Aesop Without Morals

The famous fables, and a life of Aesop, newly translated and edited by

Lloyd W. Daly
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Illustrated by Grace Muscarella

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the life

The Book of Xanthus the Philosopher
and Aesop His Slave

or

The Career of Aesop
The fabulist Aesop, the great benefactor of mankind, was by chance a slave but by origin a Phrygian of Phrygia, of loathsome aspect, worthless as a servant, potbellied, misshapen of head, snub-nosed, swarthy, dwarfish, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, liver-lipped—a portentous monstrosity. In addition to this he had a defect more serious than his unsightliness in being speechless, for he was dumb and could not talk.

His master, finding him silent under all circumstances and unsuited for service in the city, sent him to the country [to dig in one of his fields. Once when he went to visit his farm, a farm hand who had gathered some very fine figs brought them to Aesop’s master and said, “Here, master, take this early harvest of your fruit.”

The master was pleased and said, “Bless me, these are fine figs.” And he said to his servant, “Agathopous, take these and keep them for me. After I have a bath and dinner, serve me the fruit.”

About that time Aesop happened to quit work and came in for his daily meal. But Agathopous, who had taken the figs, began to feel hungry and ate one or two of them. He was strongly tempted to eat all of them but did not quite dare.] One of his fellow slaves, seeing his affliction, said to him, “Friend slave, I know you have something on your mind. You want to eat those figs.”

“Yes, by Zeus, I do,” said he, “but how do you know?”

He said, “I know the thought in your heart from the look on your face. Now, I’ll give you an idea how the two of us can eat them.”

“Well, you haven’t given me a very good idea,” said he, “for when
Born and raised in a small Midwestern town, educated at Knox College and the University of Illinois, Lloyd W. Daly has carried on a lifelong love affair with the Greek classics. As a student, he spent a rich year at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, doing research and participating in the Johns Hopkins archeological excavation of Olynthus. Teaching positions at Kenyon College and the University of Oklahoma were followed by service in Army Intelligence in World War Two, and then an invitation to join the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania where he is now Allen Memorial Professor of Greek. Dr. Daly recently served for seven years as Dean of the University’s College of Arts and Sciences, and it was during this period that he set to work on this new translation of Aesop—as a “diversion” from administrative duties. The author of numerous books and articles, Dr. Daly is now at work on a study of the history of alphabetizing throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages.

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