

Lucian of Samosata

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It was on the cards, it seems, that our modern world should not be altogether destitute of noteworthy and memorable men, but should produce enormous physical prowess and a highly philosophic mind. I speak with reference to the Boeotian Sostratus, whom the Greeks called Heracles and believed to be that hero, and especially to Demonax, the philosopher. Both these men I saw myself, and saw with wonderment: and under one of them, Demonax, I was long a student. I have written about Sostratus elsewhere,¹ and have described his size and excessive strength, his open-air life on Parnassus, his bed that was no bed of ease, his mountain fare and his deeds (not inconsistent with his name²) achieved in the way of slaying robbers, making roads in untravelled country and bridging places hard to pass. It is now fitting to tell of Demonax for two reasons—that he may be retained in memory by men of culture as far as I can bring it about, and that young men of good instincts who aspire to philosophy may not have to shape themselves by ancient precedents alone, but may be able to set themselves a pattern from our modern world and to copy that man, the best of all the philosophers whom I know about.

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He was a Cypriote by birth, and not of common stock as regards civic rank and property. Nevertheless, rising above all this and thinking that he deserved the best that life offers, he aspired to philosophy. It was not at the instigation of Agathobulus or his predecessor Demetrius or Epictetus, though he studied with all these men and with Timocrates of Heraclia besides, a wise man of great sublimity in thought as well as in language. As I was saying, however, Demonax was not enlisted in the cause by any of these men, but even from his boyhood felt the stirring of an individual impulse toward the higher life and an inborn love for philosophy, so that he despised all that men count good, and, committing himself unreservedly to liberty and free-speech, was steadfast in leading a straight, sane, irreproachable life and in setting an example to all who saw and heard him by his good judgment and the honesty of his philosophy. You must not conceive, however, that he rushed into these matters with unwashen feet, as the saying goes: he was brought up on the poets and knew most of them by heart, he was a practised speaker, his acquaintance with the schools of philosophy was not secured either in a short time or (to quote the proverb) "with the tip of his finger," he had trained his body and hardened it for endurance and in general he had made it his aim to require nothing from anyone else. Consequently, when he found out that he was no longer sufficient unto himself, he voluntarily took his departure from life, leaving behind him a great reputation among Greeks of culture.

He did not mark out for himself a single form of philosophy but combined many of them, and never

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would quite reveal which one he favoured. Probably he had most in common with Socrates, although he seemed to follow the man of Sinope¹ in dress and in easy-going ways. He did not, however, alter the details of his life in order to gain the wonder and attract the gaze of men he met, but led the same life and ate the same food as everyone else, was not in the least subject to pride, and played his part in society and politics. He did not cultivate the irony of Socrates; his conversations were full of Attic charm, so that his visitors, on going away, did not feel contempt for him because he was ill-bred or aversion to his criticisms because they were gloomy, but were beside themselves for joy and were far better, happier and more hopeful of the future than when they came. He never was known to make an uproar or excite himself or get angry, even if he had to rebuke someone; though he assailed sins, he forgave sinners, thinking that one should pattern after doctors, who heal sicknesses but feel no anger at the sick. He considered that it is human to err, divine or all but divine to set the fallen on their feet.

Leading such a life, he wanted nothing for himself, but helped his friends in a reasonable way. Some of them, who were seemingly favoured by fortune, he reminded that they were elated over imaginary blessings of brief span. Others, who were bewailing poverty, fretting at exile or finding fault with old age or sickness, he laughingly consoled, saying that they failed to see that after a little while they would have surcease of worries and would find

¹ Diogenes.

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oblivion of their fortunes, good and bad, and lasting liberty. He made it his business also to reconcile brothers at variance and to make terms of peace between wives and husbands. On occasion, he has talked reason to excited mobs, and has usually persuaded them to serve their country in a temperate spirit.

Such was the character of his philosophy—kind, gentle and cheerful. The only thing which distressed him was the illness or death of a friend, for he considered friendship the greatest of human blessings. For this reason he was everyone's friend, and there was no human being whom he did not include in his affections, though he liked the society of some better than that of others. He held aloof only from those who seemed to him to be involved in sin beyond hope of cure. And in all this, his every word and deed was smiled on by the Graces and by Aphrodite, even; so that, to quote the comedian, "persuasion perched upon his lips."¹

Hence all Athens, high and low, admired him enormously and always viewed him as a superior being. Yet in office he ran counter to public opinion and won from the masses quite as much hatred as his prototype² by his freedom of speech and action. He too had his Anytus and his Meletus who combined against him and brought the same charges that their predecessors brought against Socrates, asserting that he had never been known to sacrifice and was the only man in the community uninitiated in the Eleusinian mysteries. In reply to this, with right good

¹ Eupolis, quoted in the note on "Nigrinus" 7.

² Socrates.

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courage he wreathed his head, put on a clean cloak, went to the assembly and made his defence, which was in part good-tempered, in part more caustic than accorded with his scheme of life. Regarding his never having offered sacrifice to Athena, he said: "Do not be surprised, men of Athens, that I have not hitherto sacrificed to her: I did not suppose that she had any need of my offerings." Regarding the other charge, the matter of the mysteries, he said that he had never joined them in the rite because if the mysteries were bad, he would not hold his tongue before the uninitiate but would turn them away from the cult, while if they were good, he would reveal them to everybody out of his love for humanity. So the Athenians, who already had stones in both hands to throw at him, became good-natured and friendly toward him at once, and from that time on they honoured, respected and finally admired him. Yet in the very beginning of his speech he had used a pretty caustic introduction, "Men of Athens, you see me ready with my garland: come, sacrifice me like your former victim, for on that occasion your offering found no favour with the gods!"

I should like to cite a few of his well-directed and witty remarks, and may as well begin with Favorinus¹ and what he said to him. When Favorinus was told by someone that Demonax was making fun of his lectures and particularly of the laxity of their rhythm, saying that it was vulgar and effeminate and not by any means appropriate to philosophy, he went to Demonax and asked him: "Who are you to libel my compositions?" "A

¹ An eunuch from Arles, of considerable repute as a sophist.

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man with an ear that is not easy to cheat," said he. The sophist kept at him and asked: "What qualifications had you, Demonax, to leave school and commence philosophy?" "Those you lack," he retorted.

Another time the same man went to him and asked what philosophical school he favoured most. Demonax replied: "Why, who told you that I was a philosopher?" As he left, he broke into a very hearty laugh; and when Favorinus asked him what he was laughing at, he replied: "It seemed to me ridiculous that you should think a philosopher can be told by his beard when you yourself have none."

When the Sidonian sophist¹ was once showing his powers at Athens, and was voicing his own praise to the effect that he was acquainted with all philosophy—but I may as well cite his very words: "If Aristotle calls me to the Lyceum, I shall go with him; if Plato calls me to the Academy, I shall come; if Zeno calls, I shall spend my time in the Stoa; if Pythagoras calls, I shall hold my tongue."² Well, Demonax arose in the midst of the audience and said: "Ho" (addressing him by name), "Pythagoras is calling you!"

When a handsome young fellow named Pytho, who belonged to one of the aristocratic families in Macedonia, was quizzing him, putting a catch-question to him and asking him to tell the logical answer, he said: "I know thus much, my boy—it's a poser, and so are you!" Enraged at the pun, the other said threateningly: "I'll show you in short order that you've a man to deal with!"

¹ Otherwise unknown.

² Alluding to the Pythagorean vow of silence.

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whereupon Demonax laughingly inquired: "Oh, you will send for your man, then?"

When an athlete, whom he had ridiculed for letting himself be seen in gay clothes although he was an Olympic champion, struck him on the head with a stone and drew blood, each of the bystanders was as angry as if he himself had been struck, and they shouted "Go, get the proconsul!" But Demonax said "No! not the proconsul—the doctor!"

Finding a bit of jewelry one day while he was out walking, he posted a notice in the public square asking the one who owned it and had lost it to come and get it by describing the weight of the setting, the stone, and the engravings on it. Well, a pretty girl came to him saying that she had lost it; but as there was nothing right in her description, Demonax said: "Be off, girl, and don't lose your own jewel: this is none of yours!"

A Roman senator in Athens introduced his son to him, a handsome boy, but girlish and neurasthenic, saying: "My son here pays his respects to you." "A dear boy," said Demonax, "worthy of you and like his mother!"

The Cynic who pursued his philosophical studies clad in a bearskin he would not call Honoratus, which was his name, but Ursinus.

When a man asked him what he thought was the definition of happiness, he replied that none but a free man is happy; and when the other said that free men were numerous, he rejoined: "But I have

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in mind the man who neither hopes nor fears anything." "But how can one achieve this? For the most part we are all slaves of hope and fear." "Why, if you observe human affairs you will find that they do not afford justification either for hope or for fear, since, whatever you may say, pains and pleasures are alike destined to end."

When Peregrinus Proteus rebuked him for laughing a great deal and making sport of mankind saying: "Demonax, you're not at all doggish!" he answered, "Peregrinus, you are not at all human!"¹

When a scientist was talking of the Topsy-turvy people (Antipodes), he made him get up, took him to a well, showed him their own reflection in the water and asked: "Is that the sort of topsy-turvy people you mean?"

When a fellow claimed to be a sorcerer and to have spells so potent that by their agency he could prevail on everybody to give him whatever he wanted, Demonax said: "Nothing strange in that! I am in the same business: follow me to the bread-woman's, if you like, and you shall see me persuade her to give me bread with a single spell and a tiny charm"—implying that a coin is as good as a spell.

When Herodes,² the superlative, was mourning the premature death of Polydeuces and wanted a chariot regularly made ready and horses put to it just as if the boy were going for a drive, and dinner regularly served for him, Demonax went to him and said: "I am bringing you a message from Polydeuces."

¹ Peregrinus Proteus, of whose death and translation to a higher sphere Lucian has written in "The Passing of Peregrinus," carried his 'doggishness' (Cynicism) to extremes.

² Herodes Atticus. Polydeuces was a favourite slave.

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Herodes was pleased and thought that Demonax, like everyone else, was falling in with his humour; so he said: Well, what does Polydeuces want, Demonax?" "He finds fault with you," said he, "for not going to join him at once!"

He went to a man who was mourning the death of a son and had shut himself up in the dark, and told him that he was a sorcerer and could raise the boy's shade for him if only he would name three men who had never mourned for anyone. When the man hesitated long and was perplexed—I suppose he could not name a single one—Demonax said: "You ridiculous fellow, do you think, then, that you alone suffer beyond endurance, when you see that nobody is unacquainted with mourning?"

He also liked to poke fun at those who use obsolete and unusual words in conversation. For instance, to a man who had been asked a certain question by him and had answered in far-fetched book-language, he said: "I asked you now, but you answer me as if I had asked in Agamemnon's day."

When one of his friends said: "Demonax, let's go to the Aesculapium and pray for my son," he replied: "You must think Aesculapius very deaf, that he can't hear our prayers from where we are!"

On seeing two philosophers very ignorantly debating a given subject, one asking silly questions and the other giving answers that were not at all to the point, he said: "Doesn't it seem to you, friends, that one of these fellows is milking a he-goat and the other is holding a sieve for him!"

When Agathocles the Peripatetic was boasting

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that he was first among the logicians—that there was no other, he said: “Come now, Agathocles; if there is no other, you are not first: if you are first, then there are others.”

Cethegus the ex-consul, going by way of Greece to Asia to be his father’s lieutenant, did and said many ridiculous things. One of the friends of Demonax, looking on, said that he was a great good-for-nothing. “No, he isn’t, either,” said he—“not a great one!”

When he saw Apollonius the philosopher leaving the city with a multitude of disciples (he was called away to be tutor to the emperor), Demonax remarked: “There goes Apollonius and his Argonauts!”¹

When a man asked him if he thought that the soul was immortal, he said: “Yes, but no more so than everything else.”

Touching Herodes he remarked that Plato was right in saying that we have more than one soul, for a man with only one could not feast Regilla² and Polydeuces as if they were still alive and say what he did in his lectures.

Once, on hearing the proclamation which precedes the mysteries, he made bold to ask the Athenians publicly why they exclude foreigners, particularly as the founder of the rite, Eumolpus, was a foreigner and a Thracian to boot!

Again, when he was intending to make a voyage in winter, one of his friends remarked: “Aren’t you afraid the boat will capsize and the fishes will

¹ Alluding to Apollonius of Rhodes and his poem on the Argonauts, and implying that this was another quest of the Golden Fleece.

² Wife of Herodes.

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eat you?" "I should be an ingrate," said he, "if I made any bones about letting the fishes eat me, when I have eaten so many of them!"

An orator whose delivery was wretched was advised by him to practise and exercise; on his replying: "I am always reciting to myself," Demonax answered: "Then no wonder you recite that way, with a fool for a hearer!"

Again, on seeing a soothsayer make public forecasts for money, he said: "I don't see on what ground you claim the fee: if you think you can change destiny in any way, you ask too little, however much you ask; but if everything is to turn out as Heaven has ordained, what good is your soothsaying?"

When a Roman officer, well-developed physically, gave him an exhibition of sword-practice on a post, and asked: "What did you think of my swordsmanship, Demonax?" he said: "Fine, if you have a wooden adversary!"

Moreover, when questions were unanswerable he always had an apt retort ready. When a man asked him banteringly: "If I should burn a thousand pounds of wood, Demonax, how many pounds of smoke would it make?" he replied: "Weigh the ashes: all the rest will be smoke."

A man named Polybius, quite uneducated and ungrammatical, said: "The emperor has honoured me with the Roman citizenship." "Oh, why didn't he make you a Greek instead of a Roman?" said he.

On seeing an aristocrat who set great store on the breadth of his purple band, Demonax, taking hold of the garment and calling his attention to it,

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said in his ear: "A sheep wore this before you, and he was but a sheep for all that!"

When he was taking a bath and hesitated to enter the steaming water, a man reproached him with cowardice. "Tell me," said he, "was my country at stake in the matter?"

When someone asked him: "What do you think it is like in Hades?" he replied: "Wait a bit, and I'll send you word from there!"

A vile poet named Admetus told him that he had written an epitaph in a single line and had given instructions in his will to have it carved on his tombstone. I may as well quote it exactly:

"Earth, in thy bosom receive Admetus's husk; he's a god now!"

Demonax said with a laugh: "The epitaph is so fine that I wish it were already carved!"

A man saw on the legs of Demonax a discoloration of the sort that is natural to old people, and enquired: "What's that, Demonax?" With a smile he said: "The ferryman's tooth-mark!"

He saw a Spartan beating a slave, and said: "Stop treating him as your equal!"¹

When a woman named Danae had a dispute with her brother, he said: "Go to law! Though your name be Danae, you are not the daughter of Acrisius (Lawless)."

Above all, he made war on those who cultivate philosophy in the spirit of vainglory and not in the spirit of truth. For example, on seeing a Cynic with cloak and wallet, but with a bar (hyperon) for a

¹ Whipping was a feature of the Spartan training.

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staff, who was making an uproar and saying that he was the follower of Antisthenes, Crates, and Diogenes, Demonax said: "Don't lie! You are really a disciple of Barson (Hyperides¹)!"

When he saw many of the athletes fighting foul and breaking the rules of the games by biting instead of boxing, he said: "No wonder the athletes of the present day are called 'lions' by their hangers-on!"

His remark to the proconsul was at once clever and cutting. This man was one of the sort that use pitch to remove hair from their legs and their whole bodies. When a Cynic mounted a stone and charged him with this, accusing him of effeminacy, he was angry, had the fellow hauled down and was on the point of confining him in the stocks or even sentencing him to exile. But Demonax, who was passing by, begged him to pardon the man for making bold to speak his mind in the traditional Cynic way. The proconsul said: "Well, I will let him off for you this time, but if he ever dares to do such a thing again, what shall be done to him?" "Have him depilated!" said Demonax.

One to whom the emperor had entrusted the command of legions and of the most important province asked Demonax what was the best way to exercise authority. "Don't lose your temper!" said he: "Do little talking and much listening!"

When someone asked him: "Do *you* eat honey-cakes?" he replied: "What! do you think the bees lay up their honey just for fools?"

¹ Perhaps an unknown Cynic; but the name may be used just for the sake of the pun, without reference to a definite person.

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On seeing near the Painted Porch a statue with its hand cut off, he remarked that it was pretty late in the day for the Athenians to be honouring Cynegirus¹ with a bronze statue.

Noting that Rufinus the Cypriote (I mean the lame man of the school of Aristotle) was spending much time in the walks of the Lyceum, he remarked: "Pretty cheeky, I call it—a lame Peripatetic (Stroller)!"

When Epictetus rebuked him and advised him to get married and have children, saying that a philosopher ought to leave nature a substitute when he is gone, his answer was very much to the point: "Then give me one of your daughters, Epictetus!"

His reply to Herminus the Aristotelian deserves mention. Aware that, although he was an out-and-out scoundrel and had done a thousand misdeeds, he sang the praises of Aristotle and had his Ten Sentences (the Categories) on his tongue's end, Demonax said: "Herminus, you really need ten sentences!"

When the Athenians, out of rivalry with the Corinthians, were thinking of holding a gladiatorial show, he came before them and said: "Don't pass this resolution, men of Athens, without first pulling down the altar of Mercy."

When he went to Olympia and the Eleans voted him a bronze statue, he said: "Don't do this, men of Elis, for fear you may appear to reflect on your ancestors because they did not set up statues either to Socrates or to Diogenes."

¹ Brother of Aeschylus, who lost his hand at Marathon, and the Painted Porch was so called from a fresco by Polygnotus representing the battle.

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I once heard him say to . . . , the lawyer, that in all likelihood the laws were of no use, whether framed for the bad or the good ; for the latter had no need of laws, and the former were not improved by them.

From Homer the one line he most frequently quoted was :

“ Idler or toiler, 'tis all one to Death.”¹

He had a good word even for Thersites, calling him a mob-orator of the Cynic type.

When he was once asked which of the philosophers he liked, he said : “ They are all admirable, but for my part I revere Socrates, I wonder at Diogenes, and I love Aristippus.”

He lived almost a hundred years, without illness or pain, bothering nobody and asking nothing of anyone, helping his friends and never making an enemy. Not only the Athenians but all Greece conceived such affection for him that when he passed by the magistrates rose up in his honour and there was silence everywhere. Toward the end, when he was very old, he used to eat and sleep uninvited in any house which he chanced to be passing, and the inmates thought that it was almost a divine visitation, and that good fortune had entered their doors. As he went by, the bread-women would pull him toward them, each wanting him to take some bread from her, and she who succeeded in giving it thought that she was in luck. The children, too, brought him fruit and called him father. Once when

¹ *Iliad* 9, 320.

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there was a party quarrel in Athens, he went into the assembly and just by showing himself reduced them to silence : then, seeing that they had already repented, he went away without a word.

When he realised that he was no longer able to wait upon himself, he quoted to those who were with him the verses of the heralds at the games :

Here endeth a contest awarding the fairest
Of prizes : time calls, and forbids us delay.

Then, refraining from all food, he took leave of life in the same cheerful humour that people he met always saw him in. A short time before the end he was asked : "What orders have you to give about your burial?" and replied : "Don't borrow trouble ! The stench will get me buried !" The man said : "Why, isn't it disgraceful that the body of such a man should be exposed for birds and dogs to devour ?" "I see nothing out of the way in it," said he, "if even in death I am going to be of service to living things." But the Athenians gave him a magnificent public funeral and mourned him long. To honour him, they did obeisance to the stone bench on which he used to rest when he was tired, and they put garlands on it ; for they felt that even the stone on which he had been wont to sit was sacred. Everybody attended his burial, especially the philosophers ; indeed, it was they who took him on their shoulders and carried him to the tomb.

These are a very few things out of many which I might have mentioned, but they will suffice to give my readers a notion of the sort of man he was.