

POEMS OF CONFUCIUS.

TRANSLATED IN VERSE BY PAUL CARUS.

CONFUCIUS from time to time gave expression to his sentiments in song, and there are three poems recorded in the stone-engraved inscriptions of the temple of Confucius at Kū Fu all of which set forth his disappointment in life. After he became minister of justice in his native state Lu, he found out that the duke did not possess the seriousness necessary for the responsibilities of his position, and so Confucius resigned. Some time afterwards the duke was expelled by a usurper and had to flee to the neighboring state of Wei. Confucius followed his exiled sovereign, and when the usurper Ji Kong Ts' invited him to return he did not, because the sage would accept no favors from a man who had seized the government by unjust means. But later on when the usurper had died, Confucius returned to Lu.

We quote the following verses from inscriptions engraved on stone as they have been published and edited by the next to the last representative of the Confucian family; our own explanatory comments are inserted as footnotes or in brackets.

THE SONG ON TAI SAN.¹

After Confucius had moved to Wei, Ji Kong Ts' sent his compliments [and invited him] to come back to Lu. Confucius refused the offer. Being convinced that if he accepted the high charge it would only end in disappointment, he composed the "Song of the Mountain":

"Would rise to the lofty peak
Where cliffs and ravines debar.
So truth² though ever near

¹Tai San is the name of a peak in Lu. It means literally "the huge mountain" and is situated between Lu and Wei.

²The original reads "Tao."

THE OPEN COURT.

Is to the seeker far.
 How wearisome³ to me
 Those tangling⁴ mazes are.

"I sigh and look around,
 The summit in full view;
 With woodlands it is crowned
 And sandy patches too,
 And there stretch all around
 The highlands of Lian Fu.
 Thickets of thorns prevent
 Any ascent.
 No axe is here
 A path to clear;
 The higher we are going
 The worse the briars are growing.
 I chant and cry,
 And while I sigh
 My tears⁵ are freely flowing."

THE ORCHID IN THE GRASS.

[Comparing the sage to the orchid as a flower of rare beauty, Confucius thinks that men of a superior character should live in the company of kings and not be thrown among the vulgar people like the orchids that grow by the wayside.]⁶

Confucius on his way back to Lu from Wei stopped in a valley and saw orchids growing by the wayside, and said "Orchids should be royalty's fragrance, but here they are mixed up with common herbs." Then he stopped the car, took his lute, played on it and composed the song of the orchid.

"So gently blow the valley breezes
 With drizzling mist and rain,
 And homeward bound a stranger tarries
 With friends in a desert domain.
 Blue heaven above! for all his worth
 Is there no place for him on earth?"

³That is to say, "An attempt to climb the height would be a failure and leave me wearied and footsore."

⁴The original reads "without return," which means "mazes which allow no exit."

⁵The original here is too drastic for English taste in poetry; it reads "the tears are flowing and the nose is running."

"Through all the countries did he roam
 Yet found he no enduring home.
 Worldlings are stupid and low,
 They naught of sages know.
 So swiftly years and days pass by,
 And soon old age is drawing nigh."

Then Confucius went back to Lu.

THE CRAZY MAN'S JINGLE.

Jay Yü, the crazy man of Ts'u, passed by Confucius singing:

"Oh Phoenix, oh Phoenix, thy virtue is pinched!
 The bygone is ended and cannot be mended:
 But truly the future can still be clinched.
 Cease, ah! continue not!
 For statesmen to-day are a dangerous lot."

Confucius dismounted anxious to talk with him; but he [Jay Yü] hurried away and escaped, so Confucius could not talk with him.

[This strange piece of tradition seems to characterize pretty faithfully the situation in which Confucius found himself in his advanced age. A man ensouled with a great ideal, he was possessed of the idea that in order to realize his aspirations he ought to be a minister of state and introduce personally his proposed reform. But in this he lamentably failed. He went from court to court and was nowhere acceptable. It is natural that sovereigns would not want a councilor who was constantly preaching morality; and even if some sovereign would have liked to engage him, then the ministers or other advisers would be opposed to the appointment; so he found himself in the undignified position of offering virtue only to find out that there was no demand for it. A well-intentioned man on the throne was certainly a rare thing, and yet the fault does not lie entirely with Chinese royalty at the time of Confucius, for even good honest rulers would hesitate to engage such a moralizer as he. A man with good intentions has a conscience of his own and need not engage a man to supply him with rules of conduct. It is true that once in his life Confucius held the position of minister of justice in the state of Lu, and it is reported that his administration was very successful; nevertheless he held this office only for a short time and did not affect any lasting reform, and that was perhaps best for

his ideals. We must bear in mind that if Confucius had really had the chance to give his reform a fair trial, he would probably have found out by experience that no reform can be introduced through the government by enforcing rules of propriety. For the short span of his official activity we possess only the glowing description of his disciples; the other side, how he came to lose his position as a minister of state in the service of the duke of Lu, has not been recorded. At any rate while for Confucius himself his fate was tragic, we can understand that it could scarcely be otherwise. A fair trial would probably have proved a failure and might have spoiled all the credit of Confucianism among the coming generation. Nevertheless, in spite of his disappointments his life was not in vain, for the ideal he represented was of vital significance.

Ideals are superhuman factors, and superhuman factors can not be represented by limited individuals; they must assume shape in mythological persons, in a God or a God-man, a hero, or some other supernatural figure, in idealized persons of the distant past who have shaken off their mortal coil with all their human failings. Thus it came to pass, thanks to the enthusiasm which the master had instilled into his disciples, that the Confucian ideal had a great future. After his death Confucius came into his own. When the personal element was removed his aspirations found recognition.]

THE SWAN SONG.

When Confucius fell sick, Ts' Kong visited him. Confucius dragging himself along on his staff walked back and forth at the gate, and he sang these words:

"Huge mountains wear away
 Alas!
 The strongest beams decay.
 Alas!
 And the sage like grass
 Withers. Alas!"

Tz' Kong heard this song and said:

"If the huge mountain crumbles, say
 Where with mine eyne I'll wend?
 If the strong beams will rot away
 On what shall I depend?
 And if the sage withers like grass
 From whom shall I then learn? Alas!"

Having entered the house, Confucius said: "Ts' Kong, why come you so late? The house of Hia [2205-1818 B. C.] placed the coffin on the east stairs. The house of Yin [= Shang, 1766-1122, since 1401 called Yin] near the two pillars. I belong to the house of Yin and last night I dreamed that I sat between the two pillars. At present there is no bright ruler in the world who would employ me. I probably will die soon."

Confucius died after seven days.