

against someone and get away with it. Poor as my body is, I utter words of commonsense and thereby benefit the life of mortals."

(100) The king liked his story and said, "I grant you your life. Ask for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you."

Aesop said, "Make peace with the Samians."

The king said, "I make peace."

Aesop fell at his feet and thanked him. Then he wrote down the stories and fables that go by his name even now and deposited them in the library. When he had gotten from the king a letter wherein he agreed to make peace with the Samians for the sake of Aesop, he sailed for Samos, taking many gifts with him. He called an assembly and read the king's letter. The Samians, recognizing that Croesus had made peace with them for the sake of Aesop, voted honors for him and named the place where he had been turned over the Aesopeum. As for Aesop, he sacrificed to the Muses and then built a shrine to them, erecting in their midst a statue of Mnemosyne and not of Apollo. Thereupon, Apollo became angry with him as he had once been with Marsyas.\*

(101) After spending many years in Samos and being recognized with many honors, Aesop decided to tour the world. He lectured to audiences for a fee and, after traveling all around, came to Babylon, where Lycurgus was king. After giving an exposition of his philosophy, he was acclaimed as a great man by the Babylonians. Even the king became a great admirer of his character and wit and appointed him chamberlain. (102) In those days it was customary for kings to collect tribute from one another by means of contests in wit. They did not face one another in wars and battles but sent philosophical conundrums by letter, and the one who couldn't find the answer paid tribute to the sender. By answering the conundrums sent to Lycurgus Aesop won reputation for the king. He also provided the problems for Lycurgus to send the other kings, and they, being unable to discover answers, paid tribute. In this way the kingdom of the Babylonians expanded until it not only included barbarian nations but even most of the lands up to Greece itself were subjugated.

(103) Aesop made the acquaintance of a young man of good family at Babylon, and since he was childless, adopted him, and presented him to the king as the heir to his own wisdom. He lavished every care on

\* Another Phrygian whose story is mentioned by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* VI 382 ff. He challenged Apollo to a musical contest, and when he lost, Apollo skinned him alive.

his education, but the young man began to get a big head, became involved with the king's concubine, and was enjoying the sport. Aesop saw this and was so angered that he repeatedly threatened him, saying that anyone who touched the king's woman was bringing on his own death. (104) The boy was put out at what Aesop said, and at the persuasion of his friends, made a false accusation against him to the king. He wrote a false letter in Aesop's name to the king's enemies saying that Aesop was ready to help them, and sealing it with Aesop's ring, he turned it over to the king with the words, "This is your faithful friend; just see how he is plotting again your rule."

The king was convinced by the seal and in a rage ordered a captain of the guard to kill Aesop for a traitor. But the captain didn't kill him, because he was his true friend. Since no one inquired into the matter, he kept him in the prison and reported to the king, "I have put Aesop to death." Helios succeeded Aesop as chamberlain.

(105) Some time later Nectanabo, king of Egypt, heard that Aesop was dead and sent an embassy to Lycurgus with a letter and a conundrum for him to resolve, knowing that with Aesop dead no one could be found among the Babylonians who could solve it. And this was the conundrum: "Nectanabo, king of Egypt, to Lycurgus, the Babylonian, greeting. I want to build a tower high in the air, one that touches neither earth nor heaven. Send me men to build it and one to answer any question I ask, and collect three years' tribute on behalf of the royal city. But if you cannot do this, I will collect ten years' tribute on behalf of all the territory under your rule."

(106) When Lycurgus read the letter, he was very much distressed at this sudden turn of events. He summoned all his friends to appear, including Hermippus, and said to them, "Can you solve the question of the tower, or shall I chop off all your heads?"

His friends said, "We don't know how a tower can be built that touches neither heaven nor earth."

Another said, "Sire, we wish to do whatever you command, but we have no ability nor experience at such things. We beg you, therefore, for forgiveness."

But the king was furious and ordered the guard to put them all out of the way. Then he began to beat his brow and tear his hair and mourn for Aesop. And as he moaned he said, "In my stupidity I have

destroyed the pillar of my kingdom." And he would take neither food nor drink.

(107) When the captain of the guard saw the king's misery, he decided to disclose his misconduct immediately and said, "Sire, I know that today is my last day."

Lycurgus said to him, "What did you say?"

He replied, "In disobeying the king's order I have laid up trouble for myself."

The king said, "What do you have on your conscience?"

He said, "Aesop is alive."

The king was overjoyed at this unexpected news and said to Hermippus, "I only wish I could make this last day you talk about an eternity for you if you're telling the truth about Aesop's being alive, for if you've kept him safe, you've been the guardian of my salvation. But I'll not let you go unrewarded; I'll proclaim you my savior." And he ordered Aesop brought before him. When he appeared all filthy, unshaven, and pallid from his long imprisonment, the king turned away and wept. Then the king ordered him to be cared for and clothed and brought to receive his embrace.

(108) When Aesop was himself again, he came and embraced the king. He explaining how his adopted son had laid a false accusation against him, and he took an oath to the truth of his account. The king wanted to kill Helios for having dealt treacherously with his father, but Aesop dissuaded him, arguing that if he were dead, he would have death as a cloak for the disgrace of his life, but so long as he lived, he would be a monument of his own guilt. The king consented to let him live but said to Aesop, "Take this letter from the king of the Egyptians and read it."

He read the requirement and said with a smile, "Answer him this way: 'I will send you men to build your tower and answer your questions when the winter is over.'" The king wrote as he directed and sent the letter by his ambassadors to Egypt. He restored Aesop to his original position of responsibility and turned Helios over to him.

He took the young man and lectured him. And this was what he said, (109) "Helios, my son, listen to my words even though you were brought up on them and yet repaid me with a gratitude I did not deserve. But now keep these precepts as a trust. First, reverence God as is right. Honor your king, for his power deserves the same honor

as that of God. Honor your professor as your parents, for you are naturally obliged to treat them well, but you should be doubly grateful to him whose affection is freely bestowed. Take good food for the day as well as you can so that you may be ready for the work of the next day and keep your health. At the king's court let whatever you hear perish within you so that you may not quickly perish yourself. Let your relations with your wife be worthy so that she may not wish to have experience of another man, for womankind is a vain thing and less likely to go astray when flattered. When in your cups do not discuss serious matters to show off your learning, for you will be tripped up in an off moment and get yourself laughed at. Keep ahead of your tongue. Do not envy those who are successful, but rejoice with them, and you will share in their good fortune, for he who is jealous unwittingly harms himself. Take care of your slaves, and share what you have with them so that they may not only obey you as their master but also honor you as their benefactor. Rule your passions. If you learn a thing later than you should, do not be ashamed, for it is better to be called a late learner than a dolt. Keep your councils from your wife, and reveal no secrets to her, for womankind is a rival in married life, and she will sit all day plotting and scheming how to get you under her control. (110) Strive to put away something for tomorrow from what you get today, for it is better to leave something behind for your enemies than to go begging of your friends while you live. Be affable and courteous to those you meet, knowing that a dog's tail gets him food and his mouth, beatings. Be proud of your character and not of your wealth, for chance may rob you of the latter, but the former cannot be taken away. If you prosper, bear no grudge toward your enemies; rather treat them well so that they may have a change of heart when they realize what kind of a man they have wronged. If you are able to be charitable, do not hesitate, but give with a will, knowing that fortune does not tarry. If you find a man to be a gossip and a slanderer, cast him out in time even though he be your brother, for he does not behave so out of good will but rather in order to reveal to others what you say and do. Rejoice not at great wealth, and grieve not at small." When he had said these things to the young man, he left him. But Helios, grieving at the wrong he had done him and at being tongue-lashed by him, ended his life by refusing food. And Aesop mourned him and gave him a splendid funeral.

(111) After the funeral he called some fowlers and ordered them to catch four eagles. When the eagles were caught, he pulled out the last row of wing feathers, with which they are supposed to fly, and gave orders for them to be brought up and taught to carry boys. When they were full-grown, they would carry the boys, and with this burden they would fly up into the air with cords attached to them so that they were under the boys' control and would go wherever the boys wished. When summer came, he said goodbye to the king and set sail with his boys and his eagles, accompanied by many servants and much equipment calculated to impress the Egyptians.

(112) When he came to Memphis, it was announced to king Nectanabo that Aesop had arrived. Displeased at this news, he summoned his friends and said, "Men, I have been trapped by the news of Aesop's death. I have challenged Lycurgus by letter." So saying, he gave orders for Aesop to debark. The next day Aesop came and presented his respects to the king. Nectanabo ordered his generals and governors to put on white robes, he himself put on a pure white linen robe and horns on his head. As he sat thus on his throne, he ordered Aesop to enter.

[(113) As he entered and saw this regalia, he made obeisance. Nectanabo said to him, "What likeness do you see in me and my attendants?"

Aesop said, "I would liken you to the moon in its fullness and those about you to the stars, for as the moon surpasses the other stars so you too have the appearance of the moon in this horned guise and your officials that of the stars about it." When Nectanabo heard this, he was amazed and gave him gifts.

(114) The next day Nectanabo dressed in shining purple, took his place, carrying many flowers, amid his courtiers and ordered Aesop to enter. When he came in, the king questioned him, saying, "What likeness do you see in me and my attendants?"

Aesop said, "I would liken you to the sun in springtime and those about you to the fruits of the earth, for like a king you delight the eye with your purple splendor, and you gather to yourself the flowering fruits." Again the king was amazed at his intellect and gave him gifts.]

(115) The next day Nectanabo dressed in white, clothed his friends in scarlet robes, and mounted his throne. When Aesop came, he asked him, "What do I resemble?"

Aesop said, "You are like the sun and those about you like its rays, for as the sun is bright and undefiled, so you too present yourself pure to men who wish to behold you and are brilliant as the sun, and these are flaming red like the rays of the sun."

The king was amazed and said to him, "So long as my kingdom continues thus, it follows that Lycurgus is nothing."

Aesop smiled and said, "Don't take his name recklessly in vain, for Lycurgus is as far above you as Zeus is above things of the earth. Zeus makes the sun and the moon to shine and to keep the seasons in order. If it pleases him to be angered, he makes his own shrine to tremble, causing terrifying thunder and dread lightning and setting earthquakes in motion. Just so, Lycurgus by the brilliance of his kingdom makes your brilliance dim and obscure, for he humbles everyone with his preëminence."

(116) Nectanabo, observing his sagacity and the readiness of his tongue, said to him, "Have you brought me men to build my tower?"

Aesop said, "They are ready when you point out the place."

The king in wonderment went outside the city with Aesop and gave the measurements for the building. Aesop stationed the eagles at the corners of the assigned space and ordered the boys to mount and fly up into the air. When they got aloft, they shouted, "Give us the mud and bricks and wood and whatever is required for the building."

Nectanabo: "Where did you trump up these winged men?"

Aesop said, "Oh, Lycurgus has winged men. And do you, who are only a man, want to match yourself against a king who is on a footing with the gods?"

Nectanabo said, "Aesop, I have lost. But answer me one question."

Aesop said, "Speak up; whatever you like."

(117) Nectanabo said, "I imported brood mares from Greece, and when they hear the horses in Babylon neighing, they miscarry."

Aesop said, "I'll give you my answer on this tomorrow." Then Aesop went to his quarters and ordered his men to catch a cat alive. [They caught him a great big one and began to whip it in public.] When the Egyptians saw this, they ran to Aesop's house and raised a shout against him. Aesop then ordered the cat released. But the Egyptians went to the king with their outcry against Aesop. The king summoned Aesop and, when he arrived, said to him, "You've done a bad thing. The

animal is a symbol of the sacred goddess of Bubastis, and the Egyptians show it reverence."

(118) Aesop said, "Yes, but Lycurgus was wronged by it this night. He had a young rooster, a fighting cock—what's more, it told him the time—and the cat killed it tonight."

Nectanabo said to Aesop, "Aren't you ashamed of such a barefaced lie? How could a cat get from Egypt to Babylon in one night?"

Aesop said, "How can your mares here hear the horses at home and miscarry?"

The king, seeing his wit, began to be afraid that he would be bested and have to pay tribute to King Lycurgus.

(119) He immediately summoned prophets from Heliopolis who had knowledge of the questions of natural philosophy. When they had discussed Aesop with him, he invited them to dinner along with Aesop. They arrived at the appointed hour and took their places for dinner. One of the Heliopolitans said to Aesop, "We are sent by god to propose to you certain statements for your interpretation."

Aesop said, "You give the lie to yourselves and your god, for if he is a god he ought to know the thought of each and every man. But say on as you like."

(120) They said, "There is a temple and in it one column, and atop the column are twelve cities, and each of these is roofed with thirty beams, and about each of them run two women."

Aesop said, "Among us, children solve this conundrum. The temple is the universe, for it embraces all things; the column is the year, for it stands firm; the cities upon it are the twelve months, for they are continuously populated; the thirty beams are the thirty days of the month which embrace the year; and the two women moving around are night and day, for one follows the other." With this they arose from the dinner.

(121) The next day King Nectanabo held a council with his close associates and said, "As I can see, because of this ill-favored and accursed fellow. I am going to have to send tribute to King Lycurgus."

But one of his friends said, "Let's pose him a problem in these words: 'What is there which we have neither seen nor heard?' and no matter what clever answer he gives, we'll tell him we've heard it and seen it. He'll be stopped by this and admit defeat."

When the king heard this, he was overjoyed, thinking he had found a way to win. When Aesop presented himself, King Nectanabo said to him, "Answer us this one more question, and I will pay the tribute to Lycurgus. Tell us something we have never either seen or heard."

Aesop said, "Give me three days, and I will give you your answer." He left the king and reasoned with himself, "They will say they have seen whatever I mention." (122) But Aesop, ever resourceful in such affairs, sat down and drafted himself a note of a loan in this form: "Lent to Nectanabo by Lycurgus, a thousand talents of gold." And he inserted an indication of the time that had passed since the loan. Then, after three days, Aesop went to Nectanabo and found him with his friends, expecting him to be at a loss. But Aesop brought out the note and said, "Read this agreement."

King Nectanabo's friends lied and said, "We've seen this and heard of it many times."

Aesop said, "I'm glad you authenticate it. Let him pay the money on the spot, for the due date is past."

King Nectanabo said, "How can you be witnesses to a debt I don't owe?"

They said, "We've never seen or heard of it."

Aesop said, "If that's your answer, the problem is solved."

(123) Nectanabo said, "Lycurgus is truly fortunate to have such wisdom in his kingdom." He gave Aesop the tribute for three years and sent him back with a peaceful letter. When Aesop arrived in Babylon, he told Lycurgus all that had happened in Egypt and gave him the money. Lycurgus then ordered the erection of a golden statue of Aesop with the Muses, and he held a great celebration in honor of Aesop's wisdom.

(124) But Aesop wished to go to Delphi, and so he said goodbye to the king, swearing to return and spend the rest of his life in Babylon. He went to other cities and gave demonstrations of his wisdom and learning. And when he came to Delphi, he undertook to give an exhibition there, too, and the people enjoyed hearing him at first but gave him nothing. Seeing that the men were as pale as potherbs, Aesop said to them,

*Even as the leaves of the trees such is the race of men.\**

\* *Iliad* VI, 146.