

Lucian: The Liar

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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; Pegasuses, 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 blasphemer, 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-bridles, 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 Demylus 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 moldering 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 Pancrates, 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 Pancrates 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.