

## Life of Aesop

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Aesop may have been born in the 7th cent. BC in Phrygia. Classical sources that mention him are Herodotus *Histories* 2, 134: 3, in which he is simply described as a 'storyteller', Plato *Phaedo* 60c, where Socrates invokes Aesop as a source of practical wisdom, Aristotle *Rhetoric* 2, 20: 6, in which one of his stories is told for political reasons, and Plutarch, who makes Aesop one of the gathering that is the subject of the *Banquet of the Seven Sages*, where he seems to have been a peripheral figure who is not invited to and does not give his opinion on the best form of government in chapter 11 but is invited to and does give his opinion on the best sort of household in chapter 12. Aesop's stories are also mentioned by Aristophanes in the *Wasps* 1259.

Aesop's name was understood by Maximus Planudes as connected with 'Aethiopian', and this has been responsible for depictions of Aesop as African. The sound change -θι- to -σ- is not especially difficult, both of the consonants being closely related fricatives, but there seems to be no evidence in Attic Greek that this change ever took place, and the disappearance of the vowel is not easy to explain. The second part of the name seems to mean 'face' (ὤψ), and I wonder if Aesop's facial disfigurement might be reflected in 'uneven' (ἄϊσος), a not especially common variant form of ἄνισος.

The tales and the Life of Aesop are indisputably pre-Christian, but I would like to draw attention here to a phrase that occurs in the final story in this Life: the father who rapes his own daughter is described as 'smitten by Satanic passion' (ἔρωτι τρωθείς σατανικῶ), which is perhaps what Westermann refers to in his *apparatus criticus* on the passage, viz. that 'this story stands out, if for anything, because of a single new addition' (*haec fabula si qua re sola novitate praestat*). The phrase is likely to be of Judaic or pre-Christian origin.

It is not known when, where, why or by whom the first biography of Aesop was written.<sup>1</sup> The version of the *Vita Aesopi* presented here is the one edited by A. Westermann *Vita Aesopi* (1845), from the manuscript at Bratislava, supplemented by mss. in Munich and Vienna. It opens with Aesop already a slave ('by fate'), who is so slow of speech, hideously ugly and socially unacceptable that he is sent to do manual work on his owner's estate. Having received the gift of eloquent speech from a goddess named Philoxenia, probably Isis, he is sold to a slave trader;

1 B. E. Perry 'The text tradition of the Greek Life of Aesop' *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 64 (1933) pp. 198-244 states that there are three recensions of the Life: the earliest, perhaps based on a 2nd cent. original, is the 10th cent. Ms. no. 397 in the Pierpont Morgan library, followed by the Westermann version translated here, with a third by the Byzantine scholar Maximus Planudes. There are also Greek papyrus fragments of the text, but I have not seen them. In the matter of the composition of this version, one wonders how many 'versions' were used to produce this one: in § 16, for example, Aesop is described as 'a philosopher and one who was fond of his master', which seems out of keeping with the other descriptions of Aesop.

who takes him to Ephesus, where he is bought by the philosopher Xanthus and his students. There is no mention at this point of where Xanthus lives, but it is later revealed that his home was Samos, an island not far from Ephesus. Aesop stays with Xanthus and the relationship between the two is essentially one where the quick-witted Aesop makes fun of the relatively plodding intelligence of his master, evidently a professional philosophy teacher. Throughout Aesop wants his freedom but is unsuccessful in securing it, until some problem occurs in Samos, where eventually Aesop and Xanthus are pitted against each other in a public contest of wit, eloquence and problem-solving. The people of Samos declare Aesop the winner of the contest and set him free, from which point we see the same Aesop but against a different background. He is able to be of great value to Lycurgus in Babylon and subsequently Nectenabo in Egypt. Misfortune quite unexpectedly strikes him at Delphi, where, annoyed by the cool reception he is given by the Delphians, he insults them as slaves, and some of the Delphians decide to impute to him a major crime, theft of temple property, for which the penalty is to be thrown from a cliff from which he would die but not receive a burial. Now, story-telling does not feature greatly in the early part of this account of Aesop, but in the final section, where Aesop is fighting to save his life, it becomes prominent.

The text translated below occupies pp. 7-57, with a short piece on pp. 58-59 that contains a summary of Aesop's life, which could be understood as a sort of CV, extended publisher's 'blurb' or piece of literary criticism, or all three. Westermann seems to be certain that the text is not earlier than the 10th cent. and is dismissive of the relatively simple language of the text, which is of course not pure Attic Greek of the 5th cent. BC.

The following contains my thoughts as I read the text translated I have been struck by one or two things, about which I say a little here. The mention of Amorion as the birthplace: there is no mention this place before 137 BC, when it started to mint its own coins, a sign of growing importance. Philoxenia, the benefactor of Aesop, is not known as a goddess, but given the kindness showed by Aesop to the priest of Isis, it is probably reasonable to guess that the goddess was in fact Isis. There is inscriptional evidence from 44 AD of Ephesus as a slave market: a decree issued by P. Fabius Persicus, an English version of which can be found in R. MacMullen and E. Lane *Paganism and Christianity 100-425 AD* (1984) pp. 39ff. The relationship between Aesop and Xanthus, his master, which occupies §§ 1-15 of the text, seems to be no more than a variant of the master-servant sort comedy so well exploited by Miguel Cervantes with Sancho Panza and Don Quixote and P.G. Wodehouse with Jeeves and Wooster. It is difficult to avoid the feeling that the intellectual superiority of the slave over the master is a social comment of some sort, but quite what I do not know. The subject of slavery is prominent in the text, and it seems to me that, despite the comedy, there may have been a non-comic agenda here of attacking the entire institution of slavery (§§15 ff.). The section of the text that occupies §§ 16-21 sees Aesop on an international stage, with two monarchs, who settle their disputes by solving each other's riddles rather than by war, a humorous device that might be understood as anti-war rhetoric, which is almost unknown in writing from the ancient world, except for the Aristophanes play, *Lysistrata*. While in the service of one of the monarchs, Lycurgus of Babylon, Aesop adopts a child Aenus and gives him everything, but the child turns out to be morally flawed and does Aesop an injustice, but the two are eventually reconciled, and the reconciliation provides an opportunity for Aesop to deliver a long lecture on how to lead a profitable and useful life. It maybe worth mentioning that Westermann's critical apparatus, which is relatively parsimonious elsewhere in the text, suddenly increases in this entire passage with references to earlier writers, especially Menander. While in Lycurgus's service, Aesop solves a

riddle, which makes it necessary for him to leave Babylon and travel to Egypt, where his solution of the riddle is to be implemented. The final scene in the text sees Aesop at Delphi, where his cleverness is responsible for his downfall: he insults the Delphians and their revenge is to accuse of a capital crime and doggedly insist on his death. There is a certain amount of comic pathos in the scene, particularly in Aesop's attempts to delay the inevitable with the equivalent of 'Have you heard the one about . . . ?' The ultimate irony, one might say, is that Aesop, a freed slave, should make such a crass remark to the effect that the Delphians are descended from and are themselves still slaves.

This is only version of the *VitAes* that I have read, and I think it unlikely that I will read any more than this. I have translated it into English because it is an amusing text, but also because it forms an important part of didactic/wisdom literature, which has been and still is produced by many cultures. The genre most familiar to me was produced in Egypt, from the Pharaonic period to the arrival of Islam, in the particular the stories usually known as the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. To emphasize, as it were, that this is not meant to be a work of scholarship I have included only one footnote to indicate that I cannot identify a passage said to be from Euripides.

## The life of the truly amazing Aesop

**(1)** Aesop, whose entire life was of the greatest value, was a slave by fate and a Phrygian, from Amorion, by birth. He was very ugly, with a protruding head, long neck, simian features, black skin, moustache, a squint, potbelly, a humpback, one of nature's mistakes. What made it worse, he was slow of speech with a loud voice, cunning and very mischievous. On the grounds that he was of no use in service his master sent him to work as a cultivator on one of his estates.

One day, when his master was on the estate, a farmer brought some fine figs and presented them to him: "Master, take them, they are the first of the harvest." The master was delighted by them. He said to his steward: "Agathopous, take these, look after them, and after I have bathed, put them out for me to eat." It happened that about that time Aesop was taking his break and going off to eat his daily bread. Agathopous took the figs and greedily ate a couple of them. He then said to a fellow-slave: "I want to fill myself with them, but I am afraid." He said: "If I can eat them with you, I will give you some advice: when we eat them, let us not chew them." Agathopous said to him: "How do we do this?" The fellow-slave replied: "Let us both eat the figs, and if the master blames us, tell him that Aesop, returning from the fields and finding that it was safe to do so, went in and ate them. Aesop, being too slow to explain, will be flogged for it, and we can eat our fill." They sat down to eat them and said, "Poor old Aesop." They made their pact and ate all the figs. After bathing, the master said: "Bring me my figs, Agathopous." He said: "Master, by chance the door to the storehouse was open and Aesop, taking advantage of this, went in and ate them." The master became angry and shouted: "Let someone call Aesop for me." Aesop appeared, and the master said to him: "Tell me, you wretched slave, do you have so little regard for me that you enter my storehouse and eat figs that have been prepared for me?" Aesop heard this. Now, he was unable to speak because his speech was slow, but his mind was quick, and he looked at his accusers standing in front of him. As he was about to be flogged, he fell at the feet of his master, and calling upon him for a little indulgence, ran to fetch a pitcher, mixed some warm water and poured it into a jug. He drank and put his fingers into his mouth to vomit, and only water came up. Aesop had had no food at all. He then wanted his accusers to do the same and, in this way, the master would know who had eaten the figs. The

master was astonished at the intelligence of Aesop and told the others to do the same. The slaves decided to put their fingers to their mouth but not down it. While they were drinking the lukewarm water and bending forward, figs that were now bile came up and came out. The master looked at them and said: "Why have you lied about one who cannot speak?" And he ordered them to be stripped and beaten and paraded in public: "Anyone who plays dirty tricks on another will pay for it."

**(2)** The next day Aesop's master went into town. While Aesop was working in the fields, the priest of Isis, wandering along the road, came to the field and called out to Aesop to show him the way that led to the city. Aesop took him to a shady tree and laid out some bread, olives, dried figs and dates and pressed him to eat. He ran over to the well and drew water and brought him some to drink. Seizing his hand, he led the priest to the level and well-trodden path. The priest raised his hands to heaven and, as one who had been treated well by Aesop, prayed for him. Aesop turned back and, overcome by the heat of the day, fell asleep. Philoxenia, standing over him while he slept, granted him wisdom, a quick tongue and the ability to solve riddles because he was affable and hospitable. Aesop awoke and exclaimed: "What a refreshing sleep! I had a pleasant dream, where I was speaking without impediment and naming the things I could see - forks, ox, ass, cart. Heavens, where did I get this gift from? I know! Being respectful to strangers, as doing good is well-received by the gods, the one who does well will be given fine hopes." Overjoyed by this, Aesop took up his digging fork and started to dig enthusiastically. The steward of the fields, who was present during the work, took his staff and beat one of the slaves. Aesop cried out in solidarity with the slave: "Hey, why are you maltreating someone who has done you no harm and why do you want to kill everyone at random and for no reason every day? I will tell the master everything." When Zenas heard this, he was astonished and said: "With this sudden speech of Aesop it strikes me that I should get back to the master before him so that he does not tell him and I lose my stewardship." He then boarded a cart and went into the city. He greeted his master, who asked him what he was doing there in such a state. Zenas (for this was his name) said: "Master, something wondrous has happened on the estate." He said: "What? Has a late season tree borne fruit too early or has a beast given birth too early?" He said: "No. Aesop has started to speak and is quite eloquent." The master said to him: "So, you wretch, you think that this is wondrous? People who are very angry sometimes briefly acquire the gift of speech again." Zenas said to him: "But master, he is beginning to say all manner of things about people. He

insulted me and you and has blasphemed against the gods." The master said angrily: "From now on you have my permission: sell him, rejoice, get rid of him. Do you as you wish with him." Zenas took a written deed giving him power over Aesop and went to the field. He called out to Aesop: "Aesop, you have been given to me by the master so that I may do to you as I see fit. Since you can now talk, I want to sell you." Aesop replied: "Do you as you wish." By chance there happened to be a slave-trader passing looking to hire or buy pack animals to transport slaves. When he met Zenas, an acquaintance and friend, he greeted him and asked: "Do you have beasts for hire or sale?" Zenas replied: "No, but I have a male slave. You can buy him if you want." Zenas sent for Aesop and said to the slave-trader: "Here he is. You can buy him." The trader turned around and, when he saw Aesop, started laughing: "Where is this thing from? Is it human? He is the trumpeter for the battle of the monsters. If he did not have a voice, you might think that he was a ruptured wine skin. Have you made me break my journey for the sake of this refuse, thinking that I might buy it?" With that he went on his way. Aesop ran over to him and asked him to wait a little. He told Aesop to leave him alone: "If I bought you, people would think me mad." Aesop said: "Then tell me why you have come?" The merchant: "Thinking that I would buy something useful. But you look withered to me. I can make no use of you." Aesop said: "Buy me and trust me. I will be of great use to you." The trader asked him what use. Aesop replied: "Do you not have crying or unruly children in your house or emporium? Buy me and make me their pedagogue, and I will frighten them like a bogeyman." The trader laughed and agreed and asked Zenas how much wanted for this poor specimen. "A triobol." The trader smiled and gave him the money, about 37 pennies, reasoning that he had paid nothing for a nobody.

**(3)** As they went on their way to the city, they came to the slave emporium. Two children with their mother, when they saw Aesop, cried out in fright and hid themselves. Aesop said to his master: "You see, I was right about being a bogeyman for small children." The slave-trader laughed and said: "Aesop, go into the dining room and greet your fellow slaves." He went and found the most beautiful children and greeted them. They replied in unison: "By the sun, what a revolting sight! What has gone into our master? He has never bought a slave as hideous as you. He has bought you as an evil eye for the business." The master went into the slaves and said: "Complain all you want. I found no beasts for sale or rent. Get everything ready for tomorrow. We leave for Asia." The slaves did their work in twos. Aesop fell to his feet and begged them: "My fine fellow slaves, since I am newly bought and inexperienced, allow me to

take the lightest baggage." They said that if he were incapable, he need not take anything. Aesop said: "It is an extraordinary thing that of all the slaves here I am the only one who is of no use to his master." They said. "Take what you want." He looked around and saw various objects and vessels for different purposes, sacks, mats and baskets. Seeing a basket full of bread, which two of them wanted to take, he said: "Carry this one for me." They laughed: "This rogue is obviously a joker. He has just been asking for the lightest burden, and now he has chosen the heaviest of all. Let us give him what he wants." They loaded the basket onto him, and as he began to move, he shook violently. When the master saw him, he marvelled at him and said: "What a worker Aesop is. A fine example to the others ! He is certainly worth the price I paid. He has taken the burden of a beast !" The fellow slaves in twos kept on laughing at him. As he went along the road carrying his basket, he kept teaching it how to walk: when he went uphill, he used his hands and teeth and when he went downhill, he rolled it. And so he laboured until they reached the inn, where the master ordered them to take a break. He said to Aesop: "Distribute the bread." The basket soon became half-empty. After their rest, they set out again and Aesop was the first to reach their resting place. He distributed the bread in the evening and emptied the basket. The next day he put the empty basket on his shoulder and ran ahead of them all. His fellow slaves said: "What is he doing, running ahead of us ? Is he one of us or a stranger ?" Some said he was a stranger, others that he was the ugly one. One said: "You must know this little black fellow ? Clever devil ! We struggle with the heavy baggage and all the expensive things. What things of value does he carry ? Bread !"

**(4)** After some time they came to Ephesus, where the trader sold three slaves. The only ones left were a schoolteacher, a musician and Aesop. One of the trader's friends accosted him and said: "If you want to sell your slaves, friend, go to Samos. Xanthus the philosopher lives there. Quite a few wealthy people from the islands and the mainland go to visit him there. You may be lucky." Convinced by his friend's advice, he set off for Samos. He dressed the musician, who had fine legs. in a white tunic and sandals and stationed him at the sale-stand. The schoolteacher, light of frame, was given a heavier tunic, his hair was combed and he was given a kerchief, and he too was put on the sale-stand. With Aesop, there was nothing to be hidden or beautified, because he was a complete disaster. The trader clothed him in a rough hair tunic and put him in among the handsome slaves. There were quite a few who looked at the slaves, and when they saw Aesop. they said to each: "Where is this evil-looking rascal from ? He does nothing to improve the others !" When Aesop realized that he was being ridiculed, he boldly

stood there and stared at them all. Xanthus, on his way to teach and deep in thought, came to the marketplace with his friends and saw two attractive boys and Aesop between them. He was impressed by the thinking of the trader and said to his friends: "How cunning !" He then asked one of the boys where he was from, and he replied: "I am Cappadocian by birth." Xanthus asked: "What can you do ?" The boy replied: "Everything." Aesop smiled when he heard this. When the students saw that his laughter suddenly revealed his teeth, they thought that they were looking at something monstrous, and they said to each other: "Surely this excrescence does not have teeth ?" One of them said: "What made him laugh ?" Another replied: "He is not laughing. He is shaking. Let us find what he has to say." One of them approached Aesop and asked: "My good man, what are you laughing at ?" Aesop said: "Go away, sea creature." The student withdrew. Xanthus said to the slave-trader: "How much is the musician ?" He said: "A thousand denarii." Xanthus said: "Way over the top !" and went on to the next one and said: "Where are you from ?" The boy said: "I am Lydian." Xanthus asked him what he could do and the boy replied that he could do everything. Aesop laughed. When the students saw this, they said: "What are you laughing at ?" Another said to him: "If you want to hear 'sea goat', ask him." Xanthus said to the trader: "How much do you want for the schoolteacher ?" He said: "Three thousand." When he heard this, Xanthus lost interest, turned around and went on his way. The students said to him: "Master, do you not like these slaves ?" He replied: "Yes, but I subscribe to the doctrine that a precious human being is not bought." One of the students said: "If this is so, then buy this loathsome creature. He will provide the same service, and we will share the cost of his purchase." Xanthus said: "It is absurd that you who have laughed at him should buy him for me. My wife is fussy and would not allow me to be served by this ugly person." So they said to him: "Master, most of your teachings are that women are not to be obeyed under any circumstances." Xanthus said: "Let us first find out if he knows anything so that our money is not wasted for an empty favour." Accordingly, he went up to Aesop and greeted him, Aesop said: "Am I bothering you ?" They then exchanged greetings. Xanthus, like the others, was struck at the readiness of Aesop's speech and said to him: "What sort of person are you ?" Aesop: "One of flesh." Xanthus: "No, I mean, where were you born ?" Aesop: "In my mother's womb." Xanthus: "No, I meant in which place ?" Aesop; "My mother never told me which room I was born in, whether it was above ground or below ground or in the dining room." Xanthus: "What can you do ?" Aesop: "Absolutely nothing." Xanthus: "Why do say that ?" Aesop: "Because the others have told you they can do everything. What am I to say when I can do nothing." The students were impressed and said: "By divine



providence, he has spoken well. There is no-one who can do everything. That is why he laughed." Xanthus said to him: "Do you want me to buy you ?" Aesop replied: "Do you need me as a counsellor ? Whether you buy me or go on your way is your choice. Nobody is forcing you, It is entirely up to you. If you want, loosen the strings of purse and count out the money. If not, do not make fun of me." Xanthus said: "Why are so talkative ?" Aesop replied: "In some talking is regarded as precious. Why are you mocking me ?" The students said: "By the gods, you have bested the master." Xanthus: "If I buy you, will you run away ?" Aesop laughed: "If I want to do this, I will not ask for your advice, as you are asking for mine. Running away is up to you not me. If you are good to slaves, nobody will run away from you, friend. But if you are bad to them and thoughtlessly destroy necessities, I will not stay with you for an hour." Xanthus; "Well said ! But you really are quite ugly." Aesop: "Look at the mind not the physical appearance." Xanthus went to the slave-trader and asked: "How much for this one ?" The trader said: "Are you here to make fun of my business ?" And Xanthus asked him why and the trader said: "Because you ignore the good slaves and choose this ugly wretch. Take one of them, and you can have this fellow as a gift." Xanthus said: "No, just tell me his price." The trade: "Sixty denarii and he is yours." The students gave him their money and Xanthus bought him. When the brokers heard of the sale they went to enquire and wanted to know the details. Both were reluctant to say anything of the low price. The Aesop said: "I am the one sold. This is the seller and that is the buyer. If they say nothing, I am a free man." The brokers laughed and congratulated Xanthus. They came to an agreement with each other and left.

**(5)** Aesop followed Xanthus. It was the heat of the day and the path was very hot, and Xanthus, as he walked through the streets, gathered up his garments to urinate. Aesop, seeing this, grabbed his garments from behind, pulled him to one side and said to him: "Quick, sell me. I am going to run away." Xanthus asked him why, and Aesop said: "I cannot follow such a master." Xanthus asked him why, and Aesop replied: " Look, you are a master and you fear no-one. You should walk slowly and, as a man of substance, keep your passions in check, but here you are, urinating as you walk. Now, when I, a slave, need to do this, I have to hurry. I have to fly." Xanthus said: "Does this disturb you ? Listen: I urinated because I wanted to avoid three misfortunes when walking." Aesop said: "Which ones ?" Xanthus replied: "I did not want the sun beating down on my head', the earth scorching my feet and the pungent odour of the urine in my nostrils. This would have happened in a stationary position, and all three are avoidable in motion." Aesop said. "Carry on walking. You have convinced me." Xanthus said:

"Aesop, my wife is somewhat particular and would disapprove of having such an ugly fellow as you as a servant, so I would like you to stay outside the gate until I go into her and tell her about you in a light-hearted way so that she does not suddenly see your ugly face and take flight." Aesop told him to go and do it. Xanthus went in and said: "Wife, you can no longer reproach me for being attended by your servants. I have bought one for you, and you will see beauty the like of which has never been seen before." The servant girls, hearing this and thinking it was true, began to squabble with each other about which of them would get the new slave. Meanwhile, the mistress of the house said to Xanthus: "What is all this flattering nonsense about him? Where is he?" Xanthus said: "He has followed me to the gate, and since I have not summoned him to come in, he is outside." His wife: "Let the boy be brought." One of the servants, who was enjoying the spectacle of the others squabbling, said: "I will fetch him. I will make him my betrothed." She went outside and called out to him: "Where are you, new-bought one just for me?" Aesop said: "Here I am." When she saw him, the girl got a fright and said: "You?!" And he said: "Yes." She said: "Well, you charmless creature, where is your tail?" He, gathering his garment in front of him, showed her: "This is the only one I have." She said: "Do not go in too suddenly, otherwise they may run away." She went and called the others: "Come and see the hideous excrescence we have all been fighting over." One of them came over and, seeing him, said: "Goodness, what happened to your face? Come here, but do not hold on to me." He stood opposite the mistress of the house, and she looked at him and then turned away, saying to her husband: "Where did you get this monster? Is this the one you have been praising? Get him out of my sight!" Xanthus said: "Madam, do not scorn my new-bought slave." She said: "You hate me. You want to marry someone else and are too ashamed to tell me to leave the house and you have brought this dog-headed specimen so that I will refuse to be attended by him and leave. Just give me my dowry and I will be off." Aesop said: "Throw her out into the dark." Xanthus told him to be quiet: "Do you that know that I love her as I love myself?" "So you want the woman?" "Yes, you runaway slave." Aesop then kicked his foot out and shouted: "Xanthus the philosopher is vanquished by a woman." Then he said to her: "My good woman, would you have preferred it if your husband had bought you a young, well-proportioned, handsome, white-skinned, curly-haired boy to serve him when he had to go to the bath and see you naked, mix your bedtime drink, massage your feet and, by sporting with you, bring shame on the philosopher? O Euripides, what golden words of truth you uttered when you wrote:

Many are the angry waves of the sea  
Terrible are the winds of the rivers and fire  
Terrible is destitution and many other things  
But there is no evil as terrible as woman.<sup>2</sup>

But you, Madam, being the wife of a philosopher, do you wish to be attended by handsome slaves and inflict the shame of cuckoldry on your husband ?" On hearing this she said to her husband: "This is an evil wretch you have caught for me, husband, but he is eloquent and witty. I will come to terms with him." Xanthus said: "Aesop, your mistress finds you acceptable." Aesop replied: "It is a great thing to pacify a woman."

**(6)** Xanthus said: "Be quiet. I bought you as a slave not a discussion partner. Take the pouch and follow me so that we can buy vegetables from the gardens." Aesop put the shoulder cloth on his shoulder and followed his master. As they were walking through one of the gardens, he said to the gardener: "Give us some vegetables." He took the sickle and cut off asparagus, beet, mallows and spices with it. He tied them up carefully in a bundle and gave it to Aesop. Xanthus opened the pouch and paid for them. The gardener said to Xanthus: "Wait, I want to ask you something." Xanthus said: "What ?" The gardener said: "Master, why do these vegetables so carefully tended by me grow so slowly, while plants that are produced from the earth and are not tended grow so quickly ?" The sage heard this rather philosophical question and was unable to answer it and could say no more than: "Divine providence." When Aesop heard this, he laughed. Xanthus said: "Are you just laughing or laughing at me ?" Aesop replied: "I am not laughing at you, but the one who taught you. Those things subject to divine providence are resolved by wise men. Ask me, and I will resolve it." Xanthus said: "My good fellow, it would be inappropriate for me as one who discourses in lecture halls to now solve riddles in a garden. My servant has more experience of these matters. Put your question to him and he will solve it." The gardener said: "Is this ugly fellow literate ? What bad luck for me !" He then said to Aesop: "Tell me, do you understand ?" Aesop replied: "You want to know why it is that the plants you put in the ground and tend carefully do not grow as quickly as the wild ones that shoot up from the earth. Listen. It is like the situation of a woman who marries for the second time, with children from a previous marriage, a man who also has children from a previous marriage: she is the mother of the former and the stepmother of the latter. And the children are very different. Her own children she brings up lovingly, but the others, born of

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<sup>2</sup> I cannot identify this.

someone else's birth pangs, she hates. She assiduously cuts back the food for the other children and gives it to her own. She loves her natural children and hates her adopted ones. In the same way the earth is the mother of those plants that grow automatically but the stepmother of those planted by you. She cares for and nurtures her own rather than yours, for they are illegitimate." The gardener said: "You have taken a great weight off my mind. Have some vegetables as a gift. If you need anything, come here as if it were your own garden."

**(7)** Some days later, while Xanthus was bathing, it happened that he found some friends in the bath. He said to Aesop: "Go ahead to the house and put lentil in the pot and cook them for me." Aesop ran to the storehouse and did as he was told. Xanthus, after having bathed with his friends, said to them: "Would you do me the honour of dining with me today? We are having lentil. One does not choose friends by means of elaborate dishes - one tests them with dishes that are well-chosen and well-prepared." He brought them into the house and told Aesop to get them something to drink from the bath. He took the pitcher and filled it with water flowing from the bath and, mixing it, gave it to Xanthus, who was not at all pleased and asked: "What is this?" Aesop replied: "You said from the bath." Xanthus collected his senses and said: "Fetch me the jug." Aesop brought it and waited. Xanthus said: "Will you not wash my feet?" Aesop said: "You have instructed me to do whatever you say. You did not say: 'Put water in the jug, wash my feet and put my sandals out and so on.'" Xanthus said to his friends: "It is not a slave I have bought, but a master." After they had reclined, Xanthus said: "Is the lentil cooked? Come, let us eat." Aesop took the spoon and gave him a lentil. Xanthus took it, thinking that it had been given to him to see if it was cooked. He squeezed it and said: "Yes, the lentil is perfect. Let us eat." When the spoon was empty, Xanthus said: "Where is the lentil?" Aesop said; "You have just had it." Xanthus said: "You have cooked only one lentil?" Aesop said: "Yes. You said 'lentil' not 'lentils'. One is singular, the other plural." Xanthus, quite at a loss, said: "Friends, this man is rapidly driving me mad. But I do not wish to appear to insult my friends, please go and buy four pig's feet, cook them and serve them." Aesop went off to cook them. Xanthus wanted to punish him properly, so, when Aesop was busy, he took one of the feet from the pot and hid it. When Aesop went to look at the pot, he saw that there were only three feet. So he went out into the yard and took a knife and cut off a foot of the fattening pig and threw it into the pot and cooked it with the others. Xanthus, suspecting that Aesop might run away when he did not find the missing foot, threw it into the pot. So now there were five. Aesop put them on the plate and discovered that there were indeed five. Xanthus said: "What is all this, Aesop?" And

Aesop said: "Master, how many feet do two pigs have ?" Xanthus replied: "Eight." Aesop said: "Here there are five. One of the pigs was missing three feet." Xanthus said to his friends: "Did I not just that he is quickly driving me mad ?" Aesop said: "Master, do you not know all forms of exaggeration, whether in word or deed, are sins ?" Xanthus could find no reason to beat him, so he did nothing.

**(8)** On the following day Xanthus had a lecture, and one of the students had prepared a large dinner and invited Xanthus and his fellow-students. Xanthus took an amount of food and gave it to Aesop, saying: "Take this and give it to my loyal companion." So he went off, thinking to himself: "Now it is time to pay back my mistress for the way she made fun of me as a new-bought slave. She will see who favours my master." He went back to the house, called the mistress and placed the basket of food in front of her, saying: "Mistress, has anything been eaten ?" And she said: "No, all the food looks clean and untouched." Aesop said: "He has not sent them for you, but for his loyal companion -" She said: "Who could his loyal companion be but me ?" Aesop said: "Wait and you will see." He called the dog and said: "Lykaina, here, girl, eat !" She came up to him wagging her tail and circling around him, and bit by bit he threw the food to the bitch, saying: "My master told me to give this to you." Aesop then returned to his master. Xanthus said to hi,; "Did you give it all to ny loyal companion ?" He said: "She took it all and ate it before my eyes." Xanthus said: "What did she say while was eating ?" Aesop replied: "To me she said nothing, but she was mentally praying to you." Xanthus' wife was very upset and said: "He prefers his dog to me. How I can still love him ? I am not staying." She went into the bedroom and wept. As the dinner progressed the diners started to ask each other questions. One of them was: "What is the worst thing that could happen ?" Aesop, standing behind the diners, said: "If the dead were to come back to life and ask for their property to be returned to them." The students laughed: "The new slave is perceptive and not without charm. Xanthus teaches everyone quickly, but he says says everything well." Another said: "Why does the sheep, when led to the slaughterhouse, not cry out ? The pig's squeal is deafening !" Once again, from the back, Aesop said: "Because the sheep is used to being milked and sheared and follows when it is led and when it sees the blade, it suspects nothing. They think that their wool and their milk are enough to keep them alive. The pig has no milk or useful fleece and knows that it is being slaughtered only for its meat and screams. not having anything else to offer. The students, full of admiration, praised him, and with that the dinner came to an end. Xanthus went home to his wife and was full of flattery for her in the bedroom, but she turned

away from him, saying: "Do not touch me. Give me my dowry. I am not staying with you. Go and flatter the dog you sent the food to." Xanthus said to himself: "What has Aesop done this time?" He said to wife: "I have been drinking but you are drunk. Who did I send the food to? You!" She said: "No, not to me. To the dog!" Xanthus said: "Bring Aesop to me." When he came, Xanthus said to him: "Who did I send the food to?" And Aesop said: "To your loyal companion." His wife said: "I got nothing." Aesop said: "To whom did you say the food was to be given?" Xanthus replied: "To my loyal companion." Aesop said, addressing the dog: "She is your loyal companion. Your wife, even if she says she is, is not. If she is in the least upset, she becomes unpleasant, contradicts you or goes away. Beat the dog, hound her, and she will not go away. She will forget everything and come to her master, happily wagging her tail. You should have told me to give the food to your wife and not your loyal companion." Xanthus said his wife: "Wife of mine, do you not see that none of this is my fault but the fault of the bringer. Be patient, and I will find a reason to flog him." She said: "I am not going to live with you any longer." She left him and went back to her parents. And Aesop said to him: "Did I not tell you that it is your dog who is your loyal companion, not my mistress." Several days went by and she remained unreconciled, so Xanthus sent several people to her, begging her to return. She was intransigent. Xanthus became very despondent because his wife had gone away, and Aesop went to him and said: "Do not be sad, master. I will do something that will bring back to you of her own accord." He took some money and went to the market and bought some birds, geese and other things and took them to the place where his mistress was, pretending that he did not know that she was there. He found one of her parents' servants and said to him: "Look, I suppose you do not have geese or any of those things fitting for a wedding?" The servant said: "Why do you need them?" Aesop replied: "Xanthus the philosopher is getting married tomorrow." He rose quickly and went to tell Xanthus' wife, who, on hearing this, then made her way with all dispatch to Xanthus, shouting: "You cannot marry someone else while I am still alive."

**(9)** Some days later Xanthus invited his students to dine with him and said to Aesop: "Go and buy whatever is good and useful." Aesop went off and said to himself: "I will teach him not to issue foolish orders." He came to the butcher's, where he bought the tongues of all the sacrificed pigs. He prepared them and laid the table. When the friends and Xanthus were reclining to eat, they praised him, saying: "Master, your dinner is full of philosophy. You give us tongue, the source of all fine speaking and the better part of which is water, for every tongue

subsists in water." They ate heartily. While they were drinking, Xanthus said: "Aesop, bring the food." He gave them each a tongue boiled in salt and pepper. The students said: "Master, the tongue has been cooked as it should. The tongue is sharpened by fire, the good part improved by salt and pepper; spicy and pungent." They were enjoying their dinner. Xanthus said: "Aesop, next course please." He gave them tongue again. The students said: "We have already had the pleasure of eating tongue. Is there anything else?" Aesop then served them boiled tongue. The students began to get annoyed and said: "How much more tongue? I have had enough of this meal." Xanthus indignantly said to Aesop: "Have you not got anything else?" And Aesop said: "No." Xanthus said: "Did I not tell you, wretch, to buy me something good and useful." Aesop said: "Thank you for reproaching me in the presence of these philosophical gentlemen. You said 'something good, something useful'. What is greater in life than a tongue? For all philosophy and education are made possible through it. It is the source of giving and receiving, greeting, buying, expressing opinions, doing creative work, getting married. It builds cities and destroys them. It humiliates man and elevates him. The whole of life is made possible through the tongue. There is nothing better than it." The students said: "There is nothing better than tongue. You were wrong, master." With this reasoning they rose abruptly. They spent the rest of evening in a state of vexation. The following day, Xanthus, reproached by the philosophers, said: "This was not what I wanted. It was the fault of my useless slave. I am going to replace him today for dinner, and I will have words with him." He said to Aesop: "Since you think you know what is good, I will order you to do the opposite. Go off and buy whatever is bad and worse, for I am inviting my students to dine with me." Aesop was not in the least bothered by this and went to the butcher's and again bought tongues, as before. The students arrived and took their places at the dining table. After drinks Aesop served each one a tongue with vinegar. "They said to each: "Pig's tongues again! Perhaps you want to bring back our diarrhoea from yesterday with the vinegar." For the next course he served tongue. The students were very confused and upset. Xanthus said: "Aesop, what is the meaning of this. Did I say 'something good and useful'? Did I not say 'something rotten and worse'?" Aesop replied: "What is worse than tongue? The tongue creates hostility, slander, reproach, envy, jealousy, the destruction of war. Why go on? There is nothing worse than tongue. Many have been ruined by the tongue and reduced to penury." One of Xanthus' guests said: "If you are not careful of this man, he will drive you mad. His external form is a reflection of his inner soul." Aesop said: "You are quite a mischief-maker! Provoking your master against a servant. A busybody poking his nose into other people's business!"

**(10)** Xanthus, looking for an excuse to flog Aesop, said: "Fugitive, you say that my friend is a busybody, so show me someone who is not." Aesop said: "Master, there are many who eat their own food and drink their own drink and look after their own affairs. But there are some who are not mindful of their own affairs but meddle with those of others." Xanthus said to him: "Prepare one more dinner. Go and find me a man who is so simple that he does not meddle with what he sees or hears." Aesop went off to the market and found a fight going on, with a large mob around them, some sitting and some reading. Aesop said to himself: "I will call this one. He looks like someone who minds his own business. Nobody will hit me." He went up to him and said: "My good fellow, Xanthus the philosopher, hearing of your mild manner, wants to invite you to dine with him. The man replied that he accepted and would be outside his gate. Aesop went home and prepared the dinner. Xanthus said to Aesop: "Where is the simple man?" Aesop: "He is outside." At the appointed hour the man was brought and took his place with the other guests. Xanthus ordered wine and honey mixture to be given to him. The man said: "No, you drink first, then your wife and all of your guests." Xanthus nodded to Aesop: "First course" The man seemed somehow to be unconcerned. Aesop served the fish. Xanthus, apologizing, said: "I am afraid that the cooking is beneath contempt. There is no aroma. no oil and no sauce. Damn the cook!" The man said: "No, sir. Everything is fine." Xanthus nodded to Aesop. "Second course." Sesame-rich bread was then brought in. Xanthus tasted it and said: "Call the baker. Why does this bread have no honey or raisins?" The guest said: "Master, the bread is fine and goes well with the dinner. Please do not beat your servants." Xanthus nodded to Aesop and said: "Third course." He said: "There is no more." After the guests had risen from dinner, Aesop was suspended and flogged. Xanthus said: "This is what you get. If you do not invite a simple man, I will give you a sound thrashing." The following day Aesop went outside the city looking for one. He saw many by the wayside, one rustic in appearance but urban in manners, driving a donkey cart full of wood and nodding to all the passersby, standing to greet everyone and speaking to the donkey. Aesop followed him, guessing that he was simple. The rustic said to the donkey: "Walk on: Let us get to town as quickly as we can and sell our wood for twelve pennies: two for your fodder, two for me and eight we will keep for emergencies, such as illness and bad weather." Aesop said to himself: "What do we have here? Someone who talks to a donkey. Who could be simpler? I will greet him." The greeting was returned. Aesop asked: "How much for the wood?" The man replied: "Twelve pennies." Aesop asked him if he knew Xanthus the philosopher." The reply was: "No, my son." Aesop asked him why and



the man answered that he was a simple countryman who knew nobody. Aesop said: "I am his slave." The man said: "Did I ask if you were a slave or a free man ? It makes no difference to me." Aesop said: "If you wish, you can follow me. and I will give you money and food." So they went back to the house and Aesop gave him the money for the wood and said: "My master wishes you to dine with him." The rustic was not unduly concerned about why he was being invited and went in with mud on his footwear and took his place. Xanthus said: "Who is this ?" Aesop: "A simple man." Seeing that he was from the countryside, Xanthus said to his wife: "Wife, let us playact so that I may beat Aesop. Arise and bring water for our guest to wash his feet. Perhaps his careful reaction may reveal him to be not so simple, and Aesop will be flogged." She wanted Aesop to be flogged so she took the bowl and brought the pitcher of water for the guest. The man realized that she was the lady of the house and thought to himself: "Perhaps she wants to honour me by personally washing my feet. He asked her to wash his feet and then took his place at the table. Xanthus said: "Let your guest first be given honey wine." The guest said to himself: "First they have to drink. I will not make a fuss if that is what they want, he thought. So he took it and drank. In the course of the meal fish was served. Xanthus urged him to eat, so he did, like a brother. Xanthus then remonstrated with for the cook: "What is this rubbish ? Let him be stripped and beaten." The countryman said to himself: 'The cooking is good. There's nothing wrong with it. If he wants to beat a slave for no reason, what is that to me ?' The slave was beaten, the guest remained silent and Xanthus prattled idly. After a little while the bread was served. The guest, not knowing what to do, began to build the morsels of bread as if they were bricks and eat them. When Xanthus saw that he was happily eating, he summoned the baker. When the latter came, he said to him: "Wretch, the bread has no honey or pepper. It smells." The baker said: "If my bread is uncooked, fine. Beat me. But if it is not properly seasoned. it is the fault of the mistress who was too slow in adding the seasoning." Xanthus said: "If my wife is to blame, I will roast her alive." He said to his wife: "Let us playact so that I may beat Aesop." He said: "Aesop, bring me clematis twigs and make a fire of them." Aesop brought the clematis twigs and set them alight. He spoke to his wife and brought her near the fire so that she would seem to be burning. He then looked at the rustic to see if he would leap in to prevent from this happening. The rustic said to himself: 'There is no reason why this man should be so angry.' And he said: "Master, if you really want to do this, can you wait a little until I bring my wife from the field so that both may burn." Xanthus was astonished at the generosity of the man and said to Aesop: "A genuinely simple fellow ! You have beaten me. Aesop. That is enough. From now on serve me

faithfully and loyally, and I will give you your freedom." Aesop replied: "Do not ever again reproach me, master."

**(11)** The following day Xanthus said to Aesop: "At the appointed hour go to the bath and see if it is not busy so that I can bathe." On his way Aesop met a general, who knew that Aesop was Xanthus' servant and asked him where he was going. Aesop said that he did not know. The general thought Aesop was laughing at him and ordered him to be thrown into prison." As he was being led away, Aesop apologized for his poor reply: "I did not expect to meet you, and now I am off to the lockup." The general was struck by this plausible excuse and sent him on his way. When he arrived at the bath, he saw a crowd of people and what looked like a stone lying in the entrance, against which each one entering and leaving collided and cursed the one who had put it there. One person moved it and went in to bathe. Aesop returned home and told his master of this: "If you please, my lord, you can bathe. I saw only person in the bath." Xanthus: "It is good to have a lot of space when bathing. Prepare the necessities." Xanthus went to the bath and, when he saw the crowd of bathers, he said: "Aesop, what is this ? Did you not tell me that you saw only one person ?" Aesop said: "Indeed. I saw a stone in entrance, against which those entering were colliding. One person moved the stone so that nobody would collide with it. When I chose that person from the others, I told you the truth." Xanthus said to him: "Aesop is never without an excuse." He bathed and returned home to dine. After dinner, his stomach troubling him, he retired to the privy. Aesop stood by with a jug of water, and Xanthus summoned him: "Aesop, can you tell me why, when we retire to defecate, it is often customary for us to look at our own excrement ?" Aesop replied: "According to the ancients, a sage spent so much time defecating for pleasure that he lost his wits. Since then people have been afraid of losing their wits and often look at their excrement. But do not worry, master, for you have no wits."

**(12)** The following day, when Xanthus was drinking with friends, several problems came up for discussion. As Xanthus became agitated, Aesop saw that he was about to become pugnacious and said: "Master, Dionysus says that he made three types of wine for humans: the first for pleasure, the second for abandonment and the third for violence. So, my lord, drink and rejoice, and prove that you have finished." Xanthus, who was drunk, told him: "Be silent, counsellor of Hades." Aesop said to him: "Wait and come down to Hades." One of the students, seeing that Xanthus was overcome by drunkenness, said to him: "Master, is man capable of all

things?" Xanthus replied: "Man is cunning and of all creatures able to do things beyond reason." The student asked: "Can man drink the entire sea?" Xanthus said: "Yes, I would say so. I am capable of drinking up the sea." The student said: "And what if you cannot?" Xanthus, completely overcome by the wine, said: "I would bet all that I have." The bet was confirmed with their rings. The next morning Xanthus arose and was washing his face when he looked for his ring but could not see it. He said to Aesop: "What has happened to my ring?" Aesop said: "I do not know. But I know this: you have become a stranger to your life." Xanthus said: "What do you mean?" Aesop said: "Yesterday you bet everything you have that you could drink up the sea and you put your ring on it." Xanthus said: "How can I drink up the sea? Please, Aesop, you are clever enough to help me win somehow or cancel the bet." Aesop said: "I cannot help you win. But I can cancel the bet." Xanthus asked: "How?" When the banker comes with your opponent and they tell you to drink up the sea, agree to it. You made the bet when you were drunk, but now that you are sober, tell them to bring dining room furniture of mattresses, coverings and tables to the beach and have servants standing by. When you see that everything is ready and all the spectators have arrived, take your place and order that beakers be filled with sea water. Take one of these in your hands and say publicly to the banker: 'What was bet?' And he will tell you: 'To drink all the water from the sea.' Xanthus said: "Is this all he will say?" Aesop said: "No. But I bear witness to this. When it is your turn to speak, say that you accept the challenge and declare openly: 'Fellow citizens and friends, by Zeus and Apollo, I have a favour to ask of you, which will be the greatest help and comfort to me: you are no doubt aware that there are many rivers and streams constantly flowing into the sea. My wager is to drink only the sea, not the rivers and streams flowing into it. So, let the student go and turn back all the waters that flow into it, and I will drink up the sea.' In this way the bet is cancelled because it is impossible." Xanthus realized what he was saying and was overjoyed, The one who had placed the bet received Xanthus with other worthies of the town. He sought to satisfy his claim on Xanthus as they walked along. Aesop said: "Give your life to my master, for the sea is already half-empty for him." The student said: "Aesop, you are now mine and no longer the property of Xanthus." All the preparations on the beach were made and all the multitude came to see the performance. Xanthus was given a cup of seawater. He said publicly to the banker: "What was our bet?" "To drink up the water of the sea." Xanthus asked: "Anything else?" The answer was: "No." Xanthus then made his speech about the rivers and streams running into the sea. "If my opponent would be good enough to stop them, I will win the bet by drinking up the sea." The crowd yelled out, congratulating Xanthus. The student

meanwhile fell at Xanthus' feet and said: "Master, you are great. You have beaten me. Please cancel the bet." On their way home Aesop said to Xanthus: "As one who have saved your whole life, I deserve to be set free ?" Xanthus started to insult Aesop and drove him out: "What ? You think I would never have thought of this ? Go outside and, if you see a pair of crows, tell me. That is a good sign. If there is only one, the augury is not good." Aesop went outside and looked by chance before the gate. He went back inside and made the announcement to Xanthus and told him. When Xanthus went outside, there was a crow that was ill." Xanthus went back and said: "Wretch, did you not tell me there were two crows outside the house ?" Aesop replied: "Yes, but one was ill." Xanthus said to him: "Slave, you have a habit of annoying me." And he ordered him to be stripped and beaten. While he was being beaten, someone came to dinner and called out to Xanthus. Aesop said: "Oh dear, what an unfortunate wretch I am. I am beaten for seeing two crows and you go off for delicacies having seen one. What a waste of time auguries are !"

**(13)** Xanthus said him: "Go and prepare a nice meal. I have invited the students." Aesop made the preparations for the festivity and, when his mistress was reclining on her couch, he said to her: "Mistress, would you please watch over the table lest the dog come in and eat what is on it." She said to him: "You can go. There is no need to worry. I have eyes in my bottom." Aesop occupied himself elsewhere and, when he came back to the table, he found his mistress asleep, and the things on the table unattended. He was afraid that the dog might somehow get in and damage the table. He remembered what his mistress had said and, lifting up her tunic, removed the clothing from her bottom and let her sleep. When Xanthus and the students returned, they went in to eat. When they saw her naked and asleep, they became embarrassed and turn their heads aside. Xanthus said to Aesop: "What is the meaning of this, you wretch ?" He said: "Master, I was busy with another task, so I asked the mistress to mind the table so that the dog did not come in and eat anything." She said to me: "Go off and do not worry. I have eyes in my bottom. But as you can see, master, she fell asleep. So I removed her garments so that the eyes in her bottom might be able to see the table." Xanthus said: "Time and again, slave, you have wounded me, but this is the worst thing you have ever done. You have shamed my wife and me. But I will not lose my temper because of the guests. I will find an opportunity to thrash you. I will skin you alive !"

**(14)** Shortly after this, Xanthus summoned orators and philosophers and said to Aesop:

"Stand outside the house and do not let idiots come in, only philosophers." At dinner time Aesop closed the gate of the house and went inside to sit. When one of those invited came and knocked at the gate, Aesop said: "What does the dog wag?" The guest, thinking that he had been called a dog, became angry and left. Aesop did this several times, and they all went away, thinking that they had been insulted. One of them went up to the gate and knocked, and Aesop asked: "What does the dog wag?" The reply: "His tail." When Aesop heard this correct reply, he opened the gate and let him in. Aesop then went to his master and said: "Master, no other philosopher, apart from this one, has come to join your festivities." Xanthus was grieved, thinking they had let him down. The following day, when they entered the lecture hall, they said to Xanthus: "Master, it would appear that you wanted to belittle us and shame us, so you placed the repellent Aesop outside the house that he might insult us and call us dogs." Xanthus said: "Is this true?" The students said: "If we are not sleeping, then it is true." Xanthus said: "Bring Aesop to me." When he came, Xanthus said: "Tell me, you scoundrel, why, instead of letting my guests and friends respectfully into the house to enjoy themselves with me, did you turn them away, disrespectfully belittling and insulting them?" Aesop replied: "Master, did you not tell me not to allow unintelligent people into your house, only orators and philosophers?" Xanthus said: "Yes, you hobgoblin. Are not these men wise?" Aesop replied: "No, they are all idiots. They knocked at the gate when I was inside and I asked them: 'What does the dog wag?' and none of them recognized this saying as referring to the dog's master entertaining." Xanthus agreed that Aesop had spoken well in his own defence.

**(15)** Some time later Xanthus was with Aesop visiting monuments and he was enjoying himself reading the inscriptions on the coffins. On one coffin Aesop saw the letters A B Δ O E Θ X, which made no sense. He pointed them out to Xanthus and said to him: "What do you make of this, master?" Xanthus studied them carefully, but rack his brain and exert himself as he might, he was unable to find a solution and he said: "Aesop, I am at a loss. Can you explain this puzzle to me?" Aesop said to him: "Master, if I give you a treasure of gold by means of this inscription, what will you grant me?" Xanthus replied: "Why, Aesop! I will give you your freedom and half the gold." When Aesop heard this, he took a potsherd and leaped four paces away from the stele and started to dig. He took hold of the treasure and brought it to his master: "Now, keep your promise." Xanthus said: "I will not, unless you tell me how you found the treasure. For learning is more valuable than finding." Aesop said: "It was a philosopher who inscribed these seven letters, which mean *Going away four steps and digging, you will*

*find the treasure of gold* (Αποβάς Βήματα Τέσσαρα Ορύξας Ἐυρήσεις Θησαυρὸν Χρυσίου). Xanthus said: "Since you are wily and intelligent, you will not get your freedom." Aesop said: "Master, I advise you to give the gold to Dionysius King of Byzantium." Xanthus said: "Why do you this say this ?" Aesop replied: "The seven letters can also be read *Give to King Dionysius the treasure of gold you have found* (Ἀποδὸς Βασιλεῖ Διονυσίῳ Ὀν Εὗρες Θησαυρὸν Χρυσίου). When Xanthus heard that it was gold belonging to the king, he said: "Take half of the find and be quiet." Aesop said: "You are doing me no favours, but he who put the gold there. Listen: You who who take and leave, divide the gold treasure you have found (ἀνελόμενοι βαδίσαντες διέλεσθε ὄν εὔρατε θησαυρὸν χρυσίου)." Xanthus said: "Come into the house so that we might divide the gold and you can be free." As they were walking along, Xanthus became afraid that Aesop might talk and had him thrown into prison. And Aesop said: "So much for the promises of philosophers ! Not only do I not become free, but I am incarcerated ! Keep the gold. Just give me my freedom." Xanthus said: "Yes, Aesop, you speak so well and nobly that you will become a rather forceful accuser of me after you have your freedom." Aesop said: "And you have to do this me although you do not want to."

**(16)** At that time an extraordinary thing happened in Samos. In the middle of a general festivity, with theatrical performances, an eagle suddenly swooped down and, seizing the public seal ring, hurled it against the chest of a slave. This threw the Samians into a great uproar about this seal, so they gathered together for an assembly and asked Xanthus as leading citizen and philosopher to tell them the meaning of this portentous event Xanthus was baffled and, asking for some time to think, went home. He became so despondent that he began to think of suicide because he was unable to solve the puzzle. Now Aesop, a philosopher and one who was fond of his master, went and spoke to him: "Why are you so deep in thought and so despondent that you look as if you might be in trouble ? Tell me all and do not be angry with me. Tomorrow at dawn go to the Samians and tell them that you are not a solver of puzzles or a soothsayer, but that you have a clever slave who can explain the sign. If I am fortunate, your reputation will increase. If I am not, I will be vilified rather than the reputation of my master." Xanthus agreed with Aesop and made his way at dawn to the theatre, where he stood in the middle of it and made the speech that Aesop had written for him. Aesop was summoned to come straightaway. When he arrived and stood there, the Samians saw what he looked like and made fun of him: "Is this face to explain our sign ? Are we to hear anything good from this decrepit specimen ?" And they started to laugh. Aesop, standing in a high place,

waved his hands at the crowd and asked for quiet. When there was silence, he said: "Men of Samos, why do you ridicule my appearance ? Do not look at the face but at the intelligence. For nature often puts the most repellent face on an intelligent head. One does not usually admire the quality of the clay vessel but rather the taste of wine in it." When they heard this, people in the crowd started to mumble to each other and said: "Aesop, you are a skilful speaker. Tell the city what you have to say." Recognizing that he had been praised, he said without inhibition: "Men of Samos, ugliness usually makes those who have a good brain and have an aptitude for speaking easy to despise. For among the acanthus leaves the most beautiful roses bloom." The crowd was persuaded by his eloquence and encouraged him to continue: "Bravo, the floor is yours." Aesop begged for silence: "Worthy citizens, since fortune, which loves beauty, has arranged a beauty contest between master and slave, the slave, even if he appears better than the master, will be flogged. If you will please allow me to speak freely for my freedom, I will speak without any trepidation on all matters required." The crowd, as one, cried out; "Free Aesop. Listen to the Samians. Give the city its freedom." Xanthus said: "I will not free a slave who for some little time has been living with me," The president of the assembly said to him: "If you listen to the people, I will make him a freedman of Hera, and he will have the same status as you." The friends advising Xanthus said to him: "Set him free. If he becomes a freedman of Hera, he will have the rights of freedom and will have same same status as you." Under pressure Xanthus gave Aesop his freedom. The herald announced: "Xanthus son of Dexicrates, philosopher, liberates Aesop to the Samians." And Aesop's saying was fulfilled: "You will have to do this to me unwillingly." In the midst of this Aesop went into the middle of the theatre and asked for silence: "Philosophers, since the eagle is the lord of birds, like a king among men, his seizure of the ruler's ring and casting of it into the lap of a slave means that one of the current rulers is planning to rob you of your freedom and to render the laws of the gods null and void."

**(17)** When the Samians in the theatre heard this, they become very dispirited. At that moment a scribe clad in white had just arrived to question the council members of Samos. When he learned of the assembly in the theatre he made his way there and handed over a letter from the king. They opened to read: *Croesus king of Lydia and Samos. Greetings to the city fathers, the council and the people. I order you to pay taxes to me and provide me with weapons. If you do not obey, as long as my kingdom remains, I will harm you.* Everyone advised loyalty to the king, but agreed to ask Aesop what they should do. He said: "Your councillors have agreed to

pay the taxes, and I have no opinion about that. But I will tell you what is going to happen. Fate has shown two ways in life: the way of freedom, of which the beginning is narrow and hard to follow, but the end is level and equal : and the way of slavery, of which the beginning is level and smooth but the end is painful and hard." When the Samians heard this, especially knowing what had happened, they cried out: "We are free and are not going to become slaves." They sent the messenger back 'with a flea in his ear'. Driven out of town, he reported back to Croesus all that had happened. Croesus was disturbed when he heard it and made plans to destroy Samos as an example to the others. The messenger said to him: "Master, you cannot subject the Samians while Aesop is advising them. So you will have to send envoys to trick the Samians into giving you Aesop as a prisoner, promising to grant them certain privileges and not to levy taxes on them, and in this you may get the better of them. Croesus liked the plan and sent some of his top people to Samos, who arrived and told an assembly of the Samians to hand over Aesop. The latter went to the middle of the assembly and begged for silence: "Men of Samos, it is my wish to be at the feet of this king. I want to tell you a story. In the time when all animals could understand each other, the wolves went to war with the sheep. Since the dogs were allies of the sheep, they scared off the wolves. The wolves sent an envoy to the sheep, saying: 'If you wish to live in peace and not have any more war, give us the dogs.' The sheep, stupid as they were, believed the wolves and handed over the dogs. The wolves tore the dogs to shreds and were now in a good position to destroy the sheep. The story shows that it is not reasonable to hand over people useful to you."

**(18)** The Samians considered the matter and decided to keep Aesop, but he did not want to stay and left with the envoy for the court of Croesus, where he went into the presence of the monarch, who became angry when he saw him: "So. you are the person who has prevented me from bringing such a great people to heel ?" Aesop replied: "Great King, I have not been dragged here by force or necessity, but am here of my own free will. Those who become angry as a result of hearing things are like people who are suddenly wounded and cry out. Their wounds are healed by the skill of the doctor and your anger will be assuaged by my words. If I enter your presence voluntarily and die, I will depict your kingdom as one that is going into decline. For you will be compelling your friends to give you advice that is not in your interest. If those who give advice are judged badly by you, they will on every occasion say things contrary to your interest. They will be found to be people too quick to speak, like empty vessels that can easily be carried by the handles. But listen. *A poor man went hunting crickets.*



*He caught one and wanted to kill it. The cricket said to him: 'Do not kill me for nothing. I do no harm to the vines and cause no damage to the branches. With the harmonious combination of my wings and my feet I make pleasant sounds gratifying to wayfarers. You will find nothing that makes more sound than me. When the man heard this, he released the creature. I too, king, beg you at your feet not to kill me. I am not able to harm anyone. But in perfect health I can make useful sounds and extend the life of bee-eaters.* The king was full of admiration and sympathy with him and said: "Aesop, it is not I who will give you your life, but fate. Whatever you want, ask me and you will receive it." Aesop said: "My request is that you make peace with the Samians." The king agreed and Aesop threw himself at his feet and blessed him. All the stories that he wrote down and are still read today he left to the king. He took the letter from Croesus to the Samians, to the effect that he was making peace with them because of Aesop. With many fine gifts Aesop sailed back to Samos. When the Samians saw him, he was accompanied to the city by garlands and troupes of dancers. To a gathering of the assembly he read out Croesus' letter, a display of reciprocity for the freedom the Samians had granted him. The grateful Samians granted him honours and a sanctuary, which they called the Aesopeum.

**(19)** After this Aesop left them and went on a world lecture tour. He made an appearance in Babylon, where he showed off his wisdom, and later rose to importance under Lycurgus. In those days kings tended to be peaceful towards each other and amused themselves by sending each other written philosophical problems and those unable to solve them had to pay tribute to the the others. Aesop, by solving the problems sent to Lycurgus, was able to enhance the prestige of his king, He also used to devise problems for Lycurgus to send to the others. Those unable to solve the problems paid the tax, and this is how the Babylonian monarchy advanced. Aesop, who was childless, adopted a well-born child called Aenus and presented him to Lycurgus as his own, after having given him a solid primary education. Aenus, wishing to marry, formed a liaison with the one of the royal concubines. When Aesop found out, he threatened to kill him. Aenus, seized by fear, began to malign Aesop falsely to the king. He forged a letter from Aesop to the opponents of Lycurgus, in which Aesop was offering to help them. He sealed the document with Aesop's signet ring and showed it to Lycurgus, who was persuaded by the ring and became very angry. Without any examination he ordered Aesop to be handed over to Ermippus to be killed as a traitor. Now Ermippus was a friend of Aesop and hid him in a tomb unknwn to anyone else and fed him in secret. Aenus took over the entire administrative role of Aesop. After some time Nectenabo heard that Aesop had died, so the

Egyptian king sent a letter with problems to Lycurgus: *Nectenabo King of Egypt to Lycurgus King of Babylon. Greetings. I wish to build a tower that touches neither heaven nor earth. Send me workmen who can do this for me and someone who can answer whatever I ask him, and you will receive from me tribute for the next ten years levied on all the territory in my control. If you cannot do this, then you send me tribute for the next ten years levied on the territory under your control.* When the letter was read out to Lycurgus, he became very dispirited by this mad request. He summoned all his friends and said to them: "If you are able to solve the riddle of the tower, enlighten me." But they were all baffled. As he was sitting on the ground, he began to lament the loss of Aesop and moan: "I have destroyed my support, the support of my kingdom through ill-advised judgement. What sort of fate has kept me alive but destroyed Aesop?" When Ermippus saw how sad he was because of Aesop and how he might reveal his mistake to have been opportune, he went to the king and said: "Lord king, do not be downhearted. The sentence you passed on Aesop, I did not carry it out because I knew you would regret it. My king, you should know that Aesop is alive. But because of the royal decree I put him into a tomb alive, feeding him on bread and water." When Lycurgus heard this, he was filled with unexpected joy, rose from the ground and kissed Ermippus on the mouth: "If it is true that Aesop is alive, as you say, I wish that today could last forever. In preserving him you have preserved my kingdom." Lycurgus ordered him to be summoned forthwith. As a result of his lengthy internment Aesop looked extremely dirty, and the sight made Lycurgus wept and ordered him to wash and change. Once restored to his former self Aesop embraced Lycurgus and explained about the charges he had made against his adopted son Aenus. The king would have had the boy put to death for dishonouring his father, but Aesop asked for forgiveness, saying that he did not want Aenus to die but that he had for himself the death of shame. Lycurgus allowed the boy to live and gave Aesop the letter to read. When he read the Nectenabo's question, he smiled and said: "Write the following to him: 'When winter has passed, I will send you those who will build the tower and the one who will give you a reply.'" The king wrote this and dismissed the Egyptian envoys. He gave all of Aesop's property back to him and handed over to him the administration of his affairs, together with Aenus. Aesop took charge of the young man and warned him: "Listen to my words, child, and keep them in your heart, even though you have so far not justly repaid my favours to you. We are all wise when we receive advice, but when we do not know we make mistakes. Being human, be mindful of the common fate: the gifts of fate are not enduring. Above all worship the divine and honour the monarch. Being human, think human thoughts. The divine brings the wicked

to justice. To harm one's friends willingly is unjust. A man must bear what happens to him bravely. Make yourself a worthy opponent to your enemies that they do not scorn you, and to your friends be kind and sharing so that they might be more loyal to you. Pray that your enemies are weak and penniless that they may not harm you and wish that your friends enjoy good fortune at all times and in every way. Be good to your wife so that she does not seek to try the company of another man: women are insubstantial creatures and, if not flattered enough, think wicked thoughts. Avoid clever people, because you know that there is no opponent stronger than them. The wicked man is unfortunate even when he is fortunate. Let your ability to hear be more acute than your ability to speak, and control your tongue. Do not repeat yourself when drunk, trying to display your cleverness. If you try to show off at the wrong time how clever you are, you may be laughed at. Do not envy those doing well but be happy for them. If you envy, you will harm only yourself. Take care to give generously to your servants so that they respect you not merely as a master but also as a benefactor. Keep your temper and do not lose control, Thinking is always responsible for becoming wealthy. When you are past the learning phase, do not be ashamed to accept what is better: it is better to be called a late learner than one who has not learned at all. Never tell your wife secrets, for this will always give her the ammunition to control you. Seek to gather the things of today and store them for tomorrow, for it is better to leave things for your enemies when you die than to beg from your friends while you are alive. Be open to those you meet, knowing that the wagging tail will win bread for the dog. It is disgraceful to laugh at the unfortunate. Always be willing to learn additional useful things and apply thoughtful ones. When you receive something, give back eagerly that you may receive once again. Do not apologize if you are able to do good. The whispering and false man, throw him out your house, for the things that you say and do will be re-told to others. Do not do things harmful to you, and do not grieve over what happens to you, but behave honourably Do not plot wicked things or imitate the ways of bad people. Be patient in times of tribulation, for everything has its own time. Everything blooms and then withers. Time provides and then removes. Be hospitable to strangers and honour travellers, for one day you too may be a stranger. A good word can heal the pains caused by misfortune. Blessed is the one with a real friend and blessed is the one knows how to be charitable, for nobody is a good friend to the malefactor. Time brings all things hidden to light." With this and other advice Aesop departed from Aenus, who, lacerated by these words and with a guilty conscience about the wrongs he had inflicted on Aesop, took his leave of this life by hurling himself from a precipice.

**(20)** After this Aesop summoned all the hunters and told them to catch four eagles' chicks, whose wings Aesop clipped. In this way, he fed them and taught them to carry children in bags. When the eagles were fully grown, they flew away with the children safely bound to them, responding to the wishes of the children: they ascended and descended whenever the children wanted. At the end of the winter period, Aesop made preparations for a journey and, having made arrangements with Lycurgus, set sail for Egypt with the eagles and the children and, with a good deal of pomp, preparation and immense confidence. he hoped to astonish them. When the Egyptians saw the loathsome figure of Aesop, they thought he was a pet and were unaware that this ugly exterior contained balm more valuable than the best wine. When Nectenabo heard of his arrival, he summoned all his friends and said: "I was deceived when I learned that Aesop had died." The following day he ordered all the top officials to don their white robes, while he wore a priestly robe, a tiara and a diadem on his head and jewel-studded horns. He took his place on the lofty throne and bade Aesop enter, who did so and, impressed by the pomp, fell to the ground in an act of worship. Nectenabo said: "To what would you compare me and those around me ?" Aesop said: "You are like the sun in the Spring and those around you like the fruits that grow from the earth. As king you have the royal pleasure of looking at and receiving the fresh fruits of the earth." The king was impressed by his intelligence and gave him gifts. The following the day the king put on a clean white robe, while his entourage wore red, and he said to Aesop: "To what do you compare us ?" Aesop replied: "You are like the sun and those around you the beams of the sun. As the sun is bright and radiant, you too are bright and radiant and as pure as the disk of the sun and these fiery beings are the rays of the sun." Nectenabo said: "So I am right in thinking that Lycurgus has nothing to match my kingdom." Aesop smiled and said: "It is not an easy comparison to make, my lord. Lycurgus is seen by his own people as the sun and the moon, as you are by yours. When he becomes angry, the radiance that dominates everything disappears." Nectenabo was struck by the aptness of these words and after a pause said to him: "Have you brought us people to build the tower ?" Aesop replied: "They are ready, if you will show us the place." The king accompanied Aesop outside the city and, measuring out the area, gave it to Aesop, who stationed himself at the corner of the area designated. Getting the birds and their cargo ready with his feet and giving them trowels, he ordered them to fly up. Once in the air, they gave voice: "Give us mortar, brick, wood and all the things necessary to build a house." Nectenabo, looking at the children carried on by the eagles, said: "Tell me how it is that men have wings."

Aesop replied: "But Lycurgus has them. Do you, a man, wish to contend with a a demi-god ?"

Nectenabo said: "Aesop, you win. But I have a question I would like you to answer. I sent for horses from Greece and bred them with horses here. When the mares hear the Babylonian horses neighing, they miscarry." Aesop said; "I will give you the answer tomorrow." On his way home he told his own slaves to catch a cat. They caught a large one and started to flog it in public. The Egyptians were very distressed when they saw this and everybody went to Aesop's house, demanding the return of the cat, but he refused. They went and told the king what had happened, and he angrily sent for Aesop. When he arrived Nectenabo said: "Aesop, you have acted badly. The cat is the living image of the goddess of Bubastis, greatly revered by the Egyptians." Aesop said: "Lycurgus suffered a great wrong from by a cat. For last night the cat killed a fighting cock which he held in high regard, and in addition accurately told him the time." Nectenabo said to him: "Do not disgrace yourself by lying, Aesop. How is it possible for a cat to travel in one night from Egypt to Babylon ?" Aesop smiled and said: "How is it possible for stallions in Babylon to neigh and mares here to miscarry ?" When Nectenabo heard this, he blessed Aesop's intelligence. The following day he sent for wise men from Heliopolis who studied physical matters and told them about Aesop and invited them all to dine with him. While they were reclining at table, one of the Heliopolitans said to Aesop: "We have been sent by god with a riddle for you to solve." And he said: "You are not telling the truth. God does wish to learn anything from man. He knows how to examine the mind and character of each of us. You are impugning yourselves and your god. But say what you wish." They said: "There is a shrine and a column in the shrine with twelve cities, each city covered by thirty beams, and two women running around the cities." Aesop said: "This is a problem that children in Babylon could solve: the shrine is the world that embraces everything, the column in the shrine is the year, the twelve cities on it are the months, the thirty beams are the days of the month and and the women running around it are day and night following each other, guiding the daily life of human beings." And so he solved the problem. The next day Nectenabo gathered all his friends together and said to them: "Because of Aesop we are going to pay tribute to Lycurgus of Babylon." One of his officials said: "Let us ask him questions that he may tell us things we have not seen or heard. Whatever he says, we will say it, and we will have heard and seen it." Nectenabo was pleased by this and said: "Tell us something we do not hear or see." He said. "Give me three days and I will give you an answer." The wily Aesop drew up an IOU to the effect that Nectenabo owed Lycurgus 1,000 talents, fixing a time that had already passed. Three days later Aesop went to Nectenabo and his friends and was received by them and gave

him the document. Before they knew what it was about, they said that they understood. Aesop said: "Thank you. The payment date has passed." Nectenabo read the agreement and said: "You are my witness that I owe Lycurgus nothing." They said: "We neither see nor hear." And Aesop then said: "If that is what you decide, the problem has been solved." Nectenabo said: "Lycurgus is fortunate enough to have such wisdom in his kingdom" and gave Aesop the ten years' tribute and dismissed him. On his return to Babylon Aesop told Lycurgus all that had happened in Egypt, and the king ordered a gold statue of Aesop to be made.

**(21)** Some time later, after an agreement with Lycurgus, Aesop decided to set sail for Greece, swearing that on his return he would spend the rest of his life in Babylon. After a period of travelling around the cities of Greece and displaying his wisdom, Aesop arrived at Delphi. The crowds were delighted to listen to him but they did not honour him. Aesop was offended by this and said to them: "You are like driftwood: we see something from afar borne on the waves and think it is valuable, but when we get nearer, we see that it is of no value. From a distance I was impressed by your city and its residents, but when I came among you, I found you to be more modest than and not quite as useful as others. I have been quite deceived in the good opinion I had of you. You worthy of your ancestors." The Delphians asked him what he meant by that: "Who were our ancestors?" He said: "Slaves, like you. If you do not know, I will tell you. There was a law in Greece that when cities fell to the enemy, a tenth part of the booty taken consisted of cattle, sheep, goats and other animals, money, men and women. This is your ancestry: you were born into slavery and have become slaves for the Greeks." After Aesop had said this, he made preparations for his departure, but the Delphians reasoned that if he were to visit other cities, he would disparage them to others, so they decided to play a trick on him and accuse him of temple robbery. They waited for his slave outside the city gate carrying his belongings and they concealed among the sheets a small gold phial which they had taken from the temple of Apollo. Aesop, not knowing what was being plotted against him, set out for Phocis. The Delphians hastened to arrest him and take him back to the city. Aesop asked them what it was all about, and they said to him: "Why did you steal from the temple things that we believe in?" While he was vigorously denying that he knew anything of this, maintaining still further that if he were found guilty he should die and making a thorough search of his belongings, they found the golden phial of Apollo. The Delphians, amid great uproar and confusion, took him back to the city to show him to everyone. Aesop suspected that there was a plot against him and pleaded to be released. They seized him and threw him into prison.

Unable to find a way, as a mere mortal, to escape from this appalling fate, he began to grieve. A certain friend of his, Demeas, called upon the guards to let him in and, when he saw him weeping, he said: "Why are you grieving?" Aesop said to him: *There was a woman who had recently buried her husband and each day went to his grave to lament. A neighbour, while ploughing, conceived a desire to lie with her. So he left his plough animals and began to accompany the woman in her lament. She asked him why he was lamenting and he said: 'Because I have just buried a good wife. When I weep, it alleviates my sadness.'* She said to him: *'I am suffering in the same way.'* He said: *'Since we have a common grief, let us find common relief. I will love you as I loved my wife and you as your husband.'* He persuaded the woman and pinned her down for the *'common relief'*. A passerby released his plough animals and drove them away. The man went searching for them but found nothing and began to weep and, in pain, began to beat himself. The woman came along to find him wailing and said: *'Are you weeping again?'* He said: *'Now I am in real distress.'* That is what he said. How can you ask why I am suffering when you see how fate has ambushed me?" The friend, feeling sorry for Aesop, said: "Why do you think the Delphians are maltreating you? It is this wisdom of yours that is the cause of your maltreatment, especially in their own country." The friend went on to say: "The Delphians have taken a vote that you are a blasphemer, a braggart and a temple-robber and should be thrown from a cliff, so that you will be without any grave." While this conversation was taking place in the prison, the Delphians arrived and dragged Aesop forcefully from prison to throw him from the cliff. Aesop called upon them to listen to him. When they turned to him, he said: *When all creature spoke the same language, a mouse, who was great friends with a frog. invited him to dinner and took him to the storehouse of a rich man, where there was bread, cheese, honey, figs, and every good thing. He said: 'Eat what you want, frog.'* After they had satisfied themselves, the frog said to the mouse: *'Let me return the invitation that you may satisfy yourself with my good things. Do not hesitate, and put your foot on my foot.'* He attached the mouse's foot firmly to his own and took him off to the harbour. The mouse, stifled, said: *'You will be the death of, but I will be avenged by other creatures.'* A kite, seeing the mouse swimming, swooped down and seized it. The frog was dragged along with it. So he killed both. I too will die without legal consultation at your hands but I will be avenged in law. For Babylon and the whole of Greece will investigate my death." When the Delphians heard this, they did not spare him but dragged him to the cliff. Aesop ran and took refuge in the temple of Apollo, but they threw him out and dragged him to the cliff. As he was being taken there, he asked them to listen to another story. *There was once a hare being pursued by an eagle. He took refuge in the sleeping quarters of a*

beetle and begged the beetle to save him. The beetle interceded with the eagle on behalf of the hare and swore him by Zeus not to despise his smallness. The eagle became very angry, violently struck the beetle with his wings, snatched the hare and devoured him. The beetle attached himself to the eagle and flew off with him and waited for the eagle to hatch the eggs, and then destroyed the eggs. The eagle was distraught when he saw his family being destroyed and tried to catch the one who had dared to do this. When the time came again, he put his eggs in a higher position. But still the beetle was able to destroy them. When the eagle returned to the nest and discovered what had happened, he started to keen, saying that it was the anger of the gods that the eagle species should become rare. The long-suffering creature decided not to put the eggs in a nest again, but went as a suppliant for Zeus, saying: 'The second time I was bereaved, the third time I will entrust my eggs to you for safekeeping.' The beetle saw this and covered himself with dung. He went to Zeus and, as he crawled around the god, shook out the dung into his face. The god leaped to his feet, forgetting that he had the eagle's eggs in his lap, with the result that they fell to the ground and smashed. When Zeus learned of the injustice that prompted the beetle to harm the eagle, he summoned both to his presence and said to the eagle: 'It is just that you lost your children: you wronged him.' The beetle said to him: 'It was not only me he wronged, but it was you he dishonoured. Having taken an oath, he did not keep it but killed a suppliant. I will not stop until I have eradicated him.' Zeus did not want to reduce the eagle population and advised the beetle to come to an agreement, but the beetle refused. Zeus moved the breeding ground of the eagles to a place where there were no beetles able to attack them and eagles were able to hatch their eggs. And you, men of Delphi, do not dishonour this god because his temple is small. Think of the matter of the beetle and venerate Apollo because I have fled to him." They were still not persuaded by him, led him to the precipice and placed him at the edge. Aesop, considering his own fate, said: "Angry people, since I am unable to persuade you in any way, listen to these words. There was a farmer who had grown up in the countryside and never been to the city. One day he called upon his family to visit the city. Those of his household hitched up the waggon and the donkeys, saying: 'Just drive them. They know the way to the city.' Since it was winter, it was already getting dark, and the donkeys wandered off to a precipitous place. He recognized the danger he was in and cried out: 'Zeus, what wrong have I committed against you that I should be destroyed in this way, and not by honourable horses or noble mules but insignificant donkeys?' I am suffering in the same way. I am to die not at the hands of honourable or reasonable men, but of ignoble and base slaves. There was a woman who had an idiot daughter. She would pray constantly to the goddess to grant her the gift of intelligence, and while she was



*praying, the idiot daughter was passing and heard what she said and stopped her. After a day with her mother she went to the countryside and, emerging from the doors of the forecourt, she saw a female donkey being maltreated by a man. She went up to him and said: "What are you doing?" 'I am knocking sense into her.'* Remembering how often her mother had prayed for sense for her daughter, the idiot girl called out: "Sir, knock some sense into me. My mother will bless you for it." The man heard her, left his donkey and went to ravish her. The deflowered girl went happily back to her mother, saying: "Look, mother, your prayer has been answered. I now have some sense." The mother said: "Child, the gods have heard me." And she said: "Yes, mother." Her mother said: "How do you know?" The idiot girl said: "A man put a long thing with two round sinewy things into me, in and out he came at me, and it felt good." When the mother heard and saw, she said: "Child, you have lost the only bit of sense you had." Just as Aesop was about to be thrown over the cliff, he said: *There was a man who fell in love with his own daughter and, smitten by Satanic passion, sent his wife to the fields and raped his daughter. She said: 'Father, you have committed an unholy act. I would rather have had intercourse with a hundred men than with you.'* And I say this to you too, lawless Delphians, that I would rather travel around Sicily suffering mishaps than to die lawlessly here at your hands. I curse your country and call upon the gods to be my witness, they who will hear me as I die unjustly and they who will avenge me." They forced him over the cliff, and this is how he died. The Delphians were punished by plague and grave distress and consulted an oracle on how to appease the fate of Aesop, for they were conscious-stricken about their treacherous murder of Aesop. The built a shrine to him with a memorial plaque. The whole of Greece learned of the deeds of Aesop, and there were those who arrived in Delphi to enquire into his death and legally avenge it,

Aesop the storyteller by birth was Lydian and by fate the slave of the Athenian Timarchus known as Cursia. He was an extremely noble servant who loved his master, a man from whose tongue music flowed, a man who entertained the Greeks with his many colourful stories, which are eminently suitable as instruction for everyday life and educating the young. He compiled them and made them relevant as admonitory and most useful for life. He wove a community of speechless animals, by means of which he illustrated the crooked and illicit deeds of men and all their varied ways in parables. In accordance with the norms of education his work happens upon nature at its best and has been considered worthy of inclusion in libraries, and it is from these stories that the facility of speaking will increase for those engaged in public affairs and those who choose to speak in prestige contests. Those who bring together the main points of the tragedies have made them their principal concern, thinking as they do that it is necessary to refer to the gnostic statements of the poets for the education of their children and in this way to render their characters more credible. Others have brought together large collections of sayings that are useful for life, for they believe that when we recall them, we will profit greatly from them. Some have tried to hand down the contradictions and opinions as parables for those engaged in public affairs so that they might have much to say in their rhetorical contests and accordingly prevail over their opponents. Aesop discovered this way when he saw that the exposition of stories for things that had already been said was useful to slaves and free men. For by laying before people's eyes the understanding and the marvellous qualities of lions and stags and other creatures he was able to lead the souls of his listeners. We find approximations of his elucidations in the gnostic writings of the poets, paraphrased, copied and rewritten by others who substantially preserve the truth of the original story.