

The Comparison of Philopoemen with Flamininus

By Plutarch

Translated by John Dryden

First them, as for the greatness of the benefits which Titus conferred on Greece, neither Philopoemen, nor many braver men than he, can make good the parallel. They were Greeks fighting against Greeks, but Titus, a stranger to Greece, fought for her. And at the very time when Philopoemen went over into Crete, destitute of means to succour his besieged countrymen, Titus, by a defeat given to Philip in the heart of Greece, set them and their cities free. Again, if we examine the battles they fought, Philopoemen, whilst he was the Achaeans' general, slew more Greeks than Titus, in aiding the Greeks, slew Macedonians. As to their failings, ambition was Titus's weak side, and obstinacy Philopoemen's in the former, anger was easily kindled; in the latter, it was as hardly quenched. Titus reserved to Philip the royal dignity; he pardoned the Aetolians, and stood their friend; but Philopoemen, exasperated

against his country, deprived it of its supremacy over the adjacent villages. Titus was ever constant to those he had once befriended; the other, upon any offence, as prone to cancel kindnesses. He who had once been a benefactor to the Lacedaemonians, afterwards laid their walls level with the ground, wasted their country, and in the end changed and destroyed the whole frame of their government. He seems, in truth, to have prodigalled away his own life, through passion and perverseness; for he fell upon the Messenians, not with that conduct and caution that characterized the movements of Titus, but with unnecessary and unreasonable haste.

The many battles he fought, and the many trophies he won, may make us ascribe to Philopoemen the more thorough knowledge of war. Titus decided the matter betwixt Philip and himself in two engagements; but Philopoemen came off victorious in ten thousand encounters, to all which fortune had scarcely any pretence, so much were they owing to his skill. Besides, Titus got his renown, assisted by the power of a flourishing Rome; the other flourished under a declined Greece, so that his successes may be accounted his own; in Titus's glory Rome claims a share. The one had brave men under him, the other made his brave, by being over them. And though Philopoemen was unfortunate,

certainly, in always being opposed to his countrymen, yet this misfortune is at the same time a proof of his merit. Where the circumstances are the same, superior success can only be ascribed to superior merit. And he had, indeed, to do with the two most warlike nations of all Greece, the Cretans on the one hand, and the Lacedaemonians on the other, and he mastered the craftiest of them by art and the bravest of them by valour. It may also be said that Titus, having his men armed and disciplined to his hand, had in a manner his victories made for him; whereas Philopoemen was forced to introduce a discipline and tactics of his own, and to new-mould and model his soldiers; so that what is of greatest import towards insuring a victory was in his case his own creation, while the other had it ready provided for his benefit. Philopoemen effected many gallant things with his own hand, but Titus none; so much so that one Archedemus, an Aetolian, made it a jest against him that while he, the Aetolian, was running with his drawn sword, where he saw the Macedonians drawn up closest and fighting hardest, Titus was standing still, and with hands stretched out to heaven, praying to the gods for aid.

It is true Titus acquitted himself admirably, both as a governor and as an ambassador; but Philopoemen was no less serviceable and useful

to the Achaeans in the capacity of a private man than in that of a commander. He was a private citizen when he restored the Messenians to their liberty, and delivered their city from Nabis; he was also a private citizen when he rescued the Lacedaemonians, and shut the gates of Sparta against the general Diophanes and Titus. He had a nature so truly formed for command that he could govern even the laws themselves for the public good; he did not need to wait for the formality of being elected into command by the governed, but employed their service, if occasion required, at his own discretion; judging that he who understood their real interests was more truly their supreme magistrate, than he whom they had elected to the office. The equity, clemency, and humanity of Titus towards the Greeks display a great and generous nature; but the actions of Philopoemen, full of courage, and forward to assert his country's liberty against the Romans, have something yet greater and nobler in them. For it is not as hard a task to gratify the indigent and distressed, as to bear up against and to dare to incur the anger of the powerful. To conclude, since it does not appear to be easy, by any review or discussion, to establish the true difference of their merits and decide to which a preference is due, will it be an unfair award in the case, if we let the Greek bear away the crown for military conduct and warlike skill, and the

Roman for justice and clemency?

THE END