

*Apollonius of Tyana
Comforts a bereaved father*



From Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. II, (Epistle 58 to Valerius, perhaps Asiaticus Saturninus), pp. 455-61; tr. Conybeare. Frontispiece: Royal couple mourning for their dead daughter, by Carl Friedrich Lessing.

THERE IS NO DEATH OF ANYONE SAVE IN APPEARANCE ONLY, even as there is no birth of anyone or becoming, except only in appearance. For when a thing passes from essence into nature we consider that there is a birth or becoming, and in the same way that there is death when it passes from nature into essence; though in truth a thing neither comes into being at any time nor is destroyed. But it is only apparent at one time and later on invisible, the former owing to the density of its material, and the latter by the reason of the lightness or tenuity of the essence, which however remains always the same, and is only subject to differences of movement and state. For this is necessarily the characteristic of change caused not by anything outside, but by a conversion of the whole into the parts, and by a return of the parts into the whole, due to the oneness of the universe. But if someone asks:

What is this, which is at one time visible, and at another invisible, as it presents itself in the same or in different objects?

It may be answered, that it is characteristic of each of the several genera of things here, when it is full, to be apparent to us because of the resistance of its density to our senses, but to be unseen in case it is emptied of its matter by reason of its tenuity, the latter being perforce shed abroad, and flowing away from the eternal measure which confined it; albeit the measure itself is never created nor destroyed.

Why is it then that error has passed unrefuted on such a scale?

The reason is that some imagine that they have themselves actively brought about what they have merely suffered and experienced; because they do not understand that a child brought into the world by parents, is not begotten by its parents, any more than what grows by means of the earth grows out of the earth; nor are phenomenal modifications or affections of matter properties of the individual thing, but it is rather the case that each individual thing's affections are properties of a single phenomenon. And this single phenomenon cannot be rightly spoken of or characterised, except we name it the first essence. For this alone is agent and patient, making itself all things unto all and through all, God eternal, which in so far as it takes on the names and person of individuals, forfeits its peculiar character to its prejudice. Now this is of lesser importance; what is of greater is this, that some are apt to weep

so soon as ever God arises out of mankind,¹ by mere change of place and not of nature. But in very truth of things, you should not lament another's death, but prize and reverence it. And the highest and only befitting honour you can pay to death, is to resign unto God him that was here, and continue to rule as before over the human beings entrusted to your care. You dishonour yourself if you improve less through your judgment than by lapse of time, seeing that time alleviates the sorrows even of the wicked. High command is the most important of things; and he will best succeed in the most important office, who has first learnt to govern himself.

And what piety moreover is there in deprecating that which has happened by the will of God?

If there is an order of reality, and there is, and if God presides over it, the just man will not desire to deprecate his blessings; for such conduct savours of avarice and violates that order; but he will consider that what happens is for the best. Go forward then and heal yourself, dispense justice and console the wretched; so will you wipe away men's tears. You must not prefer your private welfare to the public, but the public to your private. And think what manner of consolation is offered you: the entire province has mourned with you for the loss of your son. Reward those who have grieved with you, and you will far sooner reward them by ceasing to mourn than by confining yourself in your house.

You have no friends?

But you have a son.

What, the one who is just dead? — you will ask.

The reply of all who reflect will be: "Yes, for that which exists is not lost, but exists by the very fact that it will be for ever."

Or would you argue that that which has no existence comes into being?

But how can that be without the destruction of that which is? Another might say, that you are impious and unjust. Impious towards God, and unjust towards your son, now impious towards him as well as towards God.

Would you then learn what death is?

Send and slay me the moment I have uttered these words, and unless you can clothe them afresh with flesh, you have there and then made me superior to yourself. You have abundant time, you have a wife who is sensible, devoted to her husband; you are yourself sound in body, take from yourself whatever lacks. One of the ancient Romans, in order to uphold the law and order of his state, slew his own son, and indeed slew him after crowning him.

You are a governor of fifty cities, and noblest of the Romans; yet this present humour of yours is such as to prevent you from affording a stable government even to your household, not to speak of cities and provinces. If Apollonius were with you, he would have persuaded Fabulla not to mourn.



¹ The idea is that by death the divine substance which was confined in a personality or name (which was the same thing) is released, so that where there was only a human being, there is now God.