

Lucian, *Lover of Lies or The Doubter*, 7-10.

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I used to visit him previously, Philocles, whenever I had a good deal of leisure; and to-day, when I wanted to find Leontichus, a close friend of mine, as you know, and was told by his boy that he had gone off to the house of Eucrates in the early morning to pay him a call because he was ill, I went there for two reasons, both to find Leontichus and to see Eucrates, for I had not known that he was ill.

I did not find Leontichus there, for he had just gone out a little while before, they said; but I found plenty of others, among whom there was Cleodemus the Peripatetic, and Deinomachus the Stoic, and Ion—you know the one that thinks he ought to be admired for his mastery of Plato's doctrines as the only person who has accurately sensed the man's meaning and can expound it to the rest of the world. You see what sort of men I am naming to you, all-wise and all-virtuous, the very fore-front of each school, every one venerable, almost terrible, to look at. In addition, the physician Antigonus was there, called in, I suppose, by reason of the illness. Eucrates seemed to be feeling better already, and the ailment was of a chronic character; he had had another attack of rheumatism in his feet.

He bade me sit by him on the couch, letting his voice drop a little to the tone of an invalid when he saw me, although as I was coming in I heard him shouting and vigorously pressing some point or other. I took very good care not to touch his feet, and after making the customary excuses that I did not know he was ill and that when I learned of it I came in hot haste, sat down beside him.

It so happened that the company had already, I think, talked at some length about his ailment and were then discussing it further; they were each suggesting certain remedies, moreover. At any rate Cleodemus said: "Well then, if you take up from the ground in your left hand the tooth of the weasel which has been killed in the way I have already described and wrap it up in the skin of a lion just flayed, and then bind it about your legs, the pain ceases instantly"

"Not in a lion's skin, I was told," said Deinomachus, "but that of a hind still immature and unmated; and the thing is more plausible that way, for the hind is fleet and her strength lies especially in her legs. The lion is brave, of course, and his fat and his right fore-paw and the stiff bristles of his whiskers are very potent if one knew how to use them with the incantation appropriate to each; but for curing the feet he is not at all promising."

"I myself," said Cleodemus, "was of that opinion formerly, that it ought to be the skin of a hind because the hind is fleet; but recently a man from Libya, well informed in such things, taught me better, saying that lions were fleetier than deer. 'No fear!' said he: 'They even chase and catch them!'"

The company applauded, in the belief that the Libyan was right in what he said. But I said, "Do you really think that certain incantations put a stop to this sort of thing, or external applications, when the trouble has its seat within?" They laughed at my remark and clearly held me convicted of great stupidity if I did not know the most obvious things, of which nobody in his right mind would maintain that they were not so. The doctor Antigonus, however, seemed to me to be

pleased with my question, for he had been overlooked a long time, I suppose, when he wanted to aid Eucrates in a professional way by advising him to abstain from wine, adopt a vegetarian diet, and in general to “lower his pitch.”

But Cleodemus, with a faint smile, said: “What is that, Tychiades? Do you consider it incredible that any alleviations of ailments are effected by such means?” “I do,” said I, “not being altogether full of drivel, so as to believe that external remedies which have nothing to do with the internal causes of the ailments, applied as you say in combination with set phrases and hocus-pocus of some sort, are efficacious and bring on the cure. That could never happen, not even if you should wrap sixteen entire weasels in the skin of the Nemean lion; in fact I have often seen the lion himself limping in pain with his skin intact upon him!”

“You are a mere layman, you see,” said Deinomachus, “and you have not made it a point to learn how such things agree with ailments when they are applied. I do not suppose you would accept even the most obvious instances—periodic fevers driven off, snakes charmed, swellings cured, and whatever else even old wives do. But if all that takes place, why in the world will you not believe that this takes place by similar means?”

“You are reasoning from false premises, Deinomachus,” I replied, “and, as the saying goes, driving out one nail with another; for it is not clear that precisely what you are speaking of takes place by the aid of any such power. If, then, you do not first convince me by logical proof that it takes place in this way naturally, because the fever or the inflammation is afraid of a holy name or a foreign phrase and so takes flight from the swelling, your stories still remain old wives’ fables.”

“It seems to me,” said Deinomachus, “that when you talk like that you do not believe in the gods, either, since you do not think that cures can be effected through holy names.” “Don’t say that, my dear sir!” I replied. “Even though the gods exist, there is nothing to prevent that sort of thing from being false just the same. For my part, I revere the gods and I see their cures and all the good that they do by restoring the sick to health with drugs and doctoring. In fact, Asclepius himself and his sons ministered to the sick by laying on healing drugs, not by fastening on lions’ skins and weasels.”