



75 AD
SOLON
638-539 B.C.
by Plutarch
translated by John Dryden

SOLON

DIDYMUS, the grammarian, in his answer to Asclepiades concerning Solon's Tables of Law, mentions a passage of one Philocles, who states that Solon's father's name was Euphorion, contrary to the opinion of all others who have written concerning him; for they generally agree that he was the son of Execestides, a man of moderate wealth and power in the city, but of a most noble stock, being descended from Codrus; his mother, as Heraclides Ponticus affirms, was cousin to Pisistratus's mother, and the two at first were great friends, partly because they were akin, and partly because of Pisistratus's noble qualities and beauty. And they say Solon loved him; and that is the reason, I suppose, that when afterwards they differed about the government, their enmity never produced any hot and violent passion, they remembered their old kindnesses, and retained-

"Still in its embers living the strong fire"

of their love and dear affection. For that Solon was not proof against beauty, nor of courage to stand up to passion and meet it-

"Hand to hand as in the ring,"

we may conjecture by his poems, and one of his laws, in which there are practices forbidden to slaves, which he would appear, therefore, to recommend to freemen. Pisistratus, it is stated, was similarly attached to one Charmus; he it was who dedicated the future of Love in the Academy, where the runners in the sacred torch race light their torches. Solon, as Hermippus writes, when his father had ruined his estate in doing benefits and kindnesses to other men, though he had friends enough that were willing to contribute to his relief, yet was ashamed to be beholden to others, since he was descended from a family who were accustomed to do kindnesses rather than receive them; and therefore applied himself to merchandise in his youth; though others assure us that he travelled rather to get learning and experience than to make money. It is certain that he was a lover of knowledge, for when he was old he would say, that he-

"Each day grew older, and learnt something new;"

and yet no admirer of riches, esteeming as equally wealthy the man-

"Who hath both gold and silver in his hand,
Horses and mules, and acres of wheat-land,
And him whose all is decent food to eat,
Clothes to his back and shoes upon his feet,
And a young wife and child, since so 'twill be,
And no more years than will with that agree;"

and in another place-

"Wealth I would have, but wealth by wrong procure

I would not; justice, e'en if slow, is sure."

And it is perfectly possible for a good man and a statesman, without being solicitous for superfluities, to show some concern for competent necessities. In his time, as Hesiod says,- "Work was a shame to none," nor was distinction made with respect to trade, but merchandise was a noble calling, which brought home the good things which the barbarous nations enjoyed, was the occasion of friendship with their kings, and a great source of experience. Some merchants have built great cities, as Protis, the founder of Massilia, to whom the Gauls, near the Rhone, were much attached. Some report also, that Thales and Hippocrates the mathematician traded; and that Plato defrayed the charges of his travels by selling oil in Egypt. Solon's softness and profuseness, his popular rather than philosophical tone about pleasure in his poems, have been ascribed to his trading life; for, having suffered a thousand dangers, it was natural they should be recompensed with some gratifications and enjoyments; but that he accounted himself rather poor than rich is evident from the lines-

"Some wicked men are rich, some good are poor,
We will not change our virtue for their store:
Virtue's a thing that none can take away;
But money changes owners all the day."

At first he used his poetry only in trifles, not for any serious purpose, but simply to pass away his idle hours; but afterwards he introduced moral sentences and state matters, which he did, not to record them merely as an historian, but to justify his own actions, and sometimes to correct, chastise, and stir up the Athenians to noble performances. Some report that he designed to put his laws into heroic verse, and that they began thus:-

"We humbly beg a blessing on our laws
From mighty Jove, and honour, and applause."

In philosophy, as most of the wise men then, he chiefly esteemed the political part of morals; in physics, he was very plain and antiquated, as appears by this:-

"It is the clouds that make the snow and hail,
And thunder comes from lightning without fail;
The sea is stormy when the winds have blown,
But it deals fairly when 'tis left alone."

And, indeed, it is probable that at that time Thales alone had raised philosophy above mere practice into speculation; and the rest of the wise men were so called from prudence in political concerns. It is said, that they had an interview at Delphi, and another at Corinth, by the procurement of Periander, who made a meeting for them, and a supper. But their reputation was chiefly raised by sending the tripod to them all, by their modest refusal, and complaisant yielding to one another. For, as the story goes, some of the Coans fishing with a net, some strangers, Milesians, bought the draught at a venture; the net brought up a golden tripod, which, they say, Helen, at her return from Troy, upon the remembrance of an old prophecy, threw in there. Now, the strangers at first contesting with the fishers about the tripod, and the cities espousing the quarrel so far as to engage themselves in a war, Apollo decided the controversy by commanding to present it to the wisest man; and first it was sent to Miletus to Thales, the Coans freely presenting him with that for

which they fought against the whole body of the Milesians; but Thales declaring Bias the wiser person, it was sent to him; from him to another; and so, going round them all, it came to Thales a second time; and, at last, being carried from Miletus to Thebes, was there dedicated to Apollo Ismenius. Theophrastus writes that it was first presented to Bias at Priene; and next to Thales at Miletus, and so through all it returned to Bias, and was afterwards sent to Delphi. This is the general report, only some, instead of a tripod, say this present was a cup sent by Croesus; others, a piece of plate that one Bathycles had left. It is stated, that Anacharsis and Solon, and Solon and Thales, were familiarly acquainted and some have delivered parts of their discourse; for, they say, Anacharsis, coming to Athens, knocked at Solon's door, and told him, that he, being a stranger, was come to be his guest, and contract a friendship with him; and Solon replying, "It is better to make friends at home," Anacharsis replied, "Then you that are at home make friendship with me." Solon, somewhat surprised at the readiness of the repartee, received him kindly, and kept him some time with him, being already engaged in public business and the compilation of his laws; which, when Anacharsis understood, he laughed at him for imagining the dishonesty and covetousness of his countrymen could be restrained by written laws, which were like spiders' webs, and would catch, it is true, the weak and poor, but easily be broken by the mighty and rich. To this Solon rejoined that men keep their promises when neither side can get anything by the breaking of them; and he would so fit his laws to the citizens, that all should understand it was more eligible to be just than to break the laws. But the event rather agreed with the conjecture of Anacharsis than Solon's hope. Anacharsis, being once at the Assembly, expressed his wonder at the fact that in Greece wise men spoke and fools decided.

Solon went, they say, to Thales, at Miletus, and wondered that Thales took no care to get him a wife and children. To this, Thales made no answer for the present; but a few days after procured a stranger to pretend that he had left Athens ten days ago; and Solon inquiring what news there, the man, according to his instructions, replied, "None but a young man's funeral, which the whole city attended; for he was the son, they said, of an honourable man, the most virtuous of the citizens, who was not then at home, but had been travelling a long time." Solon replied, "What a miserable man is he! But what was his name?" "I have heard it," says the man, "but have now forgotten it, only there was a great talk of his wisdom and his justice." Thus Solon was drawn on by every answer, and his fears heightened, till at last, being extremely concerned, he mentioned his own name, and asked the stranger if that young man was called Solon's son; and the stranger assenting, he began to beat his head, and to do and say all that is usual with men in transports of grief. But Thales took his hand, and, with a smile, said, "These things, Solon, keep me from marriage and rearing children, which are too great for even your constancy to support; however, be not concerned at the report, for it is a fiction." This Hermippus relates, from Pataecus, who boasted that he had Aesop's soul.

However, it is irrational and poor-spirited not to seek conveniences for fear of losing them, for upon the same account we should not allow ourselves to like wealth, glory, or wisdom, since we may fear to be deprived of all these; nay, even virtue itself, than which there is no greater nor more desirable possession, is often suspended by sickness or drugs. Now Thales, though unmarried, could not be free from solicitude unless he likewise felt no care for his friends, his kinsman, or his country; yet we are told he adopted Cybisthus, his sister's son. For the soul, having a principle of kindness in

itself, and being born to love, as well as perceive, think, or remember, inclines and fixes upon some stranger, when a man has none of his own to embrace. And alien or illegitimate objects insinuate themselves into his affections, as into some estate that lacks lawful heirs; and with affection come anxiety and care; insomuch that you may see men that use the strongest language against the marriage-bed and the fruit of it, when some servant's or concubine's child is sick or dies, almost killed with grief, and abjectly lamenting. Some have given way to shameful and desperate sorrow at the loss of a dog or horse; others have borne the death of virtuous children without any extravagant or unbecoming grief, have passed the rest of their lives like men, and according to the principles of reason. It is not affection, it is weakness that brings men, unarmed against fortune by reason, into these endless pains and terrors; and they indeed have not even the present enjoyment of what they dote upon, the possibility of the future loss causing them continual pangs, tremors, and distresses. We must not provide against the loss of wealth by poverty, or of friends by refusing all acquaintance, or of children by having none, but by morality and reason. But of this too much.

Now, when the Athenians were tired with a tedious and difficult war that they conducted against the Megarians for the island Salamis and made a law that it should be death for any man, by writing or speaking, to assert that the city ought to endeavour to recover it, Solon, vexed at the disgrace, and perceiving thousands of the youth wished for somebody to begin, but did not dare to stir first for fear of the law, counterfeited a distraction, and by his own family it was spread about the city that he was mad. He then secretly composed some elegiac verses, and getting them by heart, that it might seem extempore, ran out into the market-place with a cap upon his head, and, the people gathering about him, got upon the herald's stand, and sang that elegy which begins thus-

"I am a herald come from Salamis the fair,
My news from thence my verses shall declare."

The poem is called Salamis; it contains an hundred verses very elegantly written; when it had been sung, his friends commended it, and especially Pisistratus exhorted the citizens to obey his directions; insomuch that they recalled the law, and renewed the war under Solon's conduct. The popular tale is, that with Pisistratus he sailed to Colias, and, finding the women, according to the custom of the country there, sacrificing to Ceres, he sent a trusty friend to Salamis, who should pretend himself a renegade, and advise them, if they desired to seize the chief Athenian women, to come with him at once to Colias; the Megarians presently sent off men in the vessel with him; and Solon, seeing it put off from the island, commanded the women to be gone, and some beardless youths, dressed in their clothes, their shoes and caps, and privately armed with daggers, to dance and play near the shore till the enemies had landed and the vessel was in their power. Things being thus ordered, the Megarians were lured with the appearance, and, coming to the shore, jumped out, eager who should first seize a prize, so that not one of them escaped; and the Athenians set sail for the island and took it.

Others say that it was not taken this way, but that he first received this oracle from Delphi:-

"Those heroes that in fair Asopia rest,
All buried with their faces to the west,
Go and appease with offerings of the best;

and that Solon, sailing by night to the island, sacrificed to the heroes Periphemus and Cychreus, and then taking five hundred Athenian volunteers (a law having passed that those that took the island should be highest in the government), with a number of fisher-boats and one thirty-oared ship, anchored in a bay of Salamis that looks towards Nisaea; and the Megarians that were then in the island, hearing only an uncertain report, hurried to their arms, and sent a ship to reconnoiter the enemies. This ship Solon took, and, securing the Megarians, manned it with Athenians, and gave them orders to sail to the island with as much privacy as possible; meantime he, with the other soldiers, marched against the Megarians by land, and whilst they were fighting, those from the ship took the city. And this narrative is confirmed by the following solemnity, that was afterwards observed: An Athenian ship used to sail silently at first to the island, then, with noise and a great shout, one leapt out armed, and with a loud cry ran to the promontory Sciradium to meet those that approached upon the land. And just by there stands a temple which Solon dedicated to Mars. For he beat the Megarians, and as many as were not killed in the battle he sent away upon conditions.

The Megarians, however, still contending, and both sides having received considerable losses, they chose the Spartans for arbitrators. Now, many affirm that Homer's authority did Solon a considerable kindness, and that, introducing a line into the Catalogue of Ships, when the matter was to be determined, he read the passage as follows:-

"Twelve ships from Salamis stout Ajax brought,
And ranked his men where the Athenians fought."

The Athenians, however, call this but an idle story, and report that Solon made it appear to the judges, that Philaeus and Eurysaces, the sons of Ajax, being made citizens of Athens, gave them the island, and that one of them dwelt at Brauron in Attica, the other at Melite; and they have a township of Philaidae, to which Pisistratus belonged, deriving its name from this Philaeus. Solon took a farther argument against the Megarians from the dead bodies, which, he said, were not buried after their fashion, but according to the Athenian; for the Megarians turn the corpse to the east, the Athenians to the west. But Hereas the Megarian denies this, and affirms that they likewise turn the body to the west, and also that the Athenians have a separate tomb for everybody, but the Megarians put two or three into one. However, some of Apollo's oracles, where he calls Salamis Ionian, made much for Solon. This matter was determined by five Spartans, Critolaidas, Amompharetus, Hypsechidas, Anaxilas, and Cleomenes.

For this, Solon grew famed and powerful; but his advice in favour of defending the oracle at Delphi, to give aid, and not to suffer the Cirrhaeans to profane it, but to maintain the honour of the god, got him most repute among the Greeks; for upon his persuasion the Amphictyons undertook the war, as amongst others, Aristotle affirms, in his enumeration of the victors at the Pythian games, where he makes Solon the author of this counsel. Solon, however, was not general in that expedition, as Hermippus states, out of Evanthes the Samian; for Aeschines the orator says no such thing, and, in the Delphian register, Alcmaeon, not Solon, is named as commander of the Athenians.

Now the Cylonian pollution had a long while disturbed the commonwealth, ever since the time when Megacles the archon persuaded the conspirators with Cylon that took sanctuary in Minerva's temple to come down and stand to a fair trial. And they, tying a thread to the image, and holding one end of it, went down to the tribunal; but when they came to the temple of the Furies, the thread broke of its

own accord, upon which, as if the goddess had refused them protection, they were seized by Megacles and the other magistrates as many as were without the temples were stoned, these that fled for sanctuary were butchered at the altar, and only those escaped who made supplication to the wives of the magistrates. But they from that time were considered under pollution, and regarded with hatred. The remainder of the faction of Cylon grew strong again, and had continual quarrels with the family of Megacles; and now the quarrel being at its height, and the people divided, Solon, being in reputation, interposed with the chiefest of the Athenians, and by entreaty and admonition persuaded the polluted to submit to a trial and the decision of three hundred noble citizens. And Myron of Phlya being their accuser, they were found guilty, and as many as were then alive were banished, and the bodies of the dead were dug up, and scattered beyond the confines of the country. In the midst of these distractions, the Megarians falling upon them, they lost Nisaea and Salamis again; besides, the city was disturbed with superstitious fears and strange appearances, and the priests declared that the sacrifices intimated some villainies and pollutions that were to be expiated. Upon this, they sent for Epimenides the Phaestian from Crete, who is counted the seventh wise man by those that will not admit Periander into the number. He seems to have been thought a favourite of heaven, possessed of knowledge in all the supernatural and ritual parts of religion; and, therefore, the men of his age called him a new Curies, and son of a nymph named Balte. When he came to Athens, and grew acquainted with Solon, he served him in many instances, and prepared the way for his legislation. He made them moderate in their forms of worship, and abated their mourning by ordering some sacrifices presently after the funeral, and taking off those severe and barbarous ceremonies which the women usually practised; but the greatest benefit was his purifying and sanctifying the city, by certain propitiatory and expiatory lustrations, and foundations of sacred buildings, by that means making them more submissive to justice, and more inclined to harmony. It is reported that, looking upon Munychia, and considering a long while. he said to those that stood by, "How blind is man in future things! for did the Athenians foresee what mischief this would do their city, they would even eat it with their own teeth to be rid of it." A similar anticipation is ascribed to Thales; they say he commanded his friends to bury him in an obscure and contemned quarter of the territory of Mileteus, saying that it should some day be the market-place of the Milesians. Epimenides, being much honoured, and receiving from the city rich offers of large gifts and privileges, requested but one branch of the sacred olive, and, on that being granted, returned.

The Athenians, now the Cylonian sedition was over and the polluted gone into banishment fell into their old quarrels about the government, there being as many different parties as there were diversities in the country. The Hill quarter favoured democracy, the Plain, oligarchy, and those that lived by the Seaside stood for a mixed sort of government, and so hindered either of the other parties from prevailing. And the disparity of fortune between the rich and the poor, at that time, also reached its height; so that the city seemed to be in a truly dangerous condition, and no other means for freeing it from disturbances and settling it to be possible but a despotic power. All the people were indebted to the rich; and either they tilled their land for their creditors, paying them a sixth part of the increase, and were, therefore, called Hectemorii and Thetes, or else they engaged their body for the debt, and might be seized, and either sent into slavery at home, or sold to strangers; some (for no law forbade it) were forced to sell their children, or fly their

country to avoid the cruelty of their creditors; but the most part and the bravest of them began to combine together and encourage one another to stand to it, to choose a leader, to liberate the condemned debtors, divide the land, and change the government.

Then the wisest of the Athenians, perceiving Solon was of all men the only one not implicated in the troubles, that he had not joined in the exactions of the rich and was not involved in the necessities of the poor, pressed him to succour the commonwealth and compose the differences. Though Phantias the Lesbian affirms, that Solon, to save his country' put a trick upon both parties, and privately promised the poor a division of the lands, and the rich security for their debts. Solon, however, himself says, that it was reluctantly at first that he engaged in state affairs, being afraid of the pride of one party and the greediness of the other; he was chosen archon, however, after Philombrotus, and empowered to be an arbitrator and lawgiver; the rich consenting because he was wealthy, the poor because he was honest. There was a saying of his current before the election, that when things are even there never can be war, and this pleased both parties, the wealthy and the poor; the one conceiving him to mean, when all have their fair proportion; the others, when all are absolutely equal. Thus, there being great hopes on both sides, the chief men pressed Solon to take the government into his own hands, and, when he was once settled, manage the business freely and according to his pleasure; and many of the commons, perceiving it would be a difficult change to be effected by law and reason, were willing to have one wise and just man set over the affairs; and some say that Solon had this oracle from Apollo-

"Take the mid-seat, and be the vessel's guide;
Many in Athens are upon your side."

But chiefly his familiar friends chid him for disaffecting monarchy only because of the name, as if the virtue of the ruler could not make it a lawful form; Euboea had made this experiment when it chose Tynnondas, and Mitylene, which had made Pittacus its prince; yet this could not shake Solon's resolution; but, as they say, he replied to his friends, that it was true a tyranny was a very fair spot, but it had no way down from it; and in a copy of verses to Phocus he writes"-

that I spared my land,
And withheld from usurpation and from violence my hand,
And forbore to fix a stain and a disgrace on my good name,
I regret not; I believe that it will be my chiefest fame."

From which it is manifest that he was a man of great reputation before he gave his laws. The several mocks that were put upon him for refusing the power, he records in these words:-

"Solon surely was a dreamer, and a man of simple mind;
When the gods would give him fortune, he of his own will
declined;
When the net was full of fishes, over-heavy thinking it,
He declined to haul it up, through want of heart and want of wit.
Had but I that chance of riches and of kingship, for one day,
I would give my skin for flaying, and my house to die away."

Thus he makes the many and the low people speak of him. Yet, though he refused the government, he was not too mild in the affair; he did not show himself mean and submissive to the powerful, nor

make his laws to pleasure those that chose him. For where it was well before, he applied no remedy, nor altered anything, for fear lest-

"Overthrowing altogether and disordering the state,"

he should be too weak to new-model and recompose it to a tolerable condition; but what he thought he could effect by persuasion upon the pliable, and by force upon the stubborn, this he did, as he himself says-

"With force and justice working both in one."

And, therefore, when he was afterwards asked if he had left the Athenians the best laws that could be given, he replied, "The best they could receive." The way which, the moderns say, the Athenians have of softening the badness of a thing, by ingeniously giving it some pretty and innocent appellation, calling harlots, for example, mistresses, tributes customs, a garrison a guard, and the jail the chamber, seem originally to have been Solon's contrivance, who called cancelling debts Seisacthea, a relief, or disencumbrance. For the first thing which he settled was, that what debts remained should be forgiven, and no man, for the future, should engage the body of his debtor for security. Though some, as Androtion, affirm that the debts were not cancelled, but the interest only lessened, which sufficiently pleased the people; so that they named this benefit the Seisacthea, together with the enlarging their measures and raising the value of their money; for he made a pound, which before passed for seventy-three drachmas, go for a hundred; so that, though the number of pieces in the payment was equal, the value was less; which proved a considerable benefit to those that were to discharge great debts, and no loss to the creditors. But most agree that it was the taking off the debts that was called Seisacthea, which is confirmed by some places in his poem, where he takes honour to himself, that-

"The mortgage-stones that covered her, by me
Removed,- the land that was a slave is free:

that some who had been seized for their debts he had brought back from other countries, where-

"-so far their lot to roam,
They had forgot the language of their home;

and some he had set at liberty-

"Who here in shameful servitude were held."

While he was designing this, a most vexatious thing happened; for when he had resolved to take off the debts, and was considering the proper form and fit beginning for it, he told some of his friends, Conon, Clinias, and Hipponicus, in whom he had a great deal of confidence, that he would not meddle with the lands, but only free the people from their debts; upon which they, using their advantage, made haste and borrowed some considerable sums of money, and purchased some large farms; and when the law was enacted, they kept the possessions, and would not return the money; which brought Solon into great suspicion and dislike, as if he himself had not been abused, but was concerned in the contrivance. But he presently stopped this suspicion, by releasing his debtors of five talents (for he had

lent so much), according to the law; others, as Polyzelus the Rhodian, say fifteen; his friends, however, were ever afterward called Chreocopidae, repudiators.

In this he pleased neither party, for the rich were angry for their money, and the poor that the land was not divided, and, as Lycurgus ordered in his commonwealth, all men reduced to equality. He, it is true, being the eleventh from Hercules, and having reigned many years in Lacedaemon, had got a great reputation and friends and power, which he could use in modelling his state; and applying force more than persuasion, insomuch that he lost his eye in the scuffle, was able to employ the most effectual means for the safety and harmony of a state, by not permitting any to be poor or rich in his commonwealth. Solon could not rise to that in his polity, being but a citizen of the middle classes; yet he acted fully up to the height of his power, having nothing but the good-will and good opinion of his citizens to rely on; and that he offended the most part, who looked for another result, he declares in the words-

"Formerly they boasted of me vainly; with averted eyes
Now they look askance upon me; friends no more, but enemies."

And yet had any other man, he says, received the same power-

"He would not have forborne, nor let alone,
But made the fattest of the milk his own."

Soon, however, becoming sensible of the good that was done, they laid by their grudges, made a public sacrifice, calling it Seisacthea, and chose Solon to new-model and make laws for the commonwealth, giving him the entire power over everything, their magistracies, their assemblies, courts, and councils; that he should appoint the number, times of meeting, and what estate they must have that could be capable of these, and dissolve or continue any of the present constitutions, according to his pleasure.

First, then, he repealed all Draco's laws, except those concerning homicide, because they were too severe, and the punishment too great; for death was appointed for almost all offences, insomuch that those that were convicted of idleness were to die, and those that stole a cabbage or an apple to suffer even as villains that committed sacrilege or murder. So that Demades, in after time, was thought to have said very happily, that Draco's laws were written not with ink but blood; and he himself, being once asked why he made death the punishment of most offences, replied, "Small ones deserve that, and I have no higher for the greater crimes."

Next, Solon, being willing to continue the magistracies in the hands of the rich men, and yet receive the people into the other part of the government, took an account of the citizens' estates, and those that were worth five hundred measures of fruit, dry and liquid, he placed in the first rank, calling them Pentacosimedimni; those that could keep an horse, or were worth three hundred measures, were named Hippada Teluntas, and made the second class; the Zeugitae, that had two hundred measures, were in the third; and all the others were called Thetes, who were not admitted to any office, but could come to the assembly, and act as jurors; which at first seemed nothing, but afterwards was found an enormous privilege, as almost every matter of dispute came before them in this latter capacity. Even in the cases which he assigned to the archon's cognisance, he allowed an appeal to the courts. Besides, it is said that he was obscure and ambiguous in the wording of his laws, on purpose to increase the honour of his courts; for since their differences could not be adjusted by the

letter, they would have to bring all their causes to the judges, who thus were in a manner masters of the laws. Of this equalisation he himself makes mention in this manner:-

"Such power I gave the people as might do,
Abridged not what they had, now lavished new,
Those that were great in wealth and high in place
My counsel likewise kept from all disgrace.
Before them both I held my shield of might,
And let not either touch the other's right."

And for the greater security of the weak commons, he gave general liberty of indicting for an act of injury; if any one was beaten, maimed, or suffered any violence, any man that would and was able might prosecute the wrong-doer; intending by this to accustom the citizens, like members of the same body, to resent and be sensible of one another's injuries. And there is a saying of his agreeable to his law, for, being asked what city was best modelled, "That," said he, "where those that are not injured try and punish the unjust as much as those that are."

When he had constituted the Areopagus of those who had been yearly archons, of which he himself was a member therefore, observing that the people, now free from their debts, were unsettled and imperious, he formed another council of four hundred, a hundred out of each of the four tribes, which was to inspect all matters before they were propounded to the people, and to take care that nothing but what had been first examined should be brought before the general assembly. The upper council, or Areopagus, he made inspectors and keepers of the laws, conceiving that the commonwealth, held by these two councils, like anchors, would be less liable to be tossed by tumults, and the people be more quiet. Such is the general statement, that Solon instituted the Areopagus; which seems to be confirmed, because Draco makes no mention of the Areopagites, but in all causes of blood refers to the Ephetae; yet Solon's thirteenth table contains the eighth law set down in these very words: "Whoever before Solon's archonship were disfranchised, let them be restored, except those that, being condemned by the Areopagus, Ephetae, or in the Prytaneum by the kings, for homicide, murder, or designs against the government, were in banishment when this law was made; and these words seem to show that the Areopagus existed before Solon's laws, for who could be condemned by that council before his time, if he was the first that instituted the court? unless, which is probable, there is some ellipsis, or want of precision in the language, and it should run thus:- "Those that are convicted of such offences as belong to the cognisance of the Areopagites, Ephetae, or the Prytanen, when this law was made," shall remain still in disgrace, whilst others are restored; of this the reader must judge.

Amongst his other laws, one is very peculiar and surprising, which disfranchises all who stand neuter in a sedition; for it seems he would not have any one remain insensible and regardless of the public good, and securing his private affairs, glory that he has no feeling of the distempers of his country; but at once join with the good party and those that have the right upon their side, assist and venture with them, rather than keep out of harm's way and watch who would get the better. It seems an absurd and foolish law which permits an heiress, if her lawful husband fail her, to take his nearest kinsman; yet some say this law was well contrived against those who, conscious of their own unfitness, yet, for the sake of the portion, would match with heiresses, and make use of law to put a violence upon nature; for now, since she can quit him for whom she pleases, they

would either abstain from such marriages, or continue them with disgrace, and suffer for their covetousness and designed affront; it is well done, moreover, to confine her to her husband's nearest kinsman, that the children may be of the same family. Agreeable to this is the law that the bride and bridegroom shall be shut into a chamber, and eat a quince together; and that the husband of an heiress shall consort with her thrice a month; for though there be no children, yet it is an honour and due affection which an husband ought to pay to a virtuous, chaste wife; it takes off all petty differences, and will not permit their little quarrels to proceed to a rupture.

In all other marriages he forbade dowries to be given; the wife was to have three suits of clothes, a little inconsiderable household stuff, and that was all; for he would not have marriages contracted for gain or an estate, but for pure love, kind affection, and birth of children. When the mother of Dionysius desired him to marry her to one of his citizens, "Indeed," said he, "by my tyranny I have broken my country's laws, but cannot put a violence upon those of nature by an unseasonable marriage." Such disorder is never to be suffered in a commonwealth, nor such unseasonable and unloving and unperforming marriages, which attain no due end or fruit; any provident governor or lawgiver might say to an old man that takes a young wife what is said to Philoctetes in the tragedy-

"Truly, in a fit state thou to marry!

and if he find a young man, with a rich and elderly wife, growing fat in his place, like the partridges, remove him to a young woman of proper age. And of this enough.

Another commendable law of Solon's is that which forbids men to speak evil of the dead; for it is pious to think the deceased sacred, and just, not to meddle with those that are gone, and politic, to prevent the perpetuity of discord. He likewise forbade them to speak evil of the living in the temples, the courts of justice, the public offices, or at the games, or else to pay three drachmas to the person, and two to the public. For never to be able to control passion shows a weak nature and ill-breeding; and always to moderate it is very hard, and to some impossible. And laws must look to possibilities, if the maker designs to punish few in order to their amendment, and not many to no purpose.

He is likewise much commended for his law concerning wills; before him none could be made, but all the wealth and estate of the deceased belonged to his family; but he by permitting them, if they had no children to bestow it on whom they pleased, showed that he esteemed friendship a stronger tie than kindred, affection than necessity; and made every man's estate truly his own. Yet he allowed not all sorts of legacies, but those only which were not extorted by the frenzy of a disease, charms, imprisonment, force, or the persuasions of a wife; with good reason thinking that being seduced into wrong was as bad as being forced, and that between deceit and necessity, flattery and compulsion, there was little difference, since both may equally suspend the exercise of reason.

He regulated the walks, feasts, and mourning of the women and took away everything that was either unbecoming or immodest; when they walked abroad, no more than three articles of dress were allowed them; an obol's worth of meat and drink; and no basket above a cubit high; and at night they were not to go about unless in a chariot with a torch before them. Mourners tearing themselves to raise pity, and set wailings, and at one man's funeral to lament for another, he forbade. To offer an ox at the grave was not permitted, nor to bury above three pieces of dress with the body, or visit the tombs of any

besides their own family, unless at the very funeral; most of which are likewise forbidden by our laws, but this is further added in ours, that those that are convicted of extravagance in their mournings are to be punished as soft and effeminate by the censors of women.

Observing the city to be filled with persons that flocked from all parts into Attica for security of living, and that most of the country was barren and unfruitful, and that traders at sea import nothing to those that could give them nothing in exchange, he turned his citizens to trade, and made a law that no son be obliged to relieve a father who had not bred him up to any calling. It is true, Lycurgus, having a city free from all strangers, and land, according to Euripides-

"Large for large hosts, for twice their number much,"

and, above all, an abundance of labourers about Sparta, who should not be left idle, but be kept down with continual toil and work, did well to take off his citizens from laborious and mechanical occupations, and keep them to their arms, and teach them only the art of war. But Solon, fitting his laws to the state of things, and not making things to suit his laws, and finding the ground scarce rich enough to maintain the husbandmen, and altogether incapable of feeding an unoccupied and leisured multitude, brought trades into credit, and ordered the Areopagites to examine how every man got his living, and chastise the idle. But that law was yet more rigid which, as Heraclides Ponticus delivers, declared the sons of unmarried mothers not obliged to relieve their fathers; for he that avoids the honourable form of union shows that he does not take a woman for children, but for pleasure, and thus gets his just reward, and has taken away from himself every title to upbraid his children, to whom he has made their very birth a scandal and reproach.

Solon's laws in general about women are his strangest; for he permitted any one to kill an adulterer that found him in the act- but if any one forced a free woman, a hundred drachmas was the fine; if he enticed her, twenty; except those that sell themselves openly, that is, harlots, who go openly to those that hire them. He made it unlawful to sell a daughter or a sister, unless, being yet unmarried, she was found wanton. Now it is irrational to punish the same crime sometimes very severely and without remorse, and sometimes very lightly, and as it were in sport, with a trivial fine; unless there being little money then in Athens, scarcity made those mulcts the more grievous punishment. In the valuation for sacrifices, a sheep and a bushel were both estimated at a drachma; the victor in the Isthmian games was to have for reward an hundred drachmas; the conqueror in the Olympian, five hundred; he that brought a wolf, five drachmas; for a whelp, one; the former sum, as Demetrius the Phalerian asserts, was the value of an ox, the latter, of a sheep. The prices which Solon, in his sixteenth table, sets on choice victims, were naturally far greater; yet they, too, are very low in comparison of the present. The Athenians were, from the beginning, great enemies to wolves, their fields being better for pasture than corn. Some affirm their tribes did not take their names from the sons of Ion, but from the different sorts of occupation that they followed; the soldiers were called Hoplitae, the craftsmen Ergades, and, of the remaining two, the farmers Gedeontes, and the shepherds and graziers Aegicores.

Since the country has but few rivers, lakes, or large springs, and many used wells which they had dug, there was a law made, that, where there was a public well within a hippicon, that is, four furlongs, all should draw at that; but when it was farther off, they should try and procure a well of their own; and if they had dug ten

fathoms deep and could find no water, they had liberty to fetch a pitcherful of four gallons and a half in a day from their neighbours'; for he thought it prudent to make provision against want, but not to supply laziness. He showed skill in his orders about planting, for any one that would plant another tree was not to set it within five feet of his neighbour's field; but if a fig or an olive not within nine; for their roots spread farther, nor can they be planted near all sorts of trees without damage, for they draw away the nourishment, and in some cases are noxious by their effluvia. He that would dig a pit or a ditch was to dig it at the distance of its own depth from his neighbour's ground; and he that would raise stocks of bees was not to place them within three hundred feet of those which another had already raised.

He permitted only oil to be exported, and those that exported any other fruit, the archon was solemnly to curse, or else pay an hundred drachmas himself; and this law was written in his first table, and, therefore, let none think it incredible, as some affirm, that the exportation of figs was once unlawful, and the informer against the delinquents called a sycophant. He made a law, also, concerning hurts and injuries from beasts, in which he commands the master of any dog that bit a man to deliver him up with a log about his neck, four and a half feet long; a happy device for men's security. The law concerning naturalizing strangers is of doubtful character; he permitted only those to be made free of Athens who were in perpetual exile from their own country, or came with their whole family to trade there; this he did, not to discourage strangers, but rather to invite them to a permanent participation in the privileges of the government; and, besides, he thought those would prove the more faithful citizens who had been forced from their own country, or voluntarily forsook it. The law of public entertainment (*parasitein* is his name for it) is also peculiarly Solon's; for if any man came often, or if he that was invited refused, they were punished, for he concluded that one was greedy, the other a contemner of the state.

All his laws he established for an hundred years, and wrote them on wooden tables or rollers, named *axones*, which might be turned round in oblong cases; some of their relics were in my time still to be seen in the Prytaneum, or common hall at Athens. These, as Aristotle states, were called *cyrbes*, and there is a passage of Cratinus the comedian-

"By Solon, and by Draco, if you please,
Whose *Cyrbes* make the fires that parch our peas."

But some say those are properly *cyrbes*, which contain laws concerning sacrifices and the rites of religion, and all the others *axones*. The council all jointly swore to confirm the laws, and every one of the Thesmothetae vowed for himself at the stone in the market-place, that if he broke any of the statutes, he would dedicate a golden statue, as big as himself, at Delphi.

Observing the irregularity of the months, and that the moon does not always rise and set with the sun, but often in the same day overtakes and gets before him, he ordered the day should be named the Old and New, attributing that part of it which was before the conjunction to the old moon, and the rest to the new, he being the first, it seems, that understood that verse of Homer-

"The end and the beginning of the month,"

and the following day he called the new moon. After the twentieth he did not count by addition, but, like the moon itself in its wane, by

subtraction; thus up to the thirtieth.

Now when these laws were enacted, and some came to Solon every day, to commend or dispraise them, and to advise, if possible, to leave out or put in something, and many criticized and desired him to explain, and tell the meaning of such and such a passage, he, knowing that to do it was useless, and not to do it would get him ill-will, and desirous to bring himself out of all straits, and to escape all displeasure and exceptions, it being a hard thing, as he himself says-

"In great affairs to satisfy all sides,"

as an excuse for travelling, bought a trading vessel, and, having leave for ten years' absence, departed, hoping that by that time his laws would have become familiar.

His first voyage was for Egypt, and he lived, as he himself says-

"Near Nilus' mouth, by fair Canopus' shore,"

and spent some time in study with Psenophis of Heliopolis, and Sonchis the Saite, the most learned of all the priests; from whom, as Plato says, getting knowledge of the Atlantic story, he put it into a poem, and proposed to bring it to the knowledge of the Greeks. From thence he sailed to Cyprus, where he was made much of by Philocyprus, one of the kings there, who had a small city built by Demophon, Theseus's son, near the river Clarius, in a strong situation, but incommodious and uneasy of access. Solon persuaded him, since there lay a fair plain below, to remove, and build there a pleasanter and more spacious city. And he stayed himself, and assisted in gathering inhabitants, and in fitting it both for defence and convenience of living; insomuch that many flocked to Philocyprus, and the other kings imitated the design; and, therefore, to honour Solon, he called the city Soli, which was formerly named Aepea. And Solon himself, in his Elegies, addressing Philocyprus, mentions this foundation in these words:-

"Long may you live, and fill the Solian throne,
Succeeded still by children of your own;
And from your happy island while I sail,
Let Cyprus send for me a favouring gale;
May she advance, and bless your new command,
Prosper your town, and send me safe to land."

That Solon should discourse with Croesus, some think not agreeable with chronology; but I cannot reject so famous and well-attested a narrative, and, what is more, so agreeable to Solon's temper, and so worthy his wisdom and greatness of mind, because, forsooth, it does not agree with some chronological canons, which thousands have endeavoured to regulate, and yet, to this day, could never bring their differing opinions to any agreement. They say, therefore, that Solon, coming to Croesus at his request, was in the same condition as an inland man when first he goes to see the sea; for as he fancies every river he meets with to be the ocean, so Solon, as he passed through the court, and saw a great many nobles richly dressed, and proudly attended with a multitude of guards and footboys, thought every one had been the king, till he was brought to Croesus, who was decked with every possible rarity and curiosity, in ornaments of jewels, purple, and gold, that could make a grand and gorgeous spectacle of him. Now when Solon came before him, and seemed not at all surprised, nor gave Croesus those compliments he

expected, but showed himself to all discerning eyes to be a man that despised the gaudiness and petty ostentation of it, he commanded them to open all his treasure houses, and carry him to see his sumptuous furniture and luxuries, though he did not wish it; Solon could judge of him well enough by the first sight of him; and, when he returned from viewing all, Croesus asked him if ever he had known a happier man than he. And when Solon answered that he had known one Tellus, a fellow-citizen of his own, and told him that this Tellus had been an honest man, had had good children, a competent estate, and died bravely in battle for his country, Croesus took him for an ill-bred fellow and a fool, for not measuring happiness by the abundance of gold and silver, and preferring the life and death of a private and mean man before so much power and empire. He asked him, however, again, if, besides Tellus, he knew any other man more happy. And Solon replying, Yes, Cleobis and Biton, who were loving brothers, and extremely dutiful sons to their mother, and, when the oxen delayed her, harnessed themselves to the wagon, and drew her to Juno's temple, her neighbours all calling her happy, and she herself rejoicing; then, after sacrificing and feasting, they went to rest, and never rose again, but died in the midst of their honour a painless and tranquil death. "What," said Croesus, angrily, "and dost not thou reckon us amongst the happy men at all?" Solon, unwilling either to flatter or exasperate him more, replied, "The gods, O king, have given the Greeks all other gifts in moderate degree; and so our wisdom, too, is a cheerful and a homely, not a noble and kingly wisdom; and this, observing the numerous misfortunes that attend all conditions, forbids us to grow insolent upon our present enjoyments, or to admire any man's happiness that may yet, in course of time, suffer change. For the uncertain future has yet to come, with every possible variety of fortune; and him only to whom the divinity has continued happiness unto the end we call happy; to salute as happy one that is still in the midst of life and hazard, we think as little safe and conclusive as to crown and proclaim as victorious the wrestler that is yet in the ring." After this, he was dismissed, having given Croesus some pain, but no instruction.

Aesop, who wrote the fables, being then at Sardis upon Croesus's invitation, and very much esteemed, was concerned that Solon was so ill received, and gave him this advice: "Solon, let your converse with kings be either short or seasonable." "Nay, rather," replied Solon, "either short or reasonable." So at this time Croesus despised Solon; but when he was overcome by Cyrus, had lost his city, was taken alive, condemned to be burnt, and laid bound upon the pile before all the Persians and Cyrus himself, he cried out as loud as possibly he could three times, "O Solon!" and Cyrus being surprised, and sending some to inquire what man or god this Solon was, who alone he invoked in this extremity, Croesus told him the whole story, saying, "He was one of the wise men of Greece, whom I sent for, not to be instructed, or to learn anything that I wanted, but that he should see and be a witness of my happiness; the loss of which was, it seems, to be a greater evil than the enjoyment was a good; for when I had them they were goods only in opinion, but now the loss of them has brought upon me intolerable and real evils. And he, conjecturing from what then was, this that now is, bade look to the end of my life, and not rely and grow proud upon uncertainties." When this was told Cyrus, who was a wiser man than Croesus, and saw in the present example Solon's maxim confirmed, he not only freed Croesus from punishment, but honoured him as long as he lived; and Solon had the glory, by the same saying, to save one king and instruct another.

When Solon was gone, the citizens began to quarrel; Lycurgus headed the Plain; Megacles, the son of Alcmaeon, those to the Seaside;

and Pisistratus the Hill-party, in which were the poorest people, the Thetes, and greatest enemies to the rich; insomuch that, though the city still used the new laws, yet all looked for and desired a change of government, hoping severally that the change would be better for them, and put them above the contrary faction. Affairs standing thus, Solon returned, and was revered by all, and honoured; but his old age would not permit him to be as active, and to speak in public, as formerly; yet, by privately conferring with the heads of the factions, he endeavoured to compose the differences, Pisistratus appearing the most tractable; for he was extremely smooth and engaging in his language, a great friend to the poor, and moderate in his resentments; and what nature had not given him, he had the skill to imitate; so that he was trusted more than the others, being accounted a prudent and orderly man, one that loved equality, and would be an enemy to any that moved against the present settlement. Thus he deceived the majority of people; but Solon quickly discovered his character, and found out his design before any one else; yet did not hate him upon this, but endeavoured to humble him, and bring him off from his ambition, and often told him and others, that if any one could banish the passion for pre-eminence from his mind, and cure him of his desire of absolute power, none would make a more virtuous man or a more excellent citizen. Thespis, at this time, beginning to act tragedies, and the thing, because it was new, taking very much with the multitude, though it was not yet made a matter of competition, Solon, being by nature fond of hearing and learning something new, and now, in his old age, living idly, and enjoying himself, indeed, with music and with wine, went to see Thespis himself, as the ancient custom was, act: and after the play was done, he addressed him, and asked him if he was not ashamed to tell so many lies before such a number of people; and Thespis replying that it was no harm to say or do so in play, Solon vehemently struck his staff against the ground: "Ah," said he, "if we honour and commend such play as this, we shall find it some day in our business."

Now when Pisistratus, having wounded himself, was brought into the market-place in a chariot, and stirred up the people, as if he had been thus treated by his opponents because of his political conduct, and a great many were enraged and cried out, Solon, coming close to him, said, "This, O son of Hippocrates, is a bad copy of Homer's Ulysses; you do, to trick your countrymen, what he did to deceive his enemies." After this, the people were eager to protect Pisistratus, and met in an assembly, where one Ariston making a motion that they should allow Pisistratus fifty clubmen for a guard to his person, Solon opposed it, and said much to the same purport as what he has left us in his poems-

"You dote upon his words and taking phrase;"

and again-

"True, you are singly each a crafty soul,
But all together make one empty fool."

But observing the poor men bent to gratify Pisistratus, and tumultuous, and the rich fearful and getting out of harm's way, he departed, saying he was wiser than some and stouter than others; wiser than those that did not understand the design, stouter than those that, though they understood it, were afraid to oppose the tyranny. Now, the people, having passed the law, were not nice with Pisistratus about the number of his clubmen, but took no notice of it, though he enlisted and kept as many as he would, until he seized the

Acropolis. When that was done, and the city in an uproar, Megacles, with all his family, at once fled; but Solon, though he was now very old, and had none to back him, yet came into the marketplace and made a speech to the citizens, partly blaming their inadvertency and meanness of spirit, and in part urging and exhorting them not thus tamely to lose their liberty; and likewise then spoke that memorable saying, that, before, it was an easier task to stop the rising tyranny, but now the great and more glorious action to destroy it, when it was begun already, and had gathered strength. But all being afraid to side with him, he returned home, and, taking his arms, he brought them out and laid them in the porch before his door, with these words: "I have done my part to maintain my country and my laws," and then he busied himself no more. His friends advising him to fly, he refused, but wrote poems, and thus reproached the Athenians in them:-

"If now you suffer, do not blame the Powers,
For they are good, and all the fault was ours,
All the strongholds you put into his hands,
And now his slaves must do what he commands."

And many telling him that the tyrant would take his life for this, and asking what he trusted to, that he ventured to speak so boldly, he replied, "To my old age." But Pisistratus, having got the command, so extremely courted Solon, so honoured him, obliged him, and sent to see him, that Solon gave him his advice, and approved many of his actions; for he retained most of Solon's laws, observed them himself, and compelled his friends to obey. And he himself, though already absolute ruler, being accused of murder before the Areopagus, came quietly to clear himself; but his accuser did not appear. And he added other laws, one of which is that the maimed in the wars should be maintained at the public charge; this Heraclides Ponticus records, and that Pisistratus followed Solon's example in this, who had decreed it in the case of one Thersippus, that was maimed; and Theophrastus asserts that it was Pisistratus, not Solon, that made that law against laziness, which was the reason that the country was more productive, and the city tranquil.

Now Solon, having begun the great work in verse, the history or fable of the Atlantic Island, which he had learned from the wise men in Sais, and thought convenient for the Athenians to know, abandoned it; not, as Plato says, by reason of want of time, but because of his age, and being discouraged at the greatness of the task; for that he had leisure enough, such verses testify, as-

"Each day grow older, and learn something new;"

and again-

"But now the Powers, of Beauty, Song, and Wine,
Which are most men's delights, are also mine."

Plato, willing to improve the story of the Atlantic Island, as if it were a fair estate that wanted an heir and came with some title to him, formed, indeed, stately entrances, noble enclosures, large courts, such as never yet introduced any story, fable, or poetic fiction; but, beginning it late, ended his life before his work; and the reader's regret for the unfinished part is the greater, as the satisfaction he takes in that which is complete is extraordinary. For as the city of Athens left only the temple of Jupiter Olympius unfinished, so Plato, amongst all his excellent works, left this

only piece about the Atlantic Island imperfect. Solon lived after Pisistratus seized the government, as Heraclides Ponticus asserts, a long time; but Phantias the Eresian says not two full years; for Pisistratus began his tyranny when Comias was archon, and Phantias says Solon died under Hegestratus, who succeeded Comias. The story that his ashes were scattered about the island Salamis is too strange to be easily believed, or be thought anything but a mere fable; and yet it is given, amongst other good authors, by Aristotle, the philosopher.

THE END