

Post-Philippi Troubles in The Ancient Epicurean World

Post by "Cassius" of December 15, 2022 at 6:28 PM

Shamelessly cutting and pasting a post that Joshua just made, here is his quote from the fallen Horace:

"Once I wandered, an expert in crazy wisdom, a scant and infrequent adorer of gods, now I'm forced to set sail and return, to go back to the paths I abandoned. For Jupiter, Father of all of the gods, who generally splits the clouds with his lightning, flashing away, drove thundering horses, and his swift chariot, through the clear sky, till the dull earth, and the wandering rivers, and Styx, and dread Taenarus' hateful headland, and Atlas's mountain-summits shook. The god has the power to replace the highest with the lowest, bring down the famous, and raise the obscure to the heights. And greedy Fortune with her shrill whirring, carries away the crown and delights in setting it, there."

--Horace, Ode 1.34, Translated by A. S. Kline

This, this it is, O Memmius, to see through
The very nature of fire-fraught thunderbolt;
O this it is to mark by what blind force
It maketh each effect, and not, O not
To unwind Etrurian scrolls oracular,
Inquiring tokens of occult will of gods,
Even as to whence the flying flame hath come,
Or to which half of heaven it turns, or how
Through walled places it hath wound its way,
Or, after proving its dominion there,
How it hath speeded forth from thence amain,
Or what the thunderstroke portends of ill
From out high heaven. But if Jupiter

And other gods shake those refulgent vaults
With dread reverberations and hurl fire
Whither it pleases each, why smite they not
Mortals of reckless and revolting crimes,
That such may pant from a transpierced breast
Forth flames of the red levin- unto men
A drastic lesson?- why is rather he-
O he self-conscious of no foul offence-
Involved in flames, though innocent, and clasped
Up-caught in skiey whirlwind and in fire?
Nay, why, then, aim they at eternal wastes,
And spend themselves in vain?- perchance, even so
To exercise their arms and strengthen shoulders?
Why suffer they the Father's javelin
To be so blunted on the earth? And why
Doth he himself allow it, nor spare the same
Even for his enemies? O why most oft
Aims he at lofty places? Why behold we
Marks of his lightnings most on mountain tops?
Then for what reason shoots he at the sea?-
What sacrilege have waves and bulk of brine
And floating fields of foam been guilty of?
Besides, if 'tis his will that we beware
Against the lightning-stroke, why feareth he
To grant us power for to behold the shot?
And, contrariwise, if wills he to o'erwhelm us,

Quite off our guard, with fire, why thunders he
Off in yon quarter, so that we may shun?
Why rouseth he beforehand darkling air
And the far din and rumblings? And O how
Canst thou believe he shoots at one same time
Into diverse directions? Or darest thou
Contend that never hath it come to pass
That divers strokes have happened at one time?
But oft and often hath it come to pass,
And often still it must, that, even as showers
And rains o'er many regions fall, so too
Dart many thunderbolts at one same time.
Again, why never hurtles Jupiter
A bolt upon the lands nor pours abroad
Clap upon clap, when skies are cloudless all?
Or, say, doth he, so soon as ever the clouds
Have come thereunder, then into the same
Descend in person, and that from thence he may
Near-by decide upon the stroke of shaft?
And, lastly, why, with devastating bolt
Shakes he asunder holy shrines of gods
And his own thrones of splendour, and to-breaks
The well-wrought idols of divinities,
And robs of glory his own images
By wound of violence?

-Lucretius Book VI, transl. William Ellery Leonard