

# **LUCIAN'S TRUE HISTORY**

## **Table of Contents**

INTRODUCTION.

LUCIAN: HIS TRUE HISTORY.

LUCIAN HIS TRUE HISTORY.

THE SECOND BOOK.

## INTRODUCTION.

It is a commonplace of criticism that Lucian was the first of the moderns, but in truth he is near to our time because of all the ancients he is nearest to his own. With Petronius he shared the discovery that there is material for literature in the debased and various life of every day—that to the seeing eye the individual is more wonderful in colour and complexity than the severely simple abstraction of the poets. He replaced the tradition, respected of his fathers, by an observation more vivid and less pedantic than the note-book of the naturalist. He set the world in the dry light of truth, and since the vanity of mankind is a constant factor throughout the ages, there is scarce a page of Lucian's writing that wears the faded air of antiquity. His personages are as familiar to-day as they were in the second century, because, with his pitiless determination to unravel the tangled skein of human folly, he never blinded his vision to their true qualities. And the multiplicity of his interest is as fresh as his penetration. Nothing came amiss to his eager curiosity. For the first time in the history of literature (with the doubtful exception of Cicero) we encounter a writer whose ceaseless activity includes the world. While others had declared themselves poets, historians, philosophers, Lucian comes forth as a man of letters. Had he lived to-day, he would have edited a newspaper, written leading articles, and kept his name ever before the public in the magazines. For he possessed the qualities, if he avoided the defects, of the journalist. His phrase had not been worn by constant use to imbecility; his sentences were not marred by the association of commonness; his style was still his own and fit for the expression of a personal view. But he noted such types and

incidents as make an immediate, if perennial, appeal, and to study him is to be convinced that literature and journalism are not necessarily divorced.

The profession was new, and with the joy of the innovator Lucian was never tired of inventing new genres. Romance, criticism, satire—he mastered them all. In *Toxaris* and *The Ass* he proves with what delicacy and restraint he could handle the story. His ill-omened apprenticeship to a sculptor gave him that taste and feeling for art which he turned to so admirable an account. He was, in fact, the first of the art-critics, and he pursued the craft with an easy unconsciousness of the heritage he bequeathed to the world. True, he is silent concerning the technical practice of the Greeks; true, he leaves us in profound ignorance of the art of Zeuxis, whose secrets he might have revealed, had he been less a man of letters. But he found in painting and sculpture an opportunity for elegance of phrase, and we would forgive a thousand shortcomings for such inspirations of beauty as the smile of Sosandra: τὸ μείδιμα σεμνὸν καὶ λεληθὸς. In literary criticism he was on surer ground, and here also he leaves the past behind. His knowledge of Greek poetry was profound; Homer he had by heart; and on every page he proves his sympathies by covert allusion or precise quotation. His treatise concerning the Writing of History<sup>[1]</sup> preserves its force irresistible after seventeen centuries, nor has the wisdom of the ages impeached or modified this lucid argument. With a modest wit he compares himself to Diogenes, who, when he saw his fellow-citizens busied with the preparations of war, gathered his skirts about him and fell to rolling his tub up and down. So Lucian, unambitious of writing history, sheltered himself from "the waves and the smoke," and was content to provide others with the best of good counsel. Yet such is the irony of accident that, as Lucian's

criticism has outlived the masterpieces of Zeuxis, so the historians have snatched an immortality from his censure; and let it be remembered for his glory that he used Thucydides as a scourge wherewith to beat impostors. But matters of so high import did not always engross his humour, and in *The Illiterate Book-buyer*<sup>[2]</sup> he satirizes a fashion of the hour and of all time with a courage and brutality which tear the heart out of truth. How intimately does he realize his victim! And how familiar is this same victim in his modern shape! You know the very streets he haunts; you know the very shops wherein he is wont to acquire his foolish treasures; you recognize that not by a single trait has Lucian dishonoured his model. In yet another strange instance Lucian anticipated the journalist of to-day. Though his disciples know it not, he invented the interview. In that famous visit to the Elysian Fields, which is a purple patch upon his masterpiece, *The True History*, he "went to talk with Homer the Poet, our leisure serving us both well," and he put precisely those questions which the modern hack, note-book in hand, would seek to resolve. First, remembering the seven cities, he would know of Homer what fatherland claimed him, and when the poet "said indeed he was a Babylonian, and among his own countrymen not called Homer but Tigranes," Lucian straightly "questioned him about those verses in his books that are disallowed as not of his making;" whereto Homer replied with a proper condemnation of Zenodotus and Aristarchus. And you wonder whether Lucian is chastising his contemporaries or looking with the eye of a prophet into the future.

But even more remarkable than his many-coloured interest is Lucian's understanding. He was, so to say, a perfect Intelligence thrown by accident into an age of superstition and credulity. It is not only that he knew all things: he saw all things in their right

relation. If the Pagan world had never before been conscious of itself, it had no excuse to harbour illusions after his coming. Mr. Pater speaks of the intellectual light he turned upon dim places, and truly no corner of life escaped the gleam of his lantern. Gods, philosophers, necromancers, yielded up their secrets to his enquiry. With pitiless logic he criticized their extravagance and pretension; and actively anticipating the spirit of modern science, he accepted no fact, he subscribed to no theory, which he had not examined with a cold impartiality.

Indeed, he was Scepticism in human shape, but as the weapon of his destruction is always raillery, as he never takes either himself or his victims with exaggerated seriousness, you may delight in his attack, even though you care not which side wins the battle. His wit was as mordant as Heine's own;—is it fantastical to suggest that Lucian too carried Hebrew blood in his veins?—yet when the onslaught is most unsparing he is still joyous. For a gay contempt, not a bitter hatred, is the note of his satire. And for the very reason that his scepticism was felt, that it sprang from a close intimacy with the follies of his own time, so it is fresh and familiar to an age that knows not Zeus. Not even the *Dialogues of the Gods* are out of date, for if we no longer reverence Olympus, we still blink our eyes at the flash of ridicule. And might not the *Philopseudes*, that masterly analysis of ghostly terrors, might not *Alexander the False Prophet*, have been written yesterday?

And thus we arrive at Lucian's weakness. In spite of its brilliance and flippancy, his scepticism is at times over-intelligent. His good sense baffles you by its infallibility; his sanity is so magnificently beyond question, that you pray for an interlude of unreason. The sprightliness of his wit, the alertness of his fancy, mitigate the perpetual rightness of his judgment. But it must be confessed that

for all his delicate sense of ridicule he cherished a misguided admiration of the truth. If only he had understood the joy of self-deception, if only he had realized more often (as he realized in *The Ass*) the delight of throwing probability to the winds, we had regarded him with a more constant affection. His capital defect sprang from a lack of the full-blooded humour which should at times have led him into error. And yet by an irony it was this very love of truth which suggested *The True History*, that enduring masterpiece of phantasy. Setting out to prove his hatred of other men's lies, he shows himself on the road the greatest liar of them all. "The father and founder of all this foolery was Homer's Ulysses": thus he writes in his Preface, confessing that in a spirit of emulation he "turned his style to publish untruths," but with an honester mind, "for this one thing I confidently pronounce for a truth, that I lie." Such is the spirit of the work, nor is there the smallest doubt that Lucian, once embarked upon his voyage, slipped from his ideal, to enjoy the lying for its own sake. If *The True History* fails as a parody, that is because we care not a jot for Ctesias, Iambulus and the rest, at whom the satire is levelled. Its fascination, in fact, is due to those same qualities which, in others, its author affected to despise. The facile variety of its invention can scarce be matched in literature, and the lies are told with so delightful an unconcern, that belief is never difficult. Nor does the narrative ever flag. It ends at the same high level of falsehood in which it has its beginning. And the credibility is increased by the harmonious consistency of each separate lie. At the outset the traveller discovers a river of wine, and forthwith travels up stream to find the source, and "when we were come to the head" (to quote Hickeys's translation), "no spring at all appeared, but mighty vine trees of infinite number, which from their roots distilled pure wine, which made the river run so abundantly." So conclusive is the

explanation, that you only would have wondered had the stream been of water. And how admirable is the added touch that he who ate fish from the river was made drunk! Then by a pleasant gradation you are carried on from the Hippogypians, or the Riders of Vultures, every feather in whose wing is bigger and longer than the mast of a tall ship, from the fleas as big as twelve elephants, to those spiders, of mighty bigness, every one of which exceeded in size an isle of the Cyclades. "These were appointed to spin a web in the air between the Moon and the Morning Star, which was done in an instant, and made a plain champaign, upon which the foot forces were planted." Truly a very Colossus of falsehood, but Lucian's ingenuity is inexhausted and inexhaustible, and the mighty Whale is his masterpiece of impudence. For he "contained in greatness fifteen hundred furlongs"; his teeth were taller than beech-trees, and when he swallowed the travellers, he showed himself so far superior to Jonah's fish, that ship and all sailed down his throat, and happily he caught not the pigmy shallow between his chops. And the geographical divisions of the Whale's belly, and Lucian's adventures therein, are they not set down with circumstantial verity? Then there is the episode of the frozen ship, and the sea of milk, with its well-pressed cheese for an island, which reminds one of the Elizabethan madrigal: "If there were O an Hellespont of Cream." Moreover, the verisimilitude is enhanced by a scrupulously simple style. No sooner is the preface concerning lying at an end than Lucian lapses into pure narrative. A wealth of minutely considered detail gives an air of reality to the most monstrous impossibility; the smallest facts are explicitly divulged; the remote accessories described with order and impressiveness; so that the wildest invention appears plausible, even inevitable, and you know that you are in company with the very genius of falsehood. Nor does this wild diversity of invention



suggest romance. It is still classic in style and shape; not a phrase nor a word is lost; and expression, as always in the classics, is reduced to its lowest terms. But when the travellers reach the Islands of the Blessed, the style takes on a colour and a beauty which it knew not before. A fragrant air breathed upon them, as of "roses, daffodils, gillyflowers, lilies, violets, myrtles, bays, and blossoms of vines." Happy also was the Isle to look upon: ἔνθα δὴ καὶ καθεωρῶμεν λιμένας τε πολλοὺς περὶ πᾶσαν ἀκλύστους καὶ μεγάλους, ποταμούς τε διαυγεῖς ἐξίοντας ἠρέμα ἐς τὴν θάλατταν· ἔτι δὲ λειμῶνας καὶ ὕλας καὶ ὄρνεα μουσικὰ, τὰ μὲν πῖ τῶν ἠϊόνων ἄδοντα, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κλάδων ἀήρ τε κοῦφος καὶ εὐπνοὺς περιεκέχυτο τὴν χώραν: "a still and gentle air compassing the whole country." Where will you find a more vivid impression of elegance and serenity? or where match "the melody of the branches, like the sound of wind instruments in a solitary place" (ἀπὸ τῶν κλάδων κινουμένον τερπνὰ καὶ συνεχῆ μέλη ἀπεσυρίζετο εὐκότα τοῖς ἐπ' ἐρημίας αὐλήμασι τῶν πλαγίων αὐλῶν)? And when the splendour of the city breaks upon you, with its smaragdus, its cinnamon-tree, its amethyst, ivory, and beryl, the rich barbarity suggests Solomon's Temple, or the City of the Revelation. Its inhabitants are the occasion of infinite jesting, and again and again does Lucian satirize the philosophers, his dearest foes. Socrates was in danger of being thrust forth by Rhadamanthus, ἦν φλυαρῆ καὶ μὴ ἐθέλη ἀφείς τὴν εἰρωνείαν εὐωχεῖσθαι, while as for Diogenes the Sinopean, so profoundly was he changed from his old estate, that he had married Lais the Harlot. The journey to Hell is another excuse to gird at the historians. The severest torments were inflicted, says Lucian, upon Ctesias the Cnidian, Herodotus and many others, which the writer beholding "was put in great hopes that I should never have anything to do there, for I do not know that ever I spake any

untruth in my life." And yet with all his irony, all his scorn, Lucian has ever a side-glance at literature. The verse of Homer is constantly upon his lips, and it is from Homer that the Gods take their ditties in the Elysian fields. Again, when the traveller visits the city of Nephelococcygia, it is but to think upon the poet Aristophanes, "how wise a man he was, and how true a reporter, and how little cause there is to question his fidelity for what he hath written."

Such is the work which, itself a masterpiece, has been a pattern and an exemplar unto others. If Utopia and its unnumbered rivals derive from Plato, there is not a single Imaginary Traveller that is not modelled upon Lucian. *The True History* was, in effect, the beginning of a new literature. Not only was its framework borrowed, not only was its habit of fantastic names piously imitated, but the disciples, like the master, turned their voyages to the purpose of satire. It was Rabelais who made the first adaptation, for, while Epistemon's descent into Hell was certainly suggested by Lucian, Pantagruel's voyage is an ample travesty of *The True History*, and Lanternland, the home of the Lychnobii, is but Lychnopolis, Lucian's own City of Lights. The seventeenth century discovered another imitator in Cyrano de Bergerac, whose tepid *Voyage dans la Lune* is interesting merely because it is a link in the chain that unites Lucian with Swift. Yet the book had an immense popularity, and Cyrano's biographer has naught to say of the original traveller, save that he told his story "avec beaucoup moins de vraisemblance et de gentillesse d'imagination que M. de Bergerac." An astounding judgment surely, which time has already reversed. And then came *Gulliver's Travels*, incomparably the greatest descendant of *The True History*. To what excellent purpose Swift followed his Lucian is proved alike by the amazing

probability of his narrative, and the cruelty of his satire. Like Lucian, he professed an unveiled contempt for philosophers and mathematicians; unlike Lucian, he made his imaginary journey the occasion for a fierce satire upon kings and politicians. But so masterly is the narrative, so convincing the reality of Lilliput and Brobdignag, that Gulliver retains its hold upon our imagination, though the meaning of its satire is long since blunted. Swift's work came to astonish the world in 1727, and some fourteen years later in the century Holberg astonished the wits of Denmark with a satire cast in Lucian's mould. *Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum*—thus ran the title, and from Latin the book was translated into every known tongue. The city of walking trees, the home of the Potuans, and many another invention, prove Holberg's debt to the author of *The True History*. And if the *genre* is dead to-day, it is dead because the most intrepid humourist would hesitate to walk in the footsteps of Lemuel Gulliver.

Fortunate in his imitators, Lucian has been not wholly unfortunate in his translators. Not even envy could pick a quarrel with Francis Hickes, whose Englishing of *The True History* is here reprinted. The book appeared, under the auspices of Hickes's son, in 1634, four years after the translator's death. Thus it is described on the title-page: "Certaine Select Dialogues of Lucian together with his True Historie, translated from the Greeke into English by Mr. Francis Hickes. Whereunto is added the Life of Lucian gathered out of his own Writings, with briefe Notes and Illustrations upon each Dialogue and Booke, by T. H. Master of Arts, of Christ Church in Oxford. Oxford, Printed by William Turner. 1634." Composed with a certain dignity, it is dedicated "to the Right Worshipfull Dr. Duppa, Deane of Christ-Church, and Vice-Chancellor of the famous Universitie in Oxford." And the work

reflects a wholesome glory upon the famous University. For it is the work of a scholar, who knew both the languages. Though his diction lacked the spirit and colour which distinguished the splendid versions of North and Holland, he was far more keenly conscious of his original than were those masters of prose. Not only did he, unlike North, translate directly from the Greek, but he followed his original with loyalty and patience. In brief, his Lucian is a miracle of suitability. The close simplicity of Hickes fits the classical restraint of *The True History* to admiration. As the Greek is a model of narrative, so you cannot read the English version without thinking of the incomparable Hakluyt. Thirty years after the first printing of the translation, Jasper Mayne published his "Part of Lucian made English," wherein he added sundry versions of his own to the work already accomplished by Francis Hickes. And in his "Epistle Dedicatory" he discusses the art of translation with an intelligence which proves how intimately he realized the excellent quality of Hickes's version. "For as the Painter," thus Jasper Mayne, "who would draw a man of a bald head, rumped forehead, copper nose, pigge eyes, and ugly face, draws him not to life, nor doth the business of his art, if he draw him less deformed or ugly than he is; or as he who would draw a faire, amiable lady, limbes with an erring pencil, and drawes a libell, not a face, if he gives her not just features, and perfections: So in the Translation of Bookes, he who makes a dull author elegant and quick; or a sharp, elegant author flat, rustick, rude and dull, by contrary wayes, commits the same sinne, and cannot be said to translate, but to transforme." That is sound sense, and judged by the high standard of Jasper Mayne, Francis Hickes has most valiantly acquitted himself.

He was the son of Richard Hickes, an arras-weaver of Barcheston, in Warwickshire, and after taking the degree of bachelor in the University of Oxford, which he entered in 1579, at the age of thirteen, he was diverted (says Thomas, his son) "by a country retirement." Henceforth he devoted his life to husbandry and Greek. Besides Lucian, he translated Thucydides and Herodian, the manuscripts of which are said to survive in the library of Christ Church. Possibly it was his long retirement that gave a turn of pedantry to his mind. It was but natural that in his remote garden he should exaggerate the importance of the knowledge acquired in patient solitude. But certain it is that the notes wherewith he decorated his margins are triumphs of inapposite erudition. When Lucian describes the famous cobwebs, each one of which was as big as an island of the Cyclades, Hickes thinks to throw light upon the text with this astonishing irrelevancy: "They are in the Aegean Sea, in number 13." The foible is harmless, nay pleasant, and consonant with the character of the learned recluse. Thus lived Francis Hickes, silent and unknown, until in 1630 he died at a kinsman's house at Sutton in Gloucestershire. And you regret that his glory was merely posthumous. For, pedant as he was, he made known to his countrymen the enemy of all the pedants, and turned a masterpiece of Greek into English as sound and scholarly as is found in any translator of his time.

[1] Πῶς δεῖ ιστορίαύ συγγράΦειν.

[2] Πρὸς τὸν παιδευτὸν καὶ πῶς ὀνομάζονται

## LUCIAN: HIS TRUE HISTORY.

Even as champions and wrestlers and such as practise the strength and agility of body are not only careful to retain a sound constitution of health, and to hold on their ordinary course of exercise, but sometimes also to recreate themselves with seasonable intermission, and esteem it as a main point of their practice; so I think it necessary for scholars and such as addict themselves to the study of learning, after they have travelled long in the perusal of serious authors, to relax a little the intention of their thoughts, that they may be more apt and able to endure a continued course of study.

And this kind of repose will be the more conformable, and fit their purpose better, if it be employed in the reading of such works as shall not only yield a bare content by the pleasing and comely composure of them, but shall also give occasion of some learned speculation to the mind, which I suppose I have effected in these books of mine: wherein not only the novelty of the subject, nor the pleasingness of the project, may tickle the reader with delight, nor to hear so many notorious lies delivered persuasively and in the way of truth, but because everything here by me set down doth in a comical fashion glance at some or other of the old poets, historiographers, and philosophers, which in their writings have recorded many monstrous and intolerable untruths, whose names I would have quoted down, but that I knew the reading would bewray them to you.

Ctesias, the son of Ctesiochus, the Cnidian, wrote of the region of the Indians and the state of those countries, matters which he neither saw himself, nor ever heard come from the mouth of any man. Iambulus also wrote many strange miracles of the great sea, which all men knew to be lies and fictions, yet so composed that they want not their delight: and many others have made choice of the like argument, of which some have published their own travels and peregrinations, wherein they have described the greatness of beasts, the fierce condition of men, with their strange and uncouth manner of life: but the first father and founder of all this foolery was Homer's Ulysses, who tells a long tale to Alcinous of the servitude of the winds, and of wild men with one eye in their foreheads that fed upon raw flesh, of beasts with many heads, and the transformation of his friends by enchanted potions, all which he made the silly Phæakes believe for great sooth.

This coming to my perusal, I could not condemn ordinary men for lying, when I saw it in request amongst them that would be counted philosophical persons: yet could not but wonder at them, that, writing so manifest lies, they should not think to be taken with the manner; and this made me also ambitious to leave some monument of myself behind me, that I might not be the only man exempted from this liberty of lying: and because I had no matter of verity to employ my pen in (for nothing hath befallen me worth the writing), I turned my style to publish untruths, but with an honest mind than others have done: for this one thing I confidently pronounce for a truth, that I lie: and this, I hope, may be an excuse for all the rest, when I confess what I am faulty in: for I write of matters which I neither saw nor suffered, nor heard by report from others, which are in no being, nor possible ever to have a

beginning. Let no man therefore in any case give any credit to them.

Disanchoring on a time from the pillars of Hercules, the wind fitting me well for my purpose, I thrust into the West Ocean. The occasion that moved me to take such a voyage in hand was only a curiosity of mind, a desire of novelties, and a longing to learn out the bounds of the ocean, and what people inhabit the farther shore: for which purpose I made plentiful provision of victuals and fresh water, got fifty companions of the same humour to associate me in my travels, furnished myself with store of munition, gave a round sum of money to an expert pilot that could direct us in our course, and new rigged and repaired a tall ship strongly to hold a tedious and difficult journey.





lucian\_001

Thus sailed we forward a day and a night with a prosperous wind, and as long as we had any sight of land, made no great haste on our way; but the next morrow about sun rising the wind blew high and

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