

CONFUCIUS



***THE WISDOM
OF CONFUCIUS
WITH CRITICAL
AND BIOGRAPHICAL
SKETCHES***

Confucius

The Wisdom of Confucius with Critical and Biographical Sketches

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[Translated into English by James Legge]

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INTRODUCTION

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The strangest figure that meets us in the annals of Oriental thought is that of Confucius. To the popular mind he is the founder of a religion, and yet he has nothing in common with the great religious teachers of the East. We think of Siddartha, the founder of Buddhism, as the very impersonation of romantic asceticism, enthusiastic self-sacrifice, and faith in the things that are invisible. Zoroaster is the friend of God, talking face to face with the Almighty, and drinking wisdom and knowledge from the lips of Omniscience. Mohammed is represented as snatched up into heaven, where he receives the Divine communication which he is bidden to propagate with fire and sword throughout the world. These great teachers lived in an atmosphere of the supernatural. They spoke with the authority of inspired prophets. They brought the unseen world close to the minds of their disciples. They spoke positively of immortality, of reward or punishment beyond the grave. The present life they despised, the future was to them everything in its promised satisfaction. The teachings of Confucius were of a very different sort. Throughout his whole writings he has not even mentioned the name of God. He declined to discuss the question of immortality. When he was asked about spiritual beings, he remarked, "If we cannot even know men, how can we know spirits?"

Yet this was the man the impress of whose teaching has formed the national character of five hundred millions of people. A temple to Confucius stands to this day in every

town and village of China. His precepts are committed to memory by every child from the tenderest age, and each year at the royal university at Peking the Emperor holds a festival in honor of the illustrious teacher.

The influence of Confucius springs, first of all, from the narrowness and definiteness of his doctrine. He was no transcendentalist, and never meddled with supramundane things. His teaching was of the earth, earthy; it dealt entirely with the common relations of life, and the Golden Rule he must necessarily have stumbled upon, as the most obvious canon of his system. He strikes us as being the great Stoic of the East, for he believed that virtue was based on knowledge, knowledge of a man's own heart, and knowledge of human-kind. There is a pathetic resemblance between the accounts given of the death of Confucius and the death of Zeno. Both died almost without warning in dreary hopelessness, without the ministrations of either love or religion. This may be a mere coincidence, but the lives and teachings of both men must have led them to look with indifference upon such an end. For Confucius in his teaching treated only of man's life on earth, and seems to have had no ideas with regard to the human lot after death; if he had any ideas he preserved an inscrutable silence about them. As a moralist he prescribed the duties of the king and of the father, and advocated the cultivation by the individual man of that rest or apathy of mind which resembles so much the disposition aimed at by the Greek and Roman Stoic. Even as a moralist, he seems to have sacrificed the ideal to the practical, and his loose notions about marriage, his tolerance of concubinage, the slight emphasis which he lays

on the virtue of veracity—of which indeed he does not seem himself to have been particularly studious in his historic writings—place him low down in the rank of moralists. Yet he taught what he felt the people could receive, and the flat mediocrity of his character and his teachings has been stamped forever upon a people who, while they are kindly, gentle, forbearing, and full of family piety, are palpably lacking not only in the exaltation of Mysticism, but in any religious feeling, generally so-called.

The second reason that made the teaching of Confucius so influential is based on the circumstances of the time. When this thoughtful, earnest youth awoke to the consciousness of life about him, he saw that the abuses under which the people groaned sprang from the feudal system, which cut up the country into separate territories, over which the power of the king had no control. China was in the position of France in the years preceding Philippe-Auguste, excepting that there were no places of sanctuary and no Truce of God. The great doctrine of Confucius was the unlimited despotism of the Emperor, and his moral precepts were intended to teach the Emperor how to use his power aright. But the Emperor was only typical of all those in authority—the feudal duke, the judge on the bench, and the father of the family. Each could discharge his duties aright only by submitting to the moral discipline which Confucius prescribed. A vital element in this system is its conservatism, its adherence to the imperial idea. As James I said, "No bishop, no king," so the imperialists of China have found in Confucianism the strongest basis for the throne, and have supported its dissemination accordingly.

The Analects of Confucius contain the gist of his teachings, and is worthy of study. We find in this work most of the precepts which his disciples have preserved and recorded. They form a code remarkable for simplicity, even crudity, and we are compelled to admire the force of character, the practical sagacity, the insight into the needs of the hour, which enabled Confucius, without claiming any Divine sanction, to impose this system upon his countrymen.

The name Confucius is only the Latinized form of two words which mean "Master K'ung." He was born 551 B.C., his father being governor of Shantung. He was married at nineteen, and seems to have occupied some minor position under the government. In his twenty-fourth year he entered upon the three years' mourning for the death of his mother. His seclusion gave him time for deep thought and the study of history, and he resolved upon the regeneration of his unhappy country. By the time he was thirty he became known as a great teacher, and disciples flocked to him. But he was yet occupied in public duties, and rose through successive stages to the office of Chief Judge in his own country of Lu. His tenure of office is said to have put an end to crime, and he became the "idol of the people" in his district. The jealousy of the feudal lords was roused by his fame as a moral teacher and a blameless judge. Confucius was driven from his home, and wandered about, with a few disciples, until his sixty-ninth year, when he returned to Lu, after accomplishing a work which has borne fruit, such as it is, to the present day. He spent the remaining five years of his life in editing the odes and historic monuments in which

the glories of the ancient Chinese dynasty are set forth. He died in his seventy-third year, 478 B.C. There can be no doubt that the success of Confucius has been singularly great, owing especially to the narrow scope of his scheme, which has become crystallized in the habits, usages, and customs of the people. Especially has it been instrumental in consolidating the empire, and in strengthening the power of the monarch, who, as he every year burns incense in the red-walled temple at Peking, utters sincerely the invocation: "Great art thou, O perfect Sage! Thy virtue is full, thy doctrine complete. Among mortal men there has not been thine equal. All kings honor thee. Thy statutes and laws have come gloriously down. Thou art the pattern in this imperial school. Reverently have the sacrificial vessels been set out. Full of awe, we sound our drums and bells."

E. W.

BOOK I

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On Learning—Miscellaneous Sayings

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"To learn," said the Master, "and then to practise opportunely what one has learnt—does not this bring with it a sense of satisfaction?"

"To have associates in study coming to one from distant parts—does not this also mean pleasure in store?"

"And are not those who, while not comprehending all that is said, still remain not unpleased to hear, men of the superior order?"

A saying of the Scholar Yu:—

"It is rarely the case that those who act the part of true men in regard to their duty to parents and elder brothers are at the same time willing to turn curiously upon their superiors: it has never yet been the case that such as desire not to commit that offence have been men willing to promote anarchy or disorder.

"Men of superior mind busy themselves first in getting at the root of things; and when they have succeeded in this the right course is open to them. Well, are not filial piety and friendly subordination among brothers a root of that right feeling which is owing generally from man to man?"

The Master observed, "Rarely do we meet with the right feeling due from one man to another where there is fine speech and studied mien."

The Scholar Tsang once said of himself: "On three points I examine myself daily, viz., whether, in looking after other people's interests, I have not been acting whole-heartedly; whether, in my intercourse with friends, I have not been true; and whether, after teaching, I have not myself been practising what I have taught."

The Master once observed that to rule well one of the larger States meant strict attention to its affairs and conscientiousness on the part of the ruler; careful husbanding of its resources, with at the same time a tender care for the interests of all classes; and the employing of the masses in the public service at suitable seasons.

"Let young people," said he, "show filial piety at home, respectfulness towards their elders when away from home; let them be circumspect, be truthful; their love going out freely towards all, cultivating good-will to men. And if, in such a walk, there be time or energy left for other things, let them employ it in the acquisition of literary or artistic accomplishments."

The disciple Tsz-hiá said, "The appreciation of worth in men of worth, thus diverting the mind from lascivious desires—ministering to parents while one is the most capable of so doing—serving one's ruler when one is able to devote himself entirely to that object—being sincere in one's language in intercourse with friends: this I certainly must call evidence of learning, though others may say there has been 'no learning.'"

Sayings of the Master:—

"If the great man be not grave, he will not be revered, neither can his learning be solid.

"Give prominent place to loyalty and sincerity.

"Have no associates in study who are not advanced somewhat like yourself.

"When you have erred, be not afraid to correct yourself."

A saying of the Scholar Tsang:—

"The virtue of the people is renewed and enriched when attention is seen to be paid to the departed, and the remembrance of distant ancestors kept and cherished."

Tsz-k'in put this query to his fellow disciple Tsz-kung: said he, "When our Master comes to this or that State, he learns without fail how it is being governed. Does he investigate matters? or are the facts given him?"

Tsz-kung answered, "Our Master is a man of pleasant manners, and of probity, courteous, moderate, and unassuming: it is by his being such that he arrives at the facts. Is not his way of arriving at things different from that of others?"

A saying of the Master:—

"He who, after three years' observation of the will of his father when alive, or of his past conduct if dead, does not deviate from that father's ways, is entitled to be called 'a dutiful son.'"

Sayings of the Scholar Yu:—

"For the practice of the Rules of Propriety, [1] one excellent way is to be natural. This naturalness became a great grace in the practice of kings of former times; let everyone, small or great, follow their example.

"It is not, however, always practicable; and it is not so in the case of a person who does things naturally, knowing

that he should act so, and yet who neglects to regulate his acts according to the Rules.

"When truth and right are hand in hand, a statement will bear repetition. When respectfulness and propriety go hand in hand, disgrace and shame are kept afar-off. Remove all occasion for alienating those to whom you are bound by close ties, and you have them still to resort to."

A saying of the Master:—

"The man of greater mind who, when he is eating, craves not to eat to the full; who has a home, but craves not for comforts in it; who is active and earnest in his work and careful in his words; who makes towards men of high principle, and so maintains his own rectitude—that man may be styled a devoted student."

Tsz-kung asked, "What say you, sir, of the poor who do not cringe and fawn; and what of the rich who are without pride and haughtiness?" "They are passable," the Master replied; "yet they are scarcely in the same category as the poor who are happy, and the rich who love propriety."

"In the 'Book of the Odes,'" Tsz-kung went on to say, "we read of one

Polished, as by the knife and file,
The graving-tool, the smoothing-stone.

Does that coincide with your remark?"

"Ah! such as you," replied the Master, "may well commence a discussion on the Odes. If one tell you how a thing goes, you know what ought to come."

"It does not greatly concern me," said the Master, "that men do not know me; my great concern is, my not knowing them."

Footnote

[1] An important part of a Chinaman's education still. The text-book, "The Li Ki," contains rules for behavior and propriety for the whole life, from the cradle to the grave.

BOOK II

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Good Government—Filial Piety—The Superior Man

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Sayings of the Master:—

"Let a ruler base his government upon virtuous principles, and he will be like the pole-star, which remains steadfast in its place, while all the host of stars turn towards it.

"The 'Book of Odes' contains three hundred pieces, but one expression in it may be taken as covering the purport of all, viz., Unswerving mindfulness.

"To govern simply by statute, and to reduce all to order by means of pains and penalties, is to render the people evasive, and devoid of any sense of shame.

"To govern upon principles of virtue, and to reduce them to order by the Rules of Propriety, would not only create in them the sense of shame, but would moreover reach them in all their errors.

"When I attained the age of fifteen, I became bent upon study. At thirty, I was a confirmed student. At forty, nought could move me from my course. At fifty, I comprehended the will and decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ears were attuned to them. At seventy, I could follow my heart's desires, without overstepping the lines of rectitude."

To a question of Mang-i, as to what filial piety consisted in, the Master replied, "In not being perverse." Afterwards,

when Fan Ch'í was driving him, the Master informed him of this question and answer, and Fan Ch'í asked, "What was your meaning?" The Master replied, "I meant that the Rules of Propriety should always be adhered to in regard to those who brought us into the world: in ministering to them while living, in burying them when dead, and afterwards in the offering to them of sacrificial gifts."

To a query of Mang Wu respecting filial piety, the Master replied, "Parents ought to bear but one trouble—that of their own sickness."

To a like question put by Tsz-yu, his reply was this: "The filial piety of the present day simply means the being able to support one's parents—which extends even to the case of dogs and horses, all of which may have something to give in the way of support. If there be no reverential feeling in the matter, what is there to distinguish between the cases?"

To a like question of Tsz-hiá, he replied: "The manner is the difficulty. If, in the case of work to be done, the younger folks simply take upon themselves the toil of it; or if, in the matter of meat and drink, they simply set these before their elders—is this to be taken as filial piety?"

Once the Master remarked, "I have conversed with Hwúi the whole day long, and he has controverted nothing that I have said, as if he were without wits. But when his back was turned, and I looked attentively at his conduct apart from me, I found it satisfactory in all its issues. No, indeed! Hwúi is not without his wits."

Other observations of the Master:—

"If you observe what things people (usually) take in hand, watch their motives, and note particularly what it is that

gives them satisfaction, shall they be able to conceal from you what they are? Conceal themselves, indeed!

"Be versed in ancient lore, and familiarize yourself with the modern; then may you become teachers.

"The great man is not a mere receptacle."

In reply to Tsz-kung respecting the great man:—

"What he first says, as a result of his experience, he afterwards follows up.

"The great man is catholic-minded, and not one-sided. The common man is the reverse.

"Learning, without thought, is a snare; thought, without learning, is a danger.

"Where the mind is set much upon heterodox principles—there truly and indeed is harm."

To the disciple of Tsz-lu the Master said, "Shall I give you a lesson about knowledge? When you know a thing, maintain that you know it; and when you do not, acknowledge your ignorance. This is characteristic of knowledge."

Tsz-chang was studying with an eye to official income. The Master addressed him thus: "Of the many things you hear hold aloof from those that are doubtful, and speak guardedly with reference to the rest; your mistakes will then be few. Also, of the many courses you see adopted, hold aloof from those that are risky, and carefully follow the others; you will then seldom have occasion for regret. Thus, being seldom mistaken in your utterances, and having few occasions for regret in the line you take, you are on the high road to your preferment."

To a question put to him by Duke Ngai [2] as to what should be done in order to render the people submissive to authority, Confucius replied, "Promote the straightforward, and reject those whose courses are crooked, and the thing will be effected. Promote the crooked and reject the straightforward, and the effect will be the reverse."

When Ki K'ang[3] asked of him how the people could be induced to show respect, loyalty, and willingness to be led, the Master answered, "Let there be grave dignity in him who has the oversight of them, and they will show him respect; let him be seen to be good to his own parents, and kindly in disposition, and they will be loyal to him; let him promote those who have ability, and see to the instruction of those who have it not, and they will be willing to be led."

Some one, speaking to Confucius, inquired, "Why, sir, are you not an administrator of government?" The Master rejoined, "What says the 'Book of the Annals,' with reference to filial duty?—'Make it a point to be dutiful to your parents and amicable with your brethren; the same duties extend to an administrator.' If these, then, also make an administrator, how am I to take your words about being an administrator?"

On one occasion the Master remarked, "I know not what men are good for, on whose word no reliance can be placed. How should your carriages, large or little, get along without your whipple-trees or swing-trees?"

Tsz-chang asked if it were possible to forecast the state of the country ten generations hence. The Master replied in this manner: "The Yin dynasty adopted the rules and manners of the Hiá line of kings, and it is possible to tell whether it retrograded or advanced. The Chow line has

followed the Yin, adopting its ways, and whether there has been deterioration or improvement may also be determined. Some other line may take up in turn those of Chow; and supposing even this process to go on for a hundred generations, the result may be known."

Other sayings of the Master:—

"It is but flattery to make sacrificial offerings to departed spirits not belonging to one's own family.

"It is moral cowardice to leave undone what one perceives to be right to do."

Footnotes

[2] Of Lu (Confucius's native State).

[3] Head of one of the "Three Families" of Lu.

BOOK III

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Abuse of Proprieties in Ceremonial and Music

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Alluding to the head of the Ki family,[4] and the eight lines of posturers[5] before their ancestral hall, Confucius remarked, "If the Ki can allow himself to go to this extent, to what extent will he not allow himself to go?"

The Three Families[6] were in the habit, during the Removal of the sacred vessels after sacrifice, of using the hymn commencing

"Harmoniously the Princes
Draw near with reverent tread,
Assisting in his worship
Heaven's Son, the great and dread."

"How," exclaimed the Master, "can such words be appropriated in the ancestral hall of the Three Families?"

"Where a man," said he again, "has not the proper feelings due from one man to another, how will he stand as regards the Rules of Propriety? And in such a case, what shall we say of his sense of harmony?"

On a question being put to him by Lin Fang, a disciple, as to what was the radical idea upon which the Rules of Propriety were based, the Master exclaimed, "Ah! that is a large question. As to some rules, where there is likelihood of

extravagance, they would rather demand economy; in those which relate to mourning, and where there is likelihood of being easily satisfied, what is wanted is real sorrow."

Speaking of the disorder of the times he remarked that while the barbarians on the North and East had their Chieftains, we here in this great country had nothing to compare with them in that respect:—we had lost these distinctions!

Alluding to the matter of the Chief of the Ki family worshipping on T'ai-shan, [7] the Master said to Yen Yu, "Cannot you save him from this?" He replied, "It is beyond my power." "Alas, alas!" exclaimed the Master, "are we to say that the spirits of T'ai-shan have not as much discernment as Lin Fang?"

Of "the superior man," the Master observed, "In him there is no contentiousness. Say even that he does certainly contend with others, as in archery competitions; yet mark, in that case, how courteously he will bow and go up for the forfeit-cup, and come down again and give it to his competitor. In his very contest he is still the superior man."

Tsz-hiá once inquired what inference might be drawn from the lines—

"Dimples playing in witching smile,
Beautiful eyes, so dark, so bright!
Oh, and her face may be thought the while
Colored by art, red rose on white!"

"Coloring," replied the Master, "requires a pure and clear background." "Then," said the other, "rules of ceremony require to have a background!" "Ah!" exclaimed the Master,

"you are the man to catch the drift of my thought. Such as you may well introduce a discussion on the Odes."

Said the Master, "As regards the ceremonial adopted and enforced by the Hiá dynasty, I am able to describe it, although their own descendants in the State of Ki can adduce no adequate testimony in favor of its use there. So, too, I am able to describe the ceremonial of the Yin dynasty, although no more can the Sung people show sufficient reason for its continuance amongst themselves. And why cannot they do so? Because they have not documents enough, nor men learned enough. If only they had such, I could refer them to them in support of their usages.

"When I am present at the great quinquennial sacrifice to the *manes* of the royal ancestors," the Master said, "from the pouring-out of the oblation onwards, I have no heart to look on."

Some one asked what was the purport of this great sacrifice, and the Master replied, "I cannot tell. The position in the empire of him who could tell you is as evident as when you look at this"—pointing to the palm of his hand.

When he offered sacrifices to his ancestors, he used to act as if they were present before him. In offering to other spirits it was the same.

He would say, "If I do not myself take part in my offerings, it is all the same as if I did not offer them."

Wang-sun Kiá asked him once, "What says the proverb, 'Better to court favor in the kitchen than in the drawing-room'?" The Master replied, "Nay, better say, He who has sinned against Heaven has none other to whom prayer may be addressed."

Of the Chow dynasty the Master remarked, "It looks back upon two other dynasties; and what a rich possession it has in its records of those times! I follow Chow!"

On his first entry into the grand temple, he inquired about every matter connected with its usages. Some one thereupon remarked, "Who says that the son of the man of Tsou[8] understands about ceremonial? On entering the grand temple he inquired about everything." This remark coming to the Master's ears, he said, "What I did is part of the ceremonial!"

"In archery," he said, "the great point to be observed is not simply the perforation of the leather; for men have not all the same strength. That was the fashion in the olden days."

Once, seeing that his disciple Tsz-kung was desirous that the ceremonial observance of offering a sheep at the new moon might be dispensed with, the Master said, "Ah! you grudge the loss of the sheep; I grudge the loss of the ceremony."

"To serve one's ruler nowadays," he remarked, "fully complying with the Rules of Propriety, is regarded by others as toadyism!"

When Duke Ting questioned him as to how a prince should deal with his ministers, and how they in turn should serve their prince, Confucius said in reply, "In dealing with his ministers a prince should observe the proprieties; in serving his prince a minister should observe the duty of loyalty."

Referring to the First of the Odes, he remarked that it was mirthful without being lewd, and sad also without being