



DEVOTED TO RATIONAL SPIRITUALISM AND PRACTICAL REFORM.

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Entertaining and Instructive.

CONFUCIUS.

A long time ago, more than five hundred years before the birth of Christ, and some seventy before Socrates, in the years when the Jews were returning from the captivity in Babylon, and the Greeks were repelling the armies of Xerxes, a young man appeared among the little feudal kingdoms of Eastern China. His employment was that of teaching truth to men. He had no distinction of station, or wealth to aid him. He lived among petty rival states, that for the most part disowned his instructions, and followed him with persecutions during his life. He spoke of his mission at the last as a failure, and died discouraged.

The records of him are scanty and perverted by the superstitions of early times; but they show almost, undesignedly, out from the mists of antiquity, a simple and majestic life; such a life, and such words—the fit expression of it—as have naturally stamped themselves upon his country and his people, more than all the conquests and exploits of soldiers or emperors since. So that the simple preacher and noble MAN of past times has become identified almost with the personality of virtue, and is worshipped as a god. Even more,—so impressive and overflowing has been the influence of his character, that a nation of three hundred millions of men, after twenty-three centuries, still in the pettiest details of political science and private manners, revere his words as the authority which they seek in vain to follow. Not Moses, Mahomet, or Calvin, have so imprinted themselves on the legislation and religion and forms of their people, as this Chinese scholar has done, by words, whose effect he scarcely lived to see.

FORERUNNERS OF HIS BIRTH.

KOUNG-TSEU, or CONFUCIUS, as is the Latinized name, was born 551 B. C., in the kingdom of Lou, in Shantung, an eastern province of China. His family had been distinguished in former times, even reckoning princes in the line of descent; at his birth, it was not in any way eminent. The usual prodigies, which the reverence of followers throws about the birth of the founder of a religion, preceded him. A singular animal (the *ki-lin*), apparently the unicorn, was found near the house with a stone in his mouth, on which was an inscription, purporting that the babe soon to be born, would be "King, but without a kingdom." Dragons were seen in the air; and five wise men from a distance came to the house. Celestial music too was heard in the skies. In the old Chinese histories, this is represented by a band of Chinese angels among the clouds, with spiritual faces and queues and wide sleeves, playing the various national instruments.

CHILDHOOD, YOUTH, MARRIAGE, EMPLOYMENTS.

The child seems to have grown up a serious and sedate boy, thoughtful even then of the solemn things of human life, and conspicuous for his reverence towards the rites. At seventeen he was appointed an inspector of the sale and distribution of grains. This office, which had been probably one of the government sinecures to be given to aspiring young men, he at once rendered of some value. He rose early; examined the markets; read books and consulted experts as to the fermentation of grain and the best mode of preserving it, until his labors became a terror to all the cheating dealers and monopolists. At nineteen, he was married; and in consequence of his unceasing activity in the petty office, he was appointed Inspector General of fields and herds. Every thing here was managed by him as thoroughly as it had been in the subordinate place. He neglected nothing. He rode over the country; talking with the farmers, instructing them, getting information about the peculiar defects of the soil, and working carefully at all the details. Agriculture sprang up again under his care through the kingdom; and large districts of unused, desolate lands were restored. His name was becoming known, and he was fast advancing in the political course, when an event occurred which changed the direction of his whole life.

AN IMPORTANT EVENT—ITS RESULTS.

His mother died. He buried her in the same tomb with his father, with equal marks of respect, thinking, contrary to the Chinese custom, that "those whom we have alike loved in life, should not be separated in our respect in death;" an innovation in their rites, since adopted by his countrymen. He was only twenty-four, and with a distinguished career opening; but he at once abandoned all public employment, and gave himself up to his grief and to quiet memories of her during three years. It was the first outlook to the thoughtful man into the great Unseen, and the first sharp blow on his heart. He never lost the effects of it. Every serious and vigorous life, which has taken hold of something deeper than the surface of things, seems to be naturally preceded by such years of silence. Moses was amongst the slaves; Socrates worked out great thoughts in quiet company with hucksters; Luther had his solitary years of struggle, and Cromwell spent his early and mature life on the country farm.

We may well suppose that the young scholar in these years of loneliness and sorrow, questioned often of that sombre unknown Void, whither his beloved one had gone. Was she still

with him? Could she know of his love? Are the geni which the people worship her companions? What is this mysterious "Principle of Life" which the philosophers adore; and what is Death?

The answers which he made to these questionings, as shown subsequently in his philosophy and life, have been much condemned by Christian moralists; yet they seem to us among the most natural conclusions which philosophy has attained to.

RESPECT FOR THE DEPARTED.

His first thoughts in this time of his sorrow, were to show respect to her who was gone. He felt the *vagueness* over her whole destiny, and yet the tie which binds our heart to the dead, seems almost the only elevating and dignifying bond in life, if superstition be cast aside. He studied the old moralists of the nation, and found that this respect for the dead prevailed in purer times. He determined to revive it. "He constantly urged," says one of the biographers, "to those with whom he had occasion to speak, that MAN, being that which is most precious under heaven, all which composes him is worthy of the greatest respect; that being, by his nature the king of the earth, all which exists upon the earth is submitted to his laws and owes him homage; and that it is in some sort to degrade him from his dignity, and to put him to the level of the brutes, to have only indifference for that which remains of him when the breath of life no more animates him." This regard for those who were gone, seemed to him to connect the man with his family and his race, and was a pledge that he himself would not be forgotten. It cherished affection; and, in the daily round of low cares, it elevated his nature to stop a few moments before the image or memorial of the friend deceased, and think of his noble qualities, or call up again the tender love which the mould and worm of the grave could not eat away. He would have the images of the lost, in the most familiar and pleasant places, in the garden, the doorway, or the inner home; so that as men walked around, they might be prompted to emulate the virtues of their fathers, and to desire, like them, to be remembered with reverence, by those who should come after. And to him this love and affectionate adoration to ancestors, seemed the most fitting expression of gratitude or worship to the mysterious "PRINCIPLE OF LIFE," which he vaguely felt to exist.

WORSHIP OF GOD AND OF SPIRITS.

"God," said he, in a conversation later in life with one of the princes of the country, to whom he was explaining the nature of sacrifices, "CHANG-TY (God) is the universal Principle of Life; it is the fruitful source from which all things have flown. To give to heaven testimonies of gratitude, is the first of the duties of man; to show one's self grateful towards ancestors, the second. . . . After having satisfied in some sort their obligations towards CHANG-TY, to whom, as to the universal principle of all which exists, (mankind) were indebted for their own existence, . . . their hearts turned to those who had transmitted life to them. They fixed in their honor respectful ceremonies, to be as the complement of the sacrifice offered solemnly to CHANG-TY." And again, "In all which I have just recalled to your majesty, you will comprehend without doubt, that under whatever title one renders the worship; whoever may be the apparent object of it, and of whatever nature be the external ceremonies, it is always to CHANG-TY that one renders it, and it is CHANG-TY who is the object direct and principal, of the veneration."

Whatever may have been the errors of his followers, it is very apparent that this first practical direction of the Philosophy of Confucius, was based on a rational reverence. His worship of ancestors was no idolatry. Though this one development of his piety has affected his nation now for two thousand years, more than any thing which he taught, it was in reality, but a single superficial expression of his system. This, during these years of solitary thought and study, he was gradually developing. Its features we shall see more clearly as we progress with his life.

QUESTIONINGS.

The three years of mourning were over. He was at once urged by the king to return to his public office. He declined, and continued to devote himself to his study of the ancient records of the kingdom; the annals of the "golden age" of the monarchy, whose simple manners and humane spirit he perhaps already thought to revive again. His pursuits were now evidently pointing to the future business of his life; yet he continued to practice himself in all the accomplishments of a man of the world. In music, for which he had an enthusiastic love; in the science of etiquette; in the use of arms; in arithmetical practice and nicety of written composition—all essentials even then of a gentleman's education in China—he became sufficiently versed. During this period he visited, for a short time a neighboring court at the urgent request of the prince, to assist in some needed reforms; but returned soon to the kingdom of Lou, to decide on his future course. He with drew himself from all associates, and weighed the subject carefully. They were the old questions with the young man. "The world is open—what am I fitted for? What is my place? Shall I live for time or the long future? for the common weal of good, or my own narrow good?" It was decided, as some few in all ages decide it. To his friends earnestly re-

monstrating against his thus throwing away so many brilliant opportunities in political, he replied: "Put an end to your remonstrances. They will gain nothing for me. I owe myself indifferently to all men, because I regard men as composing among them only one and the same family, of which I am charged with being the Instructor."

THE DECISION MADE.

The young scholar has chosen then the highest calling; he is to be the preacher to his countrymen. His house was at once opened as a lyceum. All were welcomed—young and old, rich and poor, civilians and soldiers. With these he lectured and taught upon morals, history, and especially the practices under their simple kings of old, Yao and Chun. Whether the philosopher transferred his own high ideal to those dim characters of the past, and taught, under the protection of antiquity, the truths which belong to all ages; or whether he truly found in those records, great lessons, is not clearly apparent. The "Ancient Doctrine" henceforth became his text; and then, twenty-three centuries ago, even as now, the young Reformer found the Present corrupted and degenerated, and labored to raise men to the ideal, which always hovers in the distance, either of the future or the past, to the human soul.

THE TEACHER.

The fame soon spread through the neighboring peoples of a great teacher among them. The country now occupied by the Empire of China, was at that time held by a number of petty kingdoms, some apparently independent and some tributary to the Imperial Court. From one of these courts—that of the Prince of Tsai, came an invitation to this new philosopher, to visit the kingdom and assist in the improvement of the government and people. Confucius accepted; it being his object henceforth to apply his principles to the sources of influence in society, as well as to his own circle of pupils. On the journey the party came suddenly on an unfortunate man, about to commit suicide. They withheld him and ask his reason. He tells them that his life had been one of disappointment and discouragement; and that he wished to end it thus. Confucius, in a most characteristic speech, dissuades him; assuring him that he had mistaken the object of ambition; that he "must learn to be a common man before he could be a sage," and that "no one who had life, should ever despair."

He was received at this Court in a friendly manner, and spent a year in efforts for reforming abuses and reviving the "Ancient Doctrine." People, however, were slow to change, especially those in the atmosphere of the court, and at the close, the reformer prepared to return to his own country. The Prince offered him as a reward for his labors, the gift of a "town of the third order," which he declined, unless his projects of reform were adopted.

CLAIRVOYANCE.

At this period and on two other occasions only of his life, are miraculous powers related of him, all similar in revealing a species of inspired judgement or wise clairvoyance. A rumor was spread through the court, that one of the old imperial palaces was burnt. Confucius at once designated a particular one. On being asked the reason why he formed this opinion, he answered that it was the palace of an Emperor, once notorious for his crimes—and he supposed this the judgement of Heaven.

A courier who arrived soon, confirmed precisely the opinion of the sage.

IN THE IMPERIAL COURT.

The preachers, the wise men of those times seem to have been allowed a certain freedom at the courts. As experienced in human nature, they were frequently invited to take part temporarily in the government; and so, accepting none of the profits, they could sometimes redress the abuses of public offices.

Confucius next visited the Imperial Court, more especially with the view of studying the best ceremonial and of seeing how the highest of the Princes administered the rites. The truthful courtesy and humanity of his bearing won him friends from every party. He received the honors modestly, and to a splendid eulogium on himself, repeated to him, he replied, "It is extravagant. I do not in any way deserve it. One could content himself with saying, that I make a little music, and strive to fail in none of the rites."

In the midst of the splendor, he spoke every where of the simple manners of the early kings, and uttered the words upon government and the ideals of man's character, which his people even yet repeat with admiration.

THE OBJECT OF LIFE.

With the grasp of a strong mind and with a searching skepticism and honesty, he threw aside all the usual superstitions of the best minds. He would not even palm off his secret dreams and aspirations as a religious creed. Whatever vague ideas of a "Principle of nature" or "Supreme Reason" he may have had, he never thought it worth his while to utter. Of a God, or a future he never spoke. They may have been in his inner soul, blissful hopes to him; but he did not find evidence enough of either, to dare to teach. He only studied the present; the relations of men to one another, and the peculiar nature of the soul; and his conclusion, through a long life, is, that the health and life of the soul, its object and its happiness is principally and especially in its humanity—in Love.

ANECDOTES.

Being sick on a certain occasion, TSEU-LOU, a disciple, begged him to permit his disciples to address their prayers in his behalf to the spirits and the geni. "Is that suitable?" said the Philosopher. Tseu-lou answered with respect, "That is suitable. It is said, in the book, entitled *Lou*, 'address your prayers to the spirits and geni on high and below.'"

The philosopher answered. "The prayer of Confucius is continuous."

KILOU asked, if it was necessary to serve spirits and geni? The philosopher said, "When one is not in a state to serve men, how can one serve spirits and geni?"

"Allow me," said a disciple, "that I dare ask you *what is death*?"

"Not knowing LIFE," he answered, "how can we know Death?"

The associations in nature, which to most minds, call up some longings or thoughts of their own future, in him only awakened reflections on the truths he taught. He stood one day musingly looking at a running stream, until his friends with him asked him why he did so. He expressed in answer, that sensation which the running water seems in all ages to make on the mind—the sense of *continuity*. "So," said he, "has the 'Ancient Doctrine' flowed from one age to another, and will flow forever, if we but help it on. Let us not be wise for ourselves alone, but for others."

After some further travel, he again returned to Lou. The courtiers dreaded the pure teacher, and sought in every way to force him to depart. They at length succeeded in inducing the prince to appoint him to some petty office far below his station; thinking thus to offend him. He accepted it, however, and managed it faithfully; explaining to his friends or disciples objecting, that it would be an inconsistency and a mean pride in him, to refuse an office where he could be really useful, merely because it was beneath him in rank. While at the court, a courtier of ill character, though high in place, wished to gain him to his interests and sent him a rich present of rice, then almost the money medium of the country. It would be a mortal offence in Chinese usage to send it back, and accordingly Confucius distributed it among the poor; informing the great man politely of the fact. This suppleness, and the genuine courtesy of the man, is one of the most remarkable things about the story of his life.

At a grand dinner in the palace, he was seen eating the grains of the table before the fruit, an offence probably like taking soup last in our day. Of course a universal smile passed among the courtiers at this blunder. The king suspected that there was some purpose in it, and finally, in a very polite manner, called his attention to it. He replied, by a forcible discourse which no one could help regarding, on the defective political economy of the kingdom which had neglected the great support of man—the grains, for mere delicacies, the fruits—and that he thus wished to show his preference.

On another occasion, a prince of dissolute character sought to gain the countenance of the severe moralist to an *amour* in which he was involved, thinking thus to escape the censure of the people. Accordingly, by an act of unusual courtesy the philosopher was invited to the private apartments of the palace to converse with the courtesan, a woman of conspicuous beauty. He could not refuse and retain any influence over the court, but he came, and according to the strictest Oriental rule, did not raise his eyes or utter a word in her presence; so that she at length retired abashed from the grave man.

In an age of concubinage and to a dissolute prince, hear this advice: "Clothe yourself in your garments of ceremony," said the philosopher; "go before your future spouse to conduct her in all the apparel of your grandeur to your palace!"

"You make much of it," said the king, laughing. "It is not too much," replied Confucius, "for the action most important in life. The alliance that two persons of different names contract recalls them to their primitive origin; it gives them the same ancestry; it places them under the immediate tutelage of the spirits of the earth who watch over generations; it is the symbol of heaven and earth, whose union produces all things; it brings them near to the Divine Spirit."

"What is the secret of governing?" inquired the prince. "Rectitude," said the philosopher; and on being asked to define it, he answered, "I understand by rectitude, that quality of mind and heart, which puts him who possesses it into the happy disposition not only of imagining nothing, desiring nothing, of doing nothing, which is contrary to the light of reason, and to the general and particular good of society; but of thinking, willing and acting in any circumstances, conformably to those lights; proposing the real advantage of the common interest over his own interests, without wishing to make an illusion with one's self, or seeking to impose others."

He was at this time made Prime Minister of Justice. The first act of his administration was to cut off the head of one of the most distinguished courtiers; a man of notoriously bad influence. An envious plotter at court tried to break his hold over the mind of the prince, by sending some actors to represent

the most alluring and obscene plays before him. The minister at once ordered them to be imprisoned and executed, as breaking the great moral law of the empire. Of the office of judge he said, "It is their duty to punish the guilty, but in punishing them, they ought to make them understand that they love them, and that they would be glad from the bottom of their hearts, if it was in their power to dispense with punishing them without invading justice."

His administration throughout was stern and prompt, and he was enabled in the course of it to put a stop to an important rebellion.

Again the reformer and preacher left the court to walk and teach among the people. Like the great teachers of all ages, he was much with nature, learning and instructing as he walked over the country. In his journey to the kingdom of Kiu, his party were attacked by the peasants of Kiang, who mistook them for governmental tax-gatherers. They were driven back and delayed; until at length the philosopher went boldly forward; saying to his disciples, "Heaven has raised us up to recall to the memory of men the ancient doctrine of Ouen-ouang. Do you believe it is in the power of the men of Kiang to prevent us from fulfilling our destiny?"

As he drew nearer the peasants exclaimed at once, "They are sages," and conducted them honorably on their way.

JOURNEYING AND TEACHING.

From this time he spent the years in laborious journeys to the different kingdoms of China, teaching these truths of a higher humanity, attempting to reform abuses, and befriending the people and the subjects. He was "in cold and hunger, and fastings oft," his life was hunted after by the envious courtiers, and on several occasions he hardly escaped murder or assassination. His lectures were frequently broken up by the soldiery and his disciples dispersed; still in every new place they collected around him, and his faithful twelve, except when duties to their families called them away, were with him always. He visited the kingdoms of Ouei, Tsai, Ye, Schon, and various others, during this time but never appears to have passed the limits of China. At length at the age of sixty-eight he returned to his native kingdom. The people welcomed him gladly, and in a short time his disciples had increased to the number of three thousand; but the Government—the Court—which he wished especially to influence, met his plans of reform coldly, and he was appointed to no office. He now devoted himself to his favorite pursuits, music and study; the latter being the careful revision in the Ancient Books of the Doctrine, which he had been teaching orally so many years.

His wandering, homeless life had been sometimes painful to him. On one occasion, near a strange city, separated from his disciples, he was seen by a peasant, who reported to his friends, searching, that a stranger of noble aspect was walking about near the gates, "like a dog without a master."

"He is right," said Confucius on hearing this, "I have the fidelity of a dog and am treated like one. But it matters not; in whatever manner men conduct in my regard, I shall not depart from the affection which I bear to them, and I will hasten always to do them all the good which is in my power. If I do not receive from my labors the fruits which I would do right to expect, I will at least have the consolation of having fulfilled my duty."

In his walks through the country, everything recalled his aspirations and the disappointment of his efforts to elevate men. On a late autumn grain field, a peasant, almost the last of his kind, is seen eating the few kernels left. Confucius is saddened, and to the affectionate question why?—he replies, "because it is an image of my holy doctrine, and its state to-day. The grain bird represents myself." He traversed a battle mound, waving with the long grass which had grown over the dead. "Nature," said he, in a little poem, still affectionately preserved, "always renews herself. The spring, the autumn, the waters, the sun—but this mound, the general, the soldiers who fought under him—where are they?"

"I have made vain efforts," said he again, "to put men who wish to walk in it, on the way which leads to wisdom; not succeeding, I have no resource but tears."

A sad closing. The great man, disappointed of necessity in the heroic work of life, going out into the great Darkness. And this is all!

CLOSE OF LIFE.

To his disciples, when near the close of his life, he said, in transmitting his works solemnly to their care:

"It is a long time, my disciples, that you have been attached to me and have recognized me for your master. I have made every effort to acquit myself in my best manner, of the obligations which I have contracted with you, in accepting you for disciples. You have followed me; you have partaken my works and my pains; you have been taught what it behooves man to know, when he wishes to fulfill exactly the duty imposed on him, during his sojourn upon the earth. In the deplorable state in which things are to-day, and in view of the aversion men show every where to the reform of manners and the renewing of the Ancient Doctrine, you ought not to flatter yourselves with being able to recall the mass of men to the practice of their duties; you are witnesses of the little success which

