



## Plutarch Selection

We have scheduled the chapter "A Just Man", a study of Aristides from *The Children's Plutarch: Stories of the Greeks*, and included it on the following pages. The book may also be purchased on Amazon.

If your children are 6th grade or older, we recommend spending a full 12-week term studying Aristides with the edited (for length and content) study guide from Ambleside here: <https://amblesideonline.org/plutarch-aristides> or you can purchase the guide by Anne White on Amazon. (This is in place of *The Children's Plutarch*, not in addition to).

Plutarch's Lives

# The Just Man

## *The Children's Plutarch: Tales of the Greeks, by F. J. Gould*

THE judges sat in the court of justice, and before them stood two men, one of whom was accusing the other of a wrong done to him. The name of the accuser was Aristides (*Ar-is-ty-deez*).

"We have heard what you say, Aristides," said one of the judges, "and we believe your story, and we shall punish this man—"

"No, no, not yet," cried Aristides.

"Why not?"

"You have not heard what he has to say for himself. Even though he is my enemy, I wish him to have fair play."

And because he was always so honest and fair to others, the people of Athens called him Aristides the Just.

When the Persians came over to Greece with a very great army, the men of Athens went out to meet them at Marathon, 490 B.C. Only ten thousand against twelve times that number of Persians! But the men of Athens had more than swords and spears and daggers—they had stout hearts to fight for their homes and their fatherland against the tyrant forces of Persia. The Greeks chose several generals, each taking command for one day. When it came to the turn of Aristides to command, he gave way to a better captain than himself, for he thought more of the good of Athens than of his own glory; and under this other captain the Greeks gained the victory.

After the battle, when the Persians fled in haste and terror, and much spoil was left behind tents, clothes, gold, silver, etc.—the Greeks left Aristides to look after all these treasures while they pursued the foe; for they knew his honesty, and they knew he would touch nothing, but keep the booty to be shared by all. How differently he acted from the Athenian who was known as the Torch-bearer. A Persian, who lay hiding in a lonely place after the battle, saw the Torch-bearer approach, his long hair being fastened by a band.

Seeing this band round his head, the Persian supposed him to be a prince, and he knelt before him in homage; and then he rose and offered to show the Greek a concealed treasure. It was a heap of gold which he had put down a well. Now, the Torch-bearer knew he ought to acquaint Aristides of this store; but, instead of doing so, he slew the Persian, and kept the gold for himself. The Torch-bearer thought of his own pleasure more than of doing his duty to Athens.

Once a year the people of Athens were asked if there were any persons whom they wished to banish, so that the country might be set free from any men that were disliked and dangerous. Each citizen voted by writing on a shell or bit of broken pottery the name of the man he wished to send into exile. As Aristides passed along the street he met a man who held out a shell.

"Sir," said the stranger, "can you write?"

"Yes."

"Well, I cannot; and I should be glad if you would write a name for me on this shell—the name of a man whom I would like to banish."

"Yes; what is the name?"

"Aristides."

"Has he ever done you any harm?"

"No; but it vexes me to hear people always calling him the Just. I think he must be a vain and stuck-up person."

Aristides wrote his own name on the shell, and walked away. The man took the shell, and threw it into a part of the market-place railed round for the purpose. The shells and potsherds were counted, and I am sorry to say that more than six thousand bore the name of Aristides. For while many Athenians admired him, many others thought he was too strict and old-fashioned. But three years afterward, when an immense fleet of Persian ships was coming against the coasts of Greece, the Athenians sent for Aristides to come back; and he returned in time to take part in the battle on sea, in which the Persians were utterly beaten.

During this war the city of Athens had been almost deserted by its people, who had fled to safer places; and the Persians had blackened its houses by fire, and made its walls into broken heaps. After the sea-fight the Persian general of the land forces sent a letter to the Athenians, promising to build their city again, and to give them much money, and to make Athens the leading town in Greece, if only they would agree not to oppose him any more.

He sent the letter by messengers, who waited some days for an answer. When the Spartans heard of the letter coming to Athens, they also sent messengers to Athens. They said they hoped the Athenians would not yield; they would take care of the women and children of Athens, if the men would fight on against the Persians. Aristides was in the city, and the people agreed to give answers thus:

To the messengers from Sparta he said:

"We do not wonder at the Persians expecting us to yield up our liberty in return for gold and silver. But the Spartans are Greeks like ourselves. We wonder that they should be afraid lest we should sell ourselves for the gifts of the Persians. No, the people of Athens will not give up their freedom for all the gold above ground or under ground."

He replied to the Persian messengers, as he lifted his hand and pointed to the sun:

"As long as that sun flames in the sky, so long will we carry on war with the Persians, who have laid waste our land and burned our holy temples."

On another occasion one of the chief captains of Athens spoke to the people of Athens at a public meeting, and said:

"I have thought of a most useful thing which might be done for the good of this city; but it cannot be told to you all, as that would hinder its being done."

"Then," cried the people, "tell it only to Aristides, for he is a just man."

The captain came to Aristides, and whispered to him in such a way that no one else could hear:

"This is my plan. The other tribes of Greece have brought their ships into our harbor. If we set fire to these ships, Athens alone will have a fleet, and Athens will then be leader of all Greece."

Aristides went to the people, and spoke thus:

"My friends, the plan which has been told me would, perhaps, be useful to the city of Athens; but it would be wicked."

"Then," exclaimed the people, "whatever it is, it shall not be carried out."

So you see that, though they had once banished Aristides, the citizens now thought very well of him, and followed his advice.

You remember the Torch-bearer who was so eager to get the gold from the well. He was a kinsman of Aristides, and was the richest man in Athens. When, one day, certain enemies accused him of some offence, they tried to make out before the judges what a bad, cruel character he had. So they said:

"This Torch-bearer is a kinsman of the good man Aristides. He is very rich, and Aristides is very poor. Look at Aristides; how poor are his clothes; he is not warmly clad in cold weather like his kinsman; his wife and children have but a poor dwelling. And here is this hard-hearted Torch-bearer; he has plenty of money, and he will not help his friend."

Aristides was called to the court.

"Is this true?" the judges asked, after these tales had been told over again to him.

"No," said Aristides. "It is not the fault of my kinsman that I am poor. It is my own choice. I have few things belonging to me; I want no more. It is very easy to be good when a man is rich. I would sooner try to be honest and just when I am poor; and therefore I glory in my poverty."

The persons in the court thought to themselves: "We would sooner be the poor man Aristides than the rich Torch-bearer."

When Aristides died, he was still so poor that there was not enough money in the house to pay for a proper funeral. Though he had been a captain in the army of Athens, a leader of ships in the great sea-fight, and a magistrate over the people, yet he had never taken pains to pile up riches. Therefore, the Athenians buried him at the public cost, and also paid for the building of a monument, so that all who passed by might see it and keep the noble Aristides in memory. And so well did the folk of Athens love the remembrance of this Just Man that they gave large gifts of money to each of his daughters at their marriage, and to his son they gave a sum of silver and a plot of land well planted with trees. And for years afterward persons who belonged to his family received kind treatment from the city.

In this way the good deeds of a man remain after he is dead, and make the world happier.

***Only the actions of the just  
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.***