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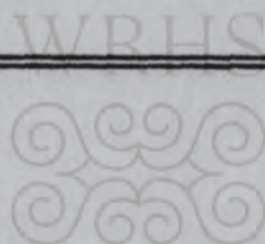
Confucius, 1925.

"CONFUCIUS."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

FEBRUARY 15, 1925, CLEVELAND.



I wish to speak this morning, friends, of a great man, who was the guide, the inspiration of a great people--the Chinese. Hundreds of millions of Chinese are to this day paying homage to this sage and master--Confucius. They are a wonderful people--the people of China; they are perhaps the one people which has retained an historical continuity for more than four thousand years, and perhaps much longer--a people which is in possession of an ardent, pliant, creative mind; a people which vouchsafed to mankind some of its most essential inventions, and a people which has learned the art of living, the grace and the charm of human intercourse, perhaps more than any living people; a peace-loving people, a people of marvelous humaneness.

Of course many of us, living amidst the rush ~~and the bustle~~ and ~~the~~ confusion of our intense industrial civilization, are inclined to look upon the Chinese as a backward people; and yet perhaps its only backwardness is ~~the~~ ⁱⁿ ~~fact that it is utterly unable to use poison gas in warfare.~~ ^{technology - in mechanization.} Much of the humanity of this fine race, which is still destined to play, as it has in the past, a glorious role in the commonalty of human life, is directly traceable to the genius, inspiration and the instruction of this sage, Confucius.

His name, which is a Latinized form ~~of~~ ^{of} his Chinese name--K'ung-Fu-tze, the ^{Master Kung} ~~philosopher~~--will forever

remain among the illustrious names of mankind, and will forever hold a prominent place in the intellectual pantheon of mankind. Confucius was born about the year 550 before the common era, in that part of China which became quite well known during the war--Shantung. He is said to have come from illustrious stock, tracing his ancestry back a thousand years or more. Like Isaac, the son of Abraham, Confucius was the child of his father's old age. His father died when the lad was about three years old; poverty ensued and Confucius was thrown back upon his own resources in early youth, but he successfully wrestled with all the difficult economic problems which confronted him.

He had a desire for study from early youth. He studied the ethics, the literature, the poetry, the institutions, the customs of his people, a people which in his day was already an ancient people; a people which was a great and illustrious people long before Europe was known. During his years of studies he eked out a living, first as a keeper of the stores of grain--some official position which he occupied; later on he was placed in charge of public fields and lands. That was perhaps his first contact with the official life of his country; and Confucius was identified with the official life of his land, directly or indirectly, ~~as an office holder, or in the finest sense of the word, an office seeker,~~ throughout his life.

We are told that at the age of twenty-two he began his career of public teaching. First a few and then an

increasingly larger number of pupils came to him to receive instruction in the things which he himself studied and in the ethics of government. From the account given by his pupils, Confucius, the man, was an aristocrat in thought, in speech, in carriage, in demeanor, in manner. He insisted on good form--propriety in everything; *but also upon honesty,* particular, in a sense *conscientiousness, and earnestness.* ~~ceremonious, proper but remarkably honest and earnest.~~

The China of his day needed a man of the type of Confucius. China in the sixth century before the common era was what Europe was during the Middle Ages--a feudal state. China was broken up in a number of principalities and provinces, each governed by a feudal lord, and within each province there were rival families struggling and conspiring for supremacy. The land was therefore in a state of unrest and great confusion. Standards were breaking down; the land was in great need of a new or a renewed political science, a reestablishment of sound political ideas and ideals. The land was in need of a great statesman to point the way out of the chaos to tranquility; and Confucius served that great purpose in China.

He held office, we are told, in the province of Lu for a few years; first, as an assistant superintendent of works, and then as minister of crime, and he discharged his duties with such remarkable deftness, with such ~~remark-~~ *with such good* ~~able~~ faithfulness and precision, and, above all, ~~results,~~ that the province in which he served became remarkably prosperous as a result of his service, so much so that the neighboring

provinces were afraid of the growing prosperity of this province, lest it become so powerful through wholesome administration as to be able to ~~abolish them~~, to conquer them. And so they proceeded to undermine the authority of this man Confucius in the palace of his prince. Confucius was compelled to leave. We are told that for some thirteen years he became a homeless wanderer, wandering from state to state, from province to province in China, seeking to impart his ideals of proper government and of proper individual conduct to his people; with very little success.

He returned to his home, and in 478 Confucius died, and the last words before his passing ~~on~~ were ~~these~~: "There is not one in the empire that will make me his master. My time is come to die." Thus, a disillusioned and heart-sick old man, ~~did~~ Confucius close ^{his} mortal life. But, as is the case with all true greatness, he became famous after death. It is a strange thing how men will crucify their prophets and then worship them on the cross. Many years did not elapse before temples were built for Confucius and sacrifices were offered in his honor. But his greatest reward lay in the fact that his teachings soon permeated, nay, saturated the life of the people and became the ~~best~~ ^{guide} ~~light~~ in their destiny. 7

His teachings are to be found principally in four Books, none of which he himself wrote, but which are in the nature of compilations of his teachings made by his disciples. The first one, perhaps the most important one,

is called the Analects, a collection of Confucius' sayings and teachings made by his disciples. The second one is called The Great Learning, which is said to have been written down by his own grandson. The third one is called, and quite significantly, as we shall see in a moment, The Doctrine of the Mean, also a compilation of his disciples; and the fourth is a book written by his greatest disciple, an apostle known to the European world as Mencius.

Now, what were the teachings of Confucius? ~~And after all, that is what we are interested in.~~ What were the principal foci of his intellectual and spiritual concerns? They may be said to revolve around two ideas--the idea of the superior man, and the idea of the superior state. Confucius held out before the eyes of his countrymen the ideal of the superior man--an ideal which differed quite radically from the superman, the ideal of ^{Nietzsche} ~~nature~~. The superior man of Confucius was not ^{the} ~~this~~ masterful, ^{dominating} ~~dominant~~ person who is beyond good and evil--the man who rides over conventions and ^{follows} ~~sort of evolves~~ a code of ~~ethics and~~ conduct all of his own; the superior man of Confucius was simply the average ^{man developed}; the normal human being living in a normal state of society, developing himself in every direction, perfecting his faculties, his aptitudes, his gifts; perfecting the virtues of life.

Perhaps the closest parallel to that is the rabbinic conception of the ^{האדם השלם} ~~the good man~~, ^{האדם השלם} ~~the complete man~~. Confucius, unlike Buddha, ~~of whom we spoke~~

~~last week~~, believed in self-development as the ideal in life. Buddha, you will recall, looked upon self-development and self-^{by human}~~inspiration~~ as the greatest menace~~s~~ to happiness. The more individualized you become, the less likely will peace and tranquility and happiness be yours. But Confucius insisted upon the ideal of self-development. He says, or it is recorded that he said: "From the highest to the lowest self-development must be deemed the root of all by every man. When the root is neglected, it cannot be that what springs from it will be well ordered. The superior man seeks to express himself and finds self-sufficiency in himself." Said Confucius: "What the superior man seeks is in himself; what the ordinary man seeks is in others" --a very profound saying, by the way.

Now, what is the object of this self-development? Truth! The object of the superior man is truth. The superior man is anxious lest he should not get truth; he is not anxious lest poverty come upon him. The superior man is open-minded in his quest of truth; the superior man in the world does not set his mind either for anything or against anything. What is right he will follow. In other words, Confucius set up as the goal of life self-fulfillment through the quest of truth. The superior man, ~~that~~, according to Confucius, is the man whom truth leads to righteousness. The superior man thinks of virtue; the ordinary man thinks of comfort.

What is Confucius' conception of righteousness?

The Golden Rule! And it may be a startling thing to you, but Confucius was ~~the father, the~~ ^{the original} author of the Golden Rule. Confucius said, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do unto others," which is the exact prototype of ~~which~~ ^{and the fiction} the great Jewish sage Hillel ~~said~~ five hundred years later: "What is hateful unto thyself, do not do unto others." And it is the exact prototype, although in the negative form, of what another great Jew ~~(five hundred years later said)~~ "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." There may be more in the affirmative version of the Golden Rule, but in the negative, frankly, I ~~can~~ ^{can} not find it.

The important thing is that Confucius conceived of human relationships, ~~of righteousness~~ as a matter of mutual reciprocity, of give and take, of live and let live, of self-development through social service, of increasing your own spiritual goods by increasing those of your neighbor, of growing not at the expense of your neighbor but with and through your neighbor. ^{TP} In all things Confucius insisted that the superior man ~~must be proper~~ ^{follow}, good form.

We seem to think that good form is ~~the monopoly~~ and the prerogative of the Anglo-Saxon ~~or some other God-chosen race~~ ^{people}. Long before these Anglo-Saxons appeared on the scene of history; ~~long before, when these and all the other~~ Nordics were perhaps barbarians, the Chinese conceived ~~of the~~ ^{that} ~~idea that~~ ^{harmonious} human life, ~~human relationships, are~~ ^{is} possible only as men develop a social discipline, ~~a finesse~~ ^{an etiquette}. We call it

the sum total of

form; we call it breeding. It is simply ^{the sum total of} those conventions which facilitate social relationships; which make our contacts ~~and our assemblies~~ and our relationships a little more graceful and pleasant and charming. Confucius said: "Respectfulness without the rules of propriety becomes laborious. Carefulness without the rules of propriety becomes timidity. Baldness without the rules of propriety becomes insubordination. Straightforwardness without the rules of propriety becomes rudeness."

It is remarkable what a fine sense of values Confucius had, and what a high standard of moderation he set up before his people. His ideal was the golden mean--~~the doctrine of the mean~~. The Greeks had it almost synchronously with Confucius. The Greeks ^{too} evolved the doctrine of the golden mean, ~~and the~~ ^{just} balance, ~~the~~ poise--nothing in excess. Said Confucius: "Sincerely hold fast to the due mean." The Master said, a disciple reports, "Alas, how the path of the mean is not walked in." And again he said, "Perfect is the virtue which is according to the mean. They have long been rare among the people who could praise it." Virtue itself may be offensive when it becomes excessive.

This, then, was his ideal of the superior man: a man well balanced, moderate, ~~kindly, righteous~~; a man who never leans to extremes, and a man who seeks fulfillment of his life through the quest of truth with an open mind. ~~Now~~

HP Confucius, too, had an ideal of the superior state, because essentially he was a statesman; and his superior state was

Filial devotion: a basic ideal in all his

teachings -



based directly upon the superior man and the superior family of men; for being a Chinese, he revered and held sacred the ideal of the family unit as the unit of civilization. "The ancients, when they wished to amplify illustrious virtue throughout the empire, first ordered well their states; desiring to order well their states, they first regulated their families; wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated themselves; wishing to cultivate themselves, they first rectified their purposes; wishing to rectify their purposes, they first sought to think sincerely; wishing to think sincerely, they first extended their knowledge as widely as possible. This they did by the investigation of things."

In other words, the possible reform of a state must begin with the reform of the units which go into the composition of the state, the family and the individual. Confucius knew what we very frequently lose sight of: that the state cannot be improved from the top by legislation; that the state must be improved from ~~the~~ ^{its} base--the individual and the family. The object of government, according to Confucius, was to establish justice in society; to rectify wrong. Confucius was not so much concerned with the form of government, whether it was monarchy or oligarchy or aristocracy or democracy. He was a wise man and he knew that forms mattered very little; he was concerned with the purpose, ~~the goal and the objective~~ ^{which is} of all government, ~~and these were~~ to serve the needs of the government, ~~to help them develop~~

~~themselves~~. He uttered many wise counsels; some very sound political philosophy; he tried to impress upon the rulers and kings and princes the thought that government, when all is said and done, must be based upon the consent of the governed; that the governments, if they are to continue, must have the confidence of the people; and to that purpose Confucius advised universal education, twenty-five hundred years ago.

↖ The ruling class and the governed class both should be educated to their highest capacity for the great experiment in political cooperation. Confucius advised the rulers to make provision for the economic competence of the people. He said unto them with shrewd insight: "If the people have plenty their prince will not be left in want alone; if the people are in want their prince will not be able to enjoy plenty alone."

He advised protection of the weak; pensions for the old, for the widowed, for the unfortunate ones--a fine, sound, wholesome system of government. He taught his people to love the fine arts; he urged them to study poetry and literature and music. He was himself a musician. He taught them above all the value of ceremony in life, the grace of living. It is not only important to do a thing well, but to do it in the right way.

Confucius had his limitations. He was not a metaphysician; he was not a theologian; he did not concern himself with the problems, the fundamental, the elemental

problems of human life--those problems which break in upon thinking men and women very often and demand solution; the whence and the whither. "What is above, what is below?--the problems of human destiny; of revelation, of retribution, of free will, of immortality; ~~the sanctions of ethics and faith and all their multitudinous perfidies~~--these problems somehow did not enter into the purview of Confucius' thinking. ~~He taught less of ethics than of soul and truthfulness, we are told, but he left spiritual beings severely alone.~~

A disciple of his, we are told, asked him about the hereafter. Tze-lu asked about serving the spirits of the dead. The master said: "While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits?" Tze-lu then said, "I fancy to ask about death." He was answered, "While you do not know life, how can you know about death?"

Confucius was not a man of vision, as we think of vision associated with prophecy. He had no revelations; he had no prophecies; ~~he had no visions~~; he was not a religious mystic. But he was a profoundly wise man, a sage. When I think of him I think of the author ~~of~~ or authors of the Book of Proverbs; of the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes, ~~and~~ ^{the} the Apocrypha; when I think of him I think of Socrates; I think of the wise men of the world; ~~the men~~ ^{He was a thinker} who tasted life and knew life; ~~the men~~ who assimilated human experience and were ~~then~~ able to give words of light and leading ~~and guidance~~ to their ~~disciples~~ ^{generation}.

The thing which impresses one most about

Confucius is the remarkable spiritual calm of the man; the imperturbability of spirit. And when one reads his words one realizes whence comes this calm and this serenity of thought. There is a phrase of the Rabbis: "A man whose mind is at ease because it is freighted with wisdom"^{is}--like a well-ballasted ship that rides steadily and truly in the midst of a stormy ocean.

Confucius, in spite of the many disillusionments and disappointments of his life, of his outer experiences, was nevertheless a man at peace with himself; a man whose life was well organized and focused; a man whose life was properly coordinated, and blessed with a unifying, informing central motif. Confucius had a program and an objective; Confucius had a goal and also a charm; there were many great problems in his life, but no confusion; there were many mighty intellectual efforts and exertions in his life but no ineffectual restiveness. He had found his objective in life, and deliberately, patiently, ardently, he set out to reach that objective; he was aware, as all wise men are aware, that the task is endless, and that it cannot be comprised within the narrow limitations of one human life. But he was also aware, as all wise men are aware, that every effort of the aspiring human soul to reach the pinnacle partakes of the quality of the eternal; that every human impulse reaching out for the goal of being, for self-fulfillment through the sincere quest of truth, in sympathetic cooperation with our fellow human beings,--that

every impulse is eternal in its quality.

This, then, is Confucius--the master. His great spirit has imprinted itself indelibly upon the lives of millions of God's children.

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