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THE

GOLDEN VERSES & THE SYMBOLS OF PYTHAGORAS.

THIS most eminent philosopher, the founder of the Italic School, was born about the year 580 B.C., at Samos, an island in the *Ægean* Sea; he studied in Greece and in Egypt and is said to have visited also India, Persia and Palestine. He settled at Crotona, a notable city of Greek colonization in the south of Italy; here he taught for forty years, but was at last obliged to leave the country on account of the disturbances accompanying a revolution there, he reached Metapontum where he died about the year 500 B.C.

It is said that he left no written works, and all that remains of his doctrine is derived from his pupils and successors. Mnesarchus, his son, and Aristæus, who married his widow, were the immediate successors who carried on the school of philosophy and they were succeeded by Bulagoras, Tidas and Diodorus. At a later date the teachings were continued at three centres, Heraclea, Metapontum and Tarentum.

The oldest authors who have left any record of his teachings are Philolaus, circa 370 B.C.; Archytas of Tarentum; Aristotle, B.C. 322; Theon of Smyrna; Jamblichus of Chalcis; Proclus; Simplicius; and lastly Photius of Constantinople, who lived about 850 A.D., and left a Bibliotheca of ancient philosophy. During the middle ages Meursius, Meibomius, Kircher,

Beroaldus and Marsilius Ficinus reprinted the old remains of the Pythagoreans.

Later editors have been Michael Neander, André Dacier, Thomas Stanley, 1700, and J. C. von Orelli, 1819.

The "Golden Verses" and the "Symbols" enshrine the Pythagorean doctrine in a concise and convenient form; they are the only works extant directly attributed to the great master, but history records that many treatises were written by his pupils to explain his philosophy; such are—Three Treatises, paideutic, politic and physic; the Universe; the Sacred discourse; the Soul; on piety; arithmetic; prognostics; and Magical virtues of herbs.

There are however two short *epistles*, one to Anaximenes and one to Hiero, which are thought to be authentic; and lastly, there is a short paragraph on the letter Y as a symbol of human life.

The Notes are chiefly gleaned by A.E.A. and by S. A. from the commentaries of Hierocles, who lived about 330, from Jamblichus of Chalcis, 320, and André Dacier, whose treatise is dated 1706, of which there is an English edition of 1707, by N. Rowe.

S. A.

THE GOLDEN VERSES OF PYTHAGORAS

Translated by A. E. A.

1. FIRST worship the immortal gods as the Law ordains.
2. Reverence thy oath, and next, the illustrious heroes.
3. Then supplicate the good terrestrial demons, with proper offerings.
4. Honour also thy parents, and those most nearly related to thee.
5. Of other men, make him thy friend who is most distinguished by virtue.
6. Listen to his kind words, and copy his good deeds.
7. Do not hate thy friend for a small fault.
8. Now, Power is a near neighbour to necessity.
9. Know these things; accustom thyself to be the master of thy Passions:
10. First gluttony, then sloth, luxury, and anger.
11. Do no shameful act in private with thyself, nor with another:
12. And above all things respect thyself.
13. In the next place be just both in deed and word.
14. And let it not be thy habit to behave thyself in any matter thoughtlessly,

15. But consider this,—that all must die.
16. And that as the good things of Fortune may be acquired, so also they may be lost.
17. As to those calamities which befall men through Divine Fortune,
18. If thou suffer, suffer in patience, and resent them not.
19. Do thy best to remedy them, and bear in mind,
20. That Destiny does not give the largest share to good men.
21. Many sorts of reasonings, good and bad, are to be found amongst men ;
22. But be not disturbed by them, nor allow them to harass thee.
23. But if anything false of thee be put forth, bear it patiently.
24. Listen now carefully to what I am about to tell thee.
25. Let no one ever seduce thee by his words or acts,
26. Nor make thee do what is not seemly.
27. Deliberate before doing, in order that what thou doest may not be foolish.
28. For it is the part of a stupid man to speak and act without thought.
29. But do thou act so that thou shalt not be troubled by the result.
30. Do nothing also which thou dost not understand,
31. But learn all that thou shouldest know, and so thou shalt lead a pleasant life.
32. Neglect not the health of thy body.
33. Be moderate in food, and drink, and exercise.
34. Now by moderation I mean what will not injure thee.
35. Accustom thyself to a style of living which is simple but not luxurious.
36. Avoid anything which can give rise to envy.

37. Spend not unseasonably as one who knows not what is right.
38. Be not niggardly nor covetous.
39. Moderation in all things is most excellent.
40. Do only those things which cannot hurt thee, and think before doing (even them).
41. Never sleep before going over the acts of the day in thy mind.
- Wherein have I done wrong? What have I done? What have I left undone?
- Examine thyself. If thou hast done evil, blame. And if thou hast done well, rejoice.
45. Practise thoroughly all these maxims ; think on them ; love them.
46. They will put thee in the way of Divine Virtue ;
47. I swear it by Him who has put into our soul the Quaternion.
48. Who is the Eternal Source of Nature?
49. But go to thy work only after having prayed the gods to accomplish it.
50. Having done this, thou shalt know the constitution of the immortal Gods and of mortal men ;
51. How far the different Beings extend, and what contains them and holds them together.
52. Thou shalt know also, according to right, that Nature is alike in all ;
53. So that thou shalt not hope for that which thou shouldst not, and nothing shall be hidden from thee.
54. Thou shalt know also that men draw their misfortunes upon themselves of their own choice.
55. Wretches ! they neither see nor understand that their Good is close at hand.
56. Few know how to free themselves from their misfortunes.
57. Such is the Fate that takes away the senses of men.

58. Some like wheels are carried in one direction, some in another, pressed down by ills innumerable.

59. For fatal strife, innate, ever following, unseen afflicts them.

60. They ought not to provoke this, but yield and so escape.

61. O Jove, mighty Father, wouldst Thou deliver them from many evils.

62. Show them what Fate is about to overtake them.

63. But be of good heart, the race of man is divine.

64. Holy Nature shews them all her mysteries.

65. If thou knowest these things, thou wilt do what I bid thee do ;

66. And, having healed thy soul, thou wilt deliver it from these evils.

67. But abstain thou from the food, of which I have spoken, in the purifications,

68. And in the deliverance of thy Soul, decide between the courses open to you, and thoroughly examine all things.

69. Take the Supreme Mind as thy guide (who must ever direct and restrain thy course).

70. And when, after having thrown aside thy body, thou comest to the realms of most pure ether,

71. Thou shalt be a God, immortal, incorruptible.

NOTES BY A. E. A.

SUGGESTED BY THE COMMENTARIES OF HIEROCLES AND DACIER.

It is doubtful whether we have in these verses the work of the philosopher himself, for they were probably written by one of his disciples, and the ancients ascribed them to Lysis. They bear the name of Pythagoras not only because they contain his doctrines, but also because his disciples never put their names to their works, which they all imputed to their Master to do him honour and to testify their gratitude.

"Among all the Rules that contain a Summary of Philosophy, the verses of Pythagoras, called the Golden Verses, justly hold the first Rank, for they contain the general Precepts of all Philosophy, as well for what regards the Active, as the Contemplative. By their means every one may acquire Truth and Virtue, render himself pure, happily attain to the Divine Resemblance, and as is said by Plato in the *Timæus*, after having regained his Health, and recovered his Integrity and his Perfection, he may see himself again in a State of Innocence and Light."

Pythagoras begins with the precepts of active Virtue. Practical Philosophy is the mother of Virtue, as we are taught by these Verses, where practical Philosophy is called "Human Virtue" — and where the contemplative is celebrated under the name of "Divine Virtue" (45, 46).

V. i. Damascius says "God (the First Principle, that is) is raised above the reach of thought; He is an unknown and impenetrable obscurity:" while the Egyptians did not, it is said, worship this First Being, as they did not know him. And this may be the reason why, in this verse, we are bidden to worship not God, but the Sons of God.

V. ii. Pythagoras taught that God created before all things the reasonable beings: the highest and most excellent of all substances, *the Immortal Gods*, were created by his first Thought—the middle Substance, the *Heroes*, by the second Thought—the *Souls of men* by his third Thought.

V. iii. "Terrestrial"—*lit.* "under the Earth." The phrase has been explained as meaning "those who are dead after having lived a virtuous life." But Pythagoras taught that the souls of men went not under the Earth but to the *Ether*. *Demons*=endowed with knowledge. [The good Demons were the heads of the hierarchies of Elemental and planetary spirits.—S.A.]

V. vii. Or "Give way to thy friend by speaking to him mildly, and be kind to him."

Vv. xiii.-xvi. The school of Pythagoras accounted for the various states and conditions of men by asserting them to be the results of their first Life, which the souls had led in their spheres before bodies had been assigned to them. Jamblichus defends the Gods against the charge of injustice in the distribution of good and evil by saying that they knew the whole of the previous lives of each soul: lib. iv., cap. 4. Compare also Plato, *De Repub.*, lib. x.

V. xx. Because these evils then change their nature, for the good suffer patiently, and are supported by the certainty that divine good is reserved for the perfect. Compare Plato, *The Laws*: lib. x.

V. xxix. Compare the teaching of the Bhagavat Gita.—S.A.

Vv. xxx., xxxi. Comp. Plato, *Philebus*. The Pythagoreans called the first Cause or Principle, *Opportunity*; and the Master himself made a Precept of *Opportunity*. Plato in *Phædrus* says, "For this vicious Horse (the 'body') grows unruly and prances, his weight drawing him towards the Earth, unless the groom take care not to feed him too high."

Here, too, we find the reason for the choice of food made by Pythagoras.

V. xxxv. An effort has been lately made to form a guild of "Simple life."—S.A.

Vv. xli.-xliv. Porphyry tells us that Pythagoras advised his disciples to be particularly careful of two hours—that when they rise, and that of going to bed: of the first, to reflect on what lay before them; and of the second to give an account of the day's actions, and that he said of the first:—

"When drowsy sleep to morning Thoughts gives way,
Think what thou hast to do th' ensuing day."

Comp. M. Aurelius at the beginning of the second book, "We ought every morning when we rise to say to ourselves, 'To-day I shall have to do with an impertinent fellow, an ungrateful person, etc.'"

V. xlvii. Quaternion, *i.e.*, the occult powers of the number 4, meaning God. How comes God to be the Quaternion? Pythagoras is said to have treated of this question in his *Treatise of the Gods*, which is now lost: in it he is also said to have explained the teaching of Orpheus, "That the essence of number was the Principle of Things, and the Root of the Gods and of the Demons." Aristotle, too, says of numbers, that they "can never be the Principles of Actions and of changes; that they may denote certain Causes, but they can never be those Causes." The Master taught that God was the unit, that all the numbers were derived from the unit, and that the finite

interval of number was ten. The Power of ten is four, for before we reach the Decad, we find all the virtue and all the Perfection of the ten in the four: $1+2+3+4=10$; four is an arithmetical middle between one and seven, for the excess above one = its defect from seven. Now the unit contains the Powers of all other numbers, and the seven being a Virgin (for it produces no number between itself and ten, nor can it be produced by any of the numbers in that interval). So, too, the first solid is found in the Quaternion—for the Point answers to the Unit, the Line to a Binary, for from one Point we go to another Point; the superficies answers to the Ternary, for a Triangle is the most plain of all rectilineal Figures: but solidity is the nature of the Quaternion, for in the Four we find the Pyramid. There are Four Faculties that form a Judgment—Understanding, Knowledge, Opinion, and Sense. Aristotle teaches this, and adds Understanding answers to One, Knowledge to Two, Opinion to Three, or the Superficies, and Sense to the Quaternion or Solid. Plutarch in *The Opinions of the Philosophers*, chap. iii., explains the reasons.

Vv. lii., liii. Pythagoras and Socrates included Morality in Physics. In his commentary on these verses Hierocles plainly asserts that by Metempsychosis, Pythagoras meant that Vice changes man into the likeness of a beast, while Virtue makes him resemble God; and that he can be neither the one nor the other by his nature.

Vv. lxvii.-lxix. For an expanded statement of this teaching consult Plato, *Phædrus*.

IN: SOMNIUM SCIPIONIS

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