

From Hogg's Weekly Instructor.
The Seven Sages of Greece and their Sayings.

(CONCLUDED.)

SOLON.

It was most probably in his retreat in Cyprus that he composed one of the few poems of his which have come down to us, in which he bewails the misfortunes of his native country—the ruin which the rashness of the Athenians was bringing upon them. "O Athens!" he exclaims, "destiny would have spared you, but you will perish by the hands of your own citizens!" * * * * The blasting hailstorm escapes from the bellowing cloud; the rapid thunder-bolt leaps out from the clear sky; the wind raises mighty tempests on the sea, and often by great men perish great states—often the imprudent people of a sudden find themselves lorded over by usurpers * * * * O Athenians! ascribe not to the gods the ill that overwhelm you; it is the work of your own corruption: yourselves have placed the power in the hands of your oppressors." He then expresses his gratitude for the kindness of the Cyprian monarch, and seems about to conclude, when a yearning for home fills his heart—the longing of age to revisit the scenes of its youth: "O lovely Venus! crowned with violet wreaths, smooth my path o'er the sea, bless the hospitable land that has welcomed me, and grant that I may once more behold my dearly-loved Athens!" The desire of his heart was not granted. He died at the court of King Philocyprus, in the eightieth year of his age.

His laws survived him for four hundred years, until Greece became absorbed in the rising empire of Rome; and Cicero, who himself saw them in operation, passes a high eulogium on the wisdom of one who framed a code so mild, and so well adapted to the temper of the fickle Athenians. The prominent feature in the character of Solon is utilitarianism—his love of the useful—his earnest desire of practically benefiting the physical and moral condition of those around him. A philosopher, he avoided the then uncertain and ill-directed speculations of metaphysics, and turned his attention solely to the duties of man and the laws of nature. Of his success in the former of these studies his code will be an enduring monument, and in the latter, having regard to the state of science in his day, he seems to have been little less successful, and, wishing to instruct his countrymen in the philosophy of nature, he composed a treatise on the subject, using poetry as a vehicle for his ideas, in order to impress them more deeply on the minds of the people. As a poet, he did not give way to the ideal reveries, the passionate sentiments, the ardent aspirations of the poetical temperament; the charms of poetry are chiefly employed by him to render his precepts attractive. Austerity formed no element in the character of Solon; but he seems always to have been calm-tempered, and of strict justice; and if in some places his writings were tinged by voluptuousness, some allowance ought to be made for the laxity of morals then all-prevalent. In conclusion, we may remark, that the writings of Solon consisted of a number of letters, a poem upon the Atlantis—an isle which was supposed to exist far off in the Western Ocean,—and several political elegies, of which some fragments have been preserved, which everywhere exhibit proofs of a noble mind, an elevated understanding, and a great talent for serious poetry.

Sayings of Solon.

There is a God who is Lord of all: no mortal has power equal to his. Our ideas of the Deity must always be imperfect. No man is happy; but also, no one under the sun is virtuous. As long as you live, seek to learn: do not presume that old age brings wisdom.

Take care how you speak all that you know.

Distrust pleasure; it is the mother of grief.

Do not be in a hurry to make new friends, nor to quit those you have.

Few crimes would be committed, if the witnesses of the injustice were not more deserving of it than the unhappy victims.

Courtiers are counters used at play—they change in value with him who employs them.

BIAS.

Bias of Priene united the benevolence of the philanthropist to the wisdom of the sage; and the memory of his kind actions will more surely preserve his name from oblivion than even the purity and truth of his maxims. He was born in Priene, one of the twelve independent cities of Ionia. He won the esteem of his countrymen by his talents and zeal in behalf of his native state, which, sharing the common fate of the small republics, was alike torn by intestine divisions and menaced by powerful enemies from without; and which, but for his exertions, must speedily have lost its dependence. He inherited, or amassed by his own efforts, a considerable fortune; and his wealth was employed by him in gratifying the promptings of a benevolent heart. Among other generous actions, he ransomed the young captives of Messona, watched over their education with all the interest of a parent, and afterwards sent them back to their native land, bearing with them the rich presents which his kindness had bestowed on them. He was a poet we are informed, and composed a poem of some two thousand verses on the way to become happy: he had found it, for he did good.

Bias flourished about five hundred and sixty-six years before our era. He was elevated by his countrymen to office in the state; but his native gentleness of heart was unchilled even by the stern forms of the hall of justice. On one occasion, we are told, on condemning a man to death, Bias wept. "If you weep," said one to him, "for the guilty, why do you condemn him?" "We can neither repress the emotions of nature," said the sensitive sage, "nor disobey the law." He is said to have been possessed of great eloquence; and to the last hour of his life, it too, like his fortune, was ever ready at the call of benevolence. One day the old man was pleading the cause of one of his friends; when he had finished speaking, he leaned his head on the bosom of his nephew who stood near. When the judges had pronounced in his favor, the bystanders wished to awake him—but life was flown!

Sayings of Bias.

A good conscience is alone above fear.

Listen much, and never speak but to the purpose.

To desire what is impossible, and to be insensible to the troubles of others, are two great maladies of the soul.

People who bestow all their talent on trifles, are like the bird of night, which sees clear in the darkness, and becomes blind in the light of the sun.

You become arbiter between two of your enemies; you will make a friend of him whom your decision favors. You constitute yourself judge between two of your friends: be sure you will lose one of them.

The wicked suppose all men knaves like themselves; the good are easily deceived.

The most unhappy of men is he who cannot support misfortune.

CLEOBULUS.

We know but little of Cleobulus, but he seems to have been a mild and good prince. He was a native of Lindos, in the island of Rhodes, and was elevated to the sovereignty of his country; and it was as much by the wisdom and the zeal for his country's welfare which characterized his conduct on the throne, as from his philosophical attainments, that he won a place among the sages of Greece. Nature seems to have been no less kind to him in physical than in mental endowments, for he is said to have possessed great beauty of form. His leisure hours were devoted to the cultivation of philosophy and poetry; and after a tranquil reign, he died in the seventieth year of his age, 546 B.F. His daughter Cleobulina seems to have inherited her father's talents, and profited by his instructions. She distinguished herself as a poetess, and composed several enigmas, in one of which the year is thus characterized:—"A father had twelve children; and these twelve children had each thirty white sons and thirty white daughters, who are immortal though they died every day."