Lucian: Hermotimus, The Rival Philosophies

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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 doctor{2} spoke so truly: *ars longa, vita brevis*. And what be 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?

Hermotimus. 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?

Hermotimus. 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.

Hermotimus. 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.

Hermotimus. 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!

Hermotimus. 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.

Hermotimus. 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?

Hermotimus. 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.

Hermotimus. 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?

Hermotimus. 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?

Hermotimus. 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, Poseidon, and Hephaestus had a match in inventiveness. Poseidon 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 i*pso 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 Hermotimus (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-bluff; 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 despondence 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 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.

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, aye, 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 Echecrates's daughter, and there would have been an action for assault, only Echecrates 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.

#LucianOfSamosata