

# Confucius on the Sage

prepared by  
Robert Canright

All references to “**sage**” (in **bold** font) from **The Analects of Confucius**, translation by James Legge. This version is available for free download from Project Gutenberg.

## BOOK III CHAP. XXIV.

The border warden at Yi requested to be introduced to the Master, saying, 'When men of superior virtue have come to this, I have never been denied the privilege of seeing them.' The followers of the **sage** introduced him, and when he came out from the interview, he said, 'My friends, why are you distressed by your master's loss of office? The kingdom has long been without the principles of truth and right; Heaven is going to use your master as a bell with its wooden tongue.'

## BOOK VI CHAP. XXVIII.

1. Tsze-kung said, 'Suppose the case of a man extensively conferring benefits on the people, and able to assist all, what would you say of him? Might he be called perfectly virtuous?' The Master said, 'Why speak only of virtue in connection with him? Must he not have the qualities of a **sage**? Even Yao and Shun were still solicitous about this.'

2. 'Now the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others.'

3. 'To be able to judge of others by what is nigh in ourselves — this may be called the art of virtue.'

## BOOK VII CHAP. XXV.

1. The Master said, 'A **sage** it is not mine to see; could I see a man of real talent and virtue, that would satisfy me.'

2. The Master said, 'A good man it is not mine to see; could I see a man possessed of constancy, that would satisfy me.'

3. 'Having not and yet affecting to have, empty and yet affecting to be full, straitened and yet affecting to be at ease — it is difficult with such characteristics to have constancy.'

## BOOK VII CHAP. XXXIII.

The Master said, 'The **sage** and the man of perfect virtue — how dare I rank myself with them? It may simply be said of me, that I strive to become such without satiety, and teach others without weariness.' Kung-hsi Hwa said, 'This is just what we, the disciples, cannot imitate you in.'

## BOOK IX CHAP. VI.

1. A high officer asked Tsze-kung, saying, 'May we not say that your Master is a **sage**? How various is his ability!'

2. Tsze-kung said, 'Certainly Heaven has endowed him unlimitedly. He is about a **sage**. And, moreover, his ability is various.'

3. The Master heard of the conversation and said, 'Does the high officer know me? When I was young, my condition was low, and therefore I acquired my ability in many things, but they were mean matters. Must the superior man have such variety of ability? He does not need variety of ability.'

4. Lao said, 'The Master said, "Having no official employment, I acquired many arts."'

## BOOK XI

### CHAP. XIX.

Tsze-chang asked what were the characteristics of the GOOD man. The Master said, 'He does not tread in the footsteps of others, but moreover, he does not enter the chamber of the **sage**.'

## BOOK XVI

### CHAP. VIII.

1. Confucius said, 'There are three things of which the superior man stands in awe. He stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven. He stands in awe of great men. He stands in awe of the words of **sages**.

2. 'The mean man does not know the ordinances of Heaven, and consequently does not stand in awe of them. He is disrespectful to great men. He makes sport of the words of **sages**.'

## BOOK XIX

### CHAP. XII.

1. Tsze-yu said, 'The disciples and followers of Tsze-hsia, in sprinkling and sweeping the ground, in answering and replying, in advancing and receding, are sufficiently accomplished. But these are only the branches of learning, and they are left ignorant of what is essential.-- How can they be acknowledged as sufficiently taught?'

2. Tsze-hsia heard of the remark and said, 'Alas! Yen Yu is wrong. According to the way of the superior man in teaching, what departments are there which he considers of prime importance, and delivers? what are there which he considers of secondary importance, and allows himself to be idle about? But as in the case of plants, which are assorted according to their classes, so he deals with his disciples. How can the way of a superior man be such as to make fools of any of them? Is it not the **sage** alone, who can unite in one the beginning and the consummation of learning?'

## BOOK XIX

### CHAP. XXIV.

Shu-sun Wu-shu having spoken revilingly of Chung-ni, Tsze-kung said, 'It is of no use doing so. Chung-ni cannot be reviled. The talents and virtue of other men are hillocks and mounds which may be stepped over. Chung-ni is the sun or moon, which it is not possible to step over. Although a man may wish to cut himself off from the **sage**, what harm can he do to the sun or moon? He only shows that he does not know his own capacity.'

BOOK XIX  
CHAP. XXV.

1. Ch'an Tsze-ch'in, addressing Tsze-kung, said, 'You are too modest. How can Chung-ni be said to be superior to you?'

2. Tsze-kung said to him, 'For one word a man is often deemed to be wise, and for one word he is often deemed to be foolish. We ought to be careful indeed in what we say.'

3. 'Our Master cannot be attained to, just in the same way as the heavens cannot be gone up to by the steps of a stair.'

4. 'Were our Master in the position of the ruler of a State or the chief of a Family, we should find verified the description which has been given of a **sage's** rule — he would plant the people, and forthwith they would be established; he would lead them on, and forthwith they would follow him; he would make them happy, and forthwith multitudes would resort to his dominions; he would stimulate them, and forthwith they would be harmonious. While he lived, he would be glorious. When he died, he would be bitterly lamented. How is it possible for him to be attained to?'