

Lucian of Samosata, *Alexander the False-Prophet*

Translation from A.M. Harmon, *Lucian* (Loeb Classical Library; London: Heinemann, 1936).
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Modified and modernized by Philip A. Harland.

[1] No doubt, my dear Celsus, you think it a slight and trivial matter to bid me set down in a book and send you the history of Alexander, the impostor of Abonoteichos, including all his clever schemes, bold emprises, and sleights of hand; but in point of fact, if one should aim to examine each detail closely, it would be no less a task than to record the exploits of Philip's son Alexander. The one was as great in villainy as the other in heroism. Nevertheless, if it should be your intention to overlook faults as you read, and to fill out for yourself the gaps in my tale, I will undertake the task for you and will essay to clean up that Augean stable, if not wholly, yet to the extent of my ability, fetching out some few basketsful, so that from them you may judge how great, how inexpressible, was the entire quantity of filth that three thousand head of cattle were able to create in many years.

[2] I blush for both of us, I confess, both for you and for myself—for you because you want a consummate rascal perpetuated in memory and in writing, and for myself because I am devoting my energy to such a purpose, to the exploits of a man who does not deserve to have polite people read about him, but rather to have the motley crowd in a vast amphitheatre see him being torn to pieces by foxes or apes. Yet if anyone brings this reproach against us, we will be able to refer to an apt precedent. Arrian, the disciple of Epictetus, a Roman of the highest distinction, and a life-long devotee of letters, laid himself open to the same charge, and so can plead our cause as well as his own; he thought fit, you know, to record the life of Tillorobus, the brigand. In our own case, however, we will commemorate a far more savage brigand, since our hero plied his trade not in forests and mountains, but in cities, and instead of infesting just Mysia and Mount Ida and harrying a few of the more deserted districts of Asia, he filled the whole Roman Empire, I may say, with his brigandage.

[3] First I will draw you a word-picture of the man himself, making as close a likeness as I can, although I am not particularly good at drawing. As regards his person—in order that I may exhibit this also to you—he was tall and handsome in appearance, and really godlike; his skin was fair, his beard not very thick; his long hair was in part natural, in part false, but very similar, so that most people did not detect that it was not his own. His eyes shone with a great glow of fervour and enthusiasm; his voice was at once very sweet and very clear; and in a word, no fault could be found with him in any respect as far as all that went.

[4] Such, then, was his outward appearance; but his soul and his mind—O Heracles Forfender! O Zeus, Averter of Mischief! O Twin Brothers, our Saviours! may it be the fortune of our enemies and ill-wishers to encounter and have to do with the like of him! In understanding, quick-wittedness, and penetration he was far beyond everyone else; and activity of mind, readiness to learn, retentiveness, natural aptitude for studies—all these qualities were his, in every case to the full. But he made the worst possible use of them, and with these noble instruments at his service soon became the most perfect rascal of all those who have been notorious far and wide for villainy, surpassing the Cercopes, surpassing Eurybatus, or Phrynonidas, or Aristodemus, or Sostratus. He himself, writing to his son-in-law Rutilianus once upon a time and speaking of himself with the greatest reserve, claimed to be like Pythagoras; but—with all due respect to Pythagoras, a wise man of more than human intelligence—if he had been this man's contemporary, he would have seemed a child, I am very sure, beside him! In the name of the Graces, do not imagine that I say this to insult Pythagoras, or in the endeavour to bring them into connection with one another by likening their doings. On the contrary, if all that is worst and most

opprobrious in what is said of Pythagoras to discredit him (which I for my part cannot believe to be true) should nevertheless be brought together for comparison, the whole of it would be but an infinitesimal part of Alexander's knavery. In sum, imagine, please, and mentally configure a highly diversified soul-blend, made up of lying, trickery, perjury, and malice; facile, audacious, venturesome, diligent in the execution of its schemes, plausible, convincing, masking as good, and wearing an appearance absolutely opposite to its purpose. indeed, there is nobody who, after meeting him for the first time, did not come away with the idea that he was the most honest and upright man in the world—yes, and the most simple and unaffected. And on top of all this, he had the quality of magnificence, of forming no petty designs but always keeping his mind upon the most important objects.

[5] While he was still a mere boy, and a very handsome one, as could be inferred from the sere and yellow leaf of him, and could also be learned by hearsay from those who recounted his story, he trafficked freely in his attractiveness and sold his company to those who sought it. Among others, he had an admirer who was a quack, one of those who advertise enchantments, miraculous incantations, charms for your love-affairs, "sendings" for your enemies, disclosures of buried treasure, and successions to estates. As this man saw that he was an apt lad, more than ready to assist him in his affairs, and that the boy was quite as much enamoured with his roguery as he with the boy's beauty, he gave him a thorough education and constantly made use of him as helper, servant, and acolyte. He himself was professedly a public physician, but, as Homer says of the wife of Thon, the Egyptian, he knew "Many a drug that was good in a compound, and many a bad one," all of which Alexander inherited and took over. This teacher and admirer of his was a man of Tyana by birth, one of those who had been followers of the notorious Apollonius, and who knew his whole bag of tricks. You see what sort of school the man that I am describing comes from!

[6] Alexander was just getting his beard when the death of the Tyanean put him in a bad way, since it coincided with the passing of his beauty, by which he might have supported himself. So he abandoned petty projects for ever. He formed a partnership with a Byzantine writer of choral songs, one of those who enter the public competitions, far more abominable than himself by nature—Cocconas, I think, was his nickname. And they went about the country practising quackery and sorcery, and "trimming the fatheads"—as they call the public in the traditional patter of magicians. Well, among these they hit upon a rich Macedonian woman, past her prime but still eager to be charming, and not only lined their purses fairly well at her expense, but went with her from Bithynia to Macedon. She came from Pella, a place once flourishing in the time of the kings of Macedon but now insignificant, with very few inhabitants. [7] There they saw great serpents, quite tame and gentle, so that they were kept by women, slept with children, let themselves be stepped upon, were not angry when they were stroked, and took milk from the breast just like babies. There are many such in the country, and that, probably, is what gave currency in former days to the story about Olympias; no doubt a serpent of that sort slept with her when she was carrying Alexander. So they bought one of the reptiles, the finest, for a few coppers. [8] And, in the words of Thucydides: "Here beginneth the war!"

As you might have expected of two consummate rascals, greatly daring, fully prepared for mischief, who had put their heads together, they readily discerned that human life is swayed by two great tyrants, hope and fear, and that a man who could use both of these to advantage would speedily enrich himself. For they perceived that both to one who fears and to one who hopes, foreknowledge is very essential and very keenly coveted, and that long ago not only Delphi, but Delos and Clarus and Branchidae, had become rich and famous because, thanks to the tyrants just mentioned, hope and fear, men continually visited their sanctuaries and sought to learn the future in advance, and to that end sacrificed hecatombs (100 victims) and dedicated ingots of gold. By turning all this round and round in

conference with one another and keeping it astir, they concocted the project of founding a prophetic shrine and oracle, hoping that if they should succeed in it, they would at once be rich and prosperous—which, in fact, befell them in greater measure than they at first expected, and turned out better than they hoped.

[9] Then they began planning, first about the place, and next, what should be the commencement and the character of the venture. Cocconas thought Chalcedon a suitable and convenient place, close to Thrace and Bithynia, and not far, too, from Asia and Galatia and all the peoples of the interior. Alexander, on the other hand, preferred his own home, saying—and it was true—that to commence such a venture they needed “fat-heads” and simpletons to be their victims, and such, he said, were the Paphlagonians who lived up above Abonoteichos, who were for the most part superstitious and rich; whenever a man but turned up with someone at his heels to play the flute or the tambourine or the cymbals, telling fortunes with a sieve, as the phrase goes, they were all agog over him on the instant and stared at him as if he were a god from heaven.

[10] There was no slight difference of opinion between them on that score, but in the end Alexander won, and going to Chalcedon, since after all that city seemed to them to have some usefulness, in the temple of Apollo, which is the most ancient in Chalcedon, they buried bronze tablets which said that very soon Asclepius, with his father Apollo, would move to Pontus and take up his residence at Abonoteichos. The opportune discovery of these tablets caused this story to spread quickly to all Bithynia and Pontus, and to Abonoteichos sooner than anywhere else. Indeed, the people of that city immediately voted to build a temple and began at once to dig for the foundations. Then Cocconas was left behind in Chalcedon, composing equivocal, ambiguous, obscure oracles, and died before long, bitten, I think, by a viper. [11] It was Alexander who was sent in first; he now wore his hair long, had falling ringlets, dressed in a parti-coloured tunic of white and purple, with a white cloak over it, and carried a falchion like that of Perseus, from whom he claimed descent on his mother’s side. And although those miserable Paphlagonians knew that both his parents were obscure, humble folk, they believed the oracle when it said: “Here in your sight is a scion of Perseus, dear unto Phoebus; This is divine Alexander, who shareth the blood of the Healer!” Podaleirius, the Healer, it would appear, was so passionate and amorous that his ardour carried him all the way from Tricca to Paphlagonia in quest of Alexander’s mother!

An oracle by now had turned up which purported to be a prior prediction by the Sibyl:

“On the shores of the Euxine sea, in the neighbourhood of Sinope,
There will be born, by a Tower, in the days of the Romans, a prophet;
After the foremost unit and three times ten, he will shew forth
Five more units besides, and a score told three times over,
Matching, with places four, the name of a valiant defender !”

[12] Well, upon invading his native land with all this pomp and circumstance after a long absence, Alexander was a man of mark and note, affecting as he did to have occasional fits of madness anti causing his mouth to fill with foam. This he easily managed by chewing the root of soapwort, the plant that dyers use; but to his fellow-countrymen even the foam seemed supernatural and awe-inspiring. Then, too, they had long ago prepared and fitted up a serpent’s head of linen, which had something of a human look, was all painted up, and appeared very lifelike. It would open and close its mouth by means of horsehairs, and a forked black tongue like a snake’s, also controlled by horsehairs, would dart out. Besides, the serpent from Pella was ready in advance and was being cared for at home, destined in due time to manifest himself to them and to take a part in their show—in fact, to be cast for the leading rôle.

[13] When at length it was time to begin, he contrived an ingenious ruse. Going at night to the foundations of the temple which were just being excavated, where a pool of water had gathered which

either issued from springs somewhere in the foundations themselves or had fallen from the sky, he secreted there a goose-egg, previously blown, which contained a snake just born; and after burying it deep in the mud, he went back again. In the morning he ran out into the market-place naked, wearing a loin-cloth (this too was gilded), carrying his falchion, and tossing his unconfined mane like a devotee of the Great Mother in the frenzy. Addressing the people from a high altar upon which he had climbed, he congratulated the city because it was at once to receive the god in visible presence. The assembly—for almost the whole city, including women, old men, and boys, had come running— marvelled, prayed and made obeisance. Uttering a few meaningless words like Hebrew or Phoenician, he dazed the creatures, who did not know what he was saying save only that he everywhere brought in Apollo and Asclepius. [14] Then he ran at full speed to the future temple, went to the excavation and the previously improvised fountain-head of the oracle, entered ‘the water, sang hymns in honour of Asclepius and Apollo at the top of his voice, and besought the god, under the blessing of Heaven, to come to the city. Then he asked for a libation-saucer, and when somebody handed him one, deftly slipped it underneath and brought up, along with water and mud, that egg in which he had immured the god; the joint about the plug had been closed with wax and white lead. Taking it in his hands, he asserted that at that moment he held Asclepius! They gazed unwaveringly to see what in the world was going to happen; indeed, they had already marvelled at the discovery of the egg in the water. But when he broke it and received the tiny snake into his hollowed hand, and the crowd saw it moving and twisting about his fingers, they at once raised a shout, welcomed the god, congratulated their city, and began each of them to sate himself greedily with prayers, craving treasures, riches, health, and every other blessing from, him. But Alexander went home again at full speed, taking with him the new-born Asclepius, “born twice, when other men are born but once,” whose mother was not Coronis, by Zeus, nor yet a crow, but a goose! And the whole population followed, all full of religious fervour and crazed with expectations.

[15] For some days he remained at home, expecting what actually happened—that as the news spread, crowds of Paphlagonians would come running in. When the city had become over-full of people, all of them already bereft of their brains and sense, and not in the least like bread-eating humans, but different from beasts of the field only in their looks, he seated himself on a couch in a certain chamber, clothed in apparel well suited to a god, and took into his bosom his Asclepius from Pella, who, as I have said, was of uncommon size and beauty. Coiling him about his neck, and letting the tail, which was long, stream over his lap and drag part of its length on the floor, he concealed only the head by holding it under his arm—the creature would submit to anything—and showed the linen head at one side of his own beard, as if it certainly belonged to the creature that was in view.

[16] Now then, please imagine a little room, not very bright and not admitting any too much daylight; also, a crowd of heterogeneous humanity, excited, wonder-struck in advance, agog with hopes. When they went in, the thing, of course, seemed to them a miracle, that the formerly tiny snake within a few days had turned into so great a serpent, with a human face, moreover, and tame! They were immediately crowded towards the exit, and before they could look closely were forced out by those who kept coming in, for another door had been opened on the opposite side as an exit. That was the way the Macedonians did, they say, in Babylon during Alexander’s illness, when he was in a bad way and they surrounded the palace, craving to see him and say good-bye. This exhibition the scoundrel gave not merely once, they say, but again and again, above all if any rich men were newly arrived.

[17] In that matter, dear Celsus, to tell the truth, we must excuse those men of Paphlagonia and Pontus, thick-witted, uneducated fellows that they were, for being deluded when they touched the serpent — Alexander let anyone do so who wished—and besides saw in a dim light what purported to be its head opening and shutting its mouth. Really the trick stood in need of a Democritus, or even Epicurus himself

or Metrodorus, or someone else with a mind as firm as adamant toward such matters, so as to disbelieve and guess the truth—one who, if he could not discover how it went, would at all events be convinced beforehand that though the method of the fraud escaped him, it was nevertheless all sham and could not possibly happen.

[18] Little by little, Bithynia, Galatia, and Thrace came pouring in, for everyone who carried the news very likely said that he not only had seen the god born but had subsequently touched him, after he had grown very great in a short time and had a face that looked like a man's. Next came paintings and statues and cult-images, some made of bronze, some of silver, and naturally a name was bestowed upon the god. He was called Glycon in consequence of a divine behest in metre; for Alexander proclaimed: "Glycon am I, the grandson of Zeus, bright beacon to mortals!"

[19] When it was time to carry out the purpose for which the whole scheme had been concocted—that is to say, to make predictions and give oracles to those who sought them—taking his cue from Amphilocheus in Cilicia, who, as you know, after the death and disappearance of his father Amphiaraus at Thebes, was exiled from his own country, went to Cilicia, and got on very well by foretelling the future, like his father, for the Cilicians and getting two obols for each prediction—taking, as I say, his cue from him, Alexander announced to all comers that the god would make prophecies, and named a date for it in advance. He directed everyone to write down in a scroll whatever he wanted and what he especially wished to learn, to tie it up, and to seal it with wax or clay or something else of that sort. Then he himself, after taking the scrolls and entering the inner sanctuary—for by that time the temple had been erected and the stage set—proposed to summon in order, with herald and priest, those who had submitted them, and after the god told him about each case, to give back the scroll with the seal upon it, just as it was, and the reply to it endorsed upon it; for the god would reply explicitly to any question that anyone should put.

[20] As a matter of fact, this trick, to a man like you, and if it is not out of place to say so, like myself also, was obvious and easy to see through, but to those drivelling idiots it was miraculous and almost as good as incredible. Having discovered various ways of undoing the seals, he would read all the questions and answer them as he thought best. Then he would roll up the scrolls again, seal them, and give them back, to the great astonishment of the recipients, among whom the comment was frequent: "Why, how did he learn the questions which I gave him very securely sealed with impressions hard to counterfeit, unless there was really some god that knew everything?"

[21] "What were his discoveries, then?" perhaps you will ask. Listen, therefore, in order to be able to show up such impostors. The first, my dear Celsus, was a well-known method; heating a needle, he removed the seal by melting through the wax underneath it, and after reading the contents he warmed the wax once more with the needle, both that which was under the thread and that which contained the seal, and so stuck it together without difficulty. Another method was by using what they call plaster; this is a compound of Bruttian pitch, asphalt, pulverized gypsum, wax, and gum Arabic. Making his plaster out of all these materials and warming it over the fire, he applied it to the seal, which he had previously wetted with saliva, and took a mould of the impression. Then, since the plaster hardened at once, after easily opening and reading the scrolls, he applied the wax and made an impression upon it precisely like the original, just as one would with a gem. Let me tell you a third method, in addition to these. Putting marble-dust into the glue with which they glue books and making a paste of it, he applied that to the seal while it was still soft, and then, as it grows hard at once, more solid than horn or even iron, he removed it and used it for the impression. There are many other devices with this result, but they need not all be mentioned, for fear that we might seem to be wanting in taste, especially in view of the fact that in the book which you wrote against the sorcerers, a very good and useful treatise, capable of preserving common-sense in its readers, you cited instances enough, and indeed a great many more than I have.

[22] Well, as I say, Alexander made predictions and gave oracles, employing great shrewdness in it and combining guesswork with his trickery. He gave responses that were sometimes obscure and ambiguous, sometimes downright unintelligible, for this seemed to him in the oracular manner. Some people he dissuaded or encouraged as seemed best to him at a guess. To others he prescribed medical treatments and diets, knowing, as I said in the beginning, many useful remedies. His “cytmides” were in highest favour with him—a name which he had coined for a restorative ointment compounded of bear’s grease. Expectations, however, and advancements and successions to estates he always put off to another day, adding: “It will all come about when I will, and when Alexander, my prophet, asks it of me and prays for you.”

[23] A price had been fixed for each oracle, a drachma and two obols. Do not think that it was low, my friend, or that the revenue from this source was scanty! He gleaned as much as seventy or eighty thousand a year, since men were so greedy as to send in ten and fifteen questions each. What he received he did not use for himself alone nor treasure up to make himself rich, but since he had many men about him by this time as assistants, servants, collectors of information, writers of oracles, custodians of oracles, clerks, sealers, and expounders, he divided with all, giving each one what was proportionate to his worth.

[24] By now he was even sending men abroad to create rumours in the different nations in regard to the oracle and to say that he made predictions, discovered fugitive slaves, detected thieves and robbers, caused treasures to be dug up, healed the sick, and in some cases had actually raised the dead. So there was a hustling and a bustling from every side, with sacrifices and votive offerings—and twice as much for the prophet and disciple of the god. For this oracle also had come out: “Honour I bid you to give my faithful servant, the prophet; No great store do I set upon riches, but much on the prophet.”

[25] When at last many sensible men, recovering, as it were, from profound intoxication, combined against him, especially all the followers of Epicurus, and when in the cities they began gradually to detect all the trickery and buncombe of the show, he issued a promulgation designed to scare them, saying that Pontus was full of atheists and Christians who had the hardihood to utter the vilest abuse of him; these he bade them drive away with stones if they wanted to have the god gracious. About Epicurus, moreover, he delivered himself of an oracle after this sort; when someone asked him how Epicurus was doing in Hades, he replied: “With leaden fetters on his feet in filthy mire he sitteth.” Do you wonder, then, that the shrine waxed great, now that you see that the questions of its visitors were intelligent and refined?

In general, the war that he waged upon Epicurus was without truce or parley, naturally enough. Upon whom else would a quack who loved humbug and bitterly hated truth more fittingly make war than upon Epicurus, who discerned the nature of things and alone knew the truth in them? The followers of Plato and Chrysippus and Pythagoras were his friends, and there was profound peace with them; but “the impervious Epicurus” —for that is what he called him—was rightly his bitter enemy, since he considered all that sort of thing a laughing-matter and a joke. So Alexander hated Amastris most of all the cities in Pontus because he knew that the followers of Lepidus and others like them were numerous in the city; and he would never deliver an oracle to an Amastrian. Once when he did venture to make a prediction for a senator’s brother, he acquitted himself ridiculously, since he could neither compose a clever response himself nor find anyone else who could do it in time. The man complained of colic, and Alexander, wishing to direct him to eat a pig’s foot cooked with mallow, said: “Mallow with cummin digest in a sacred pipkin of piglets.”

[26] Again and again, as I said before, he exhibited the serpent to all who requested it, not in its entirety, but exposing chiefly the tail and the rest of the body and keeping the head out of sight under his arm. But as he wished to astonish the crowd still more, he promised to produce the god talking—

delivering oracles in person without a prophet. It was no difficult matter for him to fasten cranes' windpipes together and pass them through the head, which he had so fashioned as to be lifelike. Then he answered the questions through someone else, who spoke into the tube from the outside, so that the voice issued from his canvas Asclepius.

These oracles were called autophones, and were not given to everybody promiscuously, but only to those who were noble, rich, and free-handed. [27] For example, the oracle given to Severianus in regard to his invasion of Armenia was one of the autophones. Alexander encouraged him to the invasion by saying:

“Under your charging spear will fall Armenians and Parthi;
Then you will fare to Rome and the glorious waters of Tiber
Wearing upon your brow the chaplet studded with sunbeams.”

Then when that silly Celt, being convinced, made the invasion and ended by getting himself and his army cut to bits by Osroes, Alexander expunged this oracle from his records and inserted another in its place

“Better for you that your forces against Armenia march not,
Lest some man, like a woman bedight, despatch from his bowstring
Grim death, cutting you off from life and enjoyment of sunlight.”

[28] That was one of his devices, and a very clever one—belated oracles to make amends for those in which he had made bad predictions and missed the mark. Often he would promise good health to sick men before their demise, and when they died another oracle would be ready with a recantation: “Seek no more for assistance against thy bitter affliction; Death now standeth in view; 'tis beyond thy power to 'scape him.”

[29] As he was aware that the priests at Clarus and Didymi and Mallus were themselves in high repute for the same sort of divination, he made them his friends by sending many of his visitors to them, saying: “Now unto Clarus begone, to the voice of my father to hearken.” and at another time, “Visit the fane of the Branchids and hear what the oracle sayeth,” and again, “Make thy way unto Mallus and let Amphiloichus answer.”

[30] So far, we have been concerned with his doings near the frontier, extending over Ionia, Cilicia, Paphlagonia, and Galatia. But when the renown of his prophetic shrine spread to Italy and invaded the city of Rome, everybody without exception, each on the other's heels, made haste, some to go in person, some to send; this was the case particularly with those who had the greatest power and the highest rank in the city. The first and foremost of these was Rutilianus, who, though a man of birth and breeding, put to the proof in many Roman offices, nevertheless in all that concerned the gods was very infirm and held strange beliefs about them. If he but saw anywhere a stone smeared with holy oil or adorned with a wreath, he would fall on his face forthwith, kiss his hand, and stand beside it for a long time making vows and craving blessings from it.

When this man heard the tales about the oracle, he very nearly abandoned the office which had been committed to him and took wing to Abonoteichos. Anyhow, he sent one set of messengers after another, and his emissaries, mere illiterate serving-people, were easily deluded, so when they came back, they told not only what they had seen but what they had heard as if they had seen it, and threw in something more for good measure, so as to gain favour with their master. Consequently, they inflamed the poor old man and made him absolutely crazy. [31] Having many powerful friends, he went about not only telling what he had heard from his messengers but adding still more on his own account. So he flooded and convulsed the city, and agitated most of the court, who themselves at once hastened to go and hear something that concerned them.

To all who came, Alexander gave a very cordial reception, made them think well of him by lavish entertainment and expensive presents, and sent them back not merely to report the answers to their questions, but to sing the praises of the god and to tell portentous lies about the oracle on their own account. [32] At the same time, however, the plaguy scoundrel devised a trick which was really clever and not what one would expect of your ordinary swindler. In opening and reading the forwarded scrolls, if he found anything dangerous and venturesome in the questions, he would keep them himself and not send them back, in order to hold the senders in subjection and all but in slavery because of their fear, since they remembered what it was that they had asked. You understand what questions are likely to be put by men who are rich and very powerful. So he used to derive much gain from those men, who knew that he had them in his net.

[33] I should tell you some of the responses that were given to Rutilianus. Asking about his son by a former marriage, who was then in the full bloom of youth, he enquired who should be appointed his tutor in his studies. The reply was: "Be it Pythagoras; aye, and the good bard, master of warfare." Then after a few days the boy died, and Alexander was at his wit's end, with nothing to say to his critics, as the oracle had been shown up so obviously. But Rutilianus himself, good soul, made haste to defend the oracle by saying that the god had predicted precisely this outcome, and on account of it had bidden him to select as his tutor nobody then alive, but rather Pythagoras and Homer, who died long ago, with whom, no doubt, the lad was then studying in Hades. What fault, then, should we find with Alexander if he thought fit to amuse himself at the expense of such homunculi?

[34] At another time, when Rutilianus enquired whose soul he had inherited, the reply was: "Peleus' son were you at the first; thereafter Menander, Then what you seem now, and hereafter will turn to a sunbeam. Four score seasons of life will be given you over a hundred." But as a matter of fact he died insane at seventy without awaiting the fulfilment of the god's promise! [35] This oracle too was one of the autophones.

When one time he enquired about getting married, Alexander said explicitly: "Take Alexander's daughter to wife, who was born of Selene." He had long before given out a story to the effect that his daughter was by Selene; for Selene had fallen in love with him on seeing him asleep once upon a time—it is a habit of hers, you know, to adore handsome lads in their sleep! Without any hesitation that prince of sages Rutilianus sent for the girl at once, celebrated his nuptials as a sexagenarian bridegroom, and took her to wife, propitiating his mother-in-law, the moon, with whole hecatombs and imagining that he himself had become one of the Celestials!

[36] No sooner did Alexander get Italy in hand than he began to devise projects that were ever greater and greater, and sent oracle-mongers everywhere in the Roman Empire, warning the cities to be on their guard against plagues and conflagrations and earthquakes; he promised that he would himself afford them infallible aid so that none of these calamities should befall them. There was one oracle, also an autophone, which he despatched to all the nations during the pestilence; it was but a single verse: "Phoebus, the god unshorn, keeps off plague's nebulous onset." This verse was to be seen everywhere written over doorways as a charm against the plague; but in most cases it had the contrary result. By some chance it was particularly the houses on which the verse was inscribed that were depopulated! Do not suppose me to mean that they were stricken on account of the verse—by some chance or other it turned out that way, and perhaps, too, people neglected precautions because of their confidence in the line and lived too carelessly, giving the oracle no assistance against the disease because they were going to have the syllables to defend them and "unshorn Phoebus" to drive away the plague with his arrows!

[37] Moreover, Alexander posted a great number of his fellow-conspirators in Rome itself as his agents, who reported everyone's views to him and gave him advance information about the questions and

the especial wishes of those who consulted him, so that the messengers might find him ready to answer even before they arrived

[38] He made these preparations to meet the situation in Italy, and also made notable preparations at home. He established a celebration of mysteries, with torchlight ceremonies and priestly offices, which was to be held annually, for three days in succession, in perpetuity. On the first day, as at Athens, there was a proclamation, worded as follows: "If any atheist or Christian or Epicurean has come to spy upon the rites, let him be off, and let those who believe in the god perform the mysteries, under the blessing of Heaven." Then, at the very outset, there was an "expulsion," in which he took the lead, saying: "Out with the Christians," and the whole multitude chanted in response, "Out with the Epicureans!" Then there was the child-bed of Leto, the birth of Apollo, his marriage to Coronis, and the birth of Asclepius. On the second day came the manifestation of Glycon, including the birth of the god. [39] On the third day there was the union of Podaleirius and the mother of Alexander—it was called the Day of Torches, and torches were burned. In conclusion there was the amour of Selene and Alexander, and the birth of Rutilianus' wife. The torch-bearer and hierophant was our Endymion, Alexander. While he lay in full view, pretending to be asleep, there came down to him from the roof, as if from heaven, not Selene but Rutilia, a very pretty woman, married to one of the emperor's stewards. She was genuinely in love with Alexander and he with her; and before the eyes of her worthless husband there were kisses and embraces in public. If the torches had not been numerous, perhaps the thing would have been carried even further. After a short time Alexander entered again, robed as a priest, amid profound silence, and said in a loud voice, over and over again, "Hail, Glycon," while, following in his train, a number of would-be Eumolpids and Ceryces from Paphlagonia, with brogans on their feet and breaths that reeked of garlic, shouted in response, "Hail, Alexander!"

[40] Often in the course of the torchlight ceremonies and the gambols of the mysteries his thigh was bared purposely and showed golden. No doubt gilded leather had been put about it, which gleamed in the light of the cressets. There was once a discussion between two of our learned idiots in regard to him, whether he had the soul of Pythagoras, on account of the golden thigh, or some other soul akin to it. They referred this question to Alexander himself, and King Glycon resolved their doubt with an oracle:

"Nay, Pythagoras' soul now waneth and other times waxeth;
His, with prophecy gifted, from God's mind taketh its issue,
Sent by the Father to aid good men in the stress of the conflict;
Then it to God will return, by God's own thunderbolt smitten."

[41] Although he cautioned all to abstain from intercourse with boys on the ground that it was impious, for his own part this pattern of propriety made a clever arrangement. He commanded the cities in Pontus and Paphlagonia to send choir-boys for three years' service, to sing hymns to the god in his household; they were required to examine, select, and send the noblest, youngest, and most handsome. These he kept under ward and treated like bought slaves, sleeping with them and affronting them in every way. He made it a rule, too, not to greet anyone over eighteen years with his lips, or to embrace and kiss him; he kissed only the young, extending his hand to the others to be kissed by them. They were called "those within the kiss."

[42] He duped the simpletons in this way from first to last, ruining women right and left as well as living with favourites. Indeed, it was a great thing that everyone coveted if he simply cast his eyes upon a man's wife; if, however, he deemed her worthy of a kiss, each husband thought that good fortune would flood his house. Many women even boasted that they had had children by Alexander, and their husbands bore witness that they spoke the truth!

[43] I want to include in my tale a dialogue between Glycon and one Sacerdos, a man of Tius,

whose intelligence you will be able to appraise from his questions. I read the conversation in an inscription in letters of gold, at Tius, in the house of Sacerdos. "Tell me, Master Glycon," said he, "who are you?" "I am the latter-day Asclepius," he replied. "A different person from the one of former times? What do you mean?" "It is not permitted you to hear that." "How many years will you tarry among us delivering oracles?" "One thousand and three." "Then where will you go?" "To Bactra and that region, for the barbarians too must profit by my presence among men." "What of the other prophetic shrines, the one in Didymi, the one in Clarus, and the one in Delphi—do they still have your father Apollo as the source of their oracles, or are the predictions now given out there false?" "This too you must not wish to know; it is not permitted." "What about myself—what will I be after my present life?" "A camel, then a horse, then a wise man and prophet just as great as Alexander."

That was Glycon's conversation with Sacerdos; and in conclusion he uttered an oracle in verse, knowing that Sacerdos was a follower of Lepidus: "Put not in Lepidus faith, for a pitiful doom is in waiting." That was because he greatly feared Epicurus, as I have said before, seeing in him an opponent and critic of his trickery.

[44] Indeed, he seriously imperilled one of the Epicureans who ventured to expose him in the presence of a great crowd. The man went up to him and said in a loud voice: "Come now, Alexander! You prevailed upon such-and-such a Paphlagonian to put his servants on trial for their lives before the governor of Galatia on the charge that they had murdered his son, a student at Alexandria. But the young man is living, and has come back alive after the execution of the servants, whom you gave over to the wild beasts." What had happened was this. The young man cruised up the Nile as far as Clysmas, and as a vessel was just putting to sea, was induced to join others in a voyage to India. Then because he was overdue, those ill-starred servants concluded that the young man either had lost his life during his cruise upon the Nile or had been made away with by brigands, who were numerous at the time; and they returned with the report of his disappearance. Then followed the oracle and their condemnation, after which the young man presented himself, telling of his travels.

[45] When he told this tale, Alexander, indignant at the exposure and unable to bear the truth of the reproach, told the bystanders to stone him, or else they themselves would be accursed and would bear the name of Epicureans. They had begun to throw stones when a man named Demonstratus who happened to be in the city, one of the most prominent men in Pontus, flung his arms about the fellow and saved him from death. But he had come very near to being overwhelmed with stones, and quite properly! Why did he have to be the only man of sense among all those lunatics and suffer from the idiocy of the Paphlagonians?

[46] That man, then, was thus dealt with. Moreover, if in any case, when men were called up in the order of their applications (which took place the day before the prophecies were given out) and the herald enquired: "Has he a prophecy for So-and-so," the reply came from within: "To the ravens," nobody would ever again receive such a person under his roof or give him fire or water, but he had to be harried from country to country as an impious man, an atheist, and an Epicurean—which, indeed, was their strongest term of abuse.

[47] One of Alexander's acts in this connection was most comical. Hitting upon the "Established Beliefs" of Epicurus, which is the finest of his books, as you know, and contains in summary the articles of the man's philosophic creed, he brought it into the middle of the market-place, burned it on fagots of fig-wood just as if he were burning the man in person, and threw the ashes into the sea, even adding an oracle also: "Burn with fire, I command you, the creed of a purblind dotard!" But the scoundrel had no idea what blessings that book creates for its readers and what peace, tranquillity, and freedom it engenders in them, liberating them as it does from terrors and apparitions and portents, from vain hopes and

extravagant cravings, developing in them intelligence and truth, and truly purifying their understanding, not with torches and squills and that sort of foolery, but with straight thinking, truthfulness and frankness.

[48] Of all this blackguard's enterprises, however, listen to the greatest one. Since he had no slight influence in the palace and at court through the favour which Rutilianus enjoyed, he published an oracle at the height of the war in Germany, when the late emperor Marcus himself had at last come to grips with the Marcomanni and Quadi. The oracle recommended that two lions be cast into the Danube alive, together with a quantity of perfumes and magnificent offerings. But it will be better to repeat the oracle itself.

“Into the pools of the Ister, the stream that from Zeus taketh issue,
Hurl, I command you, a pair of Cybele's faithful attendants,
Beasts that dwell on the mountains, and all that the Indian climate
Yieldeth of flower and herb that is fragrant; amain there will follow
Victory and great glory, and welcome peace in their footsteps.”

But when all this had been done as he had directed, the lions swam across to the enemy territory and the barbarians slaughtered them with clubs, thinking them some kind of foreign dogs or wolves; and “amain” that tremendous disaster befel our side, in which a matter of twenty thousand were wiped out at a blow. Then came what happened at Aquileia, and that city's narrow escape from capture. To meet this issue, Alexander was flat enough to adduce the Delphian defence in the matter of the oracle given to Croesus, that the God had indeed foretold victory, but had not indicated whether it would go to the Romans or to the enemy.

[49] As by this time throngs upon throngs were pouring in and their city was becoming overcrowded on account of the multitude of visitors to the shrine, so that it had not sufficient provisions, he devised the so-called “nocturnal” responses. Taking the scrolls, he slept on them, so he said, and gave replies that he pretended to have heard from the god in a dream; which, however, were in most cases not clear but ambiguous and confused, particularly when he observed that the scroll had been sealed up with unusual care. Taking no extra chances, he would append at random whatever answer came into his head, thinking that this procedure too was appropriate to oracles; and there were certain expounders who sat by with that in view and garnered large fees from the recipients of such oracles for explaining and unriddling them. Moreover, this task of theirs was subject to a levy; the expounders paid Alexander an Attic talent each.

[50] Sometimes, to amaze dolts, he would deliver an oracle for the benefit of someone who had neither enquired nor sent—who, in fact, did not exist at all. For example:

“Seek you out that man who in utmost secrecy shrouded
Tumble at home on the couch your helpmeet Calligeneia,
Slave Protogenes, him upon whom you fully relie.
He was corrupted by you, and now your wife he corrupts,
Making a bitter return unto you for his own violation.
Aye more, now against you a baneful charm they have fashioned
So that you may not hear nor see what deeds they are doing;
This will you find on the floor, beneath your bed, by the wall-side,
Close to the head; your servant Calypso shares the secret.”

What Democritus would not have been disturbed on hearing names amid places specified—and would not have been filled with contempt soon afterward, when he saw through their stratagem?

[52] Again, to someone else who was not there and did not exist at all, he said in prose: “Go back; he who sent you was killed today by his neighbour Diodes, with the help of the bandits Magnus, Celer,

and Bubalus, who already have been caught and imprisoned.”

[51] I may say too that he often gave oracles to barbarians, when anyone put a question in his native language, in Syrian or in Celtic; since he readily found strangers in the city who belonged to the same nation as his questioners. That is why the time between the presentation of the scrolls and the delivery of the oracle was long, so that in the interval the questions might be unsealed at leisure without risk and men might be found who would be able to translate them fully. Of this sort was the response given to the Scythian: “*Morphen eubargoulis eis skian chnechikrage leipsei phaos.*”

[53] Let me also tell you a few of the responses that were given to me. When I asked whether Alexander was bald, and sealed the question carefully and conspicuously, a “nocturnal” oracle was appended: “*Sabardalachou malachaattealos en.*” At another time, I asked a single question in each of two scrolls under a different name, “What was the poet Homer’s country?” In one case, misled by my serving-man, who had been asked why he came and had said, “To request a cure for a pain in the side,” he replied: “Cytmis I bid you apply, combined with the spume of a charger.” To the other, since in this case he had been told that the one who sent it enquired whether it would be better for him to go to Italy by sea or by land, he gave an answer which had nothing to do with Homer: “Make not your journey by sea, but travel afoot by the highway.”

[54] Many such traps, in fact, were set for him by me and by others. For example, I put a single question, and wrote upon the outside of the scroll, following the usual form: “Eight questions from So-and-so,” using a fictitious name and sending the eight drachmas and whatever it came to besides. Relying upon the fee that had been sent and upon the inscription on the roll, to the single question: “When will Alexander be caught cheating?” he sent me eight responses which, as the saying goes, had no connection with earth or with heaven, but were silly and nonsensical every one.

When he found out about all this afterward, and also that it was I who was attempting to dissuade Rutilianus from the marriage and from his great dependence upon the hopes inspired by the shrine, he began to hate me, as was natural, and to count me a bitter enemy. Once when Rutilianus asked about me, he replied: “Low-voiced walks in the dusk are his pleasure, and impious matings.” And generally, I was of course the man he most hated.

When he discovered that I had entered the city and ascertained that I was the Lucian of whom he had heard (I had brought, I may add, two soldiers with me, a pikeman and a spearman borrowed from the Governor of Cappadocia, then a friend of mine, to escort me to the sea), he at once sent for me very politely and with great show of friendliness. When I went, I found many about him; but I had brought along my two soldiers, as luck would have it. He extended me his right hand to kiss, as his custom was with the public; I clasped it as if to kiss it, and almost crippled it with a right good bite!

The bystanders tried to choke and beat me for sacrilege; even before that, they had been indignant because I had addressed him as Alexander and not as “Prophet.” But he mastered himself very handsomely, held them in check, and promised that he would easily make me tame and would demonstrate Glycon’s worth by showing that he transformed even bitter foes into friends. Then he removed everybody and had it out with me, professing to know very well who I was and what advice I was giving Rutilianus, and saying, “What possessed you to do this to me, when I can advance you tremendously in his favour?” By that time I was glad to receive this proffer of friendship, since I saw what a perilous position I had taken up; so, after a little, I reappeared as his friend, and it seemed quite a miracle to the observers that my change of heart had been so easily effected.

[56] Then, when I decided to sail—it chanced that I was accompanied only by Xenophon during my visit, as I had previously sent my father and my family on to Amastris—he sent me many remembrances and presents, and promised too that he himself would furnish a boat and a crew to

transport me. I considered this a sincere and polite offer; but when I was in mid-passage, I saw the master in tears, disputing with the sailors, and began to be very doubtful about the prospects. It was a fact that they had received orders from Alexander to throw us bodily into the sea. If that had been done, his quarrel with me would have been settled without ado; but by his tears the master prevailed upon his crew to do us no harm. "For sixty years, as you see," said he to me, "I have led a blameless and God-fearing life, and I should not wish, at this age and with a wife and children, to stain my hands with murder;" and he explained for what purpose he had taken us aboard, and what orders had been given by Alexander. [57] He set us ashore at Aegiali (which noble Homer mentions), and then they went back again.

There I found some men from the Bosphorus who were voyaging along the coast. They were going as ambassadors from King Eupator to Bithynia, to bring the yearly contribution. I told them of the peril in which we had been, found them courteous, was taken aboard their vessel, and won safely through to Amastris, after coming so close to losing my life.

Thereupon I myself began to prepare for battle with him, and to employ every resource in my desire to pay him back. Even before his attempt upon me, I detested him and held him in bitter enmity on account of the vileness of his character. So I undertook to prosecute him, and had many associates, particularly the followers of Timocrates, the philosopher from Heraclea. But the then governor of Bithynia and Pontus, Avitus, checked me, all but beseeching and imploring me to leave off, because out of good will to Rutilianus he could not, he said, punish Alexander even if he should find him clearly guilty of crime. In that way my effort was thwarted, and I left off exhibiting misplaced zeal before a judge who was in that state of mind.

[58] Was it not also a great piece of impudence on the part of Alexander that he should petition the emperor to change the name of Abonoteichos and call it Ionopolis, and to strike a new coin bearing on one side the likeness of Glycon and on the other that of Alexander, wearing the fillets of his grandfather Asclepius and holding the falchion of his maternal ancestor Perseus?

[59] In spite of his prediction in an oracle that he was fated to live a hundred and fifty years and then die by a stroke of lightning, he met a most wretched end before reaching the age of seventy, in a manner that befitted a son of Podaleirius; for his leg became mortified quite to the groin and was infested with maggots. It was then that his baldness was detected when because of the pain he let the doctors foment his head, which they could not have done unless his wig had been removed.

[60] Such was the conclusion of Alexander's spectacular career, and such the resolution of the whole play; being as it was, it resembled an act of Providence, although it came about by chance. It was inevitable, too, that he should have funeral games worthy of his career—that a contest for the shrine should arise. The foremost of his fellow-conspirators and impostors referred it to Rutilianus to decide which of them should be given the preference, should succeed to the shrine, and should be crowned with the fillet of priest and prophet. Paetus was one of them, a physician by profession, a greybeard, who conducted himself in a way that befitted neither a physician nor a greybeard. But Rutilianus, the umpire, sent them off unfilleted, keeping the post of prophet for the master after his departure from this life.

[61] This, my friend, is but a little out of a great deal; I have thought fit to set it down as a specimen, not only to pleasure you as an associate and friend whom above all others I hold in admiration for your wisdom, your love of truth, the gentleness and reasonableness of your ways, the peacefulness of your life, and your courtesy toward all whom you encounter, but mostly—and this will give greater pleasure to you also—to right the wrongs of Epicurus, a man truly saintly and divine in his nature, who alone truly discerned right ideals and handed them down, who proved himself the liberator of all who sought his converse. I think too that to its readers the writing will seem to have some usefulness, refuting as it does certain falsehoods and confirming certain truths in the minds of all men of sense.