

## EPICURUS: HIS CHARACTER AND HIS ETHICAL SYSTEM.

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It is concurrently attested by numerous writers of antiquity that Epicurus was one of the most abstemious of men. His disciples, too, lived on the plainest fare. Diocles says that water was their common beverage, and that of wine they never allowed themselves more than a small cup. It is related that during the siege of Athens by Demetrius, when the inhabitants were reduced to the greatest extremity, the scholars of Epicurus bore up under the calamity with less inconvenience than any other class of citizens.

It is sufficiently clear, from the writings of Plutarch, Cicero and Seneca, that a spirit of envy among many of his competitors for public fame fixed upon Epicurus and his disciples charges of living in luxury and excess, and of teaching principles subversive of morality, which have caused his name to be proverbialized as a name for general licentiousness. His exposure of the absurdities of the popular religion of his country and day was the main ground of the popular calumny with which he was assailed. All the stories about immoralities practised in the famous garden are fictions. W. Wallace, LL.D., says in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*:

"But there is scarcely a doubt that the tales of licentiousness which ill-tempered opponents circulated regarding the society of the garden are groundless. The stories of those who sought occasionally to refute the views of Epicurus by an appeal to his

alleged antecedents and habits were no doubt in the main, as Diogenes Laertius says, the stories of maniacs."

When Epicureanism had become confounded with license and libertinism, there were not a few who professed to accept the philosophy, modifying it to make it conform to their superficial theories and loose morals, but still retaining the name, in order to give to their notions the dignity and importance of a philosophical system which should justify the lives they lived. "They corrupted the theory, and so combined the conception of its friends and foes that they ended by having a theory of Epicureanism corresponding to their habits." Have we not seen the same process gone through more than once in regard to "Atheism," "Liberalism," and "Secularism," in these latter days?

That the philosophy of Epicurus, in its basic principles, really encouraged the gratification of the "appetites" in excess is neither evident *a priori* or from a consideration of that philosophy, nor is it proved by the facts of history. Epicurus made pleasure in the most comprehensive sense—the same as did John Stuart Mill, the same as does Spencer—the object of morality. But pleasure comprehends love of the beautiful, the true and the good. With him virtue was the means of happiness, "the only permanent element of pleasure."

In one of his letters to Menæceus, which