dressing of the banquet will be but unworthily judged.

The next point to be established is, that sponging depends not merely on perceptions, but on perceptions regularly employed. Nothing simpler. The perceptions on which other arts are based frequently remain unemployed by their owner for days, nights, months, or years, without his art's perishing; whereas, if those of the sponger were to miss their daily exercise, not merely his art would perish, but he with it.

There remains the 'useful purpose in human life'; it would take a madman to question that here. I find nothing that serves a more useful purpose in human life than eating and drinking; without them you cannot live.

Tychiades. That is true.

Simon. Moreover, sponging is not to be classed with beauty and strength, and so called a quality instead of an art?

Tychiades. No.

Simon. And, in the sphere of art, it does not denote the negative condition, of unskillfulness. That never brings its owner prosperity. Take an instance: if a man who did not understand navigation took charge of a ship in a stormy sea, would he be safe?

Tychiades. Not he.

Simon. Why, now? Because he wants the art which would enable him to save his life?

Tychiades. Exactly.

Simon. It follows that, if sponging was the negative of art, the sponger would not save his life by its means?

Tychiades. Yes.

Simon. A man is saved by art, not by the absence of it?

Tychiades. Quite so.

Simon. So sponging is an art?

Tychiades. Apparently.

Simon. Let me add that I have often known even good navigators and skillful drivers come to grief, resulting with the latter in bruises and with the former in death but no one will tell you of a sponger who ever made shipwreck. Very well, then, sponging is neither the negative of art, nor is it a quality; but it is a body of perceptions regularly employed. So it emerges from the present discussion an art.

Tychiades. That seems to be the upshot. But now proceed to give us a good definition of your art.

Simon. Well thought of. And I fancy this will about do: Sponging is the art of eating and drinking, and of the talk by which these may be secured; its end is Pleasure.

Tychiades. A very good definition, I think. But I warn you that your end will bring you into conflict with some of the philosophers.

Simon. Ah well, if sponging agrees with Happiness about the end, we may be content. And that it does I will soon show you. The wise Homer, admiring the sponger's life as the only blissful enviable one, has this:

I say no fairer end may be attained; Than when the people is attuned to mirth, and groans the festal board; with meat and bread, and the cup-bearer's ladle; From flowing bowl to cup the sweet wine dips.

As if this had not made his admiration quite clear enough, he lays a little more emphasis, good man, on his personal opinion: *This in my heart I count the highest bliss.*

Moreover, the character to whom he entrusts these words is not just any one; it is the wisest of the Greeks. Well now, if Odysseus had cared to say a word for the end approved by the Stoics, he had plenty of chances—when he brought back Philoctetes from Lemnos, when he sacked Troy, when he stopped the Greeks from giving up, or when he made his way into Troy by scourging himself and putting on rags bad enough for any Stoic. But no; he never said theirs was a fairer end. And again, when he was living an Epicurean life with Calypso, when he could spend idle luxurious days, enjoying the daughter of Atlas and giving the rein to every soft emotion, even then he had not his fairer end; that was still the life of the sponger. Banqueter was the word used for sponger in his day; what does he say? I must quote the lines again; nothing like repetition: *'The banqueters in order set';* and *'groans the festal board with meat and bread.'*

It was a remarkable piece of impudence on Epicurus's part to appropriate the end that belongs to sponging for his system of Happiness. That it *was* a bit of larceny—Epicurus having nothing, and the sponger much, to do with Pleasure—I will soon show you. I take it that Pleasure means, first, bodily tranquillity, and secondly, an untroubled soul. Well, the sponger attains both, Epicurus neither. A man who is busy inquiring into the earth's shape, the infinity of worlds, the sun's size, astronomic distances, the elements, the existence or non-existence of Gods, and who is engaged in incessant controversies about the end — he is a prey not merely to human, but to cosmic perturbations. Whereas the sponger, convinced that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, living secure and calm with no such perplexities to trouble him, eats and sleeps and lies on his back, letting his hands and feet look after themselves, like Odysseus on his passage home from Scheria.

But here is an independent refutation of Epicurus's pretensions to Pleasure. Our Epicurus, whoever his Wisdom may be, either is, or is not, supplied with victuals. If he is not, so far from having a pleasurable life, he will have no life at all. If he is, does he get them out of his own means, or from some one else? If the latter, he is a sponger, and not what he says he is; if the former, he will not have a pleasurable life.

Tychiades. How so?

Simon. Why, if his food is provided out of his own means, that way of life has many consequences; reckon them up. You will admit that, if the principle of your life is to be pleasure, all your appetites have to be satisfied?

Tychiades. I agree.

Simon. Well, a large income may possibly meet that requirement, a scanty one certainly not; consequently, a poor man cannot be a philosopher, or in other words attain the end, which is Pleasure. But neither will the rich, who lavishes his substance on his desires, attain it. And why? Because spending has many worries inseparably attached to it; your cook disappoints you, and you must either have strained relations with him, or else purchase peace and quiet by feeding badly and missing your pleasure. Then similar difficulties attend your steward's management of the house. You must admit all this.

Tychiades. Oh, certainly, I agree.

Simon. In fact, something or other is sure to happen and cut off Epicurus from his end. Now the sponger has no cook to be angry with, no farm, steward or money to be annoyed at the loss of; at the same time he lives on the fat of the land, and is the one person who can eat and drink without the worries from which others cannot escape.

That sponging is an art, has now been abundantly proved; it remains to show its superiority; and this I shall take in two divisions: first, it has a general superiority to all the arts; and, secondly, it is superior to each of them separately. The general superiority is this: the arts have to be instilled by dint of toil, threats and blows—regrettable necessities, all of them. My own art, of which the acquisition costs no toil, is perhaps the only exception. Who ever came away from dinner in tears? With the schoolroom it is different; or who ever went out to dinner with the dismal expression characteristic of going to school? No, the sponger needs no pressing to get him to table; he is devoted to his profession; it is the other apprentices who hate theirs, to the point of running away, sometimes. And it is worth your notice that a parent's usual reward for a child who makes progress in the ordinary arts is just the thing that the sponger gets regularly. The lad has done his writing well, they say; let him have something nice: what vile writing! Let him go without. Oh, the mouth is very useful for reward and punishment.

Again, with the other arts the result comes only after the learning is done; their fruits alone are agreeable; 'long and steep the road thereto.' Sponging is once more an exception, in that profit and learning here go hand in hand; you grasp your end as soon as you begin. And whereas all other arts are practiced solely for the sustenance they will ultimately bring, the sponger has his sustenance from the day he starts. You realize, of course, that the farmer's object in farming is something else than farming, the carpenter's something different from abstract carpentering; but the sponger has no ulterior object; occupation and preoccupation are for him one and the same.

Then it is no news to any one that other professions slave habitually, and get just one or two holidays a month; States keep some monthly and some yearly festivals; these are their times of enjoyment. But the sponger has thirty festivals a month; every day is a red-letter day with him.

Once more, success in the other arts presupposes a diet as abstemious as any invalid's; eat and drink to your heart's content, and you make no progress in your studies.

Other arts, again, are useless to their professor unless he has his plant; you cannot play the flute if you have not one to play; lyrical music requires a lyre, horsemanship a horse. But of ours one of the excellences and conveniences is that no instrument is required for its exercise.

Other arts we pay, this we are paid, to learn.

Further, while the rest have their teachers, no one teaches sponging; it is a gift from Heaven, as Socrates said of poetry.

Then do not forget that, while the others have to be suspended during a journey or a voyage, this may be in full swing under those circumstances too.

Tychiades. No doubt about that.

Simon. Another point that strikes me is that other arts feel the need of this one, but not vice versa.

Tychiades. Well, but is the appropriation of what belongs to others no offense?

Simon. Of course it is.

Tychiades. Well, the sponger does that; why is he privileged to offend?

Simon. Ah, I know nothing about that. But now look here: you know how common and mean are the beginnings of the other arts; that of sponging, on the contrary, is noble. Friendship, that theme of the encomiast, is neither more nor less, you will find, than the beginning of sponging.

Tychiades. How do you make that out?

Simon. Well, no one asks an enemy, a stranger, or even a mere acquaintance, to dinner; the man must be his friend before he will share bit and sup with him, and admit him to initiation in these sacred mysteries. I know I have often heard people say, Friend, indeed! by what right? He has never eaten or drunk with us. You see; only the man who has done that is a friend to be trusted.

Next take a sound proof, though not the only one, that it is the most royal of the arts: at the rest of them men have to work (not to mention toil and sweat) in the sitting or standing posture, which marks them for the absolute slaves of their art, whereas the sponger is free to recline like a king.

As to his happy condition, I need no more than allude to the wise Homer's words; he it is, and he alone, that '*planteth not, nor ploughs*'; he '*reapeth where he hath not ploughed nor sown*.'

Again, while knavery and folly are no bar to rhetoric, mathematics, or copper-working, no knave or fool can get on as a sponger.

Tychiades. Dear, dear, what an amazing profession! I am almost tempted to exchange my own for it.

Simon. I consider I have now established its superiority to art in general; let us next show how it excels individual arts. And it would be silly to compare it with the trades; I leave that to its detractors, and undertake to prove it superior to the greatest and most honorable professions. Such by universal acknowledgement are Rhetoric and Philosophy; indeed, some people insist that no name but science is grand enough for them; so if I prove sponging to be far above even these, *a fortiori* it will excel the others as Nausicaa her maids.

Now, its first superiority it enjoys over Philosophy and Rhetoric alike, and this is in the matter of real existence; it can claim that, they cannot. Instead of our having a single consistent notion of Rhetoric, some of us consider it an art, some the negation of art, some a mere artfulness, and so on. Similarly there is no unity in Philosophy's subject, or in its relation to it. Epicurus takes one view, the Stoics another, the Academy, the Peripatetics, others; in fact Philosophy has as many definitions as definers. So far at least victory wavers between them, and their profession cannot be called one. The conclusion is obvious; I utterly deny that what has no real existence can be an art. To illustrate: there is one and only one Arithmetic; twice two is four whether here or in Persia; Greeks and barbarians have no quarrel over that; but philosophies are many and various, agreed neither upon their beginnings nor their ends.

Tychiades. Perfectly true; they call Philosophy one, but they make it many.

Simon. Well, such a want of harmony might be excused in other arts, they being of a contingent nature, and the perceptions on which they are based not being immutable. But that Philosophy should lack unity, and even conflict with itself like instruments out of tune—how can that be tolerated? Philosophy, then, is not one, for I find its diversity infinite. And it cannot be many, because it is Philosophy, not philosophies.

The real existence of Rhetoric must incur the same criticism. That with the same subject-matter all professors should not agree, but maintain conflicting opinions, amounts to a demonstration: that which is differently apprehended cannot exist. The inquiry whether a thing is this or that, in place of agreement that it is one, is tantamount to a negation of its existence.

How different is the case of Sponging! For Greeks or barbarians, one in nature and subject and method. No one will tell you that these sponge this way, and those that; there are no spongers with peculiar principles, to match those of Stoics and Epicureans, that I know of; they are all agreed; their conduct and their end alike harmonious. Sponging, I take it on this showing, is just Wisdom itself.

Tychiades. Yes, I think you have dealt with that point sufficiently; apart from that, how do you show the inferiority of Philosophy to your art?

Simon. I must first mention that no sponger was ever in love with Philosophy; but many philosophers are recorded to have set their hearts on Sponging, to which they still remain constant.

Tychiades. Philosophers caring to sponge? Names, please.

Simon. Names? You know them well enough; you only play at not knowing because you regard it as a slur on their characters, instead of as the credit it is.

Tychiades. Simon, I solemnly assure you I cannot think where you will find your instances.

Simon. Honor bright? Then I conclude you never patronize their biographers, or you could not hesitate about my reference.

Tychiades. Seriously, I long to hear their names.

Simon. Oh, I will give you a list; not bad names either; the elite, if I am correctly informed; they will rather surprise you. Aeschines the Socratic, now, author of dialogues as witty as they are long, brought them with him to Sicily in the hope that they would gain him the royal notice of Dionysius; having given a reading of the Miltiades, and found himself famous, he settled down in Sicily to sponge on Dionysius and forget Socratic composition.

Again, I suppose you will pass Aristippus of Cyrene as a distinguished philosopher?

Tychiades. Assuredly.

Simon. Well, he was living there too at the same time and on the same terms. Dionysius reckoned him the best of all spongers; he had indeed a special gift that way; the prince used to send his cooks to him daily for instruction. He, I think, was really an ornament to the profession.

Well then, Plato, the noblest of you all, came to Sicily with the same view; he did a few days' sponging, but found himself incompetent and had to leave. He went back to Athens, took considerable pains with himself, and then had another try, with exactly the same result, however. Plato's Sicilian disaster seems to me to bear comparison with that of Nicias.

Tychiades. Your authority for all this, pray?

Simon. Oh, there are plenty of authorities; but I will specify Aristoxenus the musician, a weighty one enough, and himself attached as a sponger to Neleus. Then you of course know that Euripides held this relation to Archelaus till the day of his death, and Anaxarchus to Alexander.

As for Aristotle, that tiro in all arts was a tiro here too.

I have shown you, then, and without exaggeration, the philosophic passion for sponging. On the other hand, no one can point to a sponger who ever cared to philosophize.

But of course, if never to be hungry, thirsty, or cold, is to be happy, the sponger is the man who is in that position. Cold hungry philosophers you may see any day, but never a cold hungry sponger; the man would not be a sponger, that is all, but a wretched pauper, no better than a philosopher.

Tychiades. Well, let that pass. And now what about those many points in which your art is superior to Rhetoric and Philosophy?

Simon. Human life, my dear sir, has its times and seasons; there is peace time and there is war time. These provide unflinching tests for the character of arts and their professors. Shall we take war time first, and see who will do best for himself and for his city under those conditions?

Tychiades. Ah, now comes the tug of war. It tickles me, this queer match between sponger and philosopher.

Simon. Well, to make the thing more natural, and enable you to take it seriously, let us picture the circumstances. Sudden news has come of a hostile invasion; it has to be met; we are not going to sit still while our outlying territory is laid waste. The commander-in-chief issues orders for a general muster of all liable to serve; the troops gather, including philosophers, rhetoricians, and spongers. We had better strip them first, as the proper preliminary to arming. Now, my dear sir, have a look at them individually and see how they shape. Some of them you will find thin and white with underfeeding—all goose-flesh, as if they were lying wounded already. Now, when you think of a hard day, a stand-up fight with press and dust and wounds, what is it but a sorry jest to talk of such starvelings' being able to stand it?

Now go and inspect the sponger. Full-bodied, flesh a nice color, neither white like a woman's nor tanned like a slave's. You can see his spirit; he has a keen look, as a gentleman should, and a high, full-blooded one to boot; none of your shrinking feminine glances when you are going to war! A noble pike-man that, and a noble corpse, for that matter, if a noble death is his fate.

But why deal in conjecture when there are facts to hand? I make the simple statement that in war, of all the rhetoricians and philosophers who ever lived, most never ventured outside the city walls, and the few who did, under compulsion, take their places in the ranks left their posts and went home.

Tychiades. A bold extravagant assertion. Well, prove it.

Simon. Rhetoricians, then. Of these, Isocrates, so far from serving in war, never even ventured into a law-court; he was afraid, because his voice was weak, I understand. Well, then Demades, Aeschines, and Philocrates, directly the Macedonian war broke out, were frightened into betraying their country and themselves to Philip. They simply espoused his interests in Athenian politics; and any other Athenian who took the same side was their friend. As for Hyperides, Demosthenes, and Lycurgus, supposed to be bolder spirits, and always raising scenes in the assembly with their abuse of Philip, how did they ever show their prowess in the war? Hyperides and Lycurgus never went out, did not so much as dare show their noses beyond the gates; they sat snug inside in a domestic state of siege, composing poor little decrees and resolutions. And their great chieftain, who had no gentler words for Philip in the assembly than '*the brute from Macedon, which cannot produce even a slave worth buying*'—well, he did take heart of grace and go to Boeotia the day before; but battle had not been joined when he threw away his shield and made off. You must have heard this before; it was common talk not only at Athens, but in Thrace and Scythia, whence the creature was derived.

Tychiades. Yes, I know all that. But then these are orators, trained to speak, not to fight. But the philosophers; you cannot say the same of them.

Simon. Oh, yes; they discuss manliness every day, and do a great deal more towards wearing out the word Virtue than the orators; but you will find them still greater cowards and shirkers.—How do I know?—In the first place, can any one name a philosopher killed in battle? No, they either do not serve, or else run away. Antisthenes, Diogenes, Crates, Zeno, Plato, Aeschines, Aristotle, and all their company, never set eyes on a battle array. Their wise

Socrates was the solitary one who dared to go out; and in the battle of Delium he ran away from Mount Parnes and got safe to the gymnasium of Taureas. It was a far more civilized proceeding, according to his ideas, to sit there talking soft nonsense to handsome striplings and posing the company with quibbles, than to cross spears with a grown Spartan.

Tychiades. Well, I have heard these stories before, and from people who had no satirical intent. So I acquit you of slandering them by way of magnifying your own profession.

But come now, if you don't mind, to the sponger's military behavior; and also tell me whether there is any sponging recorded of the ancients.

Simon. My dear fellow, the most uneducated of us has surely heard enough of Homer to know that he makes the best of his heroes spongers. The great Nestor, whose tongue distilled honeyed speech, sponged on the King; Achilles was, and was known for, the most upright of the Greeks in form and in mind; but neither for him, for Ajax, nor for Diomedes, has Agamemnon such admiring praise as for Nestor. It is not for ten Ajaxes or Achilleses that he prays; no, Troy would have been taken long ago, if he had had in his host ten men like—that old sponger. Idomeneus, of Zeus's own kindred, is also represented in the same relation to Agamemnon.

Tychiades. I know the passages; but I do not feel sure of the sense in which they were spongers.

Simon. Well, recall the lines in which Agamemnon addresses Idomeneus.

Tychiades. How do they go?

Simon. *For thee the cup stands ever full, Even as for me, whene'er it lists thee drink.* When he speaks of the cup ever full, he means not that it is perpetually ready (when Idomeneus is fighting or sleeping, for instance), but that he has had the peculiar privilege all through his life of sharing the King's table without that special invitation which is necessary for his other followers. Ajax, after a glorious single combat with Hector, *'they brought to lordly Agamemnon,'* we are told; he, you see, is admitted to the royal table (and high time too) as an honor; whereas Idomeneus and Nestor were the King's regular table companions; at least that is my idea. Nestor I take to have been an exceedingly good and skillful sponger on royalty. Agamemnon was not his first patron; he had served his apprenticeship under Caeneus and Exadius. And but for Agamemnon's death I imagine he would never have relinquished the profession.

Tychiades. Yes, that was a first-class sponger. Can you give me any more?

Simon. Why, Tychiades, what else was Patroclus's relation to Achilles? And he was as fine a fellow, all round, as any Greek of them all. Judging by his actions, I cannot make out that he was inferior to Achilles himself. When Hector had forced the gates and was fighting inside by the ships, it was Patroclus who repelled him and extinguished the flames which had got a hold on Protesilaus's ship; yet one would not have said the people aboard her were inefficient—Ajax and Teucer they were, one as good in the melee as the other with his bow. A great number of the barbarians, including Sarpedon the son of Zeus, fell to this sponger. His own death was no common one. It took only one man, Achilles, to slay Hector; Paris was enough for Achilles himself; but two men and a God went to the killing of the sponger. And his last words bore no resemblance to those of the mighty Hector, who prostrated himself before Achilles and besought him to let his relations have his body; no, they were such as might be expected from one of his profession. Here they are:— *But of thy like I would have faced a score, and all the score my spear had given to death.*

Tychiades. Yes, you have proved him a good man; but can you show him to have been not Achilles's friend, but a sponger?

Simon. I will produce you his own statement to that effect.

Tychiades. What a miracle-worker you are!

Simon. Listen to the lines, then: *Achilles, lay my bones not far from thine; Thou and thine fed me; let me lie by thee.* And a little further on he says: *Peleus me received, and nurtured gently, and thy henchman named,*— That is, gave him the right of sponging; if he had meant to allude to Patroclus as his son's friend, he would not have used the word henchman; for he was a free man. What is a henchman, slaves and friends being excluded? Why, obviously a sponger. Accordingly Homer uses the same word of Meriones's relation to Idomeneus. And by the way it is not Idomeneus, though he was son of Zeus, that he describes as 'peer of Ares'; it is the sponger Meriones.

Again, did not Aristogiton, poor and of mean extraction, as Thucydides describes him, sponge on Harmodius? He was also, of course, in love with him—a quite natural relation between the two classes. This sponger it was, then, who delivered Athens from tyranny, and now adorns the marketplace in bronze, side by side with the object of his passion. And now I have given you an example or two of the profession.

But what sort of a guess do you make at the sponger's behavior in war? In the first place, he will fight on a full belly, as Odysseus advises. You must feed the man who is to fight, he says, however early in the morning it may happen to be. The time that others spend in fitting on helmet or breastplate with nervous care, or in anticipating the horrors of battle, he will devote to putting away his food with a cheerful countenance, and as soon as business begins you will find him in front. His patron will take his place behind him, sheltering under his shield as Teucer under Ajax's; when missiles begin to fly the sponger will expose himself for his patron, whose safety he values more than his own.

Should he fall in battle, neither officer nor comrade need feel ashamed of that great body, which now reclines as appropriate an ornament of the battlefield as it once was of the dining-room. A pretty sight is a philosopher's body by its side, withered, squalid, and bearded; he was dead before the fight began, poor weakling. Who would not despise the city whose guards are such miserable creatures? Who would not suppose, seeing these pallid, hairy manikins scattered on the ground, that it had none to fight for it, and so had turned out its jail-birds to fill the ranks? That is how the spongers differ from the rhetoricians and philosophers in war.

Then in peace time, sponging seems to me as much better than philosophy as peace itself than war. Be kind enough to glance first at the scenes of peace.

Tychiades. I do not quite know what they are; but let us glance at them, by all means.

Simon. Well, you will let me describe as civil scenes the market, the courts, the wrestling-schools and gymnasia, the hunting field and the dining-room?

Tychiades. Certainly.

Simon. To market and courts the sponger gives a wide berth they are the haunts of chicanery; there is no satisfaction to be got out of them. But at wrestling-school and gymnasium he is in his element; he is their chief glory. Show me a philosopher or orator who is in the same class with him when he strips in the wrestling-school; look at them in the gymnasium; they shame instead of adorning it. And in a lonely place none of them would face the onset of a wild beast; the sponger will, though, and find no difficulty in disposing of it; his table familiarity with it has bred contempt. A stag or a wild boar may put up its bristles; he will not mind; the boar may whet its tusks against him; he only returns the compliment. As for hares, he is more deadly to them than a greyhound. And then in the dining-room, where is his match, to jest or to eat? Who will contribute most to entertainment, he with his song and his joke, or a person who has not a laugh in him, sits in a threadbare cloak, and keeps his eyes on the ground as if he was at a funeral and not a dinner? If you ask me, I think a philosopher has about as much business in a dining-room as a bull in a china-shop.

But enough of this. What impression does one get of the sponger's actual life, when one compares it with the other? First it will be found that he is indifferent to reputation, and does not care a jot what people think about him, whereas all rhetoricians and philosophers without exception are the slaves of vanity, reputation, and what is worse, of money. No one could be more careless of the pebbles on the shore than the sponger is of money; he would as soon touch fire as gold. But the rhetoricians and, as if that were not bad enough, the professed philosophers, are beneath contempt in this respect. No need to illustrate in the case of the rhetoricians; but of the philosophers whose repute stands highest at present, one was lately convicted of taking a bribe for his verdict in a law-suit, and another expects a salary for giving a prince his company, and counts it no shame to go into exile in his old age, and hire himself out for pay like some Indian or Scythian captive. The very name his conduct has earned him calls no blush to his cheek.

But their susceptibilities are by no means limited to these; pain, temper, jealousy, and all sorts of desires, must be added; all of which the sponger is beyond the reach of; he does not yield to temper because on the one hand he has fortitude, and on the other hand he has no one to irritate him. Or if he is by any chance moved to wrath, there is nothing disagreeable or sullen about it; it entertains and amuses merely. As to pain, he has less of that to endure than anybody, one of his profession's recommendations and privileges being just that immunity. He has neither money, house, slave, wife, nor children—those hostages to Fortune. He desires neither fame, wealth, nor beauty.

Tychiades. He will feel pain if the supplies run short, I presume.

Simon. Ah, but you see, he is not a sponger if that happens. A courageous man is not courageous if he has no courage, a sensible one not sensible if he has no sense. He could not be a sponger under those conditions. We are discussing the sponger, not the non-sponger. If the courageous is so in virtue of his courage, the sensible, sensible in virtue of his sense, then the sponger is a sponger in virtue of sponging. Take that away, and we shall be dealing with something else, and not with a sponger at all.

Tychiades. So his supplies will never run short?

Simon. Manifestly. So he is as free from that sort of pain as from others.

Then all philosophers and rhetoricians are timorous creatures together. You may generally see them carrying sticks on their walks; well, of course they would not go armed if they were not afraid. And they bar their doors elaborately, for fear of night attacks. Now our man just latches his room door, so that the wind may not blow it open; if there is a noise in the night, it is all the same to him as if there were none; he will travel a lonely road and wear no sword; he does not know what fear is. But I am always seeing philosophers, though there is nothing to be afraid of, carrying bows and arrows; as for their sticks, they take them to bath or breakfast with them.

Again, no one can accuse a sponger of adultery, violence, rape, or in fact of any crime whatsoever. One guilty of such offenses will not be sponging, but ruining himself. If he is caught in adultery, his style thenceforth is taken from his offense. Just as a piece of cowardice brings a man not repute, but disrepute, so, I take it, the sponger who commits an offense loses his previous title and gets in exchange that proper to the offense. Of such offenses on the part of rhetoricians and philosophers, on the other hand, we have not only abundant examples in our own time, but records against the ancients in their own writings. There is an Apology of Socrates, of Aeschines, of Hyperides, of Demosthenes, and indeed of most of their kind. There is no sponger's apology extant, and you will never hear of anybody's bringing a suit against one.

Now I suppose you will tell me that the sponger's life may be better than theirs, but his death is worse. Not a bit of it; it is a far happier one. We know very well that all or most philosophers have had the wretched fate they deserved, some by poison after condemnation for heinous crimes, some by burning alive, some by strangury, some in exile. No one can adduce a sponger's death to match these; he eats and drinks, and dies a blissful death. If you are told that any died a violent one, be sure it was nothing worse than indigestion.

Tychiades. I must say, you have done well for your kind against the philosophers. And now look at it from the patron's point of view; does he get his money's worth? It strikes me the rich man does the kindness, confers the favor, finds the food, and it is all a little discreditable to the man who takes them.

Simon. Now, really, Tychiades, that is rather silly of you. Can you not see that a rich man, if he had the gold of Gyges, is yet poor as long as he dines alone, and no better than a tramp if he goes abroad unattended? A soldier without his arms, a dress without its purple, a horse without its trappings, are poor things; and a rich man without his sponger is a mean, cheap spectacle. The sponger gives lustre to the patron, never the patron to the other.

Moreover, none of the reproach that you imagine attaches to sponging. You refer, of course, to the difference in their degrees; but then it is an advantage to the rich man to keep the other; apart from his ornamental use, he is a most valuable bodyguard. In battle no one will be over ready to undertake the rich man with such a comrade at his side; and you can hardly, having him, die by poison. Who would dare attempt such a thing, with him tasting your food and drink? So he brings you not only credit, but insurance. His affection is such that he will run all risks; he would never leave his patron to face the dangers of the table alone; no, he would rather eat and die with him.

Tychiades. You have stated your case without missing a point, Simon. Do not tell me you were unprepared again; you have been trained in a good school, man. But one thing more I should like to know. There is a nasty sound about the word sponger, don't you think?

Simon. See whether I have a satisfactory answer to that. Oblige me by giving what you consider the right answers to my questions. Sponging is an old word; what does it really mean?

Tychiades. Getting your dinner at some one else's expense.

Simon. Dining out, in fact?

Tychiades. Yes.

Simon. And we may call a sponger an out-diner?

Tychiades. The gravamen's in that; he should dine at home.

Simon. A few more answers, please. Of these pairs, which do you consider the best? Which would you take, if you had the choice? -To sail, or to out-sail?

Tychiades. The latter.

Simon. To run or out-run?

Tychiades. The latter.

Simon. Ride or out-ride, shoot or out-shoot?

Tychiades. Still the same.

Simon. So I presume an out-diner is better than a diner?

Tychiades. Indisputable. Henceforward I shall come to you morning and afternoon like a schoolboy for lessons. And I am sure you ought to do your very best for me, as your first pupil. The first child is always the mother's joy, you know.

The Liar



Characters: Tychiades. Philocles

Context: A farcical story of ridiculous tales told by men in the name of religion.

Tychiades. Philocles, what is it that makes most men so fond of a lie? Can you explain it? Their delight in romancing themselves is only equaled by the earnest attention with which they receive other people's efforts in the same direction.

Philocles. Why, in some cases there is no lack of motives for lying,—motives of self-interest.

Tychiades. Ah, but that is neither here nor there. I am not speaking of men who lie with an object. There is some excuse for that. Indeed, it is sometimes to their credit, when they deceive their country's enemies, for instance, or when mendacity is but the medicine to heal their sickness. Odysseus, seeking to preserve his life and bring his companions safe home, was a liar of that kind. The men I mean are innocent of any ulterior motive: they prefer a lie to truth, simply on its own merits; they like lying, it is their favorite occupation; there is no necessity in the case. Now what good can they get out of it?

Philocles. Why, have you ever known any one with such a strong natural turn for lying?

Tychiades. Any number of them.

Philocles. Then I can only say they must be fools, if they really prefer evil to good.

Tychiades. Oh, that is not it. I could point you out plenty of men of first-rate ability, sensible enough in all other respects, who have somehow picked up this vice of romancing. It makes me quite angry: what satisfaction can there be to men of their good qualities in deceiving themselves and their neighbors?

There are instances among the ancients with which you must be more familiar than I. Look at Herodotus, or Ctesias of Cnidus; or, to go further back, take the poets—Homer himself. Here are men of world-wide celebrity, perpetuating their mendacity in black and white; not content with deceiving their hearers, they must send their lies down to posterity, under the protection of the most admirable verse. Many a time I have blushed for them, as I read of the mutilation of Uranus, the fetters of Prometheus, the revolt of the Giants, the torments of Hell; enamoured Zeus taking the shape of bull or swan; women turning into birds and bears; Pegasus, Chimaeras, Gorgons, Cyclopes, and the rest of it; monstrous medley! Fit only to charm the imaginations of children for whom Mormo and Lamia have still their terrors.

However, poets, I suppose, will be poets. But when it comes to national lies, when one finds whole cities bouncing collectively like one man, how is one to keep one's countenance? A Cretan will look you in the face, and tell you that yonder is Zeus's tomb. In Athens, you are informed that Erichthonius sprang out of the Earth, and that the first Athenians grew up from the soil like so many cabbages. And this story assumes quite a sober aspect when compared with that of the Sparti, for whom the Thebans claim descent from a dragon's teeth. If you presume to doubt these stories, if you choose to exert your common sense, and leave Triptolemus's winged aerial car, and Pan's Marathonian exploits, and Orithyia's mishap, to the stronger digestions of a Coroebus and a Margites, you are a fool and a blasphemous, for questioning such palpable truths. Such is the power of lies!

Philocles. I must say I think there is some excuse, Tychiades, both for your national liars and for the poets. The latter are quite right in throwing in a little mythology. It has a very pleasing effect, and is just the thing to secure the attention of their hearers. On the other hand, the Athenians and the Thebans and the rest are only trying to add to the lustre of their respective cities. Take away the legendary treasures of Greece, and you condemn the whole race of ciceroni to starvation. Sightseers do not want the truth; they would not take it at a gift. However, I surrender to your ridicule any one who has no such motive, and yet rejoices in lies.

Tychiades. Very well: now I have just been with the great Eucrates, who treated me to a whole string of old wives' tales. I came away in the middle of it. He was too much for me altogether. Furies could not have driven me out more effectually than his marvel-working tongue.

Philocles. What, Eucrates, of all credible witnesses? That venerably bearded sexagenarian, with his philosophic leanings? I could never have believed that he would lend his countenance to other people's lies, much less that he was capable of such things himself.

Tychiades. My dear sir, you should have heard the stuff he told me; the way in which he vouched for the truth of it all too, solemnly staking the lives of his children on his veracity! I stared at him in amazement, not knowing what to make of it. One moment I thought he must be out of his mind; the next I concluded he had been a humbug all along, an ape in a lion's skin. Oh, it was monstrous.

Philocles. Do tell me all about it; I am curious to see the quackery that shelters beneath so long a beard.

Tychiades. I often look in on Eucrates when I have time on my hands, but today I had gone there to see Leontichus. He is a friend of mine, you know, and I understood from his boy that he had gone off early to inquire after Eucrates's health. I had not heard that there was anything the matter with him, but this was an additional reason for paying him a visit. When I got there, Leontichus had just gone away, so Eucrates said; but he had a number of other visitors. There was Cleodemus the Peripatetic and Dinomachus the Stoic, and Ion.

You know Ion? He is the man who fancies himself so much on his knowledge of Plato. If you take his word for it, he is the only man who has ever really got to the bottom of that philosopher's meaning, or is qualified to act as his interpreter. There is a company for you – Wisdom and Virtue personified, the elite of every school, most reverend gentlemen all of them; it almost frightened one. Then there was Antigonus the doctor, who I suppose attended in his professional capacity. Eucrates seemed to be better already: he had come to an understanding with the gout, which had now settled down in his feet again. He motioned me to a seat on the couch beside him. His voice sank to the proper invalid level when he saw me coming, but on my way in I had overheard him bellowing away most lustily.

I made him the usual compliments—explained that this was the first I had heard of his illness, and that I had come to him post-haste—and sat down at his side, in very gingerly fashion, lest I should touch his feet. There had been a good deal of talk already about gout, and this was still going on; each man had his pet prescription to offer.

Cleodemus was giving his. 'In the left hand take up the tooth of a field-mouse, which has been killed in the manner described, and attach it to the skin of a freshly flayed lion; then bind the skin about your legs, and the pain will instantly cease.'

'A lion's skin?' says Dinomachus; 'I understood it was an uncovered hind's.'

That sounds more likely: a hind has more pace, you see, and is particularly strong in the feet. A lion is a brave beast, I grant you; his fat, his right fore-paw, and his beard-bristles, are all very efficacious, if you know the proper incantation to use with each; but they would hardly be much use for gout.' 'Ah, yes; that is what I used to think for a long time: a hind was fast, so her skin must be the one for the purpose. But I know better now: a Libyan, who understands these things, tells me that lions are faster than stags; they must be, he says, because how else could they catch them?'

All agreed that the Libyan's argument was convincing. When I asked what good incantations could do, and how an internal complaint could be cured by external attachments, I only got laughed at for my pains. Evidently they set me down as a simpleton, ignorant of the merest truisms, that no one in his senses would think of disputing. However, I thought doctor Antigonus seemed rather pleased at my question. I expect his professional advice had been slighted: he wanted to lower Eucrates's tone,—cut down his wine, and put him on a vegetable diet.

'What, Tychiades,' says Cleodemus, with a faint grin, 'you don't believe these remedies are good for anything?'

'I should have to be pretty far gone,' I replied, 'before I could admit that external things, which have no communication with the internal causes of disease, are going to work by means of incantations and stuff, and effect a cure merely by being hung on. You might take the skin of the Nemean lion himself, with a dozen of field-mice tacked on, and you would do no good. Why, I have seen a live lion limping before now, hide and all complete.'

'Ah, you have a great deal to learn,' cried Dinomachus; 'you have never taken the trouble to inquire into the operation of these valuable remedies. It would not surprise me to hear you disputing the most palpable facts, such as the curing of tumors and intermittent fevers, the charming of reptiles, and so on; things that every old woman can effect in these days. And this being so, why should not the same principles be extended further?'

'Nail drives out nail,' I replied; 'you argue in a circle. How do I know that these cures are brought about by the means to which you attribute them? You have first to show inductively that it is in the course of nature for a fever or a

tumor to take fright and bolt at the sound of holy names and foreign incantations; till then, your instances are no better than old wives' tales.'

'In other words, you do not believe in the existence of the Gods, since you maintain that cures cannot be wrought by the use of holy names?'

'Nay, say not so, my dear Dinomachus,' I answered; 'the Gods may exist, and these things may yet be lies. I respect the Gods. I see the cures performed by them, I see their beneficence at work in restoring the sick through the medium of the medical faculty and their drugs. Asclepius, and his sons after him, compounded soothing medicines and healed the sick, — without the lion's-skin-and-field-mouse process.'

'Never mind Asclepius,' cried Ion. 'I will tell you of a strange thing that happened when I was a boy of fourteen or so. Someone came and told my father that Midas, his gardener, a sturdy fellow and a good workman, had been bitten that morning by an adder, and was now lying prostrate, mortification having set in the leg. He had been tying the vine-branches to the trellis-work, when the reptile crept up and bit him on the great toe, getting off to its hole before he could catch it; and he was now in a terrible way. Before our informant had finished speaking, we saw Midas being carried up by his fellow servants on a stretcher: his whole body was swollen, livid and mortifying, and life appeared to be almost extinct.'

My father was very much troubled about it; but a friend of his who was there assured him there was no cause for uneasiness. 'I know of a Babylonian,' he said, 'what they call a Chaldaean; I will go and fetch him at once, and he will put the man right.' To make a long story short, the Babylonian came, and by means of an incantation expelled the venom from the body, and restored Midas to health. Besides the incantation, however, he used a splinter of stone chipped from the monument of a virgin; this he applied to Midas's foot. And as if that were not enough (Midas, I may mention, actually picked up the stretcher on which he had been brought, and took it off with him into the vineyard! and it was all done by an incantation and a bit of stone), the Chaldaean followed it up with an exhibition nothing short of miraculous.

Early in the morning he went into the field, pronounced seven names of sacred import, taken from an old book, purified the ground by going thrice round it with sulphur and burning torches, and thereby drove every single reptile off the estate! They came as if drawn by a spell: venomous toads and snakes of every description, asp and adder, cerastes and acontias; only one old serpent, disabled apparently by age, ignored the summons. The Chaldaean declared that the number was not complete, appointed the youngest of the snakes as his ambassador, and sent him to fetch the old serpent who presently arrived. Having got them all together, he blew upon them; and imagine our astonishment when every one of them was immediately consumed!

'Ion,' said I, 'about that one who was so old: did the ambassador snake give him an arm, or had he a stick to lean on?'

'Ah, you will have your joke,' Cleodemus put in; 'I was an unbeliever myself once—worse than you; in fact I considered it absolutely impossible to give credit to such things. I held out for a long time, but all my scruples were overcome the first time I saw the Flying Stranger. A Hyperborean, he was; I have his own word for it. There was no more to be said after that: there was he traveling through the air in broad daylight, walking on the water, or strolling through fire, perfectly at his ease!'

'What,' I exclaimed, 'you saw this Hyperborean actually flying and walking on water?'

'I did; he wore brogues, as the Hyperboreans usually do. I need not detain you with the everyday manifestations of his power. How he would make people fall in love, call up spirits, resuscitate corpses, bring down the Moon, and show you Hecate herself, as large as life. But I will just tell you of a thing I saw him do at Glaucias's. It was not long after Glaucias's father, Alexicles, had died. Glaucias, on coming into the property, had fallen in love with Chrysis, Demaenetus's daughter. I was teaching him philosophy at the time, and if it had not been for this love-affair he would have thoroughly mastered the Peripatetic doctrines. At eighteen years old that boy had been through his physics, and begun analysis.

Well, he was in a dreadful way, and told me all about his love troubles. It was clearly my duty to introduce him to this Hyperborean wizard, which I accordingly did. His preliminary fee, to cover the expenses of sacrifice, was to be fifteen pounds, and he was to have another sixty pounds if Glaucias succeeded with Chrysis. Well, as soon as the moon was full, that being the time usually chosen for these enchantments, he dug a trench in the courtyard of the house, and commenced operations, at about midnight, by summoning Glaucias's father, who had now been dead for seven months. The old man did not approve of his son's passion, and was very angry at first; however, he was

prevailed on to give his consent. Hecate was next ordered to appear, with Cerberus in her train, and the Moon was brought down, and went through a variety of transformations. She appeared first in the form of a woman, but presently she turned into a most magnificent ox, and after that into a puppy. At length the Hyperborean molded a clay Eros, and ordered it to go and fetch Chrysis. Off went the image, and before long there was a knock at the door, and there stood Chrysis. She came in and threw her arms about Glaucias's neck; you would have said she was dying for love of him; and she stayed on till at last we heard cocks crowing. Away flew the Moon into Heaven, Hecate disappeared under ground, all the apparitions vanished, and we saw Chrysis out of the house just about dawn. Now, Tychiades, if you had seen that, it would have been enough to convince you that there was something in incantations.'

'Exactly,' I replied. 'If I had seen it, I should have been convinced: as it is, you must bear with me if I have not your eyes for the miraculous. But as to Chrysis, I know her for a most inflammable lady. I do not see what occasion there was for the clay ambassador and the Moon, or for a wizard all the way from the land of the Hyperboreans. Why, Chrysis would go that distance herself for the sum of twenty shillings – 'tis a form of incantation she cannot resist. She is the exact opposite of an apparition. Apparitions, you tell me, take flight at the clash of brass or iron, whereas if Chrysis hears the chink of silver, she flies to the spot. By the way, I like your wizard: instead of making all the wealthiest women in love with himself, and getting thousands out of them, he condescends to pick up fifteen pounds by rendering Glaucias irresistible.'

'This is sheer folly,' said Ion; 'you are determined not to believe any one. I shall be glad, now, to hear your views on the subject of those who cure demoniacal possession. The effect of their exorcisms is clear enough, and they have spirits to deal with. I need not enlarge on the subject: look at that Syrian adept from Palestine. Everyone knows how time after time he has found a man thrown down on the ground in a lunatic fit, foaming at the mouth and rolling his eyes; and how he has got him on to his feet again and sent him away in his right mind; and a handsome fee he takes for freeing men from such horrors. He stands over them as they lie, and asks the spirit whence it is. The patient says not a word, but the spirit in him makes answer, in Greek or in some foreign tongue as the case may be, stating where it comes from, and how it entered into him. Then with adjurations, and if need be with threats, the Syrian constrains it to come out of the man. I myself once saw one coming out: it was of a dark, smoky complexion.'

'Ah, that is nothing for you,' I replied; 'your eyes can discern those ideas which are set forth in the works of Plato, the founder of your school: now they make a very faint impression on the dull optics of us ordinary men.'

'Do you suppose,' asked Eucrates, 'that he is the only man who has seen such things? Plenty of people besides Ion have met with spirits, by night and by day. As for me, if I have seen one apparition, I have seen a thousand. I used not to like them at first, but I am accustomed to them now, and think nothing of it; especially since the Arab gave me my ring of gallows-iron, and taught me the incantation with all those names in it. But perhaps you will doubt my word too?'

'Doubt the word of Eucrates, the learned son of Dino? Never! Least of all when he unbosoms himself in the liberty of his own house.'

'Well, what I am going to tell you about the statue was witnessed night after night by all my household, from the eldest to the youngest, and any one of them could tell you the story as well as myself.'

'What statue is this?'

'Have you never noticed as you came in that beautiful one in the court, by Demetrius the portrait-sculptor?'

'Is that the one with the quoit,—leaning forward for the throw, with his face turned back towards the hand that holds the quoit, and one knee bent, ready to rise as he lets it go?'

'Ah, that is a fine piece of work, too,—a Myron; but I don't mean that, nor the beautiful Polyclitus next it, the Youth tying on the Fillet. No, forget all you pass on your right as you come in; the Tyrannicides of Critius and Nesiotes are on that side too. But did you never notice one just by the fountain?—bald, pot-bellied, half-naked; beard partly caught by the wind; protruding veins? That is the one I mean; it looks as if it must be a portrait, and is thought to be Pelichus, the Corinthian general.'

'Ah, to be sure, I have seen it,' I replied; 'it is to the right of the Cronus. The head is crowned with fillets and withered garlands, and the breast gilded.'

'Yes, I had that done, when he cured me of the tertian ague; I had been at Death's door with it.'

'Bravo, Pelichus!' I exclaimed; 'so he was a doctor too?'

'Not was, but is. Beware of trifling with him, or he may pay you a visit before long. Well do I know what virtue is in that statue with which you make so merry. Can you doubt that he who cures the ague may also inflict it at will?'

'I implore his favour,' I cried; 'may he be as merciful as he is mighty! And what are his other doings, to which all your household are witnesses?'

'At nightfall,' said Eucrates, 'he descends from his pedestal, and walks all round the house. One or other of us is continually meeting with him; sometimes he is singing. He has never done any harm to any one: all we have to do when we see him is to step aside, and he passes on his way without molesting us. He is fond of taking a bath; you may hear him splashing about in the water all night long.'

'Perhaps,' I suggested, 'it is not Pelichus at all, but Talos the Cretan, the son of Minos? He was of bronze, and used to walk all round the island. Or if only he were made of wood instead of bronze, he might quite well be one of Daedalus's ingenious mechanisms—you say he plays truant from his pedestal just like them—and not the work of Demetrius at all.'

'Take care, Tychiades; you will be sorry for this some day. I have not forgotten what happened to the thief who stole his monthly pennies.'

'The sacrilegious villain!' cried Ion; 'I hope he got a lesson. How was he punished? Do tell me: never mind Tychiades; he can be as incredulous as he likes.'

'At the feet of the statue a number of pence were laid, and other coins were attached to his thigh by means of wax. Some of these were silver, and there were also silver plates, all being the thank-offerings of those whom he had cured of fever. Now we had a scamp of a Libyan groom, who took it into his head to filch all this coin under cover of night. He waited till the statue had descended from his pedestal, and then put his plan into effect. Pelichus detected the robbery as soon as he got back; and this is how he found the offender out and punished him. He caused the wretch to wander about in the court all night long, unable to find his way out, just as if he had been in a maze; til at daybreak he was caught with the stolen property in his possession. His guilt was clear, and he received a sound flogging there and then; and before long he died a villain's death. It seems from his own confession that he was scourged every night; and each succeeding morning the weals were to be seen on his body.—Now, Tychiades, let me hear you laugh at Pelichus: I am a dotard, am I not? A relic from the time of Minos?'

'My dear Eucrates,' said I, 'if bronze is bronze, and if that statue was cast by Demetrius of Alopece, who dealt not in Gods but in men, then I cannot anticipate any danger from a statue of Pelichus. Even the menaces of the original would not have alarmed me particularly.'

Here Antigonus, the doctor, put in a word: 'I myself,' he informed his host, 'have a Hippocrates in bronze, some eighteen inches high. Now the moment my candle is out, he goes clattering about all over the house, slamming the door, turning all my boxes upside down, and mixing up all my drugs; especially when his annual sacrifice is overdue.'

'What are we coming to?' I cried; 'Hippocrates must have sacrifices, must he? He must be feasted with all pomp and circumstance, and punctually to the day, or his leechship is angry? Why, he ought to be only too pleased to be complimented with a cup of mead or a garland, like other dead men.'

'Now here,' Eucrates went on, 'is a thing that I saw happen five years ago, in the presence of witnesses. It was during the vintage. I had left the laborers busy in the vineyard at midday, and was walking off into the wood, occupied with my own thoughts. I had already got under the shade of the trees, when I heard dogs barking, and supposed that my boy Mnason was amusing himself in the chase as usual, and had penetrated into the copse with his friends. However, that was not it: presently there was an earthquake; I heard a voice like a thunderclap, and saw a terrible woman approaching, not much less than three hundred feet high. She carried a torch in her left hand, and a sword in her right; the sword might be thirty feet long. Her lower extremities were those of a dragon; but the upper half was like Medusa—as to the eyes, I mean; they were quite awful in their expression. Instead of hair, she had clusters of snakes writhing about her neck, and curling over her shoulders. See here: it makes my flesh creep, only to speak of it!'

And he showed us all his arm, with the hair standing on end.

Ion and Dinomachus and Cleodemus and the rest of them drank down every word. The narrator led them by their venerable noses, and this least convincing of colossal bogies, this hundred-yarder, was the object of their mute adorations. And these (I was reflecting all the time)—these are the admired teachers from whom our youth are to learn wisdom! Two circumstances distinguish them from babies: they have white hair, and they have beards: but when it comes to swallowing a lie, they are babes and more than babes.

Dinomachus, for instance, wanted to know 'how big were the Goddess's dogs?'

'They were taller than Indian elephants,' he was assured, 'and as black, with coarse, matted coats. At the sight of her, I stood stock still, and turned the seal of my Arab's ring inwards; whereupon Hecate smote upon the ground with her dragon's foot, and caused a vast chasm to open, wide as the mouth of Hell. Into this she presently leaped, and was lost to sight. I began to pluck up courage, and looked over the edge; but first I took hold of a tree that grew near, for fear I should be giddy, and fall in. And then I saw the whole of Hades: there was Pyriphlegethon, the Lake of Acheron, Cerberus, the Shades. I even recognized some of them: I made out my father quite distinctly; he was still wearing the same clothes in which we buried him.'

'And what were the spirits doing?' asked Ion. 'Doing? Oh, they were just lying about on the asphodel, among their friends and kinsmen, all arranged according to their clans and tribes.'

'There now!' exclaimed Ion; 'after that I should like to hear the Epicureans say another word against the divine Plato and his account of the spiritual world. I suppose you did not happen to see Socrates or Plato among the Shades?'

'Yes, I did; I saw Socrates; not very plainly, though; I only went by the bald head and corpulent figure. Plato I did *not* make out; I will speak the plain truth; we are all friends here. I had just had a good look at everything, when the chasm began to close up; some of the servants who came to look for me (Pyrrhias here was among them) arrived while the gap was still visible. —Pyrrhias, is that the fact?'

'Indeed it is,' says Pyrrhias; 'what is more, I heard a dog barking in the hole, and if I am not mistaken I caught a glimmer of torchlight.'

I could not help a smile; it was handsome in Pyrrhias, this of the bark and the torchlight.

'Your experience,' observed Cleodemus, 'is by no means without precedent. In fact I saw something of the same kind myself, not long ago. I had been ill, and Antigonus here was attending me. The fever had been on me for seven days, and was now aggravated by the excessive heat. All my attendants were outside, having closed the door and left me to myself; those were your orders, you know, Antigonus; I was to get some sleep if I could. Well, I woke up to find a handsome young man standing at my side, in a white cloak. He raised me up from the bed, and conducted me through a sort of chasm into Hades. I knew where I was at once, because I saw Tantalus and Tityus and Sisyphus. Not to go into details, I came to the Judgment-hall, and there were Aeacus and Charon and the Fates and the Furies. One person of a majestic appearance — Pluto, I suppose it was — sat reading out the names of those who were due to die, their term of life having lapsed. The young man took me and set me before him, but Pluto flew into a rage:

"Away with him," he said to my conductor; "his thread is not yet out. Go and fetch Demylyus the smith; he has had his spindleful and more."

I ran off home, nothing loath. My fever had now disappeared, and I told everybody that Demylyus was as good as dead. He lived close by, and was said to have some illness, and it was not long before we heard the voices of mourners in his house.

'This need not surprise us,' remarked Antigonus; 'I know of a man who rose from the dead twenty days after he had been buried; I attended him both before his death and after his resurrection.'

'I should have thought,' said I, 'that the body must have putrefied in all that time, or if not that, that he must have collapsed for want of nourishment. Was your patient a second Epimenides?'

At this point in the conversation, Eucrates's sons came in from the gymnasium, one of them quite a young man, the other a boy of fifteen or so. After saluting the company, they took their seats on the couch at their father's side, and a chair was brought for me. The appearance of the boys seemed to remind Eucrates of something: laying a hand upon each of them, he addressed me as follows.

'Tychiades, if what I am now about to tell you is anything but the truth, then may I never have joy of these lads. It is

well known to every one how fond I was of my sainted wife, their mother; and I showed it in my treatment of her, not only in her lifetime, but even after her death; for I ordered all the jewels and clothes that she had valued to be burnt upon her pyre. Now on the seventh day after her death, I was sitting here on this very couch, as it might be now, trying to find comfort for my affliction in Plato's book about the soul. I was quietly reading this, when Demaenete herself appeared, and sat down at my side exactly as Eucratides is doing now.'

Here he pointed to the younger boy, who had turned quite pale during this narrative, and now shuddered in childish terror.

'The moment I saw her,' he continued, 'I threw my arms about her neck and wept aloud. She bade me cease; and complained that though I had consulted her wishes in everything else, I had neglected to burn one of her golden sandals, which she said had fallen under a chest. We had been unable to find this sandal, and had only burnt the fellow to it. While we were still conversing, a hateful little Maltese terrier that lay under the couch started barking, and my wife immediately vanished. The sandal, however, was found beneath the chest, and was eventually burnt.—Do you still doubt, Tychiades, in the face of one convincing piece of evidence after another?'

'God forbid!' I cried; 'the doubter who should presume thus to brazen it out in the face of Truth would deserve to have a golden sandal applied to him after the nursery fashion.'

Arignotus the Pythagorean now came in—the 'divine' Arignotus, as he is called; the philosopher of the long hair and the solemn countenance, you know, of whose wisdom we hear so much. I breathed again when I saw him.

'Ah!' thought I, 'the very man we want! Here is the axe to hew their lies asunder. The sage will soon pull them up when he hears their cock-and-bull stories. Fortune has brought a *deus ex machina* upon the scene.'

He sat down (Cleodemus rising to make room for him) and inquired after Eucrates's health. Eucrates replied that he was better.

'And what,' Arignotus next asked, 'is the subject of your learned conversation? I overheard your voices as I came in, and doubt not that your time will prove to have been profitably employed.'

Eucrates pointed to me. 'We were only trying,' he said, 'to convince this man of adamant that there are such things as supernatural beings and ghosts, and that the spirits of the dead walk the earth and manifest themselves to whomsoever they will.'

Moved by the august presence of Arignotus, I blushed, and hung my head.

'Ah, but, Eucrates,' said he, 'perhaps all that Tychiades means is, that a spirit only walks if its owner met with a violent end, if he was strangled, for instance, or beheaded or crucified, and not if he died a natural death. If that is what he means, there is great justice in his contention.'

'No, no,' says Dinomachus, 'he maintains that there is absolutely no such thing as an apparition.'

'What is this I hear?' asked Arignotus, scowling upon me; 'you deny the existence of the supernatural, when there is scarcely a man who has not seen some evidence of it?'

'Therein lies my exculpation,' I replied: 'I do not believe in the supernatural, because, unlike the rest of mankind, I do not see it: if I saw, I should doubtless believe, just as you all do.'

'Well,' said he, 'next time you are in Corinth, ask for the house of Eubatides, near the Craneum; and when you have found it, go up to Tibius the door-keeper, and tell him you would like to see the spot on which Arignotus the Pythagorean unearthed the demon, whose expulsion rendered the house habitable again.'

'What was that about, Arignotus?' asked Eucrates.

'The house,' replied the other, 'was haunted, and had been uninhabited for years: each intending occupant had been at once driven out of it in abject terror by a most grim and formidable apparition. Finally it had fallen into a ruinous state, the roof was giving way, and in short no one would have thought of entering it. Well, when I heard about this, I got my books together (I have a considerable number of Egyptian works on these subjects) and went off to the house about bed-time, undeterred by the remonstrances of my host, who considered that I was walking into the jaws of Death, and would almost have detained me by force when he learnt my destination.

I took a lamp and entered alone, and putting down my light in the principal room, I sat on the floor quietly reading. The spirit now made his appearance, thinking that he had to do with an ordinary person, and that he would frighten

me as he had frightened so many others. He was pitch-black, with a tangled mass of hair. He drew near, and assailed me from all quarters, trying every means to get the better of me, and changing in a moment from dog to bull, from bull to lion. Armed with my most appalling adjuration, uttered in the Egyptian tongue, I drove him spell-bound into the corner of a dark room, marked the spot at which he disappeared, and passed the rest of the night in peace. In the morning, to the amazement of all beholders (for every one had given me up for lost, and expected to find me lying dead like former occupants), I issued from the house, and carried to Eubatides the welcome news that it was now cleared of its grim visitant, and fit to serve as a human habitation.

He and a number of others, whom curiosity had prompted to join us, followed me to the spot at which I had seen the demon vanish. I instructed them to take spades and pick-axes and dig: they did so; and at about a fathom's depth we discovered a mouldering corpse, of which nothing but the bones remained entire. We took the skeleton up, and placed it in a grave; and from that day to this the house has never been troubled with apparitions.'

After such a story as this – coming as it did from Arignotus, who was generally looked up to as a man of inspired wisdom—my incredulous attitude towards the supernatural was loudly condemned on all hands. However, I was not frightened by his long hair, nor by his reputation.

'Dear, dear!' I exclaimed, 'so Arignotus, the sole mainstay of Truth, is as bad as the rest of them, as full of windy imaginings! Our treasure proves to be but ashes.'

'Now look here, Tychiades,' said Arignotus, 'you will not believe me, nor Dinomachus, nor Cleodemus here, nor yet Eucrates: we shall be glad to know who is your great authority on the other side, who is to outweigh us all?'

'No less a person,' I replied, 'than the sage of Abdera, the wondrous Democritus himself. His disbelief in apparitions is sufficiently clear. When he had shut himself up in that tomb outside the city gates, there to spend his days and nights in literary labors, certain young fellows, who had a mind to play their pranks on the philosopher and give him a fright, got themselves up in black palls and skull-masks, formed a ring round him, and treated him to a brisk dance. Was Democritus alarmed at the ghosts? Not he:

"Come, enough of that nonsense," was all he had to say to them; and that without so much as looking up, or taking pen from paper. Evidently he had quite made up his mind about disembodied spirits.'

'Which simply proves,' retorted Eucrates, 'that Democritus was no wiser than yourself. Now I am going to tell you of another thing that happened to me personally; I did not get the story second-hand. Even you, Tychiades, will scarcely hold out against so convincing a narrative.

'When I was a young man, I passed some time in Egypt, my father having sent me to that country for my education. I took it into my head to sail up the Nile to Coptus, and thence pay a visit to the statue of Memnon, and hear the curious sound that proceeds from it at sunrise. In this respect, I was more fortunate than most people, who hear nothing but an indistinct voice: Memnon actually opened his lips, and delivered me an oracle in seven hexameters; it is foreign to my present purpose, or I would quote you the very lines.

Well now, one of my fellow passengers on the way up was a scribe of Memphis, an extraordinarily able man, versed in all the lore of the Egyptians. He was said to have passed twenty-three years of his life underground in the tombs, studying occult sciences under the instruction of Isis herself.'

'You must mean the divine Panocrates, my teacher,' exclaimed Arignotus; 'tall, clean-shaven, snub-nosed, protruding lips, rather thin in the legs; dresses entirely in linen, has a thoughtful expression, and speaks Greek with a slight accent?'

'Yes, it was Panocrates himself. I knew nothing about him at first, but whenever we anchored I used to see him doing the most marvelous things,—for instance, he would actually ride on the crocodiles' backs, and swim about among the brutes, and they would fawn upon him and wag their tails; and then I realized that he was no common man. I made some advances, and by imperceptible degrees came to be on quite a friendly footing with him, and was admitted to a share in his mysterious arts. The end of it was, that he prevailed on me to leave all my servants behind at Memphis, and accompany him alone; assuring me that we should not want for attendance.

This plan we accordingly followed from that time onwards. Whenever we came to an inn, he used to take up the bar of the door, or a broom, or perhaps a pestle, dress it up in clothes, and utter a certain incantation; whereupon the thing would begin to walk about, so that every one took it for a man. It would go off and draw water, buy and cook provisions, and make itself generally useful. When we had no further occasion for its services, there was another

incantation, after which the broom was a broom once more, or the pestle a pestle. I could never get him to teach me this incantation, though it was not for want of trying; open as he was about everything else, he guarded this one secret jealously.

At last one day I hid in a dark corner, and overheard the magic syllables; they were three in number. The Egyptian gave the pestle its instructions, and then went off to the market. Well, next day he was again busy in the market: so I took the pestle, dressed it, pronounced the three syllables exactly as he had done, and ordered it to become a water-carrier. It brought me the pitcher full; and then I said: 'Stop: be water-carrier no longer, but pestle as heretofore.'

But the thing would take no notice of me: it went on drawing water the whole time, until at last the house was full of it. This was awkward: if Pancrates came back, he would be angry, I thought (and so indeed it turned out). I took an axe, and cut the pestle in two. The result was that both halves took pitchers and fetched water; I had two water-carriers instead of one. This was still going on, when Pancrates appeared. He saw how things stood, and turned the water-carriers back into wood; and then he withdrew himself from me, and went away, whither I knew not.'

'And you can actually make a man out of a pestle to this day?' asked Dinomachus.

'Yes, I can do that, but that is only half the process: I cannot turn it back again into its original form; if once it became a water-carrier, its activity would swamp the house.'

'Oh, stop!' I cried: 'if the thought that you are old men is not enough to deter you from talking this trash, at least remember who is present: if you do not want to fill these boys' heads with ghosts and hobgoblins, postpone your grotesque horrors for a more suitable occasion. Have some mercy on the lads: do not accustom them to listen to a tangle of superstitious stuff that will cling to them for the rest of their lives, and make them start at their own shadows.'

'Ah, talking of superstition, now,' says Eucrates, 'that reminds me: what do you make of oracles, for instance, and omens? Of inspired utterances, of voices from the shrine, of the priestess's prophetic lines? You will deny all that too, of course?'

If I were to tell you of a certain magic ring in my possession, the seal of which is a portrait of the Pythian Apollo, and actually speaks to me, I suppose you would decline to believe it, you would think I was bragging? But I must tell you all of what I heard in the temple of Amphilocheus at Mallus, when that hero appeared to me in person and gave me counsel, and of what I saw with my own eyes on that occasion; and again of all I saw at Pergamum and heard at Patara. It was on my way home from Egypt that the oracle of Mallus was mentioned to me as a particularly intelligible and veracious one: I was told that any question, duly written down on a tablet and handed to the priest, would receive a plain, definite answer. I thought it would be a good thing to take the oracle on my way home, and consult the God as to my future.'

I saw what was coming: this was but the prologue to a whole tragedy of the oracular. It was clear enough that I was not wanted, and as I did not feel called upon to pose as the sole champion of the cause of Truth among so many, I took my leave there and then, while Eucrates was still upon the high seas between Egypt and Mallus.

'I must go and find Leontichus,' I explained; 'I have to see him about something. Meanwhile, you gentlemen, to whom human affairs are not sufficient occupation, may solicit the insertion of divine fingers into your mythologic pie.'

And with that I went out. Relieved of my presence, I doubt not that they fell to with a will on their banquet of mendacity.

That is what I got by going to Eucrates's; and, upon my word, Philocles, my overloaded stomach needs an emetic as much as if I had been drinking new wine. I would pay something for the drug that should work oblivion in me: I fear the effects of haunting reminiscence – monsters, demons, Hecates, seem to pass before my eyes.

Philocles. I am not much better off. They tell us it is not only the mad dog that inflicts hydrophobia: his human victim's bite is as deadly as his own, and communicates the evil as surely. You, it seems, have been bitten with many bites by the liar Eucrates, and have passed it on to me; no otherwise can I explain the demoniacal poison that runs in my veins.

Tychiades. What matter, friend? Truth and good sense: these are the drugs for our ailment; let us employ them, and that empty thing, a lie, need have no terrors for us.



Zeus Cross-Examined

Characters: Cyniscus. Zeus

Context: Zeus is cross-examined by Cyniscus about the supposed role of Fate in human affairs, and how Fate squares with the supposed powers of the gods.

Cyniscus. Zeus: I am not going to trouble you with requests for a fortune or a throne; you get prayers enough of that sort from other people, and from your habit of convenient deafness I gather that you experience a difficulty in answering them. But there is one thing I should like, which would cost you no trouble to grant.

Zeus. Well, Cyniscus? You shall not be disappointed, if your expectations are as reasonable as you say.

Cyniscus. I want to ask you a plain question.

Zeus. Such a modest petition is soon granted; ask what you will.

Cyniscus. Well then: you know your Homer and Hesiod, of course? Is it all true that they sing of Destiny and the Fates--that whatever they spin for a man at his birth must inevitably come about?

Zeus. Unquestionably. Nothing is independent of their control. From their spindle hangs the life of all created things; whose end is predetermined even from the moment of their birth; and that law knows no change.

Cyniscus. Then when Homer says, for instance, in another place, *Lest unto Hell thou go, outstripping Fate*, he is talking nonsense, of course?

Zeus. Absolute nonsense. Such a thing is impossible: the law of the Fates, the thread of Destiny, is over all. No; so long as the poets are under the inspiration of the Muses, they speak truth: but once let those Goddesses leave them to their own devices, and they make blunders and contradict themselves. Nor can we blame them: they are but men; how should they know truth, when the divinity whose mouthpieces they were is departed from them?

Cyniscus. That point is settled, then. But there is another thing I want to know. There are three Fates, are there not,--Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropus?

Zeus. Quite so.

Cyniscus. But one also hears a great deal about Destiny and Fortune. Who are they, and what is the extent of their power? Is it equal to that of the Fates? or greater perhaps? People are always talking about the insuperable might of Fortune and Destiny.

Zeus. It is not proper, Cyniscus, that you should know all. But what made you ask me about the Fates?

Cyniscus. Ah, you must tell me one thing more first. Do the Fates also control you Gods? Do you depend from their thread?

Zeus. We do. Why do you smile?

Cyniscus. I was thinking of that bit in Homer, where he makes you address the Gods in council, and threaten to suspend all the world from a golden cord. You said, you know, that you would let the cord down from Heaven, and all the Gods together, if they liked, might take hold of it and try to pull you down, and they would never do it: whereas you, if you had a mind to it, could easily pull them up, *And Earth and Sea withal*.

I listened to that passage with shuddering reverence; I was much impressed with the idea of your strength. Yet now I understand that you and your cord and your threats all depend from a mere cobweb. It seems to me Clotho should be the one to boast: she has you dangling from her distaff, like a sprat at the end of a fishing-line.

Zeus. I do not catch the drift of your questions.

Cyniscus. Come, I will speak my mind; and in the name of Destiny and the Fates take not my candour amiss. If the case stands thus, if the Fates are mistresses of all, and their decisions unalterable, then why do men sacrifice to you, and bring hecatombs, and pray for good at your hands? If our prayers can neither save us from evil nor procure us any boon from Heaven, I fail to see what we get for our trouble.

Zeus. These are nice questions! I see how it is,--you have been with the sophists; accursed race! who would deny us all concern in human affairs. Yes, these are just the points they raise, impiously seeking to pervert mankind from the way of sacrifice and prayer: it is all thrown away, forsooth! the Gods take no thought for mankind; they have no power on the earth.--Ah well; they will be sorry for it some day.

Cyniscus. Now, by Clotho's own spindle, my questions are free from all sophistic taint. How it has come about, I know not; but one word has brought up another, and the end of it is--there is no use in sacrifice. Let us begin again. I will put you a few more questions; answer me frankly, but think before you speak, this time.

Zeus. Well; if you have the time to waste on such tomfoolery.

Cyniscus. Everything proceeds from the Fates, you say?

Zeus. Yes.

Cyniscus. And is it in your power to unspin what they have spun?

Zeus. It is not.

Cyniscus. Shall I proceed, or is the inference clear?

Zeus. Oh, clear enough. But you seem to think that people sacrifice to us from ulterior motives; that they are driving a bargain with us, buying blessings, as it were: not at all; it is a disinterested testimony to our superior merit.

Cyniscus. There you are, then. As you say, sacrifice answers no useful purpose; it is just our good-natured way of acknowledging your superiority. And mind you, if we had a sophist here, he would want to know all about that superiority. You are our fellow slaves, he would say; if the Fates are our mistresses, they are also yours. Your immortality will not serve you; that only makes things worse. We mortals, after all, are liberated by death: but for you there is no end to the evil; that long thread of yours means eternal servitude.

Zeus. But this eternity is an eternity of happiness; the life of Gods is one round of blessings.

Cyniscus. Not all Gods' lives. Even in Heaven there are distinctions, not to say mismanagement. You are happy, of course: you are king, and you can haul up earth and sea as it were a bucket from the well. But look at Hephaestus: a cripple; a common blacksmith. Look at Prometheus: he gets nailed up on Caucasus. And I need not remind you that your own father lies fettered in Tartarus at this hour. It seems, too, that Gods are liable to fall in love; and to receive wounds; nay, they may even have to take service with mortal men; witness your brother Posidon, and Apollo, servants to Laomedon and to Admetus. I see no great happiness in all this; some of you I dare say have a very pleasant time of it, but not so others. I might have added, that you are subject to robbery like the rest of us; your temples get plundered, and the richest of you becomes a pauper in the twinkling of an eye. To more than one of you it has even happened to be melted down, if he was a gold or a silver God. All destiny, of course.

Zeus. Take care, Cyniscus: you are going too far. You will repent of this one day.

Cyniscus. Spare your threats: you know that nothing can happen to me, except what Fate has settled first. I notice, for instance, that even temple-robbers do not always get punished; most of them, indeed, slip through your hands. Not destined to be caught, I suppose.

Zeus. I knew it! you are one of those who would abolish Providence.

Cyniscus. You seem to be very much afraid of these gentlemen, for some reason. Not one word can I say, but you must think I picked it up from them. Oblige me by answering another question; I could desire no better authority than yours. What is this Providence? Is she a Fate too? or some greater, a mistress of the Fates?

Zeus. I have already told you that there are things which it is not proper for you to know. You said you were only going to ask me one question, instead of which you go on quibbling without end. I see what it is you are at: you want to make out that we Gods take no thought for human affairs.

Cyniscus. It is nothing to do with me: it was you who said just now that the Fates ordained everything. Have you

thought better of it? Are you going to retract what you said? Are the Gods going to push Destiny aside and make a bid for government?

Zeus. Not at all; but the Fates work through us.

Cyniscus. I see: you are their servants, their underlings. But that comes to the same thing: it is still they who design; you are only their tools, their instruments.

Zeus. How do you make that out?

Cyniscus. I suppose it is pretty much the same as with a carpenter's adze and drill: they do assist him in his work, but no one would describe them as the workmen; we do not say that a ship has been turned out by such and such an adze, or by such and such a drill; we name the shipwright. In the same way, Destiny and the Fates are the universal shipwrights, and you are their drills and adzes; and it seems to me that instead of paying their respects and their sacrifices to you, men ought to sacrifice to Destiny, and implore her favours; though even that would not meet the case, because I take it that things are settled once and for all, and that the Fates themselves are not at liberty to chop and change. If some one gave the spindle a turn in the wrong direction, and undid all Clotho's work, Atropus would have something to say on the subject.

Zeus. So! You would deprive even the Fates of honour? You seem determined to reduce all to one level. Well, we Gods have at least one claim on you: we do prophesy and foretell what the Fates have disposed.

Cyniscus. Now even granting that you do, what is the use of knowing what one has to expect, when one can by no possibility take any precautions? Are you going to tell me that a man who finds out that he is to die by a steel point can escape the doom by shutting himself up? Not he. Fate will take him out hunting, and there will be his steel: Adrastus will hurl his spear at the boar, miss the brute, and get Croesus's son; Fate's inflexible law directs his aim. The full absurdity of the thing is seen in the case of Laïus: "*Seek not for offspring in the Gods' despite; Beget a child, and thou begett'st thy slayer.*"

Was not this advice superfluous, seeing that the end must come? Accordingly we find that the oracle does not deter Laïus from begetting a son, nor that son from being his slayer. On the whole, I cannot see that your prophecies entitle you to reward, even setting aside the obscurity of the oracles, which are generally contrived to cut both ways. You omitted to mention, for instance, whether Croesus--'the Halys crossed'--should destroy his own or Cyrus's mighty realm.' It might be either, so far as the oracle goes.

Zeus. Apollo was angry with Croesus. When Croesus boiled that lamb and tortoise together in the cauldron, he was making trial of Apollo.

Cyniscus. Gods ought not to be angry. After all, I suppose it was fated that the Lydian should misinterpret that oracle; his case only serves to illustrate that general ignorance of the future, which Destiny has appointed for mankind. At that rate, your prophetic power too seems to be in her hands.

Zeus. You leave us nothing, then? We exercise no control, we are not entitled to sacrifice, we are very drills and adzes. But you may well despise me: why do I sit here listening to all this, with my thunder-bolt beneath my arm?

Cyniscus. Nay, smite, if the thunder-bolt is my destiny. I shall think none the worse of you; I shall know it is all Clotho's doing; I will not even blame the bolt that wounds me. And by the way--talking of thunder-bolts--there is one thing I will ask you and Destiny to explain; you can answer for her. Why is it that you leave all the pirates and temple-robbers and ruffians and perjurers to themselves, and direct your shafts (as you are always doing) against an oak-tree or a stone or a harmless mast, or even an honest, God-fearing traveller? . . . No answer? Is this one of the things it is not proper for me to know?

Zeus. It is, Cyniscus. You are a meddling fellow; I don't know where you picked up all these ideas.

Cyniscus. Well, I suppose I must not ask you all (Providence and Destiny and you) why honest Phocion died in utter poverty and destitution, like Aristides before him, while those two unwhipped puppies, Callias and Alcibiades, and the ruffian Midias, and that Aeginetan libertine Charops, who starved his own mother to death, were all rolling in money? nor again why Socrates was handed over to the Eleven instead of Meletus? nor yet why the effeminate Sardanapalus was a king, and one high-minded Persian after another went to the cross for refusing to countenance his doings? I say nothing of our own days, in which villains and money-grubbers prosper, and honest men are oppressed with want and sickness and a thousand distresses, and can hardly call their souls their own.

Zeus. Surely you know, Cyniscus, what punishments await the evil-doers after death, and how happy will be the lot of the righteous?

Cyniscus. Ah, to be sure: Hades--Tityus--Tantalus. Whether there is such a place as Hades, I shall be able to satisfy myself when I die. In the meantime, I had rather live a pleasant life here, and have a score or so of vultures at my liver when I am dead, than thirst like Tantalus in this world, on the chance of drinking with the heroes in the Isles of the Blest, and reclining in the fields of Elysium.

Zeus. What! you doubt that there are punishments and rewards to come? You doubt of that judgement-seat before which every soul is arraigned?

Cyniscus. I have heard mention of a judge in that connexion; one Minos, a Cretan. Ah, yes, tell me about him: they say he is your son?

Zeus. And what of him?

Cyniscus. Whom does he punish in particular?

Zeus. Whom but the wicked? Murderers, for instance, and temple-robbers.

Cyniscus. And whom does he send to dwell with the heroes?

Zeus. Good men and God-fearing, who have led virtuous lives.

Cyniscus. Why?

Zeus. Because they deserve punishment and reward respectively.

Cyniscus. Suppose a man commits a crime accidentally: does he punish him just the same?

Zeus. Certainly not.

Cyniscus. Similarly, if a man involuntarily performed a good action, he would not reward him?

Zeus. No.

Cyniscus. Then there is no one for him to reward or punish.

Zeus. How so?

Cyniscus. Why, we men do nothing of our own free will: we are obeying an irresistible impulse,--that is, if there is any truth in what we settled just now, about Fate's being the cause of everything. Does a man commit a murder? Fate is the murderess. Does he rob a temple? He has her instructions for it. So if there is going to be any justice in Minos's sentences, he will punish Destiny, not Sisyphus; Fate, not Tantalus. What harm did these men do? They only obeyed orders.

Zeus. I am not going to speak to you any more. You are an unscrupulous man; a sophist. I shall go away and leave you to yourself.

Cyniscus. I wanted to ask you where the Fates lived; and how they managed to attend to all the details of such a vast mass of business, just those three. I do not envy them their lot; they must have a busy time of it, with so much on their hands. Their destiny, apparently, is no better than other people's. I would not exchange with them, if I had the choice; I had rather be poorer than I am, than sit before such a spindleful, watching every thread.-- But never mind, if you would rather not answer. Your previous replies have quite cleared up my doubts about Destiny and Providence; and for the rest, I expect I was not destined to hear it.

Hermotimus, Or, The Rival Philosophies



Characters: Lycinus. Hermotimus

Context: Lucian in the character of Lycinus educates a friend on true philosophy.

Lycinus. Good morning, Hermotimus; I guess by your book and the pace you are going at that you are on your way to lecture, and a little late. You were conning over something as you walked, your lips working and muttering, your hand flung out this way and that as you got a speech into order in your mind; you were doubtless inventing one of your crooked questions, or pondering some tricky problem; never a vacant mind, even in the streets; always on the stretch and in earnest, bent on advancing in your studies.

Hermotimus. I admit the impeachment; I was running over the details of what he said in yesterday's lecture. One must lose no chance, you know; the Coan doctor² spoke so truly: *ars longa, vita brevis*. And what he referred to was only physic—a simpler matter. As to philosophy, not only will you never attain it, however long you study, unless you are wide awake all the time, contemplating it with intense eager gaze; the stake is so tremendous, too,—whether you shall rot miserably with the vulgar herd, or be counted among philosophers and reach Happiness.

Lycinus. A glorious prize, indeed! However, you cannot be far off it now, if one may judge by the time you have given to philosophy, and the extraordinary vigor of your long pursuit. For twenty years now, I should say, I have watched you perpetually going to your professors, generally bent over a book taking notes of past lectures, pale with thought and emaciated in body. I suspect you find no release even in your dreams, you are so wrapped up in the thing. With all this you must surely get hold of Happiness soon, if indeed you have not found it long ago without telling us.

Hermotimus. Alas, Lycinus, I am only just beginning to get an inkling of the right way. Very far off dwells Virtue, as Hesiod says, and long and steep and rough is the way thither, and travelers must bedew it with sweat.

Lycinus. And you have not yet sweated and traveled enough?

Hermotimus. Surely not; else should I have been on the summit, with nothing left between me and bliss; but I am only starting yet, Lycinus.

Lycinus. Ah, but Hesiod, your own authority, tells us, “*Well begun is half done;*” so we may safely call you half-way by this time.

Hermotimus. Not even there yet; that would indeed have been much.

Lycinus. Where shall we put you, then?

Hermotimus. Still on the lower slopes, just making an effort to get on; but it is slippery and rough, and needs a helping hand.

Lycinus. Well, your master can give you that; from his station on the summit, like Zeus in Homer with his golden cord, he can let you down his discourse, and therewith haul and heave you up to himself and to the Virtue which he has himself attained this long time.

Hermotimus. The very picture of what he is doing; if it depended on him alone, I should have been hauled up long ago; it is my part that is still wanting.

Lycinus. You must be of good cheer and keep a stout heart; gaze at the end of your climb and the Happiness at the top, and remember that he is working with you. What prospect does he hold out? when are you to be up? does he think you will be on the top next year—by the Great Mysteries, or the Panathenaea, say?

Hermotimus. Too soon, Lycinus.

Lycinus. By next Olympiad, then?

Hermostimus. All too short a time, even that, for habituation to Virtue and attainment of Happiness.

Lycinus. Say two Olympiads, then, for an outside estimate. You may fairly be found guilty of laziness, if you cannot get it done by then; the time would allow you three return trips from the Pillars of Heracles to India, with a margin for exploring the tribes on the way instead of sailing straight and never stopping. How much higher and more slippery, pray, is the peak on which your Virtue dwells than that Aornos crag which Alexander stormed in a few days?

Hermostimus. There is no resemblance, Lycinus; this is not a thing, as you conceive it, to be compassed and captured quickly, though ten thousand Alexanders were to assault it; in that case, the sealers would have been legion. As it is, a good number begin the climb with great confidence, and do make progress, some very little indeed, others more; but when they get half-way, they find endless difficulties and discomforts, lose heart, and turn back, panting, dripping, and exhausted. But those who endure to the end reach the top, to be blessed thenceforth with wondrous days, looking down from their height upon the ants which are the rest of mankind.

Lycinus. Dear me, what tiny things you make us out—not so big as the Pygmies even, but positively groveling on the face of the earth. I quite understand it; your thoughts are up aloft already. And we, the common men that walk the earth, shall mingle you with the Gods in our prayers; for you are translated above the clouds, and gone up whither you have so long striven.

Hermostimus. If but that ascent might be, Lycinus! but it is far yet.

Lycinus. But you have never told me how far, in terms of time.

Hermostimus. No; for I know not precisely myself. My guess is that it will not be more than twenty years; by that time I shall surely be on the summit.

Lycinus. Mercy upon us, you take long views!

Hermostimus. Ay; but, as the toil, so is the reward.

Lycinus. That may be; but about these twenty years—have you your master's promise that you will live so long? Is he prophet as well as philosopher? Or is it a soothsayer or Chaldean expert that you trust? Such things are known to them, I understand. You would never, of course, if there were any uncertainty of your life's lasting to the Virtue-point, slave and toil night and day like this; why, just as you were close to the top, your fate might come upon you, lay hold of you by the heel, and lug you down with your hopes unfulfilled.

Hermostimus. God forbid! these are words of ill omen, Lycinus; may life be granted me, that I may grow wise, and have if it be but one day of Happiness!

Lycinus. For all these toils will you be content with your one day?

Hermostimus. Content? Yes, or with the briefest moment of it.

Lycinus. But is there indeed Happiness up there—and worth all the pains? How can you tell? You have never been up yourself.

Hermostimus. I trust my master's word; and he knows well; is he not on the topmost height?

Lycinus. Oh, do tell me what he says about it; what is Happiness like? wealth, glory, pleasures incomparable?

Hermostimus. Hush, friend! all these have nought to do with the Virtuous life.

Lycinus. Well, if these will not do, what are the good things he offers to those who carry their course right through?

Hermostimus. Wisdom, courage, true beauty, justice, full and firm knowledge of all things as they are; but wealth and glory and pleasure and all bodily things—these a man strips off and abandons before he mounts up, like Heracles burning on Mount Oeta before deification; he too cast off whatever of the human he had from his mother, and soared up to the Gods with his divine part pure and unalloyed, sifted by the fire. Even so those I speak of are purged by the philosophic fire of all that deluded men count admirable, and reaching the summit have Happiness with never a thought of wealth and glory and pleasure—except to smile at any who count them more than phantoms.

Lycinus. By Heracles (and his death on Oeta), they quit themselves like men, and have their reward, it seems. But

there is one thing I should like to know: are they allowed to come down from their elevation sometimes, and have a taste of what they left behind them? or when they have once got up, must they stay there, conversing with Virtue, and smiling at wealth and glory and pleasure?

Hermotimus. The latter, assuredly; more than that, a man once admitted of Virtue's company will never be subject to wrath or fear or desire any more; no, nor can he feel pain, nor any such sensation.

Lycinus. Well, but—if one might dare to say what one thinks—but no—let me keep a good tongue in my head—it were irreverent to pry into what wise men do.

Hermotimus. Nay, nay; let me know your meaning.

Lycinus. Dear friend, I have not the courage.

Hermotimus. Out with it, my good fellow; we are alone.

Lycinus. Well, then—most of your account I followed and accepted—how they grow wise and brave and just, and the rest—indeed I was quite fascinated by it; but then you went on to say they despised wealth and glory and pleasure; well, just there (quite between ourselves, you know) I was pulled up; I thought of a scene t'other day with—shall I tell you whom? Perhaps we can do without a name?

Hermotimus. No, no; we must have that too.

Lycinus. Your own professor himself, then,—a person to whom all respect is due, surely, not to mention his years.

Hermotimus. Well?

Lycinus. You know the Heracleot, quite an old pupil of his in philosophy by this time—red-haired—likes an argument?

Hermotimus. Yes; Dion, he is called.

Lycinus. Well, I suppose he had not paid up punctually; anyhow the other day the old man haled him before the magistrate, with a halter made of his own coat; he was shouting and fuming, and if some friends had not come up and got the young man out of his hands, he would have bitten off his nose, he was in such a temper.

Hermotimus. Ah, he is a bad character, always an unconscionable time paying his debts. There are plenty of others who owe the professor money, and he has never treated any of them so; they pay him his interest punctually.

Lycinus. Not so fast; what in the world does it matter to him, if they do not pay up? he is purified by philosophy, and has no further need of the cast clothes of Oeta.

Hermotimus. Do you suppose his interest in such things is selfish? no, but he has little ones; his care is to save them from indigence.

Lycinus. Whereas he ought to have brought them up to Virtue too, and let them share his inexpensive Happiness.

Hermotimus. Well, I have no time to argue it, Lycinus; I must not be late for lecture, lest in the end I find myself left behind.

Lycinus. Don't be afraid, my duteous one; to-day is a holiday; I can save you the rest of your walk.

Hermotimus. What do you mean?

Lycinus. You will not find him just now, if the notice is to be trusted; there was a tablet over the door announcing in large print, No meeting this day. I hear he dined yesterday with the great Eucrates, who was keeping his daughter's birthday. He talked a good deal of philosophy over the wine, and lost his temper a little with Euthydemus the Peripatetic; they were debating the old Peripatetic objections to the Porch. His long vocal exertions (for it was midnight before they broke up) gave him a bad headache, with violent perspiration. I fancy he had also drunk a little too much, toasts being the order of the day, and eaten more than an old man should. When he got home, he was very ill, they said, just managed to check and lock up carefully the slices of meat which he had conveyed to his servant at table, and then, giving orders that he was not at home, went to sleep, and has not waked since. I overheard Midas his man telling this to some of his pupils; there were a number of them coming away.

Hermotimus. Which had the victory, though, he or Euthydemus—if Midas said anything about that?

Lycinus. Why, at first, I gathered, it was very even between them; but you Stoics had it in the end, and your master was much too hard for him. Euthydemus did not even get off whole; he had a great cut on his head. He was pretentious, insisted on proving his point, would not give in, and proved a hard nut to crack; so your excellent professor, who had a goblet as big as Nestor's in his hand, brought this down on him as he lay within easy reach, and the victory was his.

Hermotimus. Good; so perish all who will not yield to their betters!

Lycinus. Very reasonable, Hermotimus; what was Euthydemus thinking of, to irritate an old man who is purged of wrath and master of his passions, when he had such a heavy goblet in his hand?

But we have time to spare—you might tell a friend like me the story of your start in philosophy; then I might perhaps, if it is not too late, begin now and join your school; you are my friends; you will not be exclusive?

Hermotimus. If only you would, Lycinus! you will soon find out how much you are superior to the rest of men. I do assure you, you will think them all children, you will be so much wiser.

Lycinus. Enough for me, if after twenty years of it I am where you are now.

Hermotimus. Oh, I was about your age when I started on philosophy; I was forty; and you must be about that.

Lycinus. Just that; so take and lead me on the same way; that is but right. And first tell me—do you allow learners to criticize, if they find difficulties in your doctrines, or must juniors abstain from that?

Hermotimus. Why, yes, they must; but you shall have leave to ask questions and criticize; you will learn easier that way.

Lycinus. I thank you for it, Hermotimus, by your name—God Hermes.

Now, is there only one road to philosophy—the Stoic way? they tell me there are a great many other philosophers; is that so?

Hermotimus. Certainly—Peripatetics, Epicureans, Platonists, followers of Diogenes, Antisthenes, Pythagoras, and more yet.

Lycinus. Quite so; numbers of them. Now, are their doctrines the same, or different?

Hermotimus. Entirely different.

Lycinus. But the truth, I presume, is bound to be in one of them, and not in all, as they differ?

Hermotimus. Certainly.

Lycinus. Then, as you love me, answer this: when you first went in pursuit of philosophy, you found many gates wide open; what induced you to pass the others by, and go in at the Stoic gate? Why did you assume that that was the only true one, which would set you on the straight road to Virtue, while the rest all opened on blind alleys? What was the test you applied then? Please abolish your present self, the self which is now instructed, or half-instructed, and better able to distinguish between good and bad than we outsiders, and answer in your then character of a layman, with no advantage over me as I am now.

Hermotimus. I cannot tell what you are driving at.

Lycinus. Oh, there is nothing recondite about it. There are a great many philosophers—let us say Plato, Aristotle, Antisthenes, and your spiritual fathers, Chrysippus, Zeno, and all the rest of them; what was it that induced you, leaving the rest alone, to pick out the school you did from among them all, and pin your philosophic faith to it? Were you favored like Chaerephon with a revelation from Apollo? Did he tell you the Stoics were the best of men, and send you to their school? I dare say he recommends different philosophers to different persons, according to their individual needs?

Hermotimus. Nothing of the kind, Lycinus; I never consulted him upon it.

Lycinus. Why? was it not a *dignus vindice nodus*? Or were you confident in your own unaided discrimination?

Hermotimus. Why, yes; I was.

Lycinus. Then this must be my first lesson from you—how one can decide out of hand which is the best and the true

philosophy to be taken, and the others left.

Hermotimus. I will tell you: I observed that it attracted most disciples, and thence inferred that it was superior.

Lycinus. Give me figures; how many more of them than of Epicureans, Platonists, Peripatetics? Of course you took a sort of show of hands.

Hermotimus. Well, no; I didn't count; I just guessed.

Lycinus. Now, now! you are not teaching, but hoaxing me; judge by guess work and impression, indeed, on a thing of this importance! You are hiding the truth.

Hermotimus. Well, that was not my only way; every one told me the Epicureans were sensual and self-indulgent, the Peripatetics avaricious and contentious, the Platonists conceited and vain; about the Stoics, on the contrary, many said they had fortitude and an open mind; he who goes their way, I heard, was the true king and millionaire and wise man, alone and all in one.

Lycinus. And, of course, it was other people who so described them; you would not have taken their own word for their excellences.

Hermotimus. Certainly not; it was others who said it.

Lycinus. Not their rivals, I suppose?

Hermotimus. Oh, no.

Lycinus. Laymen, then?

Hermotimus. Just so.

Lycinus. There you are again, cheating me with your irony; you take me for a blockhead, who will believe that an intelligent person like Hermotimus, at the age of forty, would accept the word of laymen about philosophy and philosophers, and make his own selection on the strength of what they said.

Hermotimus. But you see, Lycinus, I did not depend on their judgment entirely, but on my own too. I saw the Stoics going about with dignity, decently dressed and groomed, ever with a thoughtful air and a manly countenance, as far from effeminacy as from the utter repulsive negligence of the Cynics, bearing themselves, in fact, like moderate men; and every one admits that moderation is right.

Lycinus. Did you ever see them behaving like your master, as I described him to you just now? Lending money and clamoring for payment, losing their tempers in philosophic debates, and making other exhibitions of themselves? Or perhaps these are trifles, so long as the dress is decent, the beard long, and the hair close-cropped? We are provided for the future, then, with an infallible rule and balance, guaranteed by Hermotimus? It is by appearance and walk and haircutting that the best men are to be distinguished; and whosoever has not these marks, and is not solemn and thoughtful, shall be condemned and rejected?

Nay, do not play with me like this; you want to see whether I shall catch you at it.

Hermotimus. Why do you say that?

Lycinus. Because, my dear sir, this appearance test is one for statues; their decent orderly attire has it easily over the Stoics, because Phidias or Alcamenes or Myron designed them to be graceful. However, granting as much as you like that these are the right tests, what is a blind man to do, if he wants to take up philosophy? how is he to find the man whose principles are right, when he cannot see his appearance or gait?

Hermotimus. I am not teaching the blind, Lycinus; I have nothing to do with them.

Lycinus. Ah, but, my good sir, there ought to have been some universal criterion, in a matter of such great and general use. Still, if you will have it so, let the blind be excluded from philosophy, as they cannot see—though, by the way, they are just the people who most need philosophy to console them for their misfortune; but now, the people who can see—give them the utmost possible acuity of vision, and what can they detect of the spiritual qualities from this external shell?

What I mean is this: was it not from admiration of their spirit that you joined them, expecting to have your own spirit purified?

Hermotimus. Assuredly.

Lycinus. How could you possibly discern the true philosopher from the false, then, by the marks you mentioned? It is not the way of such qualities to come out like that; they are hidden and secret; they are revealed only under long and patient observation, in talk and debate and the conduct they inspire. You have probably heard of Momus's indictment of Hephaestus; if not, you shall have it now. According to the myth, Athene, Posidon, and Hephaestus had a match in inventiveness. Posidon made a bull, Athene planned a house, Hephaestus constructed a man; when they came before Momus, who was to judge, he examined their productions; I need not trouble you with his criticisms of the other two; but his objection to the man, and the fault he found with Hephaestus, was this: he should have made a window in his chest, so that, when it was opened, his thoughts and designs, his truth or falsehood, might have been apparent. Momus must have been blear-eyed, to have such ideas about men; but you have sharper eyes than Lynceus, and pierce through the chest to what is inside; all is patent to you, not merely any man's wishes and sentiments, but the comparative merits of any pair.

Hermotimus. You trifle, Lycinus. I made a pious choice, and do not repent it; that is enough for me.

Lycinus. And will you yet make a mystery of it to your friend, and let him be lost with the vulgar herd?

Hermotimus. Why, you will not accept anything I say.

Lycinus. On the contrary, my good sir, it is you who will not say anything I can accept. Well, as you refuse me your confidence, and are so jealous of my becoming a philosopher and your equal, I must even do my best to find out the infallible test and learn to choose safely for myself. And you may listen, if you like.

Hermotimus. That I will, Lycinus; you will very likely hit on some good idea.

Lycinus. Then attend, and do not mock me, if my inquiry is quite unscientific; it is all I can do, as you, who know better, will not give me any clearer light.

I conceive Virtue, then, under the figure of a State whose citizens are happy—as your professor, who is one of them, phrases it,—absolutely wise, all of them brave, just, and self-controlled, hardly distinguishable, in fact, from Gods. All sorts of things that go on here, such as robbery, assault, unfair gain, you will never find attempted there, I believe; their relations are all peace and unity; and this is quite natural, seeing that none of the things which elsewhere occasion strife and rivalry, and prompt men to plot against their neighbors, so much as come in their way at all. Gold, pleasures, distinctions, they never regard as objects of dispute; they have banished them long ago as undesirable elements. Their life is serene and blissful, in the enjoyment of legality, equality, liberty, and all other good things.

Hermotimus. Well, Lycinus? Must not all men yearn to belong to a State like that, and never count the toil of getting there, nor lose heart over the time it takes? Enough that one day they will arrive, and be naturalized, and given the franchise.

Lycinus. In good truth, Hermotimus, we should devote all our efforts to this, and neglect everything else; we need pay little heed to any claims of our earthly country; we should steel our hearts against the clingings and cryings of children or parents, if we have them; it is well if we can induce them to go with us; but, if they will not or cannot, shake them off and march straight for the city of bliss, leaving your coat in their hands, if they lay hold of it to keep you back, in your hurry to get there; what matter for a coat? You will be admitted there without one.

I remember hearing a description of it all once before from an old man, who urged me to go there with him. He would show me the way, enroll me when I got there, introduce me to his own circles, and promise me a share in the universal Happiness. But I was stiff-necked, in my youthful folly (it was some fifteen years ago); else might I have been in the outskirts, nay, haply at the very gates, by now. Among the noteworthy things he told me, I seem to remember these: all the citizens are aliens and foreigners, not a native among them; they include numbers of barbarians, slaves, cripples, dwarfs, and poor; in fact any one is admitted; for their law does not associate the franchise with income, with shape, size, or beauty, with old or brilliant ancestry; these things are not considered at all; any one who would be a citizen needs only understanding, zeal for the right, energy, perseverance, fortitude and resolution in facing all the trials of the road; whoever proves his possession of these by persisting till he reaches the city is ipso facto a full citizen, regardless of his antecedents. Such distinctions as superior and inferior, noble and common, bond and free, simply do not exist there, even in name.

Hermotimus. There, now; you see I am not wasting my pains on trifles; I yearn to be counted among the citizens of

that fair and happy State.

Lycinus. Why, your yearning is mine too; there is nothing I would sooner pray for. If the city had been near at hand and plain for all to see, be assured I would never have doubted, nor needed prompting; I would have gone thither and had my franchise long ago; but as you tell me—you and your bard Hesiod—that it is set exceeding far off, one must find out the way to it, and the best guide. You agree?

Hermotimus. Of course that is the only thing to do.

Lycinus. Now, so far as promises and professions go, there is no lack of guides; there are numbers of them waiting about, all representing themselves as from there. But instead of one single road there seem to be many different and inconsistent ones. North and South, East and West, they go; one leads through meadows and vegetation and shade, and is well watered and pleasant, with never a stumbling-block or inequality; another is rough and rocky, threatening heat and drought and toil. Yet all these are supposed to lead to the one city, though they take such different directions.

That is where my difficulty lies; whichever of them I try, there is sure to be a most respectable person stationed just at the entrance, with a welcoming hand and an exhortation to go his way; each of them says he is the only one who knows the straight road; his rivals are all mistaken, have never been themselves, nor learnt the way from competent guides. I go to his neighbor, and he gives the same assurances about his way, abusing the other respectable persons; and so the next, and the next, and the next. This multiplicity and dissimilarity of the roads gives me searchings of heart, and still more the assertiveness and self-satisfaction of the guides; I really cannot tell which turning or whose directions are most likely to bring me to the city.

Hermotimus. Oh, but I can solve that puzzle for you; you cannot go wrong, if you trust those who have been already.

Lycinus. Which do you mean? those who have been by which road, and under whose guidance? It is the old puzzle in a new form; you have only substituted men for measures.

Hermotimus. How do you mean?

Lycinus. Why, the man who has taken Plato's road and traveled with him will recommend that road; so with Epicurus and the rest; and you will recommend your own. How else, Hermotimus? it must be so.

Hermotimus. Well, of course.

Lycinus. So you have not solved my puzzle; I know just as little as before which traveler to trust; I find that each of them, as well as his guide, has tried one only, which he now recommends and will have to be the only one leading to the city. Whether he tells the truth I have no means of knowing; that he has attained some end, and seen some city, I may perhaps allow; but whether he saw the right one, or whether, Corinth being the real goal, he got to Babylon and thought he had seen Corinth—that is still undecided; for surely every one who has seen a city has not seen Corinth, unless Corinth is the only city there is. But my greatest difficulty of all is the absolute certainty that the true road is one; for Corinth is one, and the other roads lead anywhere but to Corinth, though there may be people deluded enough to suppose that the North road and the South road lead equally to Corinth.

Hermotimus. But that is absurd, Lycinus; they go opposite ways, you see.

Lycinus. Then, my dear good man, this choice of roads and guides is quite a serious matter; we can by no means just follow our noses; we shall be discovering that we are well on the way to Babylon or Bactria instead of to Corinth. Nor is it advisable to toss up, either, on the chance that we may hit upon the right way if we start upon any one at a venture. That is no impossibility; it may have come off once and again in a cycle; but I cannot think we ought to gamble recklessly with such high stakes, nor commit our hopes to a frail craft, like the wise men who went to sea in a bowl; we should have no fair complaint against Fortune, if her arrow or dart did not precisely hit the centre; the odds are ten thousand to one against her; just so the archer in Homer—Teucer, I suppose it was—when he meant to hit the dove, only cut the string, which held it; of course it is infinitely more likely that the point of the arrow will find its billet in one of the numberless other places, than just in that particular central one. And as to the perils of blundering into one of the wrong roads instead of the right one, misled by a belief in the discretion of Fortune, here is an illustration:—it is no easy matter to turn back and get safe into port when you have once cast loose your moorings and committed yourself to the breeze; you are at the mercy of the sea, frightened, sick and sorry with your tossing about, most likely. Your mistake was at the beginning: before leaving, you should have gone up to some high point, and observed whether the wind was in the right quarter, and of the right strength for a crossing to

Corinth, not neglecting, by the way, to secure the very best pilot obtainable, and a seaworthy craft equal to so high a sea.

Hermotimus. Much better so, Lycinus. However, I know that, if you go the whole round, you will find no better guides or more expert pilots than the Stoics; if you mean ever to get to Corinth, you will follow them, in the tracks of Chrysippus and Zeno. It is the only way to do it.

Lycinus. Ah, many can play at the game of assertion. Plato's fellow traveler, Epicurus's follower, and all the rest, will tell me just what you do, that I shall never get to Corinth except with whichever of them it is. So I must either believe them all, or disbelieve impartially. The latter is much the safest, until we have found out the truth.

Put a case, now: just as I am, as uncertain as ever which of the whole number has the truth, I choose your school; I rely on you, who are my friend, but who still know only the Stoic doctrine, and have not traveled any way but that. Now some God brings Plato, Pythagoras, Aristotle, and the rest to life again; they gather round and cross-examine me, or actually sue me in court for constructive defamation; Good Lycinus, they say, what possessed or who induced you to exalt Chrysippus and Zeno at our expense? We are far older established; they are mere creatures of yesterday; yet you never gave us a hearing, nor inquired into our statements at all. Well, what am I to plead? will it avail me to say I trusted my friend Hermotimus? I feel sure they will say, We know not this Hermotimus, who he is, nor he us; you had no right to condemn us all, and give judgment by default against us, on the authority of a man who knew only one of the philosophic roads, and even that, perhaps, imperfectly. These are not the instructions issued to juries, Lycinus; they are not to hear one party, and, refuse the other permission to say what he deems advisable; they are to hear both sides alike, with a view to the better sifting of truth from falsehood by comparison of the arguments; if they fail in these duties, the law allows an appeal to another court. That is what we may expect them to say.

Then one of them might proceed to question me like this: Suppose, Lycinus, that an Ethiopian who had never been abroad in his life, nor seen other men like us, were to state categorically in an Ethiopian assembly that there did not exist on earth any white or yellow men— nothing but blacks—, would his statement be accepted? or would some Ethiopian elder remark, How do you know, my confident friend? you have never been in foreign parts, nor had any experience of other nations. Shall I tell him the old man's question was justified? what do you advise, my counsel?

Hermotimus. Say that, certainly; I consider the old man's rebuke quite reasonable.

Lycinus. So do I. But I am not so sure you will approve what comes next; as for me, I have as little doubt of that as of the other.

Hermotimus. What is it?

Lycinus. The next step will be the application; my questioner will say, Now Lycinus, let us suppose an analogue, in a person acquainted only with the Stoic doctrine, like your friend Hermotimus; he has never traveled in Plato's country, or to Epicurus, or any other land; now, if he were to state that there was no such beauty or truth in those many countries as there is in the Porch and its teaching, would you not be justified in considering it bold of him to give you his opinion about them all, whereas he knew only one, having never set foot outside the bounds of Ethiopia? What reply do you advise to that?

Hermotimus. The perfectly true one, of course, that it is indeed the Stoic doctrine that we study fully, being minded to sink or swim with that, but still we do know what the others say also; our teacher rehearses the articles of their beliefs to us incidentally, and demolishes them with his comments.

Lycinus. Do you suppose the Platonists, Pythagoreans, Epicureans, and other schools, will let that pass? or will they laugh out loud and say, _What remarkable methods your friend has, Lycinus! he accepts our adversaries' character of us, and gathers our doctrines from the description of people who do not know, or deliberately misrepresent them. If he were to see an athlete getting his muscles in trim by kicking high, or hitting out at empty space as though he were getting a real blow home, would he (in the capacity of umpire) at once proclaim him victor, because he could not help winning? No; _he would reflect that these displays are easy and safe, when there is no defense to be reckoned with, and that the real decision must wait till he has beaten and mastered his opponent, and the latter 'has had enough'. Well then, do not let Hermotimus suppose from his teachers' sparrings with our shadows (for we are not there) that they have the victory, or that our doctrines are so easily upset; tell him the business is too like the sand houses which children, having built them weak, have no difficulty in overturning, or, to change the figure, like people practicing archery; they make a straw target, hang it to a post, plant it a little way off, and then let fly at it; if

they hit and get through the straw, they burst into a shout, as if it were a great triumph to have driven through the dry stuff. That is not the way the Persians take, or those Scythian tribes which use the bow. Generally, when they shoot, in the first place they are themselves mounted and in motion, and secondly, they like the mark to be moving too; it is not to be stationary, waiting for the arrival of the arrow, but passing at full speed; they can usually kill beasts, and their marksmen hit birds. If it ever happens that they want to test the actual impact on a target, they set up one of stout wood, or a shield of raw hide; piercing that, they reckon that their shafts will go through armor too. So, Lycinus, tell Hermotimus from us that his teachers fierce straw targets, and then say they have disposed of armed men; or paint up figures of us, spar at them, and, after a not surprising success, think they have beaten us. But we shall severally quote against them Achilles's words against Hector:

They dare not face the nodding of my plume.

So say all of them, one after the other.

I suspect that Plato, with his intimate knowledge of Sicily, will add an anecdote from there. Gelo of Syracuse had disagreeable breath, but did not find it out himself for a long time, no one venturing to mention such a circumstance to a tyrant. At last a foreign woman who had a connection with him dared to tell him; whereupon he went to his wife and scolded her for never having, with all her opportunities of knowing, warned him of it; she put in the defense that, as she had never been familiar or at close quarters with any other man, she had supposed all men were like that. So Hermotinus (Plato will say) after his exclusive association with Stoics, cannot be expected to know the savor of other people's mouths. Chrysippus, on the other hand, might say as much or more if I were to put him out of court and betake myself to Platonism, in reliance upon some one who had conversed with Plato alone. And in a word, as long as it is uncertain which is the true philosophic school, I choose none; choice of one is insult to the rest.

Hermotimus. For Heaven's sake, Lycinus, let us leave Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the rest of them alone; to argue with them is not for me. Why not just hold a private inquiry, you and I, whether philosophy is what I say it is? As for the Ethiopians and Gelo's wife, what a long way you have brought them on none of their business!

Lycinus. Away with them, then, if you find their company superfluous. And now do you proceed; my expectations are high.

Hermotimus. Well, it seems to me perfectly possible, Lycinus, after studying the Stoic doctrines alone, to get at the truth from them, without going through a course of all the others too. Look at it this way: if any one tells you simply, Twice two is four, need you go round all the mathematicians to find out whether there is one who makes it five, or seven; or would you know at once that the man was right?

Lycinus. Certainly I should.

Hermotimus. Then why should you think it impossible for a man who finds, without going further, that the Stoics make true statements, to believe them and dispense with further witness? He knows that four can never be five, though ten thousand Platos or Pythagorases said it was.

Lycinus. Not to the point. You compare accepted with disputed facts, whereas they are completely different. Tell me, did you ever meet a man who said twice two was seven or eleven?

Hermotimus. Not I; any one who did not make four of it must be mad.

Lycinus. But on the other hand—try to tell the truth, I adjure you—, did you ever meet a Stoic and an Epicurean who did not differ about principles or ends?

Hermotimus. No.

Lycinus. You are an honest man; now ask yourself whether you are trapping a friend with false logic. We are trying to find out with whom philosophic truth lies; and you beg the question and make a present of that same truth to the Stoics; for you say (what is quite unproved) that they are the people who make twice two four; the Epicureans or Platonists would say that they bring out that result, whereas you get five or seven. Does it not amount to that, when your school reckon goodness the only end, and the Epicureans pleasure? or again when you say everything is material, and Plato recognizes an immaterial element also in all that exists? As I said, you lay hold of the thing in dispute, as though it were the admitted property of the Stoics, and put it into their hands, though the others claim it and maintain that it is theirs; why, it is the very point at issue. If it is once established that Stoics have the monopoly of making four out of twice two, it is time for the rest to hold their tongues; but as long as they refuse to yield that point, we must hear all alike, or be prepared for people's calling us partial judges.

Hermotimus. It seems to me, Lycinus, you do not understand what I mean.

Lycinus. Very well, put it plainer, if it is something different from that.

Hermotimus. You will see in a minute. Let us suppose two people have gone into the temple of Asclepius or Dionysus, and subsequently one of the sacred cups is missing. Both of them will have to be searched, to see which has it about him.

Lycinus. Clearly.

Hermotimus. Of course one of them has it.

Lycinus. Necessarily, if it is missing.

Hermotimus. Then, if you find it on the first, you will not strip the other; it is clear he has not got it.

Lycinus. Quite.

Hermotimus. And if we fail to find it on the first, the other certainly has it; it is unnecessary to search him that way either.

Lycinus. Yes, he has it.

Hermotimus. So with us; if we find the cup in the possession of the Stoics, we shall not care to go on and search the others; we have what we were looking for; why trouble further?

Lycinus. There is no why, if you really find it, and can be certain it is the missing article, the sacred object being unmistakable. But there are some differences in this case, friend, the temple-visitors are not two, so that if one has not got the booty the other has, but many; and the identity of the missing object is also uncertain; it may be cup, or bowl, or garland; every priest gives a different description of it; they do not agree even about the material; bronze, say these, silver, say those—anything from gold to tin. So there is nothing for it but to strip the visitors, if you want to find it; even if you discover a gold cup on the first man, you must go on to the others.

Hermotimus. What for?

Lycinus. Because it is not certain that the thing was a cup. And even if that is generally admitted, they do not all agree that it was gold; and if it is well known that a gold cup is missing, and you find a gold cup on your first man, even so you are not quit of searching the others; it is not clear that this is the sacred cup; do you suppose there is only one gold cup in the world?

Hermotimus. No, indeed.

Lycinus. So you will have to go the round, and then collect all your finds together and decide which of them is most likely to be divine property.

For the source of all the difficulty is this: every one who is stripped has something or other on him, one a bowl, one a cup, one a garland, which again may be bronze, gold, or silver; but whether the one he has is the sacred one, is not yet clear. It is absolutely impossible to know which man to accuse of sacrilege; even if all the objects were similar, it would be uncertain who had robbed the God; for such things may be private property too. Our perplexity, of course, is simply due to the fact that the missing cup—assume it to be a cup—has no inscription; if either the God's or the donor's name had been on it, we should not have had all this trouble; when we found the inscribed one, we should have stopped stripping and inconveniencing other visitors. I suppose, Hermotimus, you have often been at athletic meetings?

Hermotimus. You suppose right; and in many places too.

Lycinus. Did you ever have a seat close by the judges?

Hermotimus. Dear me, yes; last Olympia, I was on the left of the stewards; Euandridas of Elis had got me a place in the Elean enclosure; I particularly wanted to have a near view of how things are done there.

Lycinus. So you know how they arrange ties for the wrestling or the pancratium?

Hermotimus. Yes.

Lycinus. Then you will describe it better than I, as you have seen it so close.

Hermotimus. In old days, when Heracles presided, bay leaves—

Lycinus. No old days, thank you; tell me what you saw with your own eyes.

Hermotimus. A consecrated silver urn is produced, and into it are thrown little lots about the size of a bean, with letters on them. Two are marked alpha, two beta, two more gamma, and so on, if the competitors run to more than that—two lots always to each letter. A competitor comes up, makes a prayer to Zeus, dips his hand into the urn, and pulls out one lot; then another does the same; there is a policeman to each drawer, who holds his hand so that he cannot see what letter he has drawn. When all have drawn, the chief police officer, I think it is, or one of the stewards themselves—I cannot quite remember this detail—, goes round and examines the lots while they stand in a circle, and puts together the two alphas for the wrestling or pancratium, and so for the two betas, and the rest. That is the procedure when the number of competitors is even, as eight, four, or twelve. If it is five, seven, nine, or other odd number, an odd letter is marked on one lot, which is put in with the others, not having a duplicate. Whoever draws this is a bye, and waits till the rest have finished their ties; no duplicate turns up for him, you see; and it is a considerable advantage to an athlete, to know that he will come fresh against tired competitors.

Lycinus. Stop there; that is just what I wanted. There are nine of them, we will say, and they have all drawn, and the lots are in their hands. You go round—for I promote you from spectator to steward—examining the letters; and I suppose you will not know who is the bye till you have been to them all and paired them.

Hermotimus. How do you mean?

Lycinus. It is impossible for you to hit straight upon the letter which indicates the bye; at least, you may hit upon the letter, but you will not know about the bye; it was not announced beforehand that kappa or mu or iota had the appointment in its gift; when you find alpha, you look for the holder of the other alpha, whom finding, you pair the two. Again finding beta, you inquire into the whereabouts of the second beta which matches it; and so all through, till there is no one left but the holder of the single unpaired letter.

Hermotimus. But suppose you come upon it first or second, what will you do then?

Lycinus. Never mind me; I want to know what you will do, Mr. Steward. Will you say at once, Here is the bye? or will you have to go round to all, and see whether there is a duplicate to be found, it being impossible to know the bye till you have seen all the lots?

Hermotimus. Why, Lycinus, I shall know quite easily; nine being the number, if I find the epsilon first or second, I know the holder of it for the bye.

Lycinus. But how?

Hermotimus. How? Why, two of them must have alpha, two beta, and of the next two pairs one has certainly drawn gammas and the other deltas, so that four letters have been used up over eight competitors. Obviously, then, the next letter, which is epsilon, is the only one that can be odd, and the drawer of it is the bye.

Lycinus. Shall I extol your intelligence, or would you rather I explained to you my own poor idea, which differs?

Hermotimus. The latter, of course, though I cannot conceive how you can reasonably differ.

Lycinus. You have gone on the assumption that the letters are taken in alphabetical order, until at a particular one the number of competitors runs short; and I grant you it may be done so at Olympia. But suppose we were to pick out five letters at random, say chi, sigma, zeta, kappa, theta, and duplicate the other four on the lots for eight competitors, but put a single zeta on the ninth, which we meant to indicate the bye—what then would you do if you came on the zeta first? How can you tell that its holder is the bye till you have been all round and found no counterpart to it? for you could not tell by the alphabetical order, as at Olympia.

Hermotimus. A difficult question.

Lycinus. Look at the same thing another way. Suppose we put no letters at all on the lots, but, instead of them, signs and marks such as the Egyptians use for letters, men with dogs' or lions' heads. Or no, those are rather too strange; let us avoid hybrids, and put down simple forms, as well as our draftsmanship will allow—men on two lots, horses on two, a pair of cocks, a pair of dogs, and let a lion be the mark of the ninth. Now, if you hit upon the lion at the first try, how can you tell that this is the bye-maker, until you have gone all round and seen whether any one else has a lion to match?

Hermotimus. Your question is too much for me.

Lycinus. No wonder; there is no plausible answer. Consequently if we mean to find either the man who has the sacred cup, or the bye, or our best guide to the famous city of Corinth, we must absolutely go to and examine them all, trying them carefully, stripping and comparing them; the truth will be hard enough to find, even so. If I am to take any one's advice upon the right philosophy to choose, I insist upon his knowing what they all say; every one else I disqualify; I will not trust him while there is one philosophy he is unacquainted with; that one may possibly be the best of all. If some one were to produce a handsome man, and state that he was the handsomest of mankind, we should not accept that, unless we knew he had seen all men; very likely his man is handsome, but whether the handsomest, he has no means of knowing without seeing all. Now we are looking not simply for beauty, but for the greatest beauty, and if we miss that, we shall account ourselves no further than we were; we shall not be content with chancing upon some sort of beauty; we are in search of a definite thing, the supreme beauty, which must necessarily be one.

Hermotimus. True.

Lycinus. Well then, can you name me a man who has tried every road in philosophy? one who, knowing the doctrine of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Chrysippus, Epicurus, and the rest, has ended by selecting one out of all these roads, because he has proved it genuine, and had found it by experience to be the only one that led straight to Happiness? If we can meet with such a man, we are at the end of our troubles.

Hermotimus. Alas, that is no easy matter.

Lycinus. What shall we do, then? I do not think we ought to despair, in the momentary absence of such a guide. Perhaps the best and safest plan of all is to set to work oneself, go through every system, and carefully examine the various doctrines.

Hermotimus. That is what seems to be indicated. I am afraid, though, there is an obstacle in what you said just now: it is not easy, when you have committed yourself with a spread of canvas to the wind, to get home again. How can a man try all the roads, when, as you said, he will be unable to escape from the first of them?

Lycinus. My notion is to copy Theseus, get dame Ariadne to give us a skein, and go into one labyrinth after another, with the certainty of getting out by winding it up.

Hermotimus. Who is to be our Ariadne? Where shall we find the skein?

Lycinus. Never despair; I fancy I have found something to hold on to and escape.

Hermotimus. And what is that?

Lycinus. It is not original; I borrow it from one of the wise men: 'Be sober and doubt all things,' says he. If we do not believe everything we are told, but behave like jurymen who suspend judgment till they have heard the other side, we may have no difficulty in getting out of the labyrinths.

Hermotimus. A good plan; let us try it.

Lycinus. Very well, which shall we start with? However, that will make no difference; we may begin with whomsoever we fancy, Pythagoras, say; how long shall we allow for learning the whole of Pythagoreanism? and do not omit the five years of silence; including those, I suppose thirty altogether will do; or, if you do not like that, still we cannot put it lower than twenty.

Hermotimus. Put it at that.

Lycinus. Plato will come next with as many more, and then Aristotle cannot do with less.

Hermotimus. No.

Lycinus. As to Chrysippus, I need not ask you; you have told me already that forty is barely enough.

Hermotimus. That is so.

Lycinus. And we have still Epicurus and the others. I am not taking high figures, either, as you will see if you reflect upon the number of octogenarian Stoics, Epicureans, and Platonists who confess that they have not yet completely mastered their own systems. Or, if they did not confess it, at any rate Chrysippus, Aristotle, and Plato would for them; still more Socrates, who is as good as they; he used to proclaim to all comers that, so far from knowing all, he

knew nothing whatever, except the one fact of his own ignorance. Well, let us add up. Twenty years we gave Pythagoras, the same to Plato, and so to the others. What will the total come to, if we assume only ten schools?

Hermotimus. Over two hundred years.

Lycinus. Shall we deduct a quarter of that, and say a hundred and fifty will do? or can we halve it?

Hermotimus. You must decide about that; but I see that, at the best, it will be but few who will get through the course, though they begin philosophy and life together.

Lycinus. In that case, what are we to do? Must we withdraw our previous admission, that no one can choose the best out of many without trying all? We thought selection without experiment a method of inquiry savoring more of divination than of judgment, did we not?

Hermotimus. Yes.

Lycinus. Without such longevity, then, it is absolutely impossible for us to complete the series—experiment, selection, philosophy, Happiness. Yet anything short of that is a mere game of blindman's-buff; whatever we knock against and get hold of we shall be taking for the thing we want, because the truth is hidden from us. Even if a mere piece of luck brings us straight to it, we shall have no grounded conviction of our success; there are so many similar objects, all claiming to be the real thing.

Hermotimus. Ah, Lycinus, your arguments seem to me more or less logical, but—but—to be frank with you—I hate to hear you going through them and wasting your acuteness. I suspect it was in an evil hour that I came out to-day and met you; my hopes were almost in my grasp; and now here are you plunging me into a slough of despond with your demonstrations; truth is undiscoverable, if the search needs so many years.

Lycinus. My dear friend, it would be much fairer to blame your parents, Menecrates and whatever your mother's name may have been—or indeed to go still further back to human nature. Why did not they make you a Tithonus for years and durability? instead of which, they limited you like other men to a century at the outside. As for me, I have only been helping you to deduce results.

Hermotimus. No, no; it is just your way; you want to crow over me; you detest philosophy—I cannot tell why—and poke fun at philosophers.

Lycinus. Hermotimus, I cannot show what truth is, so well as wise people like you and your professor; but one thing I do know about it, and that is that it is not pleasant to the ear; falsehood is far more esteemed; it is prettier, and therefore pleasanter; while Truth, conscious of its purity, blurts out downright remarks, and offends people. Here is a case of it: even you are offended with me for having discovered (with your assistance) how this matter really stands, and shown that our common object is hard of attainment. Suppose you had been in love with a statue and hoped to win it, under the impression that it was human, and I had realized that it was only bronze or marble, and given you a friendly warning that your passion was hopeless—you might just as well have thought I was your enemy then, because I would not leave you a prey to extravagant and impracticable delusions.

Hermotimus. Well, well; are we to give up philosophy, then, and idle our lives away like the common herd?

Lycinus. What have I said to justify that? My point is not that we are to give up philosophy, but this: whereas we are to pursue philosophy, and whereas there are many roads, each professing to lead to philosophy and Virtue, and whereas it is uncertain which of these is the true road, therefore the selection shall be made with care. Now we resolved that it was impossible out of many offers to choose the best, unless a man should try all in turn; and then the process of trial was found to be long. What do you propose?—It is the old question again. To follow and join philosophic forces with whomsoever you first fall in with, and let him thank Fortune for his proselyte?

Hermotimus. What is the good of answering your questions? You say no one can judge for himself, unless he can devote the life of a phoenix to going round experimenting; and on the other hand you refuse to trust either previous experience or the multitude of favorable testimony.

Lycinus. Where is your multitude, with knowledge and experience of all? Never mind the multitude; one man who answers the description will do for me. But if you mean the people who do not know, their mere numbers will never persuade me, as long as they pronounce upon all from knowledge of, at the most, one.

Hermotimus. Are you the only man who has found the truth, and are all the people who go in for philosophy fools?

Lycinus. You wrong me, Hermotimus, when you imply that I put myself above other people, or rank myself at all with those who know; you forget what I said; I never claimed to know the truth better than others, only confessed that I was as ignorant of it as every one else.

Hermotimus. Well, but, Lycinus, it may be all very well to insist on going the round, testing the various statements, and eschewing any other method of choice; but it is ridiculous to spend so many years on each experiment, as though there were no such thing as judging from samples. That device seems to me quite simple, and economical of time. There is a story that some sculptor, Phidias, I think, seeing a single claw, calculated from it the size of the lion, if it were modeled proportionally. So, if some one were to let you see a man's hand, keeping the rest of his body concealed, you would know at once that what was behind was a man, without seeing his whole body. Well, it is easy to find out in a few hours the essential points of the various doctrines, and, for selecting the best, these will suffice, without any of your scrupulous exacting investigation.

Lycinus. Upon my word, how confident you are in your faculty of divining the whole from the parts! And yet I remember being told just the opposite—that knowledge of the whole includes that of the parts, but not vice versa. Well, but tell me; when Phidias saw the claw, would he ever have known it for a lion's, if he had never seen a lion? Could you have said the hand was a man's, if you had never known or seen a man? Why are you dumb? Let me make the only possible answer for you—that you could not; I am afraid Phidias has modeled his lion all for nothing; for it proves to be neither here nor there. What resemblance is there? What enabled you and Phidias to recognize the parts was just your knowledge of the wholes—the lion and the man. But in philosophy—the Stoic, for instance—how will the part reveal the other parts to you, or how can you conclude that they are beautiful? You do not know the whole to which the parts belong.

Then you say it is easy to hear in a few hours the essentials of all philosophy—meaning, I suppose, their principles and ends, their accounts of God and the soul, their views on the material and the immaterial, their respective identification of pleasure or goodness with the desirable and the Happy; well, it is easy—it is quite a trifle—to deliver an opinion after such a hearing; but really to know where the truth lies will be work, I suspect, not for a few hours, but for a good many days. If not, what can have induced them to enlarge on these rudiments to the tune of a hundred or a thousand volumes apiece? I imagine they only wanted to establish the truth of those few points which you thought so easy and intelligible. If you refuse to spend your time on a conscientious selection, after personal examination of each and all, in sum and in detail, it seems to me you will still want your soothsayer to choose the best for you. It would be a fine short cut, with no meanderings or wastings of time, if you sent for him, listened to the summaries, and killed a victim at the end of each; by indicating in its liver which is the philosophy for you, the God would save you a pack of troubles.

Or, if you like, I can suggest a still simpler way; you need not shed all this blood in sacrifice to any God, nor employ an expensive priest; put into an urn a set of tablets, each marked with a philosopher's name, and tell a boy (he must be quite young, and his parents both be living) to go to the urn and pick out whichever tablet his hand first touches; and live a philosopher ever after, of the school which then comes out triumphant.

Hermotimus. This is buffoonery, Lycinus; I should not have expected it of you. Now tell me, did you ever buy wine? in person, I mean.

Lycinus. Many a time.

Hermotimus. Well, did you go to every wine vault in town, one after another, tasting and comparing?

Lycinus. Certainly not.

Hermotimus. No; as soon as you find good sound stuff, you have only to get it sent home.

Lycinus. To be sure.

Hermotimus. And from that little taste you could have answered for the quality of the whole?

Lycinus. Yes.

Hermotimus. Now suppose you had gone to all the wine-merchants and said: I want to buy a pint of wine; I must ask you, gentlemen, to let me drink the whole of the cask which each of you has on tap; after that exhaustive sampling, I shall know which of you keeps the best wine, and is the man for my money. If you had talked like that, they might have laughed at you, and, if you persisted in worrying them, have tried how you liked water.

Lycinus. Yes; it would be no more than my deserts.

Hermotimus. Apply this to philosophy. What need to drink the whole cask, when you can judge the quality of the whole from one little taste?

Lycinus. What an adept at evasion you are, Hermotimus! How you slip through one's fingers! However, it is all the better this time; you fancied yourself out, but you have flopped into the net again.

Hermotimus. What do you mean?

Lycinus. You take a thing whose nature is self-evident and universally admitted, like wine, and argue from it to perfectly unlike things, whose nature is obscure and generally debated. In fact I cannot tell what analogy you find between philosophy and wine; there is just one, indeed: philosophers and wine-merchants both sell their wares, mostly resorting to adulteration, fraud, and false measures, in the process. But let us look into your real meaning. You say all the wine in a cask is of the same quality—which is perfectly reasonable; further, that any one who draws and tastes quite a small quantity will know at once the quality of the whole—of which the same may be said; I should never have thought of objecting. But mark what comes now: do philosophy and its professors (your own, for instance) give you every day the same remarks on the same subjects, or do they vary them? They vary them a great deal, friend; you would never have stuck to your master through your twenty years' wandering—quite a philosophic Odyssey—if he had always said the same thing; one hearing would have been enough.

Hermotimus. So it would.

Lycinus. How could you have known the whole of his doctrines from the first taste, then? They were not homogeneous, like the wine; novelty to-day, and novelty to-morrow on the top of it. Consequently, dear friend, short of drinking the whole cask, you might soak to no purpose; Providence seems to me to have hidden the philosophic Good right at the bottom, underneath the lees. So you will have to drain it dry, or you will never get to that nectar for which I know you have so long thirsted. According to your idea, it has such virtue that, could you once taste it and swallow the very least drop, you would straightway have perfect wisdom; so they say the Delphian prophetess is inspired by one draught of the sacred spring with answers for those who consult the oracle. But it seems not to be so; you have drunk more than half the cask; yet you told me you were only beginning yet.

Now see whether this is not a better analogy. You shall keep your merchant, and your cask; but the contents of the latter are not to be wine, but assorted seeds. On the top is wheat, next beans, then barley, below that lentils, then peas—and other kinds yet. You go to buy seeds, and he takes some wheat out of that layer, and puts it in your hand as a sample; now, could you tell by looking at that whether the peas were Sound, the lentils tender, and the beans full?

Hermotimus. Impossible.

Lycinus. No more can you tell the quality of a philosophy from the first statements of its professor; it is not uniform, like the wine to which you compared it, claiming that it must resemble the sample glass; it is heterogeneous, and it had better not be cursorily tested. If you buy bad wine, the loss is limited to a few pence; but to rot with the common herd (in your own words) is not so light a loss. Moreover, your man who wants to drink up the cask as a preliminary to buying a pint will injure the merchant, with his dubious sampling; but philosophy knows no such danger; you may drink your fill, but this cask grows no emptier, and its owner suffers no loss. It is cut and come again here; we have the converse of the Danaids' cask; that would not hold what was put into it; it ran straight through; but here, the more you take away, the more remains.

And I have another similar remark to make about these specimen drops of philosophy. Do not fancy I am libeling it, if I say it is like hemlock, aconite, or other deadly poison. Those too, though they have death in them, will not kill if a man scrapes off the tiniest particle with the edge of his nail and tastes it; if they are not taken in the right quantity, the right manner, and the right vehicle, the taker will not die; you were wrong in claiming that the least possible quantity is enough to base a generalization on.

Hermotimus. Oh, have it your own way, Lycinus. Well then, we have got to live a hundred years, and go through all this trouble? There is no other road to philosophy?

Lycinus. No, none; and we need not complain; as you very truly said, *ars longa, vita brevis*. But I do not know what has come over you; you now make a grievance of it, if you cannot before set of sun develop into a Chrysippus, a Plato, a Pythagoras.

Hermotimus. You trap me, and drive me into a corner, Lycinus; yet I never provoked you; it is all envy, I know, because I have made some progress in my studies, whereas you have neglected yourself, when you were old enough to know better.

Lycinus. Seest, then, thy true course? never mind me, but leave me as a lunatic to my follies, and you go on your way and accomplish what you have intended all this time.

Hermotimus. But you are so masterful, you will not let me make a choice, till I have proved all.

Lycinus. Why, I confess, you will never get me to budge from that. But when you call me masterful, it seems to me you blame the blameless, as the poet says; for I am myself being dragged along by reason, until you bring up some other reason to release me from durance. And here is reason about to talk more masterfully still, you will see; but I suppose you will exonerate it, and blame me.

Hermotimus. What can it be? I am surprised to hear it still has anything in reserve.

Lycinus. It says that seeing and going through all philosophies will not suffice, if you want to choose the best of them; the most important qualification is still missing.

Hermotimus. Indeed? Which?

Lycinus. Why (bear with me), a critical investigating faculty, mental acumen, intellectual precision and independence equal to the occasion; without this, the completest inspection will be useless. Reason insists that the owner of it must further be allowed ample time; he will collect the rival candidates together, and make his choice with long, lingering, repeated deliberation; he will give no heed to the candidate's age, appearance, or repute for wisdom, but perform his functions like the Areopagites, who judge in the darkness of night, so that they must regard not the pleaders, but the pleadings. Then and not till then will you be able to make a sound choice and live a philosopher.

Hermotimus. Live? an after life, then. No mortal span will meet your demands; let me see: go the whole round, examine each with care, on that examination form a judgment, on that judgment make a choice, on that choice be a philosopher; so and no otherwise you say the truth may be found.

Lycinus. I hardly dare tell you—even that is not exhaustive; I am afraid, after all, the solid basis we thought we had found was imaginary. You know how fishermen often let down their nets, feel a weight, and pull them up expecting a great haul; when they have got them up with much toil, behold, a stone, or an old pot full of sand. I fear our catch is one of those.

Hermotimus. I don't know what this particular net may be; your nets are all round me, anyhow.

Lycinus. Well, try and get through; providentially, you are as good a swimmer as can be. Now, this is it: granted that we go all round experimenting, and get it done at last, too, I do not believe we shall have solved the elementary question, whether any of them has the much-desired; perhaps they are all wrong together.

Hermotimus. Oh, come now! not one of them right either?

Lycinus. I cannot tell. Do you think it impossible they may all be deluded, and the truth be something which none of them has yet found?

Hermotimus. How can it possibly be?

Lycinus. This way: take a correct number, twenty; suppose, I mean, a man has twenty beans in his closed hand, and asks ten different persons to guess the number; they guess seven, five, thirty, ten, fifteen—various numbers, in short. It is possible, I suppose, that one may be right?

Hermotimus. Yes.

Lycinus. It is not impossible, however, that they may all guess different incorrect numbers, and not one of them suggest twenty beans. What say you?

Hermotimus. It is not impossible.

Lycinus. In the same way, all philosophers are investigating the nature of Happiness; they get different answers one Pleasure, another Goodness, and so through the list. It is probable that Happiness is one of these; but it is also not improbable that it is something else altogether. We seem to have reversed the proper procedure, and hurried on to

the end before we had found the beginning I suppose we ought first to have ascertained that the truth has actually been discovered, and that some philosopher or other has it, and only then to have gone on to the next question, which of them is to be believed.

Hermotimus. So that, even if we go all through all philosophy, we shall have no certainty of finding the truth even then; that is what you say.

Lycinus. Please, please do not ask me; once more, apply to reason itself. Its answer will perhaps be that there can be no certainty yet—as long as we cannot be sure that it is one or other of the things they say it is.

Hermotimus. Then, according to you, we shall never finish our quest nor be philosophers, but have to give it up and live the life of laymen. What you say amounts to that: philosophy is impossible and inaccessible to a mere mortal; for you expect the aspirant first to choose the best philosophy; and you considered that the only guarantee of such choice's being correct was to go through all philosophy before choosing the truest. Then in reckoning the number of years required by each you spurned all limits, extended the thing to several generations, and made out the quest of truth too long for the individual life; and now you crown all by proving success doubtful even apart from all that; you say it is uncertain whether the philosophers have ever found truth at all.

Lycinus. Could you state on oath that they have?

Hermotimus. Not on oath, no.

Lycinus. And yet there is much that I have intentionally spared you, though it merits careful examination too.

Hermotimus. For instance?

Lycinus. Is it not said that, among the professed Stoics, Platonists, and Epicureans, some do know their respective doctrines, and some do not (without prejudice to their general respectability)?

Hermotimus. That is true.

Lycinus. Well, don't you think it will be a troublesome business to distinguish the first, and know them from the ignorant professors?

Hermotimus. Very.

Lycinus. So, if you are to recognize the best of the Stoics, you will have to go to most, if not all, of them, make trial, and appoint the best your teacher, first going through a course of training to provide you with the appropriate critical faculty; otherwise you might mistakenly prefer the wrong one. Now reflect on the additional time this will mean; I purposely left it out of account, because I was afraid you might be angry; all the same, it is the most important and necessary thing of all in questions like this—so uncertain and dubious, I mean. For the discovery of truth, your one and only sure or well-founded hope is the possession of this power: you must be able to judge and sift truth from falsehood; you must have the assayer's sense for sound and true or forged coin; if you could have come to your examination of doctrines equipped with a technical skill like that, I should have nothing to say; but without it there is nothing to prevent their severally leading you by the nose; you will follow a dangled bunch of carrots like a donkey; or, better still, you will be water spilt on a table, trained whichever way one chooses with a finger-tip; or again, a reed growing on a river's bank, bending to every breath, however gentle the breeze that shakes it in its passage.

If you could find a teacher, now, who understood demonstration and controversial method, and would impart his knowledge to you, you would be quit of your troubles; the best and the true would straightway be revealed to you, at the bidding of this art of demonstration, while falsehood would stand convicted; you would make your choice with confidence; judgment would be followed by philosophy; you would reach your long-desired Happiness, and live in its company, which sums up all good things.

Hermotimus. Thank you, Lycinus; that is a much better hearing; there is more than a glimpse of hope in that. We must surely look for a man of that sort, to give us discernment, judgment, and, above all, the power of demonstration; then all will be easy and clear, and not too long. I am grateful to you already for thinking of this short and excellent plan.

Lycinus. Ah, no, I cannot fairly claim gratitude yet. I have not discovered or revealed anything that will bring you nearer your hope; on the contrary, we are further off than ever; it is a case of much cry and little wool.

Hermotimus. Bird of ill omen, pessimist, explain yourself.

Lycinus. Why, my friend, even if we find some one who claims to know this art of demonstration, and is willing to impart it, we shall surely not take his word for it straight off; we shall look about for another man to resolve us whether the first is telling the truth. Finding number two, we shall still be uncertain whether our guarantor really knows the difference between a good judge and a bad, and shall need a number three to guarantee number two; for how can we possibly know ourselves how to select the best judge? You see how far this must go; the thing is unending; its nature does not allow us to draw the line and put a stop to it; for you will observe that all the demonstrations that can possibly be thought of are themselves unfounded and open to dispute; most of them struggle to establish their certainty by appealing to facts as questionable as themselves; and the rest produce certain truisms with which they compare, quite illegitimately, the most speculative theories, and then say they have demonstrated the latter: our eyes tell us there are altars to the Gods; therefore there must be Gods; that is the sort of thing.

Hermotimus. How unkindly you treat me, Lycinus, turning my treasure into ashes; I suppose all these years are to have been lost labor.

Lycinus. At least your chagrin will be considerably lessened by the thought that you are not alone in your disappointment; practically all who pursue philosophy do no more than disquiet themselves in vain. Who could conceivably go through all the stages I have rehearsed? you admit the impossibility yourself. As to your present mood, it is that of the man who cries and curses his luck because he cannot climb the sky, or plunge into the depths of the sea at Sicily and come up at Cyprus, or soar on wings and fly within the day from Greece to India; what is responsible for his discontent is his basing of hopes on a dream-vision or his own wild fancy, without ever asking whether his aspirations were realizable or consistent with humanity. You too, my friend, have been having a long and marvelous dream; and now reason has stuck a pin into you and startled you out of your sleep; your eyes are only half open yet, you are reluctant to shake off a sleep which has shown you such fair visions, and so you scold. It is just the condition of the day-dreamer; he is rolling in gold, digging up treasure, sitting on his throne, or somehow at the summit of bliss; for dame How-I-wish is a lavish facile Goddess, that will never turn a deaf ear to her votary, though he have a mind to fly, or change statures with Colossus, or strike a gold-reef; well, in the middle of all this, in comes his servant with some every-day question, wanting to know where he is to get bread, or what he shall say to the landlord, tired of waiting for his rent; and then he flies into a temper, as though the intrusive questioner had robbed him of all his bliss, and is ready to bite the poor fellow's nose off.

As you love me, do not treat me like that. I see you digging up treasure, spreading your wings, nursing extravagant ideas, indulging impossible hopes; and I love you too well to leave you to the company of a life-long dream—a pleasant one, if you will, but yet a dream; I beseech you to get up and take to some every-day business, such as may direct the rest of your life's course by common sense. Your acts and your thoughts up to now have been no more than Centaurs, Chimeras, Gorgons, or what else is figured by dreams and poets and painters, chartered libertines all, who reek not of what has been or may be. Yet the common folk believe them, bewitched by tale and picture just because they are strange and monstrous.

I fancy you hearing from some teller of tales how there is a certain lady of perfect beauty, beyond the Graces themselves or the Heavenly Aphrodite, and then, without ever an inquiry whether his tale is true, and such a person to be found on earth, falling straight in love with her, like Medea in the story enamored of a dream-Jason. And what most drew you on to love, you and the others who worship the same phantom, was, if I am not mistaken, the consistent way in which the inventor of the lady added to his picture, when once he had got your ear. That was the only thing you all looked to, with that he turned you about as he would, having got his first hold upon you, averring that he was leading you the straight way to your beloved. After the first step, you see, all was easy; none of you ever looked round when he came to the entrance, and inquired whether it was the right one, or whether he had accidentally taken the wrong; no, you all followed in your predecessors' footsteps, like sheep after the bell-wether, whereas the right thing was to decide at the entrance whether you should go in.

Perhaps an illustration will make my meaning clearer: when one of those audacious poets affirms that there was once a three-headed and six-handed man, if you accept that quietly without questioning its possibility, he will proceed to fill in the picture consistently—six eyes and ears, three voices talking at once, three mouths eating, and thirty fingers instead of our poor ten all told; if he has to fight, three of his hands will have a buckler, wicker targe, or shield apiece, while of the other three one swings an axe, another hurls a spear, and the third wields a sword. It is too late to carp at these details, when they come; they are consistent with the beginning; it was about that that the question ought to have been raised whether it was to be accepted and passed as true. Once grant that, and the rest comes flooding in, irresistible, hardly now susceptible of doubt, because it is consistent and accordant with your initial admissions. That is just your case; your love-yearning would not allow you to look into the facts at each

entrance, and so you are dragged on by consistency; it never occurs to you that a thing may be self-consistent and yet false; if a man says twice five is seven, and you take his word for it without checking the sum, he will naturally deduce that four times five is fourteen, and so on ad libitum. This is the way that weird geometry proceeds: it sets before beginners certain strange assumptions, and insists on their granting the existence of inconceivable things, such as points having no parts, lines without breadth, and so on, builds on these rotten foundations a superstructure equally rotten, and pretends to go on to a demonstration which is true, though it starts from premisses which are false.

Just so you, when you have granted the principles of any school, believe in the deductions from them, and take their consistency, false as it is, for a guarantee of truth. Then with some of you, hope travels through, and you die before you have seen the truth and detected your deceivers, while the rest, disillusioned too late, will not turn back for shame: what, confess at their years that they have been abused with toys all this time? so they hold on desperately, putting the best face upon it and making all the converts they can, to have the consolation of good company in their deception; they are well aware that to speak out is to sacrifice the respect and superiority and honor they are accustomed to; so they will not do it if it may be helped, knowing the height from which they will fall to the common level. Just a few are found with the courage to say they were deluded, and warn other aspirants. Meeting such a one, call him a good man, a true and an honest; nay, call him philosopher, if you will; to my mind, the name is his or no one's; the rest either have no knowledge of the truth, though they think they have, or else have knowledge and hide it, shamefaced cowards clinging to reputation.

But now for goodness' sake let us drop all this, cover it up with an amnesty, and let it be as if it had not been said; let us, assume that the Stoic philosophy, and no other, is correct; then we can examine whether it is practicable and possible, or its disciples wasting their pains; it makes wonderful promises, I am told, about the Happiness in store for those who reach the summit; for none but they shall enter into full possession of the true Good. The next point you must help me with—whether you have ever met such a Stoic, such a pattern of Stoicism, as to be unconscious of pain, untempted by pleasure, free from wrath, superior to envy, contemptuous of wealth, and, in one word, Happy; such should the example and model of the Virtuous life be; for any one who falls short in the slightest degree, even though he is better than other men at all points, is not complete, and in that case not yet Happy.

Hermotimus. I never saw such a man.

Lycinus. I am glad you do not palter with the truth. But what are your hopes in pursuing philosophy, then? You see that neither your own teacher, nor his, nor his again, and so on to the tenth generation, has been absolutely wise and so attained Happiness. It will not serve you to say that it is enough to get near Happiness; that is no good; a person on the doorstep is just as much outside and in the air as another a long way off, though with the difference that the former is tantalized by a nearer view. So it is to get into the neighborhood of Happiness—I will grant you so much—that you toil like this, wearing yourself away, letting this great portion of your life slip from you, while you are sunk in dullness and wakeful weariness; and you are to go on with it for twenty more years at the least, you tell me, to take your place when you are eighty—always assuming some one to assure you that length of days—in the ranks of the not yet Happy. Or perhaps you reckon on being the exception; you are to crown your pursuit by attaining what many a good man before you, swifter far, has pursued and never overtaken.

Well, overtake it, if that is your plan, grasp it and have it whole, this something, mysterious to me, of which the possession is sufficient reward for such toils; this something which I wonder how long you will have the enjoyment of, old man that you will be, past all pleasure, with one foot in the grave; ah, but perhaps, like a brave soul, you are getting ready for another life, that you may spend it the better when you come to it, having learned how to live: as though one should take so long preparing and elaborating a superlative dinner that he fainted with hunger and exhaustion!

However, there is another thing I do not think you have observed: Virtue is manifested, of course, in action, in doing what is just and wise and manly; but you—and when I say you, I mean the most advanced philosophers—you do not seek these things and ensue them, but spend the greater part of your life conning over miserable sentences and demonstrations and problems; it is the man who does best at these that you hail a glorious victor. And I believe that is why you admire this experienced old professor of yours: he nonplusses his associates, knows how to put crafty questions and inveigle you into pitfalls; so you pay no attention to the fruit—which consists in action—but are extremely busy with the husks, and smother each other with the leaves in your debates; come now, Hermotimus, what else are you about from morning to night?

Hermotimus. Nothing; that is what it comes to.

Lycinus. Is it wronging you to say that you hunt the shadow or the snake's dead slough, and neglect the solid body or the creeping thing itself? You are no better than a man pouring water into a mortar and braying it with an iron pestle; he thinks he is doing a necessary useful job, whereas, let him bray till all's blue (excuse the slang), the water is as much water as ever it was.

And here let me ask you whether, putting aside his discourse, you would choose to resemble your master, and be as passionate, as sordid, as quarrelsome, ay, and as addicted to pleasure (though that trait of his is not generally known). Why no answer, Hermotimus? Shall I tell you a plea for philosophy which I lately heard? It was from the mouth of an old, old man, who has quite a company of young disciples. He was angrily demanding his fees from one of these; they were long overdue, he said; the day stated in the agreement was the first of the month, and it was now the fifteenth.

The youth's uncle was there, a rustic person without any notion of your refinements; and by way of stilling the storm:

Come, come, sir, says he, you need not make such a fuss because we have bought words of you and not yet settled the bill. As to what you have sold us, you have got it still; your stock of learning is none the less; and in what I really sent the boy to you for, you have not improved him a bit; he has carried off and seduced neighbor Echebrates's daughter, and there would have been an action for assault, only Echebrates is a poor man; but the prank cost me a couple of hundred. And the other day he struck his mother; she had tried to stop him when he was smuggling wine out of the house, for one of his club-dinners, I suppose. As to temper and conceit and impudence and brass and lying, he was not half so bad twelve months ago as he is now. That is where I should have liked him to profit by your teaching; and we could have done, without his knowing the stuff he reels of at table every day: 'a crocodile seized hold of a baby,' says he, 'and promised to give it back if its father could answer'—the Lord knows what; or how, 'day being, night cannot be'; and sometimes his worship twists round what we say somehow or other, till there we are with horns on our heads! We just laugh at it—most of all when he stuffs up his ears and repeats to himself what he calls temperaments and conditions and conceptions and impressions, and a lot more like that. And he tells us God is not in heaven, but goes about in everything, wood and stone and animals—the meanest of them, too; and if his mother asks him why he talks such stuff, he laughs at her and says if once he gets the 'stuff' pat off, there will be nothing to prevent him from being the only rich man, the only king, and counting every one else slaves and offscourings.

When he had finished, mark the reverend philosopher's answer:

You should consider, he said, that if he had never come to me, he would have behaved far worse—very possibly have come to the gallows. As it is, philosophy and the respect he has for it have been a check upon him, so that you find he keeps within bounds and is not quite unbearable; the philosophic system and name tutor him with their presence, and the thought of disgracing them shames him. I should be quite justified in taking your money, if not for any positive improvement I have effected, yet for the abstentions due to his respect for philosophy; the very nurses will tell you as much: children should go to school, because, even if they are not old enough to learn, they will at least be out of mischief there. My conscience is quite easy about him; if you like to select any of your friends who is acquainted with Stoicism and bring him here to-morrow, you shall see how the boy can question and answer, how much he has learnt, how many books he has read on axioms, syllogisms, conceptions, duty, and all sorts of subjects. As for his hitting his mother or seducing girls, what have I to do with that? Am I his keeper?

A dignified defense of philosophy for an old man! Perhaps you will say too that it is a good enough reason for pursuing it, if it will keep us from worse employments. Were our original expectations from philosophy at all of a different nature, by the way? did they contemplate anything beyond a more decent behavior than the average? Why this obstinate silence?

Hermotimus. Oh, why but that I could cry like a baby? It cuts me to the heart, it is all so true; it is too much for me, when I think of my wretched, wasted years—paying all that money for my own labor, too! I am sober again after a debauch, I see what the object of my maudlin affection is like, and what it has brought upon me.

Lycinus. No need for tears, dear fellow; that is a very sensible fable of Aesop's. A man sat on the shore and counted the waves breaking; missing count, he was excessively annoyed. But the fox came up and said to him: 'Why vex yourself, good sir, over the past ones? you should let them go, and begin counting afresh.' So you, since this is your mind, had better reconcile yourself now to living like an ordinary man; you will give up your extravagant haughty

hopes and put yourself on a level with the commonalty; if you are sensible, you will not be ashamed to unlearn in your old age, and change your course for a better.

Now I beg you not to fancy that I have said all this as an anti-Stoic, moved by any special dislike of your school; my arguments hold against all schools. I should have said just the same if you had chosen Plato or Aristotle, and condemned the others unheard. But, as Stoicism was your choice, the argument has seemed to be aimed at that, though it had no such special application.

Hermotimus. You are quite right. And now I will be off to metamorphose myself. When we next meet, there will be no long, shaggy beard, no artificial composure; I shall be natural, as a gentleman should. I may go as far as a fashionable coat, by way of publishing my renunciation of nonsense. I only wish there were an emetic that would purge out every doctrine they have instilled into me; I assure you, if I could reverse Chrysippus's plan with the hellebore, and drink forgetfulness, not of the world but of Stoicism, I would not think twice about it. Well, Lycinus, I owe you a debt indeed; I was being swept along in a rough turbid torrent, unresisting, drifting with the stream; when lo, you stood there and fished me out, a true *deus ex machina*. I have good enough reason, I think, to shave my head like the people who get clear off from a wreck; for I am to make votive offerings to-day for the dispersion of that thick cloud which was over my eyes. Henceforth, if I meet a philosopher on my walks (and it will not be with my will), I shall turn aside and avoid him as I would a mad dog.



¹ It is also fruitful to compare this passage to the Defense of Epicurus delivered by Torquatus in Cicero's *De Finibus*, where a similar argument is made, and where Torquatus concluded with "*You amuse yourself by thinking that Epicurus was uneducated. The truth is that Epicurus refused to consider any education to be worthy of the name if it did not teach us the means to live happily. Was Epicurus to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, perusing the poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but only childish amusement? Was Epicurus to occupy himself like Plato, with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which are at best mere tools, and which, if they start from false premises, can never reveal truth or contribute anything to make our lives happier and therefore better? Was Epicurus to study the limited arts such as these, and neglect the master art, so difficult but correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living? No! It was not Epicurus who was uninformed. The truly uneducated are those who ask us to go on studying until old age the subjects that we ought to be ashamed not to have learned when we were children!*"

² *Belinus*, per Harmon.