Dialogues of the Dead, by Lucian of Samosata, English translated by H. W. & F. G. Fowler

I (1). DIOGENES AND POLLUX

DIOGENES

Pollux, I have a commission for you; next time you go up—and I think it is your turn for earth to-morrow—if you come across Menippus the Cynic—you will find him about the Craneum at Corinth, or in the Lyceum, laughing at the philosophers' disputes—well, give him this message:—Menippus, Diogenes advises you, if mortal subjects for laughter begin to pall, to come down below, and find much richer material; where you are now, there is always a dash of uncertainty in it; the question will always intrude—who can be quite sure about the hereafter? Here, you can have your laugh out in security, like me; it is the best of sport to see millionaires, governors, despots, now mean and insignificant; you can only tell them by their lamentations, and the spiritless despondency which is the legacy of better days. Tell him this, and mention that he had better stuff his wallet with plenty of lupines, and any un-considered trifles he can snap up in the way of pauper doles1 or lustral eggs.2

POLLUX

I will tell him, Diogenes. But give me some idea of his appearance.

DIOGENES

Old, bald, with a cloak that allows him plenty of light and ventilation, and is patched all colours of the rainbow; always laughing, and usually gibing at pretentious philosophers.

POLLUX

Ah, I cannot mistake him now.

DIOGENES

May I give you another message to those same philosophers?

POLLUX

Oh, I don't mind; go on.

DIOGENES

Charge them generally to give up playing the fool, quarrelling over metaphysics, tricking each other with horn and crocodile puzzles and teaching people to waste wit on such absurdities.

POLLUX

Oh, but if I say anything against their wisdom, they will call me an ignorant blockhead.

DIOGENES

Then tell them from me to go to the devil.

POLLUX
Very well; rely upon me.

DIOGENES
And then, my most obliging of Polluxes, there is this for the rich:—O vain fools, why hoard gold? why all these pains over interest sums and the adding of hundred to hundred, when you must shortly come to us with nothing beyond the dead-penny?

POLLUX
They shall have their message too.

DIOGENES
Ah, and a word to the handsome and strong; Megillus of Corinth, and Damoxenus the wrestler will do. Inform them that auburn locks, eyes bright or black, rosy cheeks, are as little in fashion here as tense muscles or mighty shoulders; man and man are as like as two peas, tell them, when it comes to bare skull and no beauty.

POLLUX
That is to the handsome and strong; yes, I can manage that.

DIOGENES
Yes, my Spartan, and here is for the poor. There are a great many of them, very sorry for themselves and resentful of their helplessness. Tell them to dry their tears and cease their cries; explain to them that here one man is as good as another, and they will find those who were rich on earth no better than themselves. As for your Spartans, you will not mind scolding them, from me, upon their present degeneracy?

POLLUX
No, no, Diogenes; leave Sparta alone; that is going too far; your other commissions I will execute.

DIOGENES
Oh, well, let them off, if you care about it; but tell all the others what I said.

1. In the Greek, "a Hecate's repast lying at a street corner." "Rich men used to make offerings to Hecate on the 30th of every month as Goddess of roads at street corners; and these offerings were at once pounced upon by the poor, or, as here, the Cynics." Jacobitz.
2. "Eggs were often used as purificatory offerings and set out in front of the house purified." Id.

2 (22). CHARON AND MENIPPUS

CHARON

Your fare, you rascal.

MENIPPUS

Bawl away, Charon, if it gives you any pleasure.

CHARON

I brought you across: give me my fare.

MENIPPUS

I can't, if I haven't got it.

CHARON

And who is so poor that he has not got a penny?

MENIPPUS

I for one; I don't know who else.

CHARON

Pay: or, by Pluto, I'll strangle you.

MENIPPUS

And I'll crack your skull with this stick.

CHARON

So you are to come all that way for nothing?

MENIPPUS

Let Hermes pay for me: he put me on board.

HERMES

I dare say! A fine time I shall have of it, if I am to pay for the shades.

CHARON

I'm not going to let you off.

MENIPPUS

You can haul up your ship and wait, for all I care. If I have not got the money, I can't pay you, can I?

CHARON
You knew you ought to bring it?

MENIPPUS
I knew that: but I hadn't got it. What would you have? I ought not to have died, I suppose?

CHARON
So you are to have the distinction of being the only passenger that ever crossed gratis?

MENIPPUS
Oh, come now: gratis! I took an oar, and I baled; and I didn't cry, which is more than can be said for any of the others.

CHARON
That's neither here nor there. I must have my penny; it's only right.

MENIPPUS
Well, you had better take me back again to life.

CHARON
Yes, and get a thrashing from Aeacus for my pains! I like that.

MENIPPUS
Well, don't bother me.

CHARON
Let me see what you have got in that wallet.

MENIPPUS
Beans: have some?—and a Hecate's supper.

CHARON
Where did you pick up this Cynic, Hermes? The noise he made on the crossing, too! laughing and jeering at all the rest, and singing, when every one else was at his lamentations.

HERMES
Ah, Charon, you little know your passenger! Independence, every inch of him: he cares for no one. 'Tis Menippus.

CHARON
Wait till I catch you—

MENIPPUS
Precisely; I'll wait—till you catch me again.

3 (2). SHADES TO PLUTO AGAINST MENIPPUS
CROESUS
Pluto, we can stand this snarling Cynic no longer in our neighbourhood; either you must transfer him to other quarters, or we are going to migrate.

PLUTO
Why, what harm does he do to your ghostly community?

CROESUS
Midas here, and Sardanapalus and I, can never get in a good cry over the old days of gold and luxury and treasure, but he must be laughing at us, and calling us rude names; `slaves' and `garbage,' he says we are. And then he sings; and that throws us out.—In short, he is a nuisance.

PLUTO
Menippus, what's this I hear?

MENIPPUS
All perfectly true, Pluto. I detest these abject rascals! Not content with having lived the abominable lives they did, they keep on talking about it now they are dead, and harping on the good old days. I take a positive pleasure in annoying them.

PLUTO
Yes, but you mustn't. They have had terrible losses; they feel it deeply.

MENIPPUS
Pluto! you are not going to lend your countenance to these whimpering fools?

PLUTO
It isn't that: but I won't have you quarrelling.

MENIPPUS
Well, you scum of your respective nations, let there be no misunderstanding; I am going on just the same. Wherever you are, there shall I be also; worrying, jeering, singing you down.

CROESUS
Presumption!

MENIPPUS
Not a bit of it. Yours was the presumption, when you expected men to fall down before you, when you trampled on men's liberty, and forgot there was such a thing as death. Now comes the weeping and gnashing of teeth: for all is lost!

CROESUS
Lost! Ah God! My treasure-heaps—

MIDAS
My gold—

SARDANAPALUS
My little comforts—

MENIPPUS
That's right: stick to it! You do the whining, and I'll chime in with a string of GNOTHI-SAUTONS, best of accompaniments.

4 (21). MENIPPUS AND CERBERUS
MENIPPUS
My dear coz—for Cerberus and Cynic are surely related through the dog—I adjure you by the Styx, tell me how Socrates behaved during the descent. A God like you can doubtless articulate instead of barking, if he chooses.

CERBERUS
Well, while he was some way off, he seemed quite unshaken; and I thought he was bent on letting the people outside realize the fact too. Then he passed into the opening and saw the gloom; I at the same time gave him a touch of the hemlock, and a pull by the leg, as he was rather slow. Then he squalled like a baby, whimpered about his children, and, oh, I don't know what he didn't do.

MENIPPUS
So he was one of the theorists, was he? His indifference was a sham?

CERBERUS
Yes; it was only that he accepted the inevitable, and put a bold face on it, pretending to welcome the universal fate, by way of impressing the bystanders. All that sort are the same, I tell you—bold resolute fellows as far as the entrance; it is inside that the real test comes.

MENIPPUS
What did you think of my performance?

CERBERUS

Ah, Menippus, you were the exception; you are a credit to the breed, and so was Diogenes before you. You two came in without any compulsion or pushing, of your own free will, with a laugh for yourselves and a curse for the rest.

5 (18). MENIPPUS AND HERMES

MENIPPUS

Where are all the beauties, Hermes? Show me round; I am a new-comer.

HERMES

I am busy, Menippus. But look over there to your right, and you will see Hyacinth, Narcissus, Nireus, Achilles, Tyro, Helen, Leda,—all the beauties of old.

MENIPPUS

I can only see bones, and bare skulls; most of them are exactly alike.

HERMES

Those bones, of which you seem to think so lightly, have been the theme of admiring poets.

MENIPPUS

Well, but show me Helen; I shall never be able to make her out by myself.

HERMES

This skull is Helen.

MENIPPUS

And for this a thousand ships carried warriors from every part of Greece; Greeks and barbarians were slain, and cities made desolate.

HERMES

Ah, Menippus, you never saw the living Helen; or you would have said with Homer,

Well might they suffer grievous years of toil
Who strove for such a prize.

We look at withered flowers, whose dye is gone from them, and what can we call them but unlovely things? Yet in the hour of their bloom these unlovely things were things of beauty.

MENIPPUS

Strange, that the Greeks could not realize what it was for which they laboured; how short-lived, how soon to fade.

HERMES

I have no time for moralizing. Choose your spot, where you will, and lie down. I must go to fetch new dead.

6 (20). MENIPPUS AND AEACUS

MENIPPUS

In Pluto's name, Aeacus, show me all the sights of Hades.

AEACUS

That would be rather an undertaking, Menippus. However, you shall see the principal things. Cerberus here you know already, and the ferryman who brought you over. And you saw the Styx on your way, and Pyriphlegethon.

MENIPPUS

Yes, and you are the gate-keeper; I know all that; and I have seen the King and the Furies. But show me the men of ancient days, especially the celebrities.

AEACUS

This is Agamemnon; this is Achilles; near him, Idomeneus; next comes Odysseus; then Ajax, Diomede, and all the great Greeks.

MENIPPUS

Why, Homer, Homer, what is this? All your great heroes flung down upon the earth, shapeless, undistinguishable; mere meaningless dust; 'strengthless heads,' and no mistake.—Who is this one, Aeacus?

AEACUS

That is Cyrus; and here is Croesus; beyond him Sardanapalus, and beyond him again Midas. And yonder is Xerxes.

MENIPPUS

Ha! and it was before this creature that Greece trembled? this is our yoker of Hellesponts, our designer of Athos-canals?—Croesus too! a sad spectacle! As to Sardanapalus, I will lend him a box on the ear, with your permission.

AEACUS

And crack his skull, poor dear! Certainly not.

MENIPPUS
Then I must content myself with spitting in his ladyship's face.

AEACUS
Would you like to see the philosophers?

MENIPPUS
I should like it of all things.

AEACUS
First comes Pythagoras.

MENIPPUS
Good-day, Euphorbus, alias Apollo, alias what you will.

PYTHAGORAS
Good-day, Menippus.

MENIPPUS
What, no golden thigh nowadays?

PYTHAGORAS
Why, no. I wonder if there is anything to eat in that wallet of yours?

MENIPPUS
Beans, friend; you don't like beans.

PYTHAGORAS
Try me. My principles have changed with my quarters. I find that down here our parents' heads are in no way connected with beans.

AEACUS
Here is Solon, the son of Execestides, and there is Thales. By them are Pittacus, and the rest of the sages, seven in all, as you see.

MENIPPUS
The only resigned and cheerful countenances yet. Who is the one covered with ashes, like a loaf baked in the embers? He is all over blisters.

AEACUS
That is Empedocles. He was half-roasted when he got here from Etna.

MENIPPUS
Tell me, my brazen-slippered friend, what induced you to jump into the crater?

EMPEDOCLES
I did it in a fit of melancholy.

MENIPPUS
Not you. Vanity, pride, folly; these were what burnt you up, slippers and all; and serve you right. All that ingenuity was thrown away, too: your death was detected.—Aeacus, where is Socrates?

AEACUS
He is generally talking nonsense with Nestor and Palamedes.

MENIPPUS
But I should like to see him, if he is anywhere about.

AEACUS
You see the bald one?

MENIPPUS
They are all bald; that is a distinction without a difference.

AEACUS
The snub-nosed one.

MENIPPUS
There again: they are all snub-nosed.

SOCRATES
Do you want me, Menippus?

MENIPPUS
The very man I am looking for.

SOCRATES
How goes it in Athens?

MENIPPUS
There are a great many young men there professing philosophy; and to judge from their dress and their walk, they should be perfect in it.

SOCRATES
I have seen many such.

MENIPPUS
For that matter, I suppose you saw Aristippus arrive, reeking with scent; and Plato, the polished flatterer from Sicilian courts?

SOCRATES
And what do they think about me in Athens?

MENIPPUS
Ah, you are fortunate in that respect. You pass for a most remarkable man, omniscient in fact. And all the time—if the truth must out—you know absolutely nothing.

SOCRATES
I told them that myself: but they would have it that that was my irony.

MENIPPUS
And who are your friends?

SOCRATES
Charmides; Phaedrus; the son of Clinias.

MENIPPUS
Ha, ha! still at your old trade; still an admirer of beauty.

SOCRATES
How could I be better occupied? Will you join us?

MENIPPUS
No, thank you; I am off, to take up my quarters by Croesus and Sardanapalus. I expect huge entertainment from their outcries.

AEACUS
I must be off, too; or some one may escape. You shall see the rest another day, Menippus.

MENIPPUS
I need not detain you. I have seen enough.

7 (17). MENIPPUS AND TANTALUS

MENIPPUS
What are you crying out about, Tantalus? standing at the edge and whining like that!

TANTALUS
Ah, Menippus, I thirst, I perish!

MENIPPUS
What, not enterprise enough to bend down to it, or scoop up some in your palm?

TANTALUS
It is no use bending down; the water shrinks away as soon as it sees me coming. And if I do scoop it up and get it to my mouth, the outside of my lips is hardly moist before it has managed to run through my fingers, and my hand is as dry as ever.

MENIPPUS
A very odd experience, that. But by the way, why do you want to drink? you have no body—the part of you that was liable to hunger and thirst is buried in Lydia somewhere; how can you, the spirit, hunger or thirst any more?

TANTALUS
Therein lies my punishment—soul thirsts as if it were body.

MENIPPUS
Well, let that pass, as you say thirst is your punishment. But why do you mind it? are you afraid of dying, for want of drink? I do not know of any second Hades; can you die to this one, and go further?

TANTALUS
No, that is quite true. But you see this is part of the sentence: I must long for drink, though I have no need of it.

MENIPPUS
There is no meaning in that. There is a draught you need, though; some neat hellebore is what you want; you are suffering from a converse hydrophobia; you are not afraid of water, but you are of thirst.

TANTALUS
I would as life drink hellebore as anything, if I could but drink.

MENIPPUS
Never fear, Tantalus; neither you nor any other ghost will ever do that; it is impossible, you see;

just as well we have not all got a penal thirst like you, with the water running away from us.

8 (26). MENIPPUS AND CHIRON

MENIPPUS

I have heard that you were a god, Chiron, and that you died of your own choice?

CHIRON

You were rightly informed. I am dead, as you see, and might have been immortal.

MENIPPUS

And what should possess you, to be in love with Death? He has no charm for most people.

CHIRON

You are a sensible fellow; I will tell you. There was no further satisfaction to be had from immortality.

MENIPPUS

Was it not a pleasure merely to live and see the light?

CHIRON

No; it is variety, as I take it, and not monotony, that constitutes pleasure. Living on and on, everything always the same; sun, light, food, spring, summer, autumn, winter, one thing following another in unending sequence,—I sickened of it all. I found that enjoyment lay not in continual possession; that deprivation had its share therein.

MENIPPUS

Very true, Chiron. And how have you got on since you made Hades your home?

CHIRON

Not unpleasantly. I like the truly republican equality that prevails; and as to whether one is in light or darkness, that makes no difference at all. Then again there is no hunger or thirst here; one is independent of such things.

MENIPPUS

Take care, Chiron! You may be caught in the snare of your own reasonings.

CHIRON

How should that be?

MENIPPUS

Why, if the monotony of the other world brought on satiety, the monotony here may do the same.

You will have to look about for a further change, and I fancy there is no third life procurable.

CHIRON
Then what is to be done, Menippus?

MENIPPUS
Take things as you find them, I suppose, like a sensible fellow, and make the best of everything.

9 (28). MENIPPUS AND TIRESIAS
MENIPPUS
Whether you are blind or not, Tiresias, would be a difficult question. Eyeless sockets are the rule among us; there is no telling Phineus from Lynceus nowadays. However, I know that you were a seer, and that you enjoy the unique distinction of having been both man and woman; I have it from the poets. Pray tell me which you found the more pleasant life, the man's or the woman's?

TIRESIAS
The woman's, by a long way; it was much less trouble. Women have the mastery of men; and there is no fighting for them, no manning of walls, no squabbling in the assembly, no cross-examination in the law-courts.

MENIPPUS
Well, but you have heard how Medea, in Euripides, compassionates her sex on their hard lot—on the intolerable pangs they endure in travail? And by the way—Medea's words remind me did you ever have a child, when you were a woman, or were you barren?

TIRESIAS
What do you mean by that question, Menippus?

MENIPPUS
Oh, nothing; but I should like to know, if it is no trouble to you.

TIRESIAS
I was not barren: but I did not have a child, exactly.

MENIPPUS
No; but you might have had. That's all I wanted to know.

TIRESIAS
Certainly.

MENIPPUS

And your feminine characteristics gradually vanished, and you developed a beard, and became a man? Or did the change take place in a moment?

TIRESIAS

Whither does your question tend? One would think you doubted the fact.

MENIPPUS

And what should I do but doubt such a story? Am I to take it in, like a nincompoop, without asking myself whether it is possible or not?

TIRESIAS

At that rate, I suppose you are equally incredulous when you hear of women being turned into birds or trees or beasts,—Aëdon for instance, or Daphne, or Callisto?

MENIPPUS

If I fall in with any of these ladies, I will see what they have to say about it. But to return, friend, to your own case: were you a prophet even in the days of your femininity? or did manhood and prophecy come together?

TIRESIAS

Pooh, you know nothing of the matter. I once settled a dispute among the Gods, and was blinded by Hera for my pains; whereupon Zeus consoled me with the gift of prophecy.

MENIPPUS

Ah, you love a lie still, Tiresias. But there, 'tis your trade. You prophets! There is no truth in you.

10 (3). MENIPPUS, AMPHILOCHUS AND TROPHONIUS

MENIPPUS

Now I wonder how it is that you two dead men have been honoured with temples and taken for prophets; those silly mortals imagine you are Gods.

AMPHILOCHUS

How can we help it, if they are fools enough to have such fancies about the dead?

MENIPPUS

Ah, they would never have had them, though, if you had not been charlatans in your lifetime, and pretended to know the future and be able to foretell it to your clients.

TROPHONIUS

Well, Menippus, Amphilochus can take his own line, if he likes; as for me, I am a Hero, and do

give oracles to any one who comes down to me. It is pretty clear you were never at Lebadea, or you would not be so incredulous.

MENIPPUS

What do you mean? I must go to Lebadea, swaddle myself up in absurd linen, take a cake in my hand, and crawl through a narrow passage into a cave, before I could tell that you are a dead man, with nothing but knavery to differentiate you from the rest of us? Now, on your seer-ship, what is a Hero? I am sure I don't know.

TROPHONIUS

He is half God, and half man.

MENIPPUS

So what is neither man (as you imply) nor God, is both at once? Well, at present what has become of your diviner half?

TROPHONIUS

He gives oracles in Boeotia.

MENIPPUS

What you may mean is quite beyond me; the one thing I know for certain is that you are dead—the whole of you.

11 (16). DIOGENES AND HERACLES

DIOGENES

Surely this is Heracles I see? By his godhead, 'tis no other! The bow, the club, the lion's-skin, the giant frame; 'tis Heracles complete. Yet how should this be?—a son of Zeus, and mortal? I say, Mighty Conqueror, are you dead? I used to sacrifice to you in the other world; I understood you were a God!

HERACLES

Thou didst well. Heracles is with the Gods in Heaven, and hath white-ankled Hebe there to wife. I am his phantom.

DIOGENES

His phantom! What then, can one half of any one be a God, and the other half mortal?

HERACLES

Even so. The God still lives. 'Tis I, his counterpart, am dead.

DIOGENES

I see. You're a dummy; he palms you off upon Pluto, instead of coming himself. And here are you, enjoying his mortality!

HERACLES
’Tis somewhat as thou hast said.

DIOGENES
Well, but where were Aeacus's keen eyes, that he let a counterfeit Heracles pass under his very nose, and never knew the difference?

HERACLES
I was made very like to him.

DIOGENES
I believe you! Very like indeed, no difference at all! Why, we may find it's the other way round, that you are Heracles, and the phantom is in Heaven, married to Hebe!

HERACLES
Prating knave, no more of thy gibes; else thou shalt presently learn how great a God calls me phantom.

DIOGENES
H’m. That bow looks as if it meant business. And yet,—what have I to fear now? A man can die but once. Tell me, phantom,—by your great Substance I adjure you—did you serve him in your present capacity in the upper world? Perhaps you were one individual during your lives, the separation taking place only at your deaths, when he, the God, soared heavenwards, and you, the phantom, very properly made your appearance here?

HERACLES
Thy ribald questions were best unanswered. Yet thus much thou shalt know.—All that was Amphitryon in Heracles, is dead; I am that mortal part. The Zeus in him lives, and is with the Gods in Heaven.

DIOGENES
Ah, now I see! Alcmena had twins, you mean,—Heracles the son of Zeus, and Heracles the son of Amphitryon? You were really half-bothers all the time?

HERACLES
Fool! not so. We twain were one Heracles.

DIOGENES

It's a little difficult to grasp, the two Heracleses packed into one. I suppose you must have been like a sort of Centaur, man and God all mixed together?

HERACLES

And are not all thus composed of two elements,—the body and the soul? What then should hinder the soul from being in Heaven, with Zeus who gave it, and the mortal part—myself—among the dead?

DIOGENES

Yes, yes, my esteemed son of Amphitryon,—that would be all very well if you were a body; but you see you are a phantom, you have no body. At this rate we shall get three Heracleses.

HERACLES

Three?

DIOGENES

Yes; look here. One in Heaven: one in Hades, that's you, the phantom: and lastly the body, which by this time has returned to dust. That makes three. Can you think of a good father for number Three?

HERACLES

Impudent quibbler! And who art thou?

DIOGENES

I am Diogenes's phantom, late of Sinope. But my original, I assure you, is not `among th' immortal Gods,' but here among dead men; where he enjoys the best of company, and snaps my ringers at Homer and all hair-splitting.

12 (14). PHILIP AND ALEXANDER

PHILIP

You cannot deny that you are my son this time, Alexander; you would not have died if you had been Ammon's.

ALEXANDER

I knew all the time that you, Philip, son of Amyntas, were my father. I only accepted the statement of the oracle because I thought it was good policy.

PHILIP

What, to suffer yourself to be fooled by lying priests?

ALEXANDER

No, but it had an awe-inspiring effect upon the barbarians. When they thought they had a God to deal with, they gave up the struggle; which made their conquest a simple matter.

PHILIP

And whom did you ever conquer that was worth conquering? Your adversaries were ever timid creatures, with their bows and their targets and their wicker shields. It was other work conquering the Greeks: Boeotians, Phocians, Athenians; Arcadian hoplites, Thessalian cavalry, javelin-men from Elis, peltasts of Mantinea; Thracians, Illyrians, Paeonians; to subdue these was something. But for gold-laced womanish Medes and Persians and Chaldaeans,—why, it had been done before: did you never hear of the expedition of the Ten Thousand under Clearchus? and how the enemy would not even come to blows with them, but ran away before they were within bow-shot?

ALEXANDER

Still, there were the Scythians, father, and the Indian elephants; they were no joke. And my conquests were not gained by dissension or treachery; I broke no oath, no promise, nor ever purchased victory at the expense of honour. As to the Greeks, most of them joined me without a struggle; and I dare say you have heard how I handled Thebes.

PHILIP

I know all about that; I had it from Clitus, whom you ran through the body, in the middle of dinner, because he presumed to mention my achievements in the same breath with yours. They tell me too that you took to aping the manners of your conquered Medes; abandoned the Macedonian cloak in favour of the candys, assumed the upright tiara, and exacted oriental prostrations from Macedonian freemen! This is delicious. As to your brilliant matches, and your beloved Hephaestion, and your scholars in lions' cages,--the less said the better. I have only heard one thing to your credit: you respected the person of Darius's beautiful wife, and you provided for his mother and daughters; there you acted like a king.

ALEXANDER

And have you nothing to say of my adventurous spirit, father, when I was the first to leap down within the ramparts of Oxydracae, and was covered with wounds?

PHILIP

Not a word. Not that it is a bad thing, in my opinion, for a king to get wounded occasionally, and to face danger at the head of his troops: but this was the last thing that you were called upon to do. You were passing for a God; and your being wounded, and carried off the field on a litter, bleeding and groaning, could only excite the ridicule of the spectators: Ammon stood convicted of quackery, his oracle of falsehood, his priests of flattery. The son of Zeus in a swoon, requiring medical assistance! who could help laughing at the sight? And now that you have died, can you doubt that many a jest is being cracked on the subject of your divinity, as men contemplate the God's corpse laid out for burial, and already going the way of all flesh? Besides, your

achievements lose half their credit from this very circumstance which you say was so useful in facilitating your conquests: nothing you did could come up to your divine reputation.

ALEXANDER
The world thinks otherwise. I am ranked with Heracles and Dionysus; and, for that matter, I took Aornos, which was more than either of them could do.

PHILIP
There spoke the son of Ammon. Heracles and Dionysus, indeed! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Alexander; when will you learn to drop that bombast, and know yourself for the shade that you are?

13 (13). DIOGENES AND ALEXANDER
DIOGENES
Dear me, Alexander, you dead like the rest of us?

ALEXANDER
As you see, sir; is there anything extraordinary in a mortal's dying?

DIOGENES
So Ammon lied when he said you were his son; you were Philip's after all.

ALEXANDER
Apparently; if I had been Ammon's, I should not have died.

DIOGENES
Strange! there were tales of the same order about Olympias too. A serpent visited her, and was seen in her bed; we were given to understand that that was how you came into the world, and Philip made a mistake when he took you for his.

ALEXANDER
Yes, I was told all that myself; however, I know now that my mother's and the Ammon stories were all moonshine.

DIOGENES
Their lies were of some practical value to you, though; your divinity brought a good many people to their knees. But now, whom did you leave your great empire to?

ALEXANDER
Diogenes, I cannot tell you. I had no time to leave any directions about it, beyond just giving Perdiccas my ring as I died. Why are you laughing?

DIOGENES

Oh, I was only thinking of the Greeks' behaviour; directly you succeeded, how they flattered you! their elected patron, generalissimo against the barbarian; one of the twelve Gods according to some; temples built and sacrifices offered to the Serpent's son! If I may ask, where did your Macedonians bury you?

ALEXANDER

I have lain in Babylon a full month to-day; and Ptolemy of the Guards is pledged, as soon as he can get a moment's respite from present disturbances, to take and bury me in Egypt, there to be reckoned among the Gods.

DIOGENES

I have some reason to laugh, you see; still nursing vain hopes of developing into an Osiris or Anubis! Pray, your Godhead, put these expectations from you; none may re-ascend who has once sailed the lake and penetrated our entrance; Aeacus is watchful, and Cerberus an awkward customer. But there is one thing I wish you would tell me: how do you like thinking over all the earthly bliss you left to come here—your guards and armour-bearers and lieutenant-governors, your heaps of gold and adoring peoples, Babylon and Bactria, your huge elephants, your honour and glory, those conspicuous drives with white-cinctured locks and clasped purple cloak? does the thought of them hurt? What, crying? silly fellow! did not your wise Aristotle include in his instructions any hint of the insecurity of fortune's favours?

ALEXANDER

Wise? call him the craftiest of all flatterers. Allow me to know a little more than other people about Aristotle; his requests and his letters came to my address; I know how he profited by my passion for culture; how he would toady and compliment me, to be sure! now it was my beauty—that too is included under The Good; now it was my deeds and my money; for money too he called a Good—he meant that he was not going to be ashamed of taking it. Ah, Diogenes, an impostor; and a past master at it too. For me, the result of his wisdom is that I am distressed for the things you catalogued just now, as if I had lost in them the chief Goods.

DIOGENES

Wouldst know thy course? I will prescribe for your distress. Our flora, unfortunately, does not include hellebore; but you take plenty of Lethe-water—good, deep, repeated draughts; that will relieve your distress over the Aristotelian Goods. Quick; here are Clitus, Callisthenes, and a lot of others making for you; they mean to tear you in pieces and pay you out. Here, go the opposite way; and remember, repeated draughts.

14 (4). HERMES AND CHARON

HERMES

Ferryman, what do you say to settling up accounts? It will prevent any unpleasantness later on.

CHARON
Very good. It does save trouble to get these things straight.

HERMES
One anchor, to your order, five shillings.

CHARON
That is a lot of money.

HERMES
So help me Pluto, it is what I had to pay. One rowlock-strap, fourpence.

CHARON
Five and four; put that down.

HERMES
Then there was a needle, for mending the sail; tenpence.

CHARON
Down with it.

HERMES
Caulking-wax; nails; and cord for the brace. Two shillings the lot.

CHARON
They were worth the money.

HERMES
That's all; unless I have forgotten anything. When will you pay it?

CHARON
I can't just now, Hermes; we shall have a war or a plague presently, and then the passengers will come shoaling in, and I shall be able to make a little by jobbing the fares.

HERMES
So for the present I have nothing to do but sit down, and pray for the worst, as my only chance of getting paid?

CHARON

There is nothing else for it;—very little business doing just now, as you see, owing to the peace.

HERMES

That is just as well, though it does keep me waiting for my money. After all, though, Charon, in old days men were men; you remember the state they used to come down in,—all blood and wounds generally. Nowadays, a man is poisoned by his slave or his wife; or gets dropsy from overfeeding; a pale, spiritless lot, nothing like the men of old. Most of them seem to meet their end in some plot that has money for its object.

CHARON

Ah; money is in great request.

HERMES

Yes; you can't blame me if I am somewhat urgent for payment.

15 (5). PLUTO AND HERMES

PLUTO

You know that old, old fellow, Eucrates the millionaire—no children, but a few thousand would-be heirs?

HERMES

Yes—lives at Sicyon. Well?

PLUTO

Well, Hermes, he is ninety now; let him live as much longer, please; I should like it to be more still, if possible; and bring me down his toadies one by one, that young Charinus, Damon, and the rest of them.

HERMES

It would seem so strange, wouldn't it?

PLUTO

On the contrary, it would be ideal justice. What business have they to pray for his death, or pretend to his money? they are no relations. The most abominable thing about it is that they vary these prayers with every public attention; when he is ill, every one knows what they are after, and yet they vow offerings if he recovers; talk of versatility! So let him be immortal, and bring them away before him with their mouths still open for the fruit that never drops.

HERMES

Well, they are rascals, and it would be a comic ending. He leads them a pretty life too, on hope gruel; he always looks more dead than alive, but he is tougher than a young man. They have

divided up the inheritance among them, and feed on imaginary bliss.

PLUTO
Just so; now he is to throw off his years like Iolaus, and rejuvenate, while they in the middle of their hopes find themselves here with their dream-wealth left behind them. Nothing like making the punishment fit the crime.

HERMES
Say no more, Pluto; I will fetch you them one after another; seven of them, is it?

PLUTO
Down with them; and he shall change from an old man to a blooming youth, and attend their funerals.

16 (6). TERPSION AND PLUTO

TERPSION
Now is this fair, Pluto,—that I should die at the age of thirty, and that old Thucritus go on living past ninety?

PLUTO
Nothing could be fairer. Thucritus lives and is in no hurry for his neighbours to die; whereas you always had some design against him; you were waiting to step into his shoes.

TERPSION
Well, an old man like that is past getting any enjoyment out of his money; he ought to die, and make room for younger men.

PLUTO
This is a novel principle: the man who can no longer derive pleasure from his money is to die!—Fate and Nature have ordered it otherwise.

TERPSION
Then they have ordered it wrongly. There ought to be a proper sequence according to seniority. Things are turned upside down, if an old man is to go on living with only three teeth in his head, half blind, tottering about with a pair of slaves on each side to hold him up, drivelling and rheumy-eyed, having no joy of life, a living tomb, the derision of his juniors,—and young men are to die in the prime of their strength and beauty. 'Tis contrary to nature. At any rate the young men have a right to know when the old are going to die, so that they may not throw away their attentions on them for nothing, as is sometimes the case. The present arrangement is a putting of

the cart before the horse.

PLUTO

There is a great deal more sound sense in it than you suppose, Terpsion. Besides, what right have you young fellows got to be prying after other men's goods, and thrusting yourselves upon your childless elders? You look rather foolish, when you get buried first; it tickles people immensely; the more fervent your prayers for the death of your aged friend, the greater is the general exultation when you precede him. It has become quite a profession lately, this amorous devotion to old men and women,—childless, of course; children destroy the illusion. By the way though, some of the beloved objects see through your dirty motives well enough by now; they have children, but they pretend to hate them, and so have lovers all the same. When their wills come to be read, their faithful bodyguard is not included: nature asserts itself, the children get their rights, and the lovers realize, with gnashings of teeth, that they have been taken in.

TERPSION

Too true! The luxuries that Thucritus has enjoyed at my expense! He always looked as if he were at the point of death. I never went to see him, but he would groan and squeak like a chicken barely out of the shell: I considered that he might step into his coffin at any moment, and heaped gift upon gift, for fear of being outdone in generosity by my rivals; I passed anxious, sleepless nights, reckoning and arranging all; ’twas this, the sleeplessness and the anxiety, that brought me to my death. And he swallows my bait whole, and attends my funeral chuckling.

PLUTO

Well done, Thucritus! Long may you live to enjoy your wealth,—and your joke at the youngsters' expense; many a toady may you send hither before your own time comes!

TERPSION

Now I think of it, it would be a satisfaction if Charoeades were to die before him.

PLUTO

Charoeades! My dear Terpsion, Phido, Melanthus,—every one of them will be here before Thucritus,—all victims of this same anxiety!

TERPSION

That is as it should be. Hold on, Thucritus!

17 (7). ZENOPHANTUS AND CALLIDEMIDES

ZENOPHANTUS

Ah, Callidemides, and how did you come by your end? As for me, I was free of Dinias's table, and there died of a surfeit; but that is stale news; you were there, of course.

CALLIDEMIDES
Yes, I was. Now there was an element of surprise about my fate. I suppose you know that old Ptoeodorus?

ZENOPHANTUS
The rich man with no children, to whom you gave most of your company?

CALLIDEMIDES
That is the man; he had promised to leave me his heir, and I used to show my appreciation. However, it went on such a time; Tithonus was a juvenile to him; so I found a short cut to my property. I bought a potion, and agreed with the butler that next time his master called for wine (he is a pretty stiff drinker) he should have this ready in a cup and present it; and I was pledged to reward the man with his freedom.

ZENOPHANTUS
And what happened? this is interesting.

CALLIDEMIDES
When we came from bath, the young fellow had two cups ready, one with the poison for Ptoeodorus, and the other for me; but by some blunder he handed me the poisoned cup, and Ptoeodorus the plain; and behold, before he had done drinking, there was I sprawling on the ground, a vicarious corpse! Why are you laughing so, Zenophantus? I am your friend; such mirth is unseemly.

ZENOPHANTUS
Well, it was such a humorous exit. And how did the old man behave?

CALLIDEMIDES
He was dreadfully distressed for the moment; then he saw, I suppose, and laughed as much as you over the butler's trick.

ZENOPHANTUS
Ah, short cuts are no better for you than for other people, you see; the high road would have been safer, if not quite so quick.

18 (8). CNEMON AND DAMNIPPUS

CNEMON
Why, ’tis the proverb fulfilled! The fawn hath taken the lion.

DAMNIPPUS
What's the matter, Cnemon?

CNEMON
The matter! I have been fooled, miserably fooled. I have passed over all whom I should have liked to make my heirs, and left my money to the wrong man.

DAMNIPPUS
How was that?

CNEMON
I had been speculating on the death of Hermolaus, the millionaire. He had no children, and my attentions had been well received by him. I thought it would be a good idea to let him know that I had made my will in his favour, on the chance of its exciting his emulation.

DAMNIPPUS
Yes; and Hermolaus?

CNEMON
What his will was, I don't know. I died suddenly,—the roof came down about my ears; and now Hermolaus is my heir. The pike has swallowed hook and bait.

DAMNIPPUS
And your anglership into the bargain. The pit that you digged for other. . . .

CNEMON
That's about the truth of the matter, confound it.

19 (9). SIMYLUS AND POLYSTRATUS

SIMYLUS
So here you are at last, Polystratus; you must be something very like a centenarian.

POLYSTRATUS
Ninety-eight.

SIMYLUS
And what sort of a life have you had of it, these thirty years? you were about seventy when I died.

POLYSTRATUS
Delightful, though you may find it hard to believe.

SIMYLUS
It is surprising that you could have any joy of your life—old, weak, and childless, moreover.

POLYSTRATUS
In the first place, I could do just what I liked; there were still plenty of handsome boys and dainty women; perfumes were sweet, wine kept its bouquet, Sicilian feasts were nothing to mine.

SIMYLUS
This is a change, to be sure; you were very economical in my day.

POLYSTRATUS
Ah, but, my simple friend, these good things were presents—came in streams. From dawn my doors were thronged with visitors, and in the day it was a procession of the fairest gifts of earth.

SIMYLUS
Why, you must have seized the crown after my death.

POLYSTRATUS
Oh no, it was only that I inspired a number of tender passions.

SIMYLUS
Tender passions, indeed! what, you, an old man with hardly a tooth left in your head!

POLYSTRATUS
Certainly; the first of our townsmen were in love with me. Such as you see me, old, bald, blear-eyed, rheumy, they delighted to do me honour; happy was the man on whom my glance rested a moment.

SIMYLUS
Well, then, you had some adventure like Phaon's, when he rowed Aphrodite across from Chios; your God granted your prayer and made you young and fair and lovely again.

POLYSTRATUS
No, no; I was as you see me, and I was the object of all desire.

SIMYLUS
Oh, I give it up.

POLYSTRATUS
Why, I should have thought you knew the violent passion for old men who have plenty of

money and no children.

SIMYLUS
Ah, now I comprehend your beauty, old fellow; it was the Golden Aphrodite bestowed it.

POLYSTRATUS
I assure you, Simylus, I had a good deal of satisfaction out of my lovers; they idolized me, almost. Often I would be coy and shut some of them out. Such rivalries! such jealous emulations!

SIMYLUS
And how did you dispose of your fortune in the end?

POLYSTRATUS
I gave each an express promise to make him my heir; he believed, and treated me to more attentions than ever; meanwhile I had another genuine will, which was the one I left, with a message to them all to go hang.

SIMYLUS
Who was the heir by this one? one of your relations, I suppose.

POLYSTRATUS
Not likely; it was a handsome young Phrygian I had lately bought.

SIMYLUS
Age?

POLYSTRATUS
About twenty.

SIMYLUS
Ah, I can guess his office.

POLYSTRATUS
Well, you know, he deserved the inheritance much better than they did; he was a barbarian and a rascal; but by this time he has the best of society at his beck. So he inherited; and now he is one of the aristocracy; his smooth chin and his foreign accent are no bars to his being called nobler than Codrus, handsomer than Nireus, wiser than Odysseus.

SIMYLUS
Well, I don't mind; let him be Emperor of Greece, if he likes, so long as he keeps the property away from that other crew.

20 (10). CHARON AND HERMES

CHARON

I'll tell you how things stand. Our craft, as you see, is small, and leaky, and three-parts rotten; a single lurch, and she will capsize without more ado. And here are all you passengers, each with his luggage. If you come on board like that, I am afraid you may have cause to repent it; especially those who have not learnt to swim.

HERMES

Then how are we to make a trip of it?

CHARON

I'll tell you. They must leave all this nonsense behind them on shore, and come aboard in their skins. As it is, there will be no room to spare. And in future, Hermes, mind you admit no one till he has cleared himself of encumbrances, as I say. Stand by the gangway, and keep an eye on them, and make them strip before you let them pass.

HERMES

Very good. Well, Number One, who are you?

MENIPPUS

Menippus. Here are my wallet and staff; overboard with them. I had the sense not to bring my cloak.

HERMES

Pass on, Menippus; you're a good fellow; you shall have the seat of honour, up by the pilot, where you can see every one.—ere is a handsome person; who is he?

CHARMOLEOS

Charmoleos of Megara; the irresistible, whose kiss was worth a thousand pounds.

HERMES

That beauty must come off,—lips, kisses, and all; the flowing locks, the blushing cheeks, the skin entire. That's right. Now we're in better trim;—you may pass on.—And who is the stunning gentleman in the purple and the diadem?

LAMPICHUS

I am Lampichus, tyrant of Gela.

HERMES

And what is all this splendour doing here, Lampichus?

LAMPICHUS
How! would you have a tyrant come hither stripped?

HERMES
A tyrant! That would be too much to expect. But with a shade we must insist. Off with these things.

LAMPICHUS
There, then: away goes my wealth.

HERMES
Pomp must go too, and pride; we shall be overfreighted else.

LAMPICHUS
At least let me keep my diadem and robes.

HERMES
No, no; off they come!

LAMPICHUS
Well? That is all, as you see for yourself.

HERMES
There is something more yet: cruelty, folly, insolence, hatred.

LAMPICHUS
There then: I am bare.

HERMES
Pass on.—And who may you be, my bulky friend?

DAMASIAS
Damasias the athlete.

HERMES
To be sure; many is the time I have seen you in the gymnasium.

DAMASIAS
You have. Well, I have peeled; let me pass.

HERMES

Peeled! my dear sir, what, with all this fleshy encumbrance? Come, off with it; we should go to the bottom if you put one foot aboard. And those crowns, those victories, remove them.

DAMASIAS

There; no mistake about it this time; I am as light as any shade among them.

HERMES

That's more the kind of thing. On with you.—Crato, you can take off that wealth and luxury and effeminacy; and we can't have that funeral pomp here, nor those ancestral glories either; down with your rank and reputation, and any votes of thanks or inscriptions you have about you; and you need not tell us what size your tomb was; remarks of that kind come heavy.

CRATON

Well, if I must, I must; there's no help for it.

HERMES

Hullo! in full armour? What does this mean? and why this trophy?

GENERAL

I am a great conqueror; a valiant warrior; my country's pride.

HERMES

The trophy may stop behind; we are at peace; there is no demand for arms.—Whom have we here? whose is this knitted brow, this flowing beard? 'Tis some reverend sage, if outside goes for anything; he mutters; he is wrapped in meditation.

MENIPPUS

That's a philosopher, Hermes; and an impudent quack not the bargain. Have him out of that cloak; you will find something to amuse you underneath it.

HERMES

Off with your clothes first; and then we will see to the rest. My goodness, what a bundle: quackery, ignorance, quarrelsomeness, vainglory; idle questionings, prickly arguments, intricate conceptions; humbug and gammon and wishy-washy hair-splittings without end; and hullo! why here's avarice, and self-indulgence, and impudence! luxury, effeminacy and peevishness!—Yes, I see them all; you need not try to hide them. Away with falsehood and swagger and superciliousness; why, the three-decker is not built that would hold you with all this luggage.

PHILOSOPHER

I resign them all, since such is your bidding.

MENIPPUS
Have his beard off too, Hermes; only look what a ponderous bush of a thing! There's a good five pounds' weight there.

HERMES
Yes; the beard must go.

PHILOSOPHER
And who shall shave me?

HERMES
Menippus here shall take it off with the carpenter's axe; the gangway will serve for a block.

MENIPPUS
Oh, can't I have a saw, Hermes? It would be much better fun.

HERMES
The axe must serve.—Shrewdly chopped!—Why, you look more like a man and less like a goat already.

MENIPPUS
A little off the eyebrows?

HERMES
Why, certainly; he has trained them up all over his forehead, for reasons best known to himself.—Worm! what, snivelling? afraid of death? Oh, get on board with you.

MENIPPUS
He has still got the biggest thumper of all under his arm.

HERMES
What's that?

MENIPPUS
Flattery; many is the good turn that has done him.

PHILOSOPHER
Oh, all right, Menippus; suppose you leave your independence behind you, and your plain—speaking, and your indifference, and your high spirit, and your jests!--No one else here has a jest about him.

HERMES

Don't you, Menippus! you stick to them; useful commodities, these, on shipboard; light and handy.—You rhetorician there, with your verbosities and your barbarisms, your antitheses and balances and periods, off with the whole pack of them.

RHETORICIAN

Away they go.

HERMES

All's ready. Loose the cable, and pull in the gangway; haul up the anchor; spread all sail; and, pilot, look to your helm. Good luck to our voyage!—What are you all whining about, you fools? You philosopher, late of the beard,—you're as bad as any of them.

PHILOSOPHER

Ah, Hermes: I had thought that the soul was immortal.

MENIPPUS

He lies: that is not the cause of his distress.

HERMES

What is it, then?

MENIPPUS

He knows that he will never have a good dinner again; never sneak about at night with his cloak over his head, going the round of the brothels; never spend his mornings in fooling boys out of their money, under the pretext of teaching them wisdom.

PHILOSOPHER

And pray are you content to be dead?

MENIPPUS

It may be presumed so, as I sought death of my own accord.—By the way, I surely heard a noise, as if people were shouting on the earth?

HERMES

You did; and from more than one quarter.—There are people running in a body to the Town-hall, exulting over the death of Lampichus; the women have got hold of his wife; his infant children fare no better,—the boys are giving them handsome pelting. Then again you hear the applause that greets the orator Diophantus, as he pronounces the funeral oration of our friend Crato. Ah yes, and that's Damasias's mother, with her women, striking up a dirge. No one has tear for you,

Menippus; your remains are left in peace. Privileged person!

MENIPPUS
Wait a bit: before long you will hear the mournful howl of dogs, and the beating of crows' wings, as they gather to perform my funeral rites.

HERMES
I like your spirit.—However, here we are in port. Away with you all to the judgement-seat; it is straight ahead. The ferryman and I must go back for a fresh load.

MENIPPUS
Good voyage to you, Hermes.—Let us be getting on; what are you all waiting for? We have got to face the judge, sooner or later; and by all accounts his sentences are no joke; wheels, rocks, vultures are mentioned. Every detail of our lives will now come to light!

21 (11). CRATES AND DIOGENES
CRATES
Did you know Moerichus of Corinth, Diogenes? A shipowner, rolling in money, with a cousin called Aristeas, nearly as rich. He had a Homeric quotation:—Wilt thou heave me? shall I heave thee?1

DIOGENES
What was the point of it?

CRATES
Why, the cousins were of equal age, expected to succeed to each other's wealth, and behaved accordingly. They published their wills, each naming the other sole heir in case of his own prior decease. So it stood in black and white, and they vied with each other in showing that deference which the relation demands. All the prophets, astrologers, and Chaldean dream-interpreters alike, and Apollo himself for that matter, held different views at different times about the winner; the thousands seemed to incline now to Aristeas's side, now to Moerichus's.

DIOGENES
And how did it end? I am quite curious.

CRATES
They both died on the same day, and the properties passed to Eunomius and Thrasycles, two relations who had never had a presentiment of it. They had been crossing from Sicyon to Cirrha, when they were taken aback by a squall from the north-west, and capsized in mid-channel.

DIOGENES

Cleverly done. Now, when we were alive, we never had such designs on one another. I never prayed for Antisthenes's death, with a view to inheriting his staff--though it was an extremely serviceable one, which he had cut himself from a wild olive; and I do not credit you, Crates, with ever having had an eye to my succession; it included the tub, and a wallet with two pints of lupines in it.

CRATES

Why, no; these things were superfluities to me—and to yourself, indeed. The real necessities you inherited from Antisthenes, and I from you; and in those necessities was more grandeur and majesty than in the Persian Empire.

DIOGENES

You allude to—

CRATES

Wisdom, independence, truth, frankness, freedom.

DIOGENES

To be sure; now I think of it, I did inherit all this from Antisthenes, and left it to you with some addition.

CRATES

Others, however, were not interested in such property; no one paid us the attentions of an expectant heir; they all lad their eyes on gold, instead.

DIOGENES

Of course; they had no receptacle for such things as we could give; luxury had made them so leaky—as full of holes as a worn-out purse. Put wisdom, frankness, or truth into them, and it would have dropped out; the bottom of the bag would have let them through, like the perforated cask into which those poor Danaids are always pouring. Gold, on the other hand, they could grip with tooth or nail or somehow.

CRATES

Result: our wealth will still be ours down here; while they will arrive with no more than one penny, and even that must be left with the ferryman.

1. Homer, Il. xxiii. 724. When Ajax and Odysseus have wrestled for some time without either's producing any impression, and the spectators are getting p. 124 tired of it, the former proposes a change in tactics. "Let us hoist—try you with me or I with you." The idea evidently is that each in turn is to offer only a passive resistance, and let his adversary try to fling him thus.' Leaf.

22 (27). DIOGENES, ANTISTHENES AND CRATES

DIOGENES

Now, friends, we have plenty of time; what say you to a stroll? we might go to the entrance and have a look at the new-comers—what they are and how they behave.

ANTISTHENES

The very thing. It will be an amusing sight—some weeping, some imploring to be let go, some resisting; when Hermes collars them, they will stick their heels in and throw their weight back; and all to no purpose.

CRATES

Very well; and meanwhile, let me give you my experiences on the way down.

DIOGENES

Yes, go on, Crates; I dare say you saw some entertaining sights.

CRATES

We were a large party, of which the most distinguished were Ismenodorus, a rich townsman of ours, Arsaces, ruler of Media, and Oroetes the Armenian. Ismenodorus had been murdered by robbers going to Eleusis over Cithaeron, I believe. He was moaning, nursing his wound, apostrophizing the young children he had left, and cursing his foolhardiness. He knew Cithaeron and the Eleutherae district were all devastated by the wars, and yet he must take only two servants with him—with five bowls and four cups of solid gold in his baggage, too. Arsaces was an old man of rather imposing aspect; he expressed his feelings in true barbaric fashion, was exceedingly angry at being expected to walk, and kept calling for his horse. In point of fact it had died with him, it and he having been simultaneously transfixed by a Thracian pikeman in the fight with the Cappadocians on the Araxes. Arsaces described to us how he had charged far in advance of his men, and the Thracian, standing his ground and sheltering himself with his buckler, warded off the lance, and then, planting his pike, transfixed man and horse together.

ANTISTHENES

How could it possibly be done simultaneously?

CRATES

Oh, quite simple. The Median was charging with his thirty-foot lance in front of him; the Thracian knocked it aside with his buckler; the point glanced by; then he knelt, received the charge on his pike, pierced the horse's chest—the spirited beast impaling itself by its own impetus—, and finally ran Arsaces through groin and buttock. You see what happened; it was the horse's doing rather than the man's. However, Arsaces did not at all appreciate equality, and wanted to come down on horseback. As for Oroetes, he was so tender-footed that he could not stand, far less walk. That is the way with all the Medes--once they are off their horses, they go

delicately on tiptoe as if they were treading on thorns. He threw himself down, and there he lay; nothing would induce him to get up; so the excellent Hermes had to pick him up and carry him to the ferry; how I laughed!

ANTISTHENES
When I came down, I did not keep with the crowd; I left them to their blubberings, ran on to the ferry, and secured a comfortable seat for the passage. Then as we crossed, they were divided between tears and sea-sickness, and gave me a merry time of it.

DIOGENES
You two have described your fellow passengers; now for mine. There came down with me Blepsias, the Pisatan usurer, Lampis, an Acarnanian freelance, and the Corinthian millionaire Damis. The last had been poisoned by his son, Lampis had cut his throat for love of the courtesan Myrtium, and the wretched Blepsias is supposed to have died of starvation; his awful pallor and extreme emaciation looked like it. I inquired into the manner of their deaths, though I knew very well. When Damis exclaimed upon his son, `You only have your deserts,' I remarked,—an old man of ninety living in luxury yourself with your million of money, and fobbing off your eighteen-year son with a few pence! As for you, sir Acarnanian'—he was groaning and cursing Myrtium—, `why put the blame on Love? it belongs to yourself; you were never afraid of an enemy—took all sorts of risks in other people's service—and then let yourself be caught, my hero, by the artificial tears and sighs of the first wench you came across.' Blepsias uttered his own condemnation, without giving me time to do it for him: he had hoarded his money for heirs who were nothing to him, and been fool enough to reckon on immortality. I assure you it was no common satisfaction I derived from their whinings.

But here we are at the gate; we must keep our eyes open, and get the earliest view. Lord, lord, what a mixed crowd! and all in tears except these babes and sucklings. Why, the hoary seniors are all lamentation too; strange! has madam Life given them a love-potion? I must interrogate this most reverend senior of them all.—Sir, why weep, seeing that you have died full of years? has your excellency any complaint to make, after so long a term? Ah, but you were doubtless a king.

PAUPER
Not so.

DIOGENES
A provincial governor, then?

PAUPER
No, nor that.

DIOGENES

I see; you were wealthy, and do not like leaving your boundless luxury to die.

PAUPER
You are quite mistaken; I was near ninety, made a miserable livelihood out of my line and rod, was excessively poor, childless, a cripple, and had nearly lost my sight.

DIOGENES
And you still wished to live?

PAUPER
Ay, sweet is the light, and dread is death; would that one might escape it!

DIOGENES
You are beside yourself, old man; you are like a child kicking at the pricks, you contemporary of the ferryman. Well, we need wonder no more at youth, when age is still in love with life; one would have thought it should court death as the cure for its proper ills.—And now let us go our way, before our loitering here brings suspicion on us: they may think we are planning an escape.

23 (29). AJAX AND AGAMEMNON
AGAMEMNON
If you went mad and wrought your own destruction, Ajax, in default of that you designed for us all, why put the blame on Odysseus? Why would you not vouchsafe him a look or a word, when he came to consult Tiresias that day? you stalked past your old comrade in arms as if he was beneath your notice.

AJAX
Had I not good reason? My madness lies at the door of my solitary rival for the arms.

AGAMEMNON
Did you expect to be unopposed, and carry it over us all without a contest?

AJAX
Surely, in such a matter. The armour was mine by natural right, seeing I was Achilles's cousin. The rest of you, his undoubted superiors, refused to compete, recognizing my claim. It was the son of Laertes, he that I had rescued scores of times when he would have been cut to pieces by the Phrygians, who set up for a better man and a stronger claimant than I.

AGAMEMNON
Blame Thetis, then, my good sir; it was she who, instead of delivering the inheritance to the next of kin, brought the arms and left the ownership an open question.

AJAX

No, no; the guilt was in claiming them—alone, I mean.

AGAMEMNON

Surely, Ajax, a mere man may be forgiven the sin of coveting honour—that sweetest bait for which each one of us adventured; nay, and he outdid you there, if a Trojan verdict counts.

AJAX

Who inspired that verdict?1 I know, but about the Gods we may not speak. Let that pass; but cease to hate Odysseus? 'tis not in my power, Agamemnon, though Athene's self should require it of me.

1. Athene is meant. The allusion is to Homer, Od. xi. 547, a passage upon the contest for the arms of Achilles, in which Odysseus states that "The judges were the sons of the Trojans, and Pallas Athene."

24 (30). MINOS AND SOSTRATUS

MINOS

Sostratus, the pirate here, can be dropped into Pyriphlegethon, Hermes; the temple-robber shall be clawed by the Chimera; and lay out the tyrant alongside of Tityus, there to have his liver torn by the vultures. And you honest fellows can make the best of your way to Elysium and the Isles of the Blest; this it is to lead righteous lives.

SOSTRATUS

A word with you, Minos. See if there is not some justice in my plea.

MINOS

What, more pleadings? Have you not been convicted of villany and murder without end?

SOSTRATUS

I have. Yet consider whether my sentence is just.

MINOS

Is it just that you should have your deserts? If so, the sentence is just.

SOSTRATUS

Well, answer my questions; I will not detain you long.

MINOS

Say on, but be brief; I have other cases waiting for me.

SOSTRATUS

The deeds of my life—were they in my own choice, or were they decreed by Fate?

MINOS

Decreed, of course.

SOSTRATUS

Then all of us, whether we passed for honest men or rogues, were the instruments of Fate in all that we did?

MINOS

Certainly; Clotho prescribes the conduct of every man at his birth.

SOSTRATUS

Now suppose a man commits a murder under compulsion of a power which he cannot resist, an executioner, for instance, at the bidding of a judge, or a bodyguard at that of a tyrant. Who is the murderer, according to you?

MINOS

The judge, of course, or the tyrant. As well ask whether the sword is guilty, which is but the tool of his anger who is prime mover in the affair.

SOSTRATUS

I am indebted to you for a further illustration of my argument. Again: a slave, sent by his master, brings me gold or silver; to whom am I to be grateful? who goes down on my tablets as a benefactor?

MINOS

The sender; the bringer is but his minister.

SOSTRATUS

Observe then your injustice! You punish us who are but the slaves of Clotho's bidding, and reward these, who do but minister to another's beneficence. For it will never be said that it was in our power to gainsay the irresistible ordinances of Fate?

MINOS

Ah, Sostratus; look closely enough, and you will find plenty of inconsistencies besides these. However, I see you are no common pirate, but a philosopher in your way; so much you have gained by your questions. Let him go, Hermes; he shall not be punished after that. But mind,

Sostratus, you must not put it into other people's heads to ask questions of this kind.

25 (12). ALEXANDER, HANNIBAL, MINOS AND SCIPIO

ALEXANDER

Libyan, I claim precedence of you. I am the better man.

HANNIBAL

Pardon me.

ALEXANDER

Then let Minos decide.

MINOS

Who are you both?

ALEXANDER

This is Hannibal, the Carthaginian: I am Alexander, the son of Philip.

MINOS

Bless me, a distinguished pair! And what is the quarrel about?

ALEXANDER

It is a question of precedence. He says he is the better general: and I maintain that neither Hannibal nor (I might almost add) any of my predecessors was my equal in strategy; all the world knows that.

MINOS

Well, you shall each have your say in turn: the Libyan first.

HANNIBAL

Fortunately for me, Minos, I have mastered Greek since I have been here; so that my adversary will not have even that advantage of me. Now I hold that the highest praise is due to those who have won their way to greatness from obscurity; who have clothed themselves in power, and shown themselves fit for dominion. I myself entered Spain with a handful of men, took service under my brother, and was found worthy of the supreme command. I conquered the Celtiberians, subdued Western Gaul, crossed the Alps, overran the valley of the Po, sacked town after town, made myself master of the plains, approached the bulwarks of the capital, and in one day slew such a host, that their finger-rings were measured by bushels, and the rivers were bridged by their bodies. And this I did, though I had never been called a son of Ammon; I never pretended to be a god, never related visions of my mother; I made no secret of the fact that I was mere flesh and blood. My rivals were the ablest generals in the world, commanding the best soldiers in the world;

I warred not with Medes or Assyrians, who fly before they are pursued, and yield the victory to him that dares take it. Alexander, on the other hand, in increasing and extending as he did the dominion which he had inherited from his father, was but following the impetus given to him by Fortune. And this conqueror had no sooner crushed his puny adversary by the victories of Issus and Arbela, than he forsook the traditions of his country, and lived the life of a Persian; accepting the prostrations of his subjects, assassinating his friends at his own table, or handing them over to the executioner. I in my command respected the freedom of my country, delayed not to obey her summons, when the enemy with their huge armament invaded Libya, laid aside the privileges of my office, and submitted to my sentence without a murmur. Yet I was a barbarian all unskilled in Greek culture; I could not recite Homer, nor had I enjoyed the advantages of Aristotle's instruction; I had to make a shift with such qualities as were mine by nature.—It is on these grounds that I claim the pre-eminence. My rival has indeed all the lustre that attaches to the wearing of a diadem, and—I know not—for Macedonians such things may have charms: but I cannot think that this circumstance constitutes a higher claim than the courage and genius of one who owed nothing to Fortune, and everything to his own resolution.

MINOS

Not bad, for a Libyan.—Well, Alexander, what do you say to that?

ALEXANDER

Silence, Minos, would be the best answer to such confident self-assertion. The tongue of Fame will suffice of itself to convince you that I was a great prince, and my opponent a petty adventurer. But I would have you consider the distance between us. Called to the throne while I was yet a boy, I quelled the disorders of my kingdom, and avenged my father's murder. By the destruction of Thebes, I inspired the Greeks with such awe, that they appointed me their commander-in-chief; and from that moment, scorning to confine myself to the kingdom that I inherited from my father, I extended my gaze over the entire face of the earth, and thought it shame if I should govern less than the whole. With a small force I invaded Asia, gained a great victory on the Granicus, took Lydia, Ionia, Phrygia,—in short, subdued all that was within my reach, before I commenced my march for Issus, where Darius was waiting for me at the head of his myriads. You know the sequel: yourselves can best say what was the number of the dead whom on one day I dispatched hither. The ferryman tells me that his boat would not hold them; most of them had to come across on rafts of their own construction. In these enterprises, I was ever at the head of my troops, ever courted danger. To say nothing of Tyre and Arbela, I penetrated into India, and carried my empire to the shores of Ocean; I captured elephants; I conquered Porus; I crossed the Tanais, and worsted the Scythians—no mean enemies—in a tremendous cavalry engagement. I heaped benefits upon my friends: I made my enemies taste my resentment. If men took me for a god, I cannot blame them; the vastness of my undertakings might excuse such a belief. But to conclude. I died a king: Hannibal, a fugitive at the court of the Bithynian Prusias—fitting end for villany and cruelty. Of his Italian victories I say nothing; they were the fruit not of honest legitimate warfare, but of treachery, craft, and dissimulation. He taunts me with self-indulgence: my illustrious friend has

surely forgotten the pleasant time he spent in Capua among the ladies, while the precious moments fleeted by. Had I not scorned the Western world, and turned my attention to the East, what would it have cost me to make the bloodless conquest of Italy, and Libya, and all, as far West as Gades? But nations that already cowered beneath a master were unworthy of my sword.—I have finished, Minos, and await your decision; of the many arguments I might have used, these shall suffice.

SCIPIO
First, Minos, let me speak.

MINOS
And who are you, friend? and where do you come from?

SCIPIO
I am Scipio, the Roman general, who destroyed Carthage, and gained great victories over the Libyans.

MINOS
Well, and what have you to say?

SCIPIO
That Alexander is my superior, and I am Hannibal's, having defeated him, and driven him to ignominious flight. What impudence is this, to contend with Alexander, to whom I, your conqueror, would not presume to compare myself!

MINOS
Honestly spoken, Scipio, on my word! Very well, then: Alexander comes first, and you next; and I think we must say Hannibal third. And a very creditable third, too.

26 (15). ACHILLES AND ANTILOCHUS

ANTILOCHUS
Achilles, what you were saying to Odysseus the other day about death was very poor-spirited; I should have expected better things from a pupil of Chiron and Phoenix. I was listening; you said you would rather be a servant on earth to some poor hind 'of scanty livelihood possessed,' than king of all the dead. Such sentiments might have been very well in the mouth of a poor-spirited cowardly Phrygian, dishonourably in love with life: for the son of Peleus, boldest of all Heroes, so to vilify himself, is a disgrace; it gives the lie to all your life; you might have had a long inglorious reign in Phthia, and your own choice was death and glory.

ACHILLES
In those days, son of Nestor, I knew not this place; ignorant whether of those two was the better,

I esteemed that flicker of fame more than life; now I see that it is worthless, let folk up there make what verses of it they will. ’Tis dead level among the dead, Antilochus; strength and beauty are no more; we welter all in the same gloom, one no better than another; the shades of Trojans fear me not, Achaeans pay me no reverence; each may say what he will; a man is a ghost, 'or be he churl, or be he peer.' It irks me; I would fain be a servant, and alive.

ANTILOCHUS

But what help, Achilles? ’tis Nature's decree that by all means all die. We must abide by her law, and not fret at her commands. Consider too how many of us are with you here; Odysseus comes ere long; how else? Is there not comfort in the common fate? ’tis something not to suffer alone. See Heracles, Meleager, and many another great one; they, methinks, would not choose return, if one would send them up to serve poor destitute men.

ACHILLES

Ay, your intent is friendly; but I know not, the thought of the past life irks me—and each of you too, if I mistake not. And if you confess it not, the worse for you, smothering your pain.

ANTILOCHUS

Not the worse, Achilles; the better; for we see that speech is unavailing. Be silent, bear, endure—that is our resolve, lest such longings bring mockery on us, as on you.

27 (19). AEACUS AND PROTESILAUS

AEACUS

Now then, Protesilaus, what do you mean by assaulting and throttling Helen?

PROTESILAUS

Why, it was all her fault that I died, leaving my house half built, and my bride a widow.

AEACUS

You should blame Menelaus, for taking you all to Troy after such a light-o'-love.

PROTESILAUS

That is true; he shall answer it.

MENELAUS

No, no, my dear sir; Paris surely is the man; he outraged all rights in carrying off his host's wife with him. He deserves throttling, if you like, and not from you only, but from Greeks and barbarians as well, for all the deaths he brought upon them.

PROTESILAUS

Ah, now I have it. Here, you—you Paris! you shall not escape my clutches.

PARIS
Oh, come, sir, you will never wrong one of the same gentle craft as yourself. Am I not a lover too, and a subject of your deity? against love you know (with the best will in the world) how vain it is to strive; ’tis a spirit that draws us whither it will.

PROTESILAUS
There is reason in that. Oh, would that I had Love himself here in these hands!

AEACUS
Permit me to charge myself with his defence. He does not absolutely deny his responsibility for Paris's love; but that for your death he refers to yourself, Protesilaus. You forgot all about your bride, fell in love with fame, and, directly the fleet touched the Troad, took that rash senseless leap, which brought you first to shore and to death.

PROTESILAUS
Now it is my turn to correct, Aeacus. The blame does not rest with me, but with Fate; so was my thread spun from the beginning.

AEACUS
Exactly so; then why blame our good friends here?

28 (23). PROTESILAUS, PLUTO AND PERSEPHONE
PROTESILAUS
Lord, King, our Zeus! and thou, daughter of Demeter! Grant a lover's boon!

PLUTO
What do you want? who are you?

PROTESILAUS
Protesilaus, son of Iphiclus, of Phylace, one of the Achaean host, the first that died at Troy. And the boon I ask is release and one day's life.

PLUTO
Ah, friend, that is the love that all these dead men love, and none shall ever win.

PROTESILAUS
Nay, dread lord, ’tis not life I love, but the bride that I left new wedded in my chamber that day I sailed away—ah me, to be slain by Hector as my foot touched land! My lord, that yearning gives me no peace. I return content, if she might look on me but for an hour.

PLUTO
Did you miss your dose of Lethe, man?

PROTESILAUS
Nay, lord; but this prevailed against it.

PLUTO
Oh, well, wait a little; she will come to you one day; it is so simple; no need for you to be going up.

PROTESILAUS
My heart is sick with hope deferred; thou too, O Pluto, hast loved; thou knowest what love is.

PLUTO
What good will it do you to come to life for a day, and then renew your pains?

PROTESILAUS
I think to win her to come with me, and bring two dead for one.

PLUTO
It may not be; it never has been.

PROTESILAUS
Bethink thee, Pluto. 'Twas for this same cause that ye gave Orpheus his Eurydice; and Heracles had interest enough to be granted Alcestis; she was of my kin.

PLUTO
Would you like to present that bare ugly skull to your fair bride? will she admit you, when she cannot tell you from another man? I know well enough; she will be frightened and run from you, and you will have gone all that way for nothing.

PERSEPHONE
Husband, doctor that disease yourself: tell Hermes, as soon as Protesilaus reaches the light, to touch him with his wand, and make him young and fair as when he left the bridal chamber.

PLUTO
Well, I cannot refuse a lady. Hermes, take him up and turn him into a bridegroom. But mind, you sir, a strictly temporary one.

29 (24). DIOGENES AND MAUSOLUS
DIOGENES

Why so proud, Carian? How are you better than the rest of us?

MAUSOLUS

Sinopean, to begin with, I was a king; king of all Caria, ruler of many Lydians, subduer of islands, conqueror of well-nigh the whole of Ionia, even to the borders of Miletus. Further, I was comely, and of noble stature, and a mighty warrior. Finally, a vast tomb lies over me in Halicarnassus, of such dimensions, of such exquisite beauty as no other shade can boast. Thereon are the perfect semblances of man and horse, carved in the fairest marble; scarcely may a temple be found to match it. These are the grounds of my pride: are they inadequate?

DIOGENES

Kingship—beauty—heavy tomb; is that it?

MAUSOLUS

It is as you say.

DIOGENES

But, my handsome Mausolus, the power and the beauty are no longer there. If we were to appoint an umpire now on the question of comeliness, I see no reason why he should prefer your skull to mine. Both are bald, and bare of flesh; our teeth are equally in evidence; each of us has lost his eyes, and each is snub-nosed. Then as to the tomb and the costly marbles, I dare say such a fine erection gives the Halicarnassians something to brag about and show off to strangers: but I don't see, friend, that you are the better for it, unless it is that you claim to carry more weight than the rest of us, with all that marble on the top of you.

MAUSOLUS

Then all is to go for nothing? Mausolus and Diogenes are to rank as equals?

DIOGENES

Equals! My dear sir, no; I don't say that. While Mausolus is groaning over the memories of earth, and the felicity which he supposed to be his, Diogenes will be chuckling. While Mausolus boasts of the tomb raised to him by Artemisia, his wife and sister, Diogenes knows not whether he has a tomb or no—the question never having occurred to him; he knows only that his name is on the tongues of the wise, as one who lived the life of a man; a higher monument than yours, vile Carian slave, and set on firmer foundations.

30 (25). NIREUS, THERSITES AND MENIPPUS

NIREUS

Here we are; Menippus shall award the palm of beauty. Menippus, am I not better-looking than he?

MENIPPUS
Well, who are you? I must know that first, mustn't I?

NIREUS
Nireus and Thersites.

MENIPPUS
Which is which? I cannot tell that yet.

THERSITES
One to me; I am like you; you have no such superiority as Homer (blind, by the way) gave you when he called you the handsomest of men; he might peak my head and thin my hair, our judge finds me none the worse. Now, Menippus, make up your mind which is handsomer.

NIREUS
I, of course, I, the son of Aglaia and Charopus,

Comeliest of all that came ’neath Trojan walls.

MENIPPUS
But not comeliest of all that come ’neath the earth, as far as I know. Your bones are much like other people's; and the only difference between your two skulls is that yours would not take much to stove it in. It is a tender article, something short of masculine.

NIREUS
Ask Homer what I was, when I sailed with the Achaeans.

MENIPPUS
Dreams, dreams. I am looking at what you are; what you were is ancient history.

NIREUS
Am I not handsomer here, Menippus?

MENIPPUS
You are not handsome at all, nor any one else either. Hades is a democracy; one man is as good as another here.

THERSITES
And a very tolerable arrangement too, if you ask me.
THE END.

MENIPPUS, A NECROMANTIC EXPERIMENT

MENIPPUS

[1] All hail, my roof, my doors, my hearth and home! How sweet again to see the light and thee!

PHILONIDES

Menippus the cynic, surely; even so, or there are visions about. Menippus, every inch of him. What has he been getting himself up like that for? sailor's cap, lyre, and lion-skin? However, here goes.—How are you, Menippus? where do you spring from? You have disappeared this long time.

MENIPPUS

Death's lurking-place I leave, and those dark gates Where Hades dwells, a God apart from Gods.

PHILONIDES

Good gracious! has Menippus died, all on the quiet, and come to life for a second spell?

MENIPPUS

Not so; a living guest in Hades I.

PHILONIDES

But what induced you to take this queer original journey?

MENIPPUS

Youth drew me on—too bold, too little wise.

PHILONIDES

My good man, truce to your heroics; get off those iambic stilts, and tell me in plain prose what this get-up means; what did you want with the lower regions? It is a journey that needs a motive to make it attractive.

MENIPPUS

Dear friend, to Hades' realms I needs must go,

To counsel with Tiresias of Thebes.

PHILONIDES

Man, you must be mad; or why string verses instead of talking like one friend with another?

MENIPPUS

My dear fellow, you need not be so surprised. I have just been in Euripides's and Homer's company; I suppose I am full to the throat with verse, and the numbers come as soon as I open

my mouth. But how are things going up here? what is Athens about?

PHILONIDES
[2] Oh, nothing new; extortion, perjury, forty per cent, face-grinding.

MENIPPUS
Poor misguided fools! they are not posted up in the latest lower-world legislation; the recent decrees against the rich will be too much for all their evasive ingenuity.

PHILONIDES
Do you mean to say the lower world has been making new regulations for us?

MENIPPUS
Plenty of them, I assure you. But I may not publish them, nor reveal secrets; the result might be a suit for impiety in the court of Rhadamanthus.

PHILONIDES
Oh now, Menippus, in Heaven's name, no secrets between friends! you know I am no blabber; and I am initiated, if you come to that.

MENIPPUS
’ Tis a hard thing you ask, and a perilous; yet for you I must venture it. It was resolved, then, that these rich who roll in money and keep their gold under lock and key like a Danae—

PHILONIDES
Oh, don't come to the decrees yet; begin at the beginning. I am particularly curious about your object in going, who showed you the way, and the whole story of what you saw and heard down there; you are a man of taste, and sure not to have missed anything worth looking at or listening to.

MENIPPUS
[3] I can refuse you nothing, you see; what is one to do, when a friend insists? Well, I will show you first the state of mind which put me on the venture. When I was a boy, and listened to Homer's and Hesiod's tales of war and civil strife—and they do not confine themselves to the Heroes, but include the Gods in their descriptions, adulterous Gods, rapacious Gods, violent, litigious, usurping, incestuous Gods—, well, I found it all quite proper, and indeed was intensely interested in it. But as I came to man's estate, I observed that the laws flatly contradicted the poets, forbidding adultery, sedition, and rapacity. So I was in a very hazy state of mind, and could not tell what to make of it. The Gods would surely never have been guilty of such behaviour if they had not considered it good; and yet law-givers would never have recommended avoiding it, if avoidance had not seemed desirable.

[4] In this perplexity, I determined to go to the people they call philosophers, put myself in their hands, and ask them to make what they would of me and give me a plain reliable map of life. This was my idea in going to them; but the effort only shifted me from the frying-pan into the fire; it was just among these that my inquiry brought the greatest ignorance and bewilderment to light; they very soon convinced me that the real golden life is that of the man in the street. One of them would have me do nothing but seek pleasure and ensue it; according to him, Happiness was pleasure. Another recommended the exact contrary—toil and moil, bring the body under, be filthy and squalid, disgusting and abusive—concluding always with the tags from Hesiod about Virtue, or something about indefatigable pursuit of the ideal. Another bade me despise money, and reckon the acquisition of it as a thing indifferent; he too had his contrary, who declared wealth a good in itself. I will spare you their metaphysics; I was sickened with daily doses of Ideas, Incorporeal Things, Atoms, Vacua, and a multitude more. The extraordinary thing was that people maintaining the most opposite views would each of them produce convincing plausible arguments; when the same thing was called hot and cold by different persons, there was no refuting one more than the other, however well one knew that it could not be hot and cold at once. I was just like a man dropping off to sleep, with his head first nodding forward, and then jerking back.

[5] Yet that absurdity is surpassed by another. I found by observation that the practice of these same people was diametrically opposed to their precepts. Those who preached contempt of wealth would hold on to it like grim death, dispute about interest, teach for pay, and sacrifice everything to the main chance, while the depreciators of fame directed all their words and deeds to nothing else but fame; pleasure, which had all their private devotions, they were almost unanimous in condemning.

[6] Thus again disappointed of my hope, I was in yet worse case than before; it was slight consolation to reflect that I was in numerous and wise and eminently sensible company, if I was a fool still, all astray in my quest of Truth. One night, while these thoughts kept me sleepless, I resolved to go to Babylon and ask help from one of the Magi, Zoroaster's disciples and successors; I had been told that by incantations and other rites they could open the gates of Hades, take down any one they chose in safety, and bring him up again. I thought the best thing would be to secure the services of one of these, visit Tiresias the Boeotian, and learn from that wise seer what is the best life and the right choice for a man of sense. I got up with all speed and started straight for Babylon. When I arrived, I found a wise and wonderful Chaldean; he was white-haired, with a long imposing beard, and called Mithrobarzanes. My prayers and supplications at last induced him to name a price for conducting me down.

[7] Taking me under his charge, he commenced with a new moon, and brought me down for twenty-nine successive mornings to the Euphrates, where he bathed me, apostrophizing the rising sun in a long formula, of which I never caught much; he gabbled indistinctly, like bad heralds at

the Games; but he appeared to be invoking spirits. This charm completed, he spat thrice upon my face, and I went home, not letting my eyes meet those of any one we passed. Our food was nuts and acorns, our drink milk and hydromel and water from the Choaspes, and we slept out of doors on the grass. When he thought me sufficiently prepared, he took me at midnight to the Tigris, purified and rubbed me over, sanctified me with torches and squills and other things, muttering the charm aforesaid, then made a magic circle round me to protect me from ghosts, and finally led me home backwards just as I was; it was now time to arrange our voyage.

[8] He himself put on a magic robe, Median in character, and fetched and gave me the cap, lion's skin, and lyre which you see, telling me if I were asked my name not to say Menippus, but Heracles, Odysseus, or Orpheus.

PHILONIDES
What was that for? I see no reason either for the get-up or for the choice of names.

MENIPPUS
Oh, obvious enough; there is no mystery in that. He thought that as these three had gone down alive to Hades before us, I might easily elude Aeacus's guard by borrowing their appearance, and be passed as an habitué; there is good warrant in the theatre for the efficiency of disguise.

[9] Dawn was approaching when we went down to the river to embark; he had provided a boat, victims, hydromel, and all necessaries for our mystic enterprise. We put all aboard, and then,

Troubled at heart, with welling tears, we went.

For some distance we floated down stream, until we entered the marshy lake in which the Euphrates disappears. Beyond this we came to a desolate, wooded, sunless spot; there we landed, Mithrobarzanes leading the way, and proceeded to dig a pit, slay our sheep, and sprinkle their blood round the edge. Meanwhile the Mage, with a lighted torch in his hand, abandoning his customary whisper, shouted at the top of his voice an invocation to all spirits, particularly the Poenae and Erinyes,

Hecat's dark might, and dread Persephone,

with a string of other names, outlandish, unintelligible, and polysyllabic.

[10] As he ended, there was a great commotion, earth was burst open by the incantation, the barking of Cerberus was heard far off, and all was overcast and lowering;

Quaked in his dark abyss the King of Shades;

for almost all was now unveiled to us, the lake, and Phlegethon, and the abode of Pluto. Undeterred, we made our way down the chasm, and came upon Rhadamanthus half dead with fear. Cerberus barked and looked like getting up; but I quickly touched my lyre, and the first note sufficed to lull him. Reaching the lake, we nearly missed our passage for that time, the ferry-boat being already full; there was incessant lamentation, and all the passengers had wounds upon them; mangled legs, mangled heads, mangled everything; no doubt there was a war going on. Nevertheless, when good Charon saw the lion's skin, taking me for Heracles, he made room, was delighted to give me a passage, and showed us our direction when we got off.

[11] We were now in darkness; so Mithrobarzanes led the way, and I followed holding on to him, until we reached a great meadow of asphodel, where the shades of the dead, with their thin voices, came flitting round us. Working gradually on, we reached the court of Minos; he was sitting on a high throne, with the Poenae, Avengers, and Erinyes standing at the sides. From another direction was being brought a long row of persons chained together; I heard that they were adulterers, procurers, publicans, sycophants, informers, and all the filth that pollutes the stream of life. Separate from them came the rich and usurers, pale, pot-bellied, and gouty, each with a hundredweight of spiked collar upon him. There we stood looking at the proceedings and listening to the pleas they put in; their accusers were orators of a strange and novel species.

PHILONIDES
Who, in God's name? shrink not; let me know all.

MENIPPUS
It has not escaped your observation that the sun projects certain shadows of our bodies on the ground.

PHILONIDES
How should it have?

MENIPPUS
These, when we die, are the prosecutors and witnesses who bring home to us our conduct on earth; their constant attendance and absolute attachment to our persons secures them high credit in the witness-box.

[12] Well, Minos carefully examined each prisoner, and sent him off to the place of the wicked to receive punishment proportionate to his transgressions. He was especially severe upon those who, puffed up with wealth and authority, were expecting an almost reverential treatment; he could not away with their ephemeral presumption and superciliousness, their failure to realize the mortality of themselves and their fortunes. Stripped of all that made them glorious, of wealth and birth and power, there they stood naked and downcast, reconstructing their worldly blessedness in their minds like a dream that is gone; the spectacle was meat and drink to me; any that I knew by sight

I would come quietly up to, and remind him of his state up here; what a spirit had his been, when morning crowds lined his hall, expectant of his coming, being jostled or thrust out by lacqueys! at last my lord Sun would dawn upon them, in purple or gold or rainbow hues, not unconscious of the bliss he shed upon those who approached, if he let them kiss his breast or his hand. These reminders seemed to annoy them.

[13] Minos, however, did allow his decision to be influenced in one case. Dionysius of Syracuse was accused by Dion of many unholy deeds, and damning evidence was produced by his shadow; he was on the point of being chained to the Chimera, when Aristippus of Cyrene, whose name and influence are great below, got him off on the ground of his constant generosity as a patron of literature.

[14] We left the court at last, and came to the place of punishment. Many a piteous sight and sound was there—cracking of whips, shrieks of the burning, rack and gibbet and wheel; Chimera tearing, Cerberus devouring; all tortured together, kings and slaves, governors and paupers, rich and beggars, and all repenting their sins. A few of them, the lately dead, we recognized. These would turn away and shrink from observation; or if they met our eyes, it would be with a slavish cringing glance—how different from the arrogance and contempt that had marked them in life! The poor were allowed half-time in their tortures, respite and punishment alternating. Those with whom legend is so busy I saw with my eyes—Ixion, Sisyphus, the Phrygian Tantalus in all his misery, and the giant Tityus—how vast, his bulk covering a whole field!

[15] Leaving these, we entered the Acherusian plain, and there found the demi-gods, men and women both, and the common dead, dwelling in their nations and tribes, some of them ancient and mouldering, 'strengthless heads,' as Homer has it, others fresh, with substance yet in them, Egyptians chiefly, these--so long last their embalming drugs. But to know one from another was no easy task; all are so like when the bones are bared; yet with pains and long scrutiny we could make them out. They lay pell-mell in undistinguished heaps, with none of their earthly beauties left. With all those anatomies piled together as like as could be, eyes glaring ghastly and vacant, teeth gleaming bare, I knew not how to tell Thersites from Nireus the beauty, beggar Irus from the Phaeacian king, or cook Pyrrhias from Agamemnon's self. Their ancient marks were gone, and their bones alike—uncertain, unlabelled, indistinguishable.

[16] When I saw all this, the life of man came before me under the likeness of a great pageant, arranged and marshalled by Chance, who distributed infinitely varied costumes to the performers. She would take one and array him like a king, with tiara, bodyguard, and crown complete; another she dressed like a slave; one was adorned with beauty, another got up as a ridiculous hunchback; there must be all kinds in the show. Often before the procession was over she made individuals exchange characters; they could not be allowed to keep the same to the end; Croesus must double parts and appear as slave and captive; Maeandrius, starting as slave, would take over Polycrates's despotism, and be allowed to keep his new clothes for a little while. And when the

procession is done, every one disrobes, gives up his character with his body, and appears, as he originally was, just like his neighbour. Some, when Chance comes round collecting the properties, are silly enough to sulk and protest, as though they were being robbed of their own instead of only returning loans. You know the kind of thing on the stage—tragic actors shifting as the play requires from Creon to Priam, from Priam to Agamemnon; the same man, very likely, whom you saw just now in all the majesty of Cecrops or Erechtheus, treads the boards next as a slave, because the author tells him to. The play over, each of them throws off his gold-spangled robe and his mask, descends from the buskin's height, and moves a mean ordinary creature; his name is not now Agamemnon son of Atreus or Creon son of Menoeceus, but Polus son of Charicles of Sunium or Satyrus son of Theogiton of Marathon. Such is the condition of mankind, or so that sight presented it to me.

PHILONIDES

[17] Now, if a man occupies a costly towering sepulchre, or leaves monuments, statues, inscriptions behind him on earth, does not this place him in a class above the common dead?

MENIPPUS

Nonsense, my good man; if you had looked on Mausolus himself—the Carian so famous for his tomb—, I assure you, you would never have stopped laughing; he was a miserable unconsidered unit among the general mass of the dead, flung aside in a dusty hole, with no profit of his sepulchre but its extra weight upon him. No, friend, when Aeacus gives a man his allowance of space—and it never exceeds a foot's breadth—, he must be content to pack himself into its limits. You might have laughed still more if you had beheld the kings and governors of earth begging in Hades, selling salt fish for a living, it might be, or giving elementary lessons, insulted by any one who met them, and cuffed like the most worthless of slaves. When I saw Philip of Macedon, I could not contain myself; some one showed him to me cobbling old shoes for money in a corner. Many others were to be seen begging—people like Xerxes, Darius, or Polycrates.

PHILONIDES

[18] These royal downfalls are extraordinary almost incredible. But what of Socrates, Diogenes, and such wise men?

MENIPPUS

Socrates still goes about proving everybody wrong, the same as ever; Palamedes, Odysseus, Nestor, and a few other conversational shades, keep him company. His legs, by the way, were still puffy and swollen from the poison. Good Diogenes pitches close to Sardanapalus, Midas, and other specimens of magnificence. The sound of their lamentations and better-day memories keeps him in laughter and spirits; he is generally stretched on his back roaring out a noisy song which drowns lamentation; it annoys them, and they are looking out for a new pitch where he may not molest them.

PHILONIDES

[19] I am satisfied. And now for that decree which you told me had been passed against the rich.

MENIPPUS

Well remembered; that was what I meant to tell you about, but I have somehow got far astray. Well, during my stay the presiding officers gave notice of an assembly on matters of general interest. So, when I saw every one flocking to it, I mingled with the shades and constituted myself a member. Various measures were decided upon, and last came this question of the rich. Many grave accusations were preferred against them, including violence, ostentation, pride, injustice; and at last a popular speaker rose and moved this decree.

DECREE

[20] `Whereas the rich are guilty of many illegalities on earth, harrying and oppressing the poor and trampling upon all their rights, it is the pleasure of the Senate and People that after death they shall be punished in their bodies like other malefactors, but their souls shall be sent on earth to inhabit asses, until they have passed in that shape a quarter-million of years, generation after generation, bearing burdens under the tender mercies of the poor; after which they shall be permitted to die. Mover of this decree—Cranion son of Skeletion of the deme Necysia in the Alibantid1 tribe.' The decree read, a formal vote was taken, in which the people accepted it. A snort from Brimo and a bark from Cerberus completed the proceedings according to the regular form.

[21] So went the assembly. And now, in pursuance of my original design, I went to Tiresias, explained my case fully, and implored him to give me his views upon the best life. He is a blind little old man, pale and weak-voiced. He smiled and said:—`My son, the cause of your perplexity, I know, is the fact that doctors differ; but I may not enlighten you; Rhadamanthus forbids.' `Ah, say not so, father,' I exclaimed; `speak out, and leave me not to wander through life in a blindness worse than yours.' So he drew me apart to a considerable distance, and whispered in my ear:—`The life of the ordinary man is the best and most prudent choice; cease from the folly of metaphysical speculation and inquiry into origins and ends, utterly reject their clever logic, count all these things idle talk, and pursue one end alone—how you may do what your hand finds to do, and go your way with ever a smile and never a passion.' So he, and sought the lawn of asphodel.

[22] It was now late, and I told Mithrobarzanes that our work was done, and we might reascend. `Very well, Menippus,' said he, `I will show you an easy short cut.' And taking me to a place where the darkness was especially thick, he pointed to a dim and distant ray of light—a mere pencil admitted through a chink. 'There,' he said, `is the shrine of Trophonius, from which the Boeotian inquirers start; go up that way, and you will be on Grecian soil without more ado.' I was delighted, took my leave of the Mage, crawled with considerable difficulty through the aperture, and found myself, sure enough, at Lebadea.

1. The four names are formed from words meaning skull, skeleton, corpse, anatomy.