

**THE EPICUREAN:  
A TALE**

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The Epicurean: A Tale by Thomas Moore

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BY

THOMAS MOORE

*New American Edition*



CHICAGO

A. C. McCLURG AND COMPANY

1890

A

LETTER TO THE TRANSLATOR,

FROM

——, Esq.

CAIRO, June 19, 1800.

MY DEAR SIR, —

In a visit lately paid by me to the monastery of St. Macarius — which is situated, as you know, in the valley of the Lakes of Natron — I was lucky enough to obtain possession of a curious Greek manuscript, which, in the hope that you may be induced to translate it, I herewith transmit to you. Observing one of the monks very busily occupied in tearing up into a variety of fantastic shapes some papers which had the appearance of being the leaves of old books, I inquired of him the meaning of his task, and received the following explanation : —

The Arabs, it seems, who are as fond of pigeons as the ancient Egyptians, have a superstitious notion that if they place in their pigeon-houses small scraps of paper written over with learned characters, the birds are always sure to thrive the better for the charm; and the monks, who are never slow in profiting by superstition, have at all times a supply of such amulets for purchasers.

In general, the fathers of the monastery have been in the habit of scribbling these fragments themselves; but a discovery lately made by them saves all this trouble. Having dug up (as my informant stated) a chest of old manuscripts, which, being chiefly on the subject of alchemy, must have been buried in the time of Diocletian, "we thought," added the monk, "that we could not employ such rubbish more properly than in tearing it up, as you see, for the pigeon-houses of the Arabs."

On my expressing a wish to rescue some part of these treasures from the fate to which his indolent fraternity had consigned them, he produced the manuscript which I have now the pleasure of sending you,—the only one, he said, remaining entire; and I very readily paid the price which he demanded for it.

You will find the story, I think, not altogether uninteresting; and the coincidence, in many respects, of the curious details in chapter vi. with the description of the same ceremonies in the romance of "Sethos"<sup>1</sup> will, I have no doubt, strike you. Hoping that you may be induced to give a translation of this tale to the world,

I am, my dear Sir,

Very truly yours,

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<sup>1</sup> The description here alluded to may also be found, copied *verbatim* from Sethos, in the "Voyages d'Anténor." "In that philosophical romance called 'La Vie de Séthos,'" says Warburton, "we find a much juster account of old Egyptian wisdom than in all the pretended 'Histoire du Ciel'" (*Div. Leg.* book iv. sect. 14).







## THE EPICUREAN.

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### CHAPTER I.

**I**T was in the fourth year of the reign of the late Emperor Valerian that the followers of Epicurus, who were at that time numerous in Athens, proceeded to the election of a person to fill the vacant chair of their sect; and by the unanimous voice of the School I was the individual chosen for their chief. I was just then entering on my twenty-fourth year; and no instance had ever before occurred of a person so young being selected for that office. Youth, however, and the personal advantages that adorn it were not, it may be supposed, among the least valid recommendations to a sect that included within its circle all the beauty as well as the wit of Athens, and which, though dignifying its pursuits with the name of philosophy, was little else than a pretext for the more refined cultivation of pleasure.

The character of the sect had, indeed, much changed since the time of its wise and virtuous founder, who while he asserted that Pleasure is the only Good, inculcated also that Good is the only source of Pleasure. The purer part of this doctrine had long evaporated, and the temperate Epicurus would have as little recognized his own sect in the assemblage of refined voluptuaries who now usurped its name as he would have known his own quiet Garden in the luxurious groves and bowers among which the meetings of the school were now held.

Many causes concurred at this period, besides the attractiveness of its doctrines, to render our school by far the most popular of any that still survived the glory of Greece. It may generally be observed that the prevalence in one half of a community of very rigid notions on the subject of religion produces the opposite extreme of laxity and infidelity in the other; and this kind of reaction it was that now mainly contributed to render the doctrines of the Garden the most fashionable philosophy of the day. The rapid progress of the Christian faith had alarmed all those who, either from piety or worldliness, were interested in the continuance of the old established creed, — all who believed in the Deities of Olympus, and all who lived by them. The consequence was a considerable increase of zeal and activity throughout the constituted authorities and priesthood of the whole heathen world. What was wanting in sin-