

Selected thoughts of Apollonius Tyanaeus

His travels allegorically described after the Zodiacal signs



Excerpted from Philostratus' *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. Translated by F.C. Conybeare. First published in 1912 in two volumes as part of the Loeb Classical Library Series.

On how to seduce goats with cinnamon.

They say that from this point¹ they crossed the part of the Caucasus which stretches down to the Red Sea; and this range is thickly overgrown with aromatic shrubs. The spurs then of the mountain bear the cinnamon tree, which resembles the young tendrils of the vine, and the goat gives sure indication of this aromatic shrub; for if you hold out a bit of cinnamon to a goat, she will whine and whimper after your hand like a dog, and will follow you when you go away, pressing her nose against it; and if the goat herd drags her away, she will moan as if she were being torn away from the lotus. But on the steeps of this mountain there grow very lofty frankincense trees, as well as many other species, for example the pepper trees which are cultivated by the apes.

Nor did they neglect to record the look and appearance of this tree, and I will repeat exactly their account of it. The pepper tree resembles in general the willow of the Greeks, and particularly in regard to the berry of the fruit; and it grows in steep ravines where it cannot be got at by men, and where a community of apes is said to live in the recesses of the mountain and in any of its glens; and these apes are held in great esteem by the Indians, because they harvest the pepper for them, and they drive the lions off them with dogs and weapons. For the lion, when he is sick, attacks the ape in order to get a remedy, for the flesh of the ape stays the course of his disease; and he attacks it when he is grown old to get a meal, for the lions when they are past hunting stags and wild boars gobble up the apes, and husband for their pursuit whatever strength they have left. The inhabitants of the country, however, are not disposed to allow this, because they regard these animals as their benefactors, and so make war against the lions in behalf of them. For this is the way they go to work in collecting the pepper; the Indians go up to the lower trees and pluck off the fruit, and they make little round shallow pits around the trees, into which they collect the pepper, carelessly tossing it in, as if it had no value and was of no serious use to mankind. Then the monkeys mark their actions from above out of their fastnesses, and when the night comes on they imitate the action of the Indians, and twisting off the twigs of the trees, they bring and throw them into the pits in ques-

¹ [The banks of river Hyphasis]

tion; then the Indians at daybreak carry away the heaps of the spice which they have thus got without any trouble, and indeed during the repose of slumber.¹

On the duty of ordinary men and of noble men.

[Apollonius sent to the Lacedaemonian Ephors] an epistle from Olympia, briefer than any cipher dispatch of ancient Sparta; and it ran as follows:

Apollonius to the Ephors sends salutation.

It is the duty of men not to fall into sin, but of noble men, to recognize that they are doing so.²

On those who have been in revolt not only against the Romans, but against humanity.

As for the count of ill luck, I may dismiss it; but as for that of cowardice, how can you avoid it? How escape the reproach of having been afraid of Nero, the most cowardly and supine of rulers? Look at the revolt against him planned by Vindex,³ you surely were the man of the hour, its natural leader, not he! For you had an army at your back, and the forces you were leading against the Jews, would they not have been more suitably employed in chastising Nero? For the Jews have long been in revolt not only against the Romans, but against humanity; and a race that has made its own a life apart and irreconcilable, that cannot share with the rest of mankind in the pleasures of the table nor join in their libations or prayers or sacrifices, are separated from ourselves by a greater gulf than divides us from Susa or Bactra or the more distant Indies. What sense then or reason was there in chastising them for revolting from us, whom we had better have never annexed? As for Nero, who would not have prayed with his own hand to slay a man well-nigh drunk with human blood, singing as he sat amidst the hecatombs of his victims?⁴

On Justice.

For anyone who considers the fate of Palamedes in Troy or Socrates in Athens, will discover that even justice is not sure of success among men, for assuredly these men suffered most unjustly being themselves most just. Still they at least were put to death on the score of acts of injustice imputed on them, and the verdict was a distortion of the truth; whereas in the case of Aristides the son of Lysimachus, it was very justice that was the undoing of him, for he in spite of his integrity was banished merely because of his reputation for this very virtue.⁵ And I am sure that justice will appear in a very ridiculous light; for having been appointed by Zeus and by the Fates

¹ Vol. I, Bk. III, § 4, pp. 237-41

² Vol. I, Bk. IV, § 27, p. 411

³ [Gaius Julius Vindex, 37-69 CE, Roman senator and governor of Gallia Lugdunensis. Vindex was the first to revolt against emperor Nero.]

⁴ Vol. I, Bk. V, § 33, pp. 539-41

⁵ [Aristides, surnamed "the just," was an Athenian politician. According to a famous anecdote, which Philostratus repeats in § 7.21, a voting took place to ostracise Aristides, and an illiterate man, not recognizing Aristides, asked him to write "Aristides" on his sherd [or shard, a piece of a broken pot, also known as ostrakon]. The politician asked him what Aristides had done wrong, and got the following reply: "I don't even know him, but I'm tired of hearing everyone call him 'the just.'" Aristides did as he was asked.]

to prevent men being unjust to one another, she has never been able to defend herself against injustice.

And the history of Aristides is sufficient to me to show the difference between one who is not unjust and one who is really just. For, tell me, is not this the same Aristides of whom your Hellenic compatriots when they come here tell us that he undertook a voyage to the islands to fix the tribute of the allies [of Athens in the Delian League], and after settling it on a fair basis, returned again to his country still wearing the same cloak in which he left it?"

"It is he," answered Apollonius, "who made the love of poverty once to flourish."

"Now," said the other, "let us suppose that there were at Athens two public orators passing an encomium upon Aristides, just after he had returned from the allies; one of the proposes that he shall be crowned, because he has come back again without enriching himself or amassing any fortune, but the poorest of the Athenians, poorer than he was before; and the other orator, we will suppose, drafts his motion somewhat as follows:

Whereas Aristides has fixed the tribute of the allies according to their ability to pay, and not in excess of the resources of their respective countries; and whereas he has endeavoured to keep them loyal to the Athenians, and to see that they shall feel it no grievance to pay upon this scale, it is hereby resolved to crown him for justice.

Do you not suppose that Aristides himself would have opposed the first of these resolutions, as an indignity to his entire life, seeing that it only honoured him for not doing injustice; whereas, he might perhaps have supported the other resolution as a fair attempt to express his intentions and policy?¹

On the merits of individual instruction.

Some people ask the reason why I have left off giving lectures to large audiences. Let all know then, who may be interested to understand such matters: No discourse can be really useful, unless, if it be single, it be also delivered to a single individual. Anyone then who discourses in any other manner is motivated by vain glory to discourse.²

On the true magician.

The Persians give the name of magi to divine beings. A magus then is either a worshipper of the gods or one who is by nature divine. Well, you are no magus, but a man without god.³

¹ Vol. II, Bk. VI, § 21, pp. 93-97

² Vol. II, (Epistle 10 to Dion), p. 417

³ Vol. II, (Epistle 17 to Euphrates), p. 423

On the health of the body depending upon the purity of the soul.

Pythagoras has declared that the divinest thing we have is the healing art. But if the divinest thing is the healing art, then we must take care of the soul as well as of the body; for surely a living creature cannot be in sound health, if in respect of its highest element it be diseased.¹

On the futility of envy.

You must not feel envious of anyone; for while good men deserve what they have, the bad live badly even if they are prosperous.²



“Blavatsky on Apollonius of Tyana,” in our Buddhas and Initiates Series.

¹ Vol. II, (Epistle 23 to Crito), p. 427

² Vol. II, (Epistle 91 to his Brothers), p. 479