

pose to do. You would fail in your project, and be laughed at by your rivals.

Love your parents. If they cause you some slight inconveniences, learn to support them.

SOLON.

Solon, the celebrated Athenian lawgiver, was born in the small island of Salamis, on the southern coast of Attica, 592 years before Christ. He was of noble lineage, being descended from Cadmus, the last king of Athens, and a family relationship existed between him and his future antagonist Pisistratus. His father had expended the greater part of his fortune in acts of benevolence, and at his death the family were no longer able to maintain the rank to which they had been accustomed. Young Solon, however, received a liberal education at Athens, and became desirous of re-establishing the fortunes of his family. From the maritime situation of Athens, and the natural bent of its citizens to mercantile pursuits, the Athenian nobility considered it in no way derogatory to their rank to engage in commerce; and Solon accordingly entered into commercial life, and it would appear with considerable success. It was doubtless in the capacity of merchant that the greater part of his early travels were undertaken, when he visited almost every part of Greece, and during which his already well-informed mind closely observed the habits and customs of the places he visited. During those travels his attention was principally directed to the study of mankind and their principles of action, which was of great service to him in his subsequent office of legislator; and from his various attainments, on his return to his native country, he was already one of the greatest philosophers and politicians of his day. He cultivated the acquaintance of all those who were most distinguished by their virtues and their wisdom—especially such as were void of personal ambition, who were animated by a patriotic spirit, and by the desire of ameliorating the forms of government, and of directing the passions of their countrymen to a useful and an honorable end. Periander too, the talented but tyrannic ruler of Corinth, was at this time among the number of his acquaintances; and it is narrated that one day, when they were at table together, Solon was unusually silent. "Why don't you converse?" inquired Periander; "is it stupidity? is it barrenness of idea?"—"Do you not know, then," replied Solon, "that it is impossible for a fool to keep silence at table?"

The Athenians at this time groaned under the sanguinary laws of Draco, which punished every crime indiscriminately with death. Athens, indeed, was in a state of anarchy, for the laws were too atrocious to be put in force. A new code must be drawn up, more conformable to the spirit of the age and the spirit of the people; and Solon was unanimously chosen by his fellow-citizens for that high but difficult office. He was created archon and supreme legislator. He executed his task with great zeal and with great impartiality, and it was one which required all the wisdom of his matured mind. One day, when engaged in his task, Anacharsis, the Scythian philosopher, entered his apartment: "What are you taken up with, my dear Solon?" said he. "Do you not know that laws are like cobwebs? The weak are caught in them; the strong break through."

Solon acted very much on the principle conveyed in this remark; and if in his laws he has unduly favored the people, it was because he was deeply interested in their happiness, and because he saw how many means of oppression were possessed by the powerful, and how difficult it was for the poor man to protect himself. Whether the institutions he framed were the best to effect his purpose may be doubted; he himself remarked, "I have not given the Athenians the best of laws; but I have given them the best they were capable of receiving." But unquestionably he placed a very dangerous power in the hands of the people, by constituting them a court of last appeal in every cause, and in framing his laws so obscurely that an appeal to the people to interpret them was of constant occurrence. In regard to the domestic relations, the code of Solon was far in advance of the spirit of his age, and infinitely superior to that framed by Lycurgus for the Spartans.

Solon was the first of his nation who invested the family com-

pact with a dignity becoming its importance, by regarding marriage as a sacred tie, and strengthening it by legislative enactments. But he could not at once rise superior to the lax morality of the age; he permitted divorce, though under restrictions, yet on grounds that would appear far from sufficient in modern times. It was reserved for the religion of Christ to raise woman to her proper rank in society; the New Testament is the great charter of her liberties. The character of Solon makes it probable that he sought much of his happiness in the domestic relations; and we know that he was an affectionate father. He was deeply afflicted by the death of his son; and a friend one day visiting him, surprised him in tears. "Why do you grieve so bitterly?" said his friend; "tears cannot bring back the dead."—"Tis because of that I weep" was the sorrowful rejoinder.

The conduct of Solon, and the laws which he framed, gave so much satisfaction to the Athenians that he might now have easily have obtained the sovereign power in the state. But he refused the offer of the kingly office; and having now completed his legislative duties, and fearing lest he should himself be the first to alter his code, he withdrew into voluntary exile for ten years, having previously obtained from his countrymen a solemn oath that they would strictly observe his laws for one hundred years, and that they would live at peace till his return. Upon leaving Athens he visited Egypt. From thence he repaired to the court of Croesus, king of Lydia, who seems to have treated him with great favor, although the opinions of the frank-spoken sage must have been at times disagreeable to the most opulent monarch of the age. On one occasion being asked by Croesus if he were not the happiest of mortals, "Tellus, an Athenian," replied the sage, "who always saw his country prosperous, his children virtuous, and who died himself in his country's defence, was more truly to be called happy than the possessor of riches and the ruler of empires."

Thus living as it were in seclusion, removed from the cares of state, and free from the anxieties of his late legislative office, Solon indulged the belief that, by the wise and mild constitution which he had framed, he had permanently secured the happiness of his countrymen. But if in this he was forgetful of the fickleness of the people, he underrated also the ambitious projects of individuals. In his absence, the republican constitution which he had framed was already tottering. The blow was struck by a relation of his own—Pisistratus. While yet a youth, Pisistratus had fixed upon himself the admiration of the Athenians no less by his military talents and personal valor in the field, than by his eloquence and address at home. Gifted with a fine person—brave, frank, and generous, he was every way fitted to become the idol of the people; he redressed private grievances, listened to the complaints and encouraged the hopes of those who flocked around him; and on the return of Solon, he was rapidly smoothing his way to supreme power.

Republican in principal, and grieved to see the liberties of his country thus endangered, Solon struggled against the rising power of his ambitious relative—but in vain. Strong in the love of the people, Pisistratus soon obtained the protection of a body-guard to his person—Solon alone raising his powerful voice in opposition. Henceforth Athens was no longer free. Yet Pisistratus knew how to gild the chains which he threw round his fellow-citizens; and his conduct while in power was in many respects most praiseworthy. His rule was distinguished by justice and moderation; he raised the dignity of Athens; he encouraged literature and the arts; and was the friend and patron of illustrious men. He always treated Solon with the greatest respect, though the latter continued his inflexible antagonist; and even, by kindly offices, endeavored to renew the ties of friendship which formerly had existed between them. But Solon rejected the friendly advances of one whom he deemed the destroyer of his country's liberty; and grieved at the overthrow of his best plans, and chagrined at the sight of his countrymen forging their own chains by the favor they showed to Pisistratus, in bitterness of heart the old man withdrew from Athens, and retired to Cyprus, where his declining years were sustained by the kindness of King Philocypus.

(To be Continued.)