



Government of Tamilnadu

Department of Employment and Training

Course : TNPSC Group I, II & IIA Prelims Exam
Subject : History, Culture, Heritage and Socio-Political Movements in Tamil Nadu
Topic : **Thirukkural**

© Copyright

The Department of Employment and Training has prepared the TNPSC Group-I, II & IIA Preliminary study material in the form of e-content for the benefit of Competitive Exam aspirants and it is being uploaded in this Virtual Learning Portal. This e-content study material is the sole property of the Department of Employment and Training. No one (either an individual or an institution) is allowed to make copy or reproduce the matter in any form. The trespassers will be prosecuted under the Indian Copyright Act.

It is a cost-free service provided to the job seekers who are preparing for the Competitive Exams.

Commissioner,
Department of Employment and Training

Thirukkural

The Praise of God

A, as its first of letters, every speech maintains;

The “Primal Deity” is first through all the world’s domains

Explanation: As the letter A is the first of all letters, so the eternal God is first in the world.

No fruit have men of all their studied lore,

Save they the ‘Purely Wise One’s’ feet adore

Explanation: What Profit have those derived from learning, who worship not the good feet of him who is possessed of pure knowledge?

His feet, ‘Who o’er the full-blown flower hath past,’ who gain

In bliss long time shall dwell above this earthly plain

Explanation: They who are united to the glorious feet of Him who passes swiftly over the flower of the mind, shall flourish long above all worlds.

His foot, ‘Whom want affects not, irks not grief,’ who gain

Shall not, through every time, of any woes complain

Explanation: To those who meditate the feet of Him who is void of desire or aversion, evil shall never come.

The Blessing of Rain

If clouds, that promised rain, deceive and in the sky remain, Famine, sore torment, stalks o’er earth’s vast ocean-girdled plain

Explanation: If the cloud, withholding rain, deceive (our hopes) hunger will long distress the sea-girt spacious world.

If clouds their wealth of waters fail on earth to pour, The ploughers plough with oxen's sturdy team no more

Explanation: If the abundance of wealth imparting rain diminish, the labour of the plough must cease.

Tis rain works all: it ruin spreads, then timely aid supplies;

As, in the happy days before, it bids the ruined rise

Explanation: Rain by its absence ruins men; and by its existence restores them to fortune.

The Greatness of Ascetics

As counting those that from the earth have passed away,

'Tis vain attempt the might of holy men to say.

Explanation: To describe the measure of the greatness of those who have forsaken the two-fold desires, is like counting the dead.

Things hard in the doing will great men do;

Things hard in the doing the mean eschew.

Explanation: The great will do those things which is difficult to be done; but the mean cannot do them.

Taste, light, touch, sound and smell: who knows the way

Of all the five-the world submissive owns his sway.

Explanation: The world is within the knowledge of him who knows the properties of taste, sight, touch, hearing and smell.

Assertion of the Strength of Virtue

It yields distinction, yields prosperity; what gain Greater than virtue can a living man obtain?

Explanation: Virtue will confer heaven and wealth; what greater source of happiness can man possess?

To finish virtue's work with ceaseless effort strive,

What way thou may'st, where'er thou see'st the work may thrive.

Explanation: As much as possible, in every way, incessantly practice virtue.

'Tis virtue when, his footsteps sliding not through envy, wrath,
Lust, evil speech-these four, man onwards moves in ordered path.

Explanation: That conduct is virtue which is free from these four things, viz, malice, desire, anger and bitter speech.

The Wealth of Children

Their children's wisdom greater than their own confessed,
Through the wide world is sweet to every human breast.

Explanation: That their children should possess knowledge is more pleasing to all men of this great earth than to themselves.

'The pipe is sweet, the lute is sweet,' by them not will be averred,
Who music of their infants' lisping lips have never heard.

Explanation: "The pipe is sweet, the lute is sweet," say those who have not heard the prattle of their own children.

Who children gain, that none reproach, of virtuous worth,
No evils touch them, through the seven-fold maze of birth.

Explanation: The evils of the seven births shall not touch those who obtain children of a good disposition, free from vice.

The Possession of Love

And is there bar that can even love restrain?
The tiny tear shall make the lover's secret plain.

Explanation: Is there any fastening that can shut in love? Tears of the affectionate will publish the love that is within.

The loveless to themselves belong alone;
The loving men are others to the very bone.

Explanation: Those who are destitute of love appropriate all they have to themselves; but those who possess love consider even their bones to belong to others

Bodies of loveless men are bony framework clad with skin;
Then is the body seat of life, when love resides within

Explanation: That body alone which is inspired with love contains a living soul: if void of it, (the body) is bone overlaid with skin.

As sun's fierce ray dries up the boneless things,
So loveless beings virtue's power to nothing brings.

Explanation: Virtue will burn up the soul which is without love, even as the sun burns up the creature which is without bone, i.e., worms.

Hospitality

Though food of immortality should crown the board,
Feasting alone, the guests without unfed, is thing abhorred.

Explanation: It is not fit that one should wish his guests to be outside (his house) even though he were eating the food of immortality.

To reckon up the fruit of kindly deeds were all in vain;
Their worth is as the worth of guests you entertain.

Explanation: The advantages of benevolence cannot be measured; the measure (of the virtue) of the guests (entertained) is the only measure.

With pain they guard their stores, yet 'All forlorn are we,' they'll cry,
Who cherish not their guests, nor kindly help supply?

Explanation: Those who have taken no part in the benevolence of hospitality shall (at length lament) saying, "we have laboured and laid up wealth and are now without support."

The Utterance of Pleasant Words

The men of pleasant speech that gladness breathe around,
Through indigence shall never sorrow's prey be found.

Explanation: Sorrow-increasing poverty shall not come upon those who use towards all, pleasure-increasing sweetness of speech.

Humility with pleasant speech to man on earth,
Is choice adornment; all besides is nothing worth.

Explanation: Humility and sweetness of speech are the ornaments of man; all others are not (ornaments)

Who sees the pleasure kindly speech affords,
Why makes he use of harsh, repellant words.

Explanation: Why does he use harsh words, who sees the pleasure which sweet speech yields?

Gratitude

Assistance given by those who never received our aid,
Is debt by gift of heaven and earth but poorly paid.

Explanation: (The gift of) heaven and earth is not an equivalent for a benefit which is conferred where none had been received.

Kindness shown by those who weigh not what the return may be:
When you ponder right its merit, 'Tis vaster than the sea.

Explanation: If we weigh the excellence of a benefit which is conferred without weighing the return, it is larger than the sea.

Each benefit to those of actions' fruit who rightly deem,
Though small as millet-seed, as palm-tree vast will seem.

Explanation: Though the benefit conferred be as small as a millet seed, those who know its advantage will consider it as large as a palmyra fruit.

Impartiality

Though only good it seems to give, yet gain
By wrong acquired, not even one day retain.

Explanation: Forsake in the very moment (of acquisition) that gain which, though it should bring advantage, is without equity.

The man who justly lives, tenacious of the right,
In low estate is never low to wise man's sight.

Explanation: The great will not regard as poverty the low estate of that man who dwells in the virtue of equity.

To stand, like balance-rod that level hangs and rightly weighs,
With calm unbiassed equity of soul, is sages' praise.

Explanation: To incline to neither side, but to rest impartial as the even-fixed scale is the ornament of the wise.

The Possession of Self-Restraint

If versed in wisdom's lore by virtue's law you self-restrain
Your self-repression known will yield you glory's gain.

Explanation: Knowing that self-control is knowledge, if a man should control himself, in the prescribed course, such self-control will bring him distinction among the wise.

In his station, all unswerving, if man self-subdue,
Greater he then mountain proudly rising to the view

Explanation: Loftier than a mountain will be the greatness of that man who without swerving from his domestic state, controls himself.

Like tortoise, who the five restrains
In one, through seven world bliss obtains.

Explanation: Should one throughout a single birth, like a tortoise keep in his five senses, the fruit of it will prove a safe-guard to him throughout the seven-fold births.

The Possession of Decorum

Searching, duly watching, learning, 'decorum' still we find;
Man's only aid; toiling, guard thou this with watchful mind.

Explanation: Let propriety of conduct be laboriously preserved and guarded; though one knows and practice and excel in many virtues, that will be an eminent aid.

The envious soul in life no rich increase of blessing gains,
So man of 'due decorum' void no dignity obtains.

Explanation: Just as the envious man will be without wealth, so will the man of destitute of propriety of conduct be without greatness.

Who know not with the world in harmony to dwell,
May many things have learned, but nothing well

Explanation: Those who know not how to act agreeably to the world, though they have learnt many things, are still ignorant.

Assertion of the Strength of Virtue

What from virtue floweth, yieldeth dear delight;
All else extern, is void of glory's light.

Explanation: Only that pleasure which flows from domestic virtue is pleasure; all else is not pleasure, and it is without praise.

It yields distinction, yields prosperity; what gain
Greater than virtue can a living man obtain?

Explanation:

Virtue will confer heaven and wealth; what greater source of happiness can man possess?

Not Coveting Another's Wife

Who laws of virtue and possession's rights have known,
Indulge no foolish love of her by right another's own.

Explanation: The folly of desiring her who is the property of another will not be found in those who know (the attributes of) virtue and (the rights of) property.

How great so ever they be, what gain have they of life,
Who, not a whit reflecting, seek a neighbour's wife?

Explanation: However great one may be, what does it avail if, without at all considering his guilt, he goes unto the wife of another?

Who sees the wife, another's own, with no desiring eye?

In sure domestic bliss he dwelleth ever virtuously.

Explanation: He who desires not the womanhood of her who should walk according to the will of another will be praised as a virtuous house-holder.

The Possession of Patience, Forbearance

Forgiving trespasses is good always;

Forgetting them hath even higher praise;

Explanation: Bear with reproach even when you can retaliate; but to forget it will be still better than that.

Who wreak their wrath as worthless are despised;

Who patiently forbear as gold are prized?

Explanation: (The wise) will not at all esteem the resentful. They will esteem the patient just as the gold which they lay up with care.

With overweening pride when men with injuries assail,

By thine own righteous dealing shalt thou mightily prevail.

Explanation: Let a man by patience overcome those who through pride commit excesses.

Not Envy

As 'strict decorum's' laws, that all men bind,

Let each regard unenvying grace of mind.

Explanation: Let a man esteem that disposition which is free from envy in the same manner as propriety of conduct.

The wise through envy break not virtue's laws,

Knowing ill-deeds of foul disgrace, the cause.

Explanation: (The wise) knowing the misery that comes from transgression will not through envy commit unrighteous deeds.

No envious men to large and full felicity attain;
No men from envy free have failed a sure increase to gain.

Explanation: Never have the envious become great; never have those who are free from envy been without greatness.

Not Coveting

No deeds of ill, misled by base desire,
Do they, whose souls to other joys aspire.

Explanation: Those who desire the higher pleasures (of heaven) will not act unjustly through desire of the trifling joy (in this life).

Though, grace desiring, he in virtue's way stand strong,
He's lost who wealth desires, and ponders deeds of wrong.

Explanation: If he, who through desire of the virtue of kindness abides in the domestic state i.e., the path in which it may be obtained, covet (the property of others) and think of evil methods (to obtain it), he will perish.

Good fortune draws a nigh in helpful time of need,
To him who, schooled in virtue, guards his soul from greed.

Explanation: Lakshmi, knowing the manner (in which she may approach) will immediately come to those wise men who, knowing that it is virtue, covet not the property of others.

Not Backbiting

Though virtuous words his lips speak not, and all his deeds are ill.
If neighbour he defames not, there's good within him still.

Explanation: Though one does not even speak of virtue and live in sin, it will be well if it be said of him "he does not backbite"

Tus greater gain of virtuous good for man to die,
Then live to slander absent friend, and falsely praise when nigh.

Explanation: Death rather than life will confer upon the deceitful backbiter the profit which (the treatises on) virtue point out.

Tus charity, I ween, that makes the earth sustain their load.

Who, neighbours' absence watching, tales or slander tell abroad?

Explanation: The world through charity supports the weight of those who reproach others observing their absence.

Against Vain Speaking

Diffusive speech of useless words proclaims

A man who never righteous wisdom gains.

Explanation: That conversation in which a man utters forth useless things will say of him "he is without virtue".

Gone are both fame and boasted excellence,

When men of worth speak of words devoid of sense.

Explanation: If the good speak vain words their eminence and excellence will leave them.

Let those who list speak things that no delight affords,

Tus good for men of worth to speak no idle word.

Explanation:

Let the wise if they will, speak things without excellence; it will be well for them not to speak useless things.

Duty to Society

The worthy say, when wealth rewards their toil-spent hours,

For uses of beneficence alone tis ours.

Explanation: All the wealth acquired with perseverance by the worthy is for the exercise of benevolence.

The wealth of men who love the 'fitting way,' the truly wise,

Is as when water fills the lake that village needs supplies.

Explanation: The wealth of that man of eminent knowledge who desires to exercise the benevolence approved of by the world, is like the full waters of a city-tank.

Though by 'beneficence,' the loss of all should come,
'Twere meet man sold himself, and bought it with the sum.

Explanation: If it be said that loss will result from benevolence, such loss is worth being procured even by the sale of one's self.

Dread of Evil Deeds

With sinful act men cease to feel the dread of ill within,
The excellent will dread the wanton pride of cherished sin.

Explanation: Those who have experience of evil deeds will not fear, but the excellent will fear the pride of sin.

Even to those that hate make no return of ill;
So shalt thou wisdom's highest law, 'tis said, fulfil.

Explanation: To do no evil to enemies will be called the chief of all virtues.

Make not thy poverty a plea for ill;
Thy evil deeds will make thee poorer still.

Explanation: Commit not evil, saying, "I am poor": if you do, you will become poorer still.

Giving

'I've nought' is ne'er the high-born man's reply;
He gives to those who raise themselves that cry.

Explanation: (Even in a low state) not to adopt the mean expedient of saying "I have nothing," but to give, is the characteristic of the mad of noble birth.

'Tis bitter pain to die, 'Tis worse to live.
For him who nothing finds to give!

Explanation: Nothing is more unpleasant than death: yet even that is pleasant where charity cannot be exercised.

Renown

The speech of all that speak agrees to crown
The men that give to those that ask, with fair renown.

Explanation: Whatsoever is spoken in the world will abide as praise upon that man who gives alms to the poor.

If men do virtuous deeds by world-wide ample glory crowned,
The heavens will cease to laud the sage for other gifts renowned.

Explanation: If one has acquired extensive fame within the limits of this earth, the world of the Gods will no longer praise those sages who have attained that world.

If man you walk the stage, appear adorned with glory's grace;
Save glorious you can shine, 'there better hide your face.

Explanation: If you are born (in this world), be born with qualities conducive to fame. From those who are destitute of them it will be better not to be born.

Compassion

They in whose breast a 'gracious kindliness' resides,
See not the gruesome world, where darkness drear abides.

Explanation: They will never enter the world of darkness and wretchedness whose minds are the abode of kindness.

Gain of true wealth oblivious they eschew,
Who 'grace' forsakes, and graceless actions do.

Explanation: (The wise) say that those who neglect kindness and practise cruelties, neglected virtue (in their former birth), and forgot (the sorrows which they must suffer).

When weaker men you front with threat'ning brow,
Think how you felt in presence of some stronger foe.

Explanation: When a man is about to rush upon those who are weaker than himself, let him remember how he has stood (trembling) before those who are stronger than himself.

Abstinence from Flesh

How can the wont of 'kindly grace' to him be known?
Who other creatures' flesh consumes to feed his own?

Explanation: How can he be possessed of kindness, who to increase his own flesh, eats the flesh of other creatures.

Like heart of them that murderous weapons bear, his mind,
Who eats of savoury meat, no joy in good can find?

Explanation: Like the (murderous) mind of him who carries a weapon (in his hand), the mind of him who feasts with pleasure on the body of another (creature), has no regard for goodness.

Penance

To 'penitents' sincere avails their 'penitence';
Where that is not, 'tis but a vain pretence.

Explanation: Austerities can only be borne, and their benefits enjoyed, by those who have practised them (in a former birth); it will be useless for those who have not done so, to attempt to practise them (now).

That what they wish may, as they wish, be won,
By men on earth are works of painful 'penance' done.

Explanation: Religious discipline is practised in this world, because it secures the attainment of whatever one may wish to enjoy (in the world to come).

Imposture

As if a steer should graze wrapped round with tiger's skin,
Is show of virtuous might when weakness lurks within.

Explanation: The assumed appearance of power, by a man who has no power (to restrain his senses and perform austerity), is like a cow feeding on grass covered with a tiger's skin.

Cruel is the arrow straight, the crooked lute is sweet,
Judge by their deeds the many forms of men you meet.

Explanation: As, in its use, the arrow is crooked, and the curved lute is straight, so by their deeds, (and not by their appearance) let (the uprightness or crookedness of) men be estimated.

The Absence of Fraud

Who seeks heaven's joys, from impious levity secure,

Let him from every fraud preserve his spirit pure.

Explanation: Let him, who desires not to be despised, keep his mind from (the desire of) defrauding another of the smallest thing.

Tis sin if in the mind man but thought conceive;

'By fraud I will my neighbour of his wealth bereave'.

Explanation: Even the thought (of sin) is sin; think not then of craftily stealing the property of another.

Veracity

You ask, in lips of men what 'truth' may be;

'Tis speech from every taint of evil free.

Explanation: Truth is the speaking of such words as are free from the least degree of evil (to others).

Falsehood may take the place of truthful word,

If blessing, free from fault, it can afford.

Explanation: Even falsehood has the nature of truth, if it confers a benefit that is free from fault.

Speak not a word which false thy own heart knows

Self-kindled fire within the false one's spirit glows.

Explanation: Let not a man knowingly tell a lie; for after he has told the lie, his mind will burn him (with the memory of his guilt).

Greater is he who speaks the truth with full consenting mind.

Then men whose lives have penitence and charity combined.

Explanation: He, who speaks truth with all his heart, is superior to those who make gifts and practise austerities.

Not Doing Evil

Though ill to neighbour wrought should gloriously pride of wealth secure,
No ill to do is fixed decree of men in spirit pure.

Explanation: It is the determination of the spotless not to cause sorrow to others, although they could (by so causing) obtain the wealth which confers greatness.

From wisdom's vaunted lore what doth the learner gain,
If as his own he guard not others' souls from pain?

Explanation: What benefit has he derived from his knowledge, who does not endeavour to keep off pain from another as much as from himself?

Not Killing

What is the work of virtue? 'Not to kill';
For 'killing' leads to every work of ill.

Explanation: Never to destroy life is the sum of all virtuous conduct. The destruction of life leads to every evil.

Though thine own life for that spared life the price must pay,
Take not from aught that lives gift of sweet life away.

Explanation: Let no one do that which would destroy the life of another, although he should by so doing, lose his own life.

Renunciation

From whatever, aye, whatever, man gets free,
From what, aye, from that, no more of pain hath he!

Explanation: Whatever thing, a man has renounced, by that thing; he cannot suffer pain.

Cling thou to that which He, to Whom nought clings, hath bid thee cling,
Cling to that bond, to get thee free from every clinging thing.

Explanation: Desire the desire of Him who is without desire; in order to renounce desire, desire that desire.

Curbing of Desire

If desire you feel, freedom from changing birth require!

'I' will come, if you desire to 'scape, set free from all desire.

Explanation: If anything, be desired, freedom from births should be desired; that (freedom from births) will be attained by desiring to be without desire.

Desire each soul beguiles;

True virtue dreads its wiles.

Explanation: It is the chief duty of (an ascetic) to watch against desire with (jealous) fear; for it has power to deceive (and destroy) him.

The Greatness of a King

Courage, a liberal hand, wisdom and energy: these four

Are qualities a king adorns for evermore.

Explanation: Never to fail in these four things, fearlessness, liberality, wisdom and energy, is the kingly character.

With pleasant speech, who gives and guards with powerful liberal hand,

He sees the world obedient all to his command.

Explanation: The world will praise and submit itself to the mind of the king who is able to give with affability, and to protect all who come to him.

Learning

So, learn that you may full and faultless learning gain,

Then in obedience meet to lessons learnt remain.

Explanation: Let a man learn thoroughly whatever he may learn, and let his conduct be worthy of his learning.

The man who store of learning gains,

In one, through seven worlds, bliss attains.

Explanation: The learning, which a man has acquired in one birth, will yield him pleasure during seven births.

Like those who doat on hoyden's undeveloped charms are they,
Of learning void, who eagerly their power of words display.

Explanation: The desire of the unlearned to speak (in an assembly), is like a woman without breasts desiring (the enjoyment of) woman-hood.

Hearing

Wealth of wealth is wealth acquired be ear attent;
Wealth mid all wealth supremely excellent.

Explanation: Wealth (gained) by the ear is wealth of wealth; that wealth is the chief of all wealth.

Who feed their ear with learned teachings rare?
Are like the happy gods' oblations rich who share.

Explanation: Those who in this world enjoy instruction which is the food of the ear, are equal to the Gods, who enjoy the food of the sacrifices.

The Possession of Knowledge

Though things diverse from divers' sages' lips we learn,
'Tis wisdom's part in each the true thing to discern.

Explanation: To discern the truth in every thing, by whomsoever spoken, is wisdom.

The wise is rich, with every blessing blest;
The fool is poor, of everything possessed.

Explanation: Those who possess wisdom, possess every thing; those who have not wisdom, whatever they may possess, have nothing.

Seeking the Aid of Great Men

As friends the men who virtue knows, and riper wisdom share,
Their worth weighed well; the king should choose with care.

Explanation: Let a king ponder well its value, and secure the friendship of men of virtue and of mature knowledge.

The king with none to censure him, bereft of safeguards all,
Though none his ruin work, shall surely ruined fall.

Explanation:

The king, who is without the guard of men who can rebuke him, will perish, even though there be no one to destroy him.

Acting after due Consideration

'Tis ruin if man do an unbefitting thing;
Fit things to leave undone will equal ruin bring.

Explanation: He will perish who does not what is not fit to do; and he also will perish who does not do what it is fit to do.

Plan and perform no work that others may despise;
What misbeseems a king the world will not approve as wise.

Explanation: Let a man reflect, and do things which bring no reproach; the world will not approve, with him, of things which do not become of his position to adopt.

Selection and Confidence

How treats he virtue, wealth and pleasure? How, when life's at stake,
Comports himself? This four-fold test of man will full assurance make.

Explanation: Let a minister be chosen, after he has been tried by means of these four things, viz, his virtue, love of money, love of sexual pleasure, and fear of losing life.

Who trusts an untried stranger, brings disgrace,
Remediless, on all his race.

Explanation: Sorrow that will not leave even his posterity will come upon him chooses a stranger whose character he has not known.

Cherishing Kinsmen

When wealth is fled, old kindness still to show,
Is kindly grace that only kinsmen know.

Explanation: Even when a man's property is all gone, relatives will act towards him with their accustomed kindness.

Who knows the use of pleasant words, and liberal gifts can give,
Connections, heaps of them, surrounding him shall live.

Explanation: He will be surrounded by numerous relatives who manifests generosity and affability.

Energy

The wealth of mind man owns a real worth imparts,
Material wealth man owns endures not, utterly departs.

Explanation: The possession of energy of mind is true property; the possession of wealth passes away and abides not.

Firmness of soul in man is real excellence;
Others are trees, their human form a mere pretence.

Explanation: Energy is mental wealth; those men who are destitute of it are only trees in the form of men.

Power of Speech

A tongue that rightly speaks the right is greatest gain,
It stands alone midst goodly things that men obtain.

Explanation: The possession of that goodness which is called the goodness of speech is even to others better than any other goodness.

Tis speech that spell-bound holds the listening ear,
While those who have not heard desire to hear.

Explanation: The minister's speech is that which seeks to express elements as bind his friends to himself and is so delivered as to make even his enemies desire his friendship.

Purity in Action

Who tell themselves that nobler things shall yet be won?
All deeds that dim the light of glory must they shun.

Explanation: Those who say, "we will become better" should avoid the performance of acts that would destroy their fame.

Though troubles press, no shameful deed they do,
Whose eyes the ever-during vision view.

Explanation:

Those who have infallible judgement though threatened with peril will not do acts which have brought disgrace on former ministers.

Power in Action

What men call 'power in action' know for 'power of mind'
Externe to man all other aids you find.

Explanation: Firmness in action is simply one's firmness of mind; all other abilities are not of this nature.

Easy to every man the speech that shows the way;
Hard thing to shape one's life by words they say!

Explanation: To say how an act is to be performed is indeed easy for any one; but far difficult it is to do according to what has been said.

Modes of Action

With work or foe, when you neglect some little thing,
If you reflect, like smouldering fire, 'twill ruin bring.

Explanation: When duly considered, the incomplete execution of an undertaking and hostility will grow and destroy one like the unextinguished remnant of a fire.

Who would succeed must thus begin: first let him ask?
The thoughts of them who thoroughly know the task.

Explanation: The method of performance for one who has begun an act is to ascertain the mind of him who knows the secret thereof.

The Land

Where spreads fertility unfailing, where resides a band,
Of virtuous men, and those of ample wealth, call that a 'land'.

Explanation: A kingdom is that in which those who carry on a complete cultivation, virtuous persons, and merchants with inexhaustible wealth, dwell together.

That is a 'land' whose peaceful annals know,
Nor famine fierce, nor wasting plague, nor ravage of the foe.

Explanation: kingdom is that which continues to be free from excessive starvation, irremediable epidemics, and destructive foes.

The Fortification

Fort is wealth to those who act against their foes;
Is wealth to them who, fearing, guard themselves from woes.

Explanation: A fort is an object of importance to those who march against their foes as well as to those who through fear of pursuers would seek it for shelter.

A fort, with all munitions amply stored,
In time of need should good reserves afford.

Explanation: A fort is that which has all needful things, and excellent heroes that can help it against destruction by foes.

Friendship

What so hard for men to gain as friendship true?
What so sure defence 'gainst all that foe can do?

Explanation: What things are there so difficult to acquire as friendship? What guards are there so difficult to break through by the efforts of one's foes?

Learned scroll the more you ponder, Sweeter grows the mental food;
So, the heart by use grows fonder, Bound in friendship with the good.

Explanation: Like learning, the friendship of the noble, the more it is cultivated, the more delightful does it become.

Investigation in Forming Friendships

Alliance with the man you have not proved and proved again,
In length of days will give you mortal pain.

Explanation: The friendship contracted by him who has not made repeated inquiry will in the end grieve him to death.

Who, born of noble race, from guilt would shrink with shame,
Pay any price so you as friend that man may claim.

Explanation: The friendship of one who belongs to a good family and is afraid of being charged with guilt, is worth even purchasing.

Evil Friendship

These are alike: the friends who ponder friendship's gain
Those who accept whatever you give, and all the plundering train.

Explanation: Friendship who calculate the profits of their friendship, prostitutes who are bent on obtaining their gains, and thieves are all of the same character.

Those men who make a grievous toil of what they do
On your behalf, their friendship silently eschews.

Explanation: Gradually abandon without revealing before hand the friendship of those who pretend inability to carry out what they really could do.

Unreal Friendship

To heartfelt goodness men ignoble hardly may attain,
Although abundant stores of goodly lore they gain.

Explanation: Though one's enemies may have mastered many good books, it will be impossible for them to become truly loving at heart.

When minds are not in unison, 'tis never; just,
In any word's men speak to put your trust.

Explanation: In nothing whatever is it proper to rely on the words of those who do not love with their heart.

Folly

What one thing merits folly's special name.
Letting gain go, loss for one's own to claim!

Explanation: Folly is one of the chief defects; it is that which makes one incur loss and forego gain.

Ashamed of nothing, searching nothing out, of loveless heart,
Nought cherishing, 'tis thus the fool will play his part.

Explanation:

Shamelessness indifference to what must be sought after, harshness, and aversion for everything that ought to be desired are the qualities of the fool.

Enmity within

Dread not the foes that as drawn swords appear;
Friendship of foes, who seem like kinsmen, fear!

Explanation: Fear not foes who say they would cut like a sword; but fear the friendship of foes who seemingly act like relations.

The Might of Hatred

With stronger than thyself, turn from the strife away;
With weaker shun not, rather court the fray.

Explanation:

Avoid offering resistance to the strong; but never fail to cherish enmity towards the weak.

No kinsman's love, no strength of friends has he;
How can he bear his foeman's enmity?

Explanation: How can he who is unloving, destitute of powerful aids, and himself without strength overcome the might of his foe?

Not Offending the Great

The chiefest care of those who guard themselves from ill,
Is not to slight the powers of those who work their mighty will.

Explanation: Not to disregard the power of those who can carry out their wishes is more important than all the watchfulness of those who guard themselves against evil.

If men will lead their lives reckless of great men's will,
Such life, through great men's powers, will bring perpetual ill.

Explanation: To behave without respect for the great rulers will make them do us irremediable evils.

Not Drinking Palm-Wine

Drink not inebriating draught. Let him count well the cost.

Who drinks, by drinking, all good men's esteem is lost.

Explanation: Let no liquor be drunk; if it is desired, let it be drunk by those who care not for esteem of the great.

Sleepers are as the dead, no otherwise they seem;

Who drink intoxicating draughts, they poison quaff, we deem?

Explanation:

They that sleep resemble the deed; likewise, they that drink is no other than poison-eaters.

Gambling

Seek not the gamester's play; though you should win,

Your gain is as the baited hook the fish takes in.

Explanation: Though able to win, let not one desire gambling; for even what is won is like a fish swallowing the iron in fish-hook.

Gaming brings many woes, and ruins fair renown;

Nothing to want brings men so surely down.

Explanation: There is nothing else that brings us poverty like gambling which causes many a misery and destroys one's reputation.

Nobility

In these three things the men of noble birth fail not:

In virtuous deed and truthful word, and chastened thought.

Explanation: The high-born will never deviate from these three; good manners, truthfulness and modesty.

The faults of men of noble race are seen by every eye,

As spots on her bright orb that walks sublime the evening sky.

Explanation: The defects of the noble will be observed as clearly as the dark spots in the moon.

Honour

Bow down thy soul, with increase blest, in happy hour;

Lift up thy heart, when stript of all by fortune's power.

Explanation: In great prosperity humility is becoming; dignity, in great adversity.

It yields no praise, nor to the land of Gods throws wide the gate:

Why follow men who scorn, and at their bidding wait?

Explanation: Of what good is it for the high-born to go and stand in vain before those who revile him? it only brings him loss of honour and exclusion from heaven.

Perfectness

The good of inward excellence they claim,

The perfect men; all other good is only good in name.

Explanation: The only delight of the perfect is that of their goodness; all other sensual delights are not to be included among any true delights.

Submission is the might of men of mighty acts; the sage

With that same weapon stills his foeman's rage.

Explanation: Stooping to inferiors is the strength of those who can accomplish an undertaking; and that is the weapon with which the great avert their foes.

Courtesy

Who easy access gives to every man, they say,

Of kindly courtesy will learn with ease the way.

Explanation: If one is easy of access to all, it will be easy for one to obtain the virtue called goodness.

Contempt is evil though in sport. They who man's nature know,

Even in their wrath, a courteous mind will show.

Explanation: Reproach is painful to one even in sport; those therefore who know the nature of others exhibit pleasing qualities even when they are hated.

Shame

And is not shame an ornament to men of dignity?

Without it step of stately pride is piteous thing to see.

Explanation: Is not the modesty ornament of the noble? Without it, their haughtiness would be a pain to others.

As home of virtuous shame by all the world the men are known,

Who feel ashamed for others, guilt as for their own?

Explanation: The world regards as the abode of modesty him who fear his own and other's guilt.

Farming

However they roam, the world must follow still the plougher's team;

Though toilsome, culture of the ground as noblest toil esteem.

Explanation: Agriculture, though laborious, is the most excellent form of labour; for people, though they go about in search of various employments, have at last to resort to the farmer.

Who ploughing eat their food, they truly live:

The rest to others bends subservient, eating what they give.

Explanation: They alone live who live by agriculture; all others lead a cringing, dependent life.