



## Plutarch Selection

For our Plutarch selection, we have chosen the chapter "Three Powers," a study of Lysander from *The Children's Plutarch: Stories of the Greeks*, and included it on the following pages. The book may also be purchased on Amazon.

In this selection, we follow the life of Lysander and discover three powerful influences in the world—the sword, money, and poetry—and the very different ways each one shapes the human heart.

**Please Note:** Unfortunately, Ambleside Online does not have a study guide for this "life."

*Plutarch*

# Three Powers

*The Children's Plutarch: Tales of the Greeks, by F. J. Gould*

THE conqueror who marched with his Greek soldiers right from the shores of Asia Minor to India, the land of elephants, was Alexander the Great (356 B.C. to 323 B.C.). The god of strength who slew lions and fought wild bulls was Hercules. The prince of the city of Troy, who in valiant combat killed thirty-one chiefs, was Hector. The Spartan general who captured the city of Athens was Lysander (Ly-san-der).

Lysander had the glory of ending a war which lasted twenty-eight years—a war between Greeks and Greeks, between the warriors of Athens and the hardy men of Sparta. The war went on from the year 431 B.C. to 404 B.C. On land Greek had spilled the blood of Greek; and on sea, among the fair and fruitful islands, the galleys had sailed to and fro and crashed against each other in the shock of battle. At last the Spartans, led by Lysander, suddenly attacked the Athenian fleet at a time when one hundred and twenty ships lay off the shore with scarce a man in them. The Athenian admiral gave the alarm, and hurried on board with all the men he could find. Others came running from the camp on the beach, where they had been cooking dinner, or taking their ease. Only nine galleys escaped, and a number of Athenians were slain and three thousand were made prisoners. Lysander sailed homeward in triumph, his men singing songs of joy, and the musicians playing flutes. Then the Spartan general turned upon Athens, the beautiful city by the sea. Many people had crowded for refuge into the city, hoping its long walls would protect them from the Spartans. But after three months the place surrendered. Lysander caused many players to sound their instruments—wind and string and drum—and, while the music sounded, the Spartans flung down the long walls and burned the Athenian ships. Such was the POWER OF THE SWORD.

Nine years afterward Lysander laid siege to a town, and one evening at sunset he approached the gates, when the garrison suddenly rushed out and fell upon him and his companions, and he died. Thus Lysander, who became great by the power of the sword, died by the sword.

During the celebrated war of which I have just been telling you, Lysander had gained an immense spoil, crowns of gold, vessels of gold, and much coin of gold and silver; and he sent the treasure to Sparta in the keeping of an officer named Gylippus (Gy-lip-pus). The treasure was fastened in a large number of bags, in each of which Lysander had placed a note to say how much the bag contained, such as one thousand silver coins and two silver cups, and so on.

Each bag was sealed with wax. Now, Gylippus was a man who was brave in war, and a very famous captain, but his heart was touched with the passion of greed. He faced the swords and darts of the Athenians without dread, but the sight of money made him weak as water, and he coveted the treasure which belonged to his city. On his way to Sparta he cut open every bag at the bottom, took out some of the silver and gold, sewed up the rents, and handed the bags to the magistrates of the city. Since the seals were unbroken, he thought all was well, and that he should not be found out. He did not know Lysander had put a note in each bag.

And what do you think he did with the stolen money? He hid the coins under the straw thatch of the roof of his house. And I must tell you that the coins bore the image of an owl, which was a sacred bird to the Athenians, and was therefore pictured on their money. When the magistrates opened the bags and counted the treasure, and examined the figures on the notes, they were surprised to find that no bag contained the right amount.

"How is this, Gylippus?" asked the magistrates.

The officer turned red, and tried to stammer out a reason for the shortness of the money.

Just at this moment the servant of Gylippus stepped forward.

"Gentlemen," he said to the magistrates, "a good many owls are roosting under the thatch of my master's house."

No doubt you understood what he meant. The money was found, and Gylippus was so ashamed that he left the country altogether. Thus you see how this brave man was disgraced because he fell under the POWER OF MONEY.

The people of Sparta even passed a resolution that the money in the bags should not be shared out at all, but kept as a public treasure—that is, kept for the use of all the people, as in paying for statues, buildings, etc. And I think that was a good plan. The treasure or wealth in a nation should be used for the good of all the folk in that nation, and not just for a few.

Again, we read in the life of Lysander that he was rather vain—that is, he thought too much of himself, and was too fond of praise. After he had, as I have related, thrown down the long walls and burned the galleys of Athens, a poet brought to him a paper of verses written in his honor. And the Spartan general was so pleased that he gave the poet a hat full of silver. We sometimes read in the newspapers of a minister or teacher receiving a purse of gold from the people who admire him, but we should not think of handing the gift in a hat. I suppose the Greek poet did not mind the hat so long as he got the silver. Perhaps, indeed, he only wrote his verses in order to secure the pay. If so, I am afraid that would show the power of money over the poet and his poetry.

But I have a better tale to tell you about the POWER OF POETRY.

Not long before the fall of Athens the citizens had sent an army in many ships to attack the seaport town of Syracuse (Sy-ra-kuze), in the island of Sicily. The people of this seaport were Greeks, and spoke the same tongue as the Athenians and read the same books, and enjoyed the same plays at the theatres, and sang the same hymns at the temples. The Athenians quite failed in their purpose. Their commander was slain, their ships taken, and the whole army was made prisoners. Many of the Athenians were sent to toil in the quarries, getting up stone; and their daily food was but a pint of barley and a half pint of water. Many others were employed as slaves in the households of the richer citizens of Syracuse.

Now the people of the city took great pleasure in hearing the poems of a certain writer named Euripides (U-rip-id-eez). The Athenian prisoners knew many of his lines by heart, and could sing some of the verses which he had composed not long before, and which were not yet known to the people of Syracuse. With much delight they would gather round the slave who was about to recite or sing, and they listened with silent attention till he had done, and then broke into loud applause.

"Friend," the owner of the slave would then say, "in return for your song I give you your freedom. You may go."

A number of Athenians who were thus released from bondage went back to Athens and called on the old poet.

"We have come to thank you for giving us our liberty," they said.

"How? I have done nothing for you."

"Oh yes, you have, sir. We sang your verses to our masters when we were slaves in Syracuse, and they showed their thanks by setting us free."

It is also related that a ship from Athens was once pursued by sea-robbers, and tried to enter a harbor on the coast of Sicily. The people at the harbor-mouth shouted out:

"You are Athenians; we cannot let you enter."

"But the pirates are following us. Let us take shelter here, we pray you!"

"Can you repeat to us any of the poems of Euripides?"

"Yes."

"Then come in, and welcome!"

The ship sailed into the harbor; the pirates lost their prize, and a crowd of people were soon gathered about the sailors, listening to lines from their favorite poet.

The power of the sword is cruel. It takes life, and works ruin.

The power of money is mean. It tempts brave men to do low and base deeds.

The power of poetry is noble. It fills the heart with tender feelings; it writes high thoughts in our memory; it makes the eye sparkle with desire to do things that are fair and just. The poet is a friend who teaches us concerning all beautiful things—sunsets, sea, blue sky, and the dreams in the minds of heroes. The poet is the man

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.