

Those who have the highest righteousness do not consider that they are righteous; therefore they are righteous.

Those of lesser righteousness never forget that they are righteous; this is why they are not truly righteous.

Those who have the highest righteousness act righteously without thinking of righteousness.

The men of lesser righteousness are consciously righteous.

Those who have supreme humanity act rightly without thinking of humanity.

Those who weigh human rights practise them self-consciously.

Those who follow formalism practise it, and the people do not respond; then they use force to make formalism effective.

This is why men become self-consciously righteous after they have lost the Way; they become self-consciously humane after they have lost righteousness; they concern themselves with the rights of man after they have ceased to be humane; they become formalists after they have lost the sense of the rights of man.

Formalism is only the outer bark of uprightness and sincerity; it is the beginning of disorder.

False wisdom is but the barren flower of the Way and the principle of ignorance.

Therefore the great man cleaves to the substance and ignores mere surfaces.

He honours the fruit and leaves the barren flower.

Therefore he takes the one and rejects the other.

We have here a descending scale: The Way (Tao); self-conscious righteousness; what we may call humanitarianism; concern over the rights of man; and a lifeless formalism. But, at the distance of twenty-five centuries, it is not easy to catch the exact shades of Lao Tse's meaning.

To begin with the first sentence: "Those who have the highest righteousness do not consider that they are righteous": we may cite, as a parallel: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven"; or that other saying, with its fine irony: "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." Or we may quote the saying that there is nothing more contemptible than self-conscious heroism.

One of the Chinese commentators has this to say of the closing sentences of this section: "The holy man penetrates all beings by the aid of a marvellous intuition. The true and the false, good and evil, shine in his vision as in a mirror. Nothing escapes his perspicacity. Common men see nothing but what is before their eyes, and hear nothing but what reaches their ears, and think nothing that is beyond their minds. They walk as blind men in the midst of beings; they use their faculties to gain knowledge, and only by

chance do they catch gleams of light. They believe that they understand, and do not see that they are going toward the depth of ignorance. They rejoice when they have won what is lowest and vilest in the world, and they lose sight of what is lofty and sublime. They seek after surfaces and neglect realities; they gather the flower and throw away the fruit. Only the great man rejects the flower for the fruit.”

Editors generally mark this as the first section of the second part of the Tao-teh-king; and, as the word “teh”, which we have translated “righteousness”, occurs ten times in this section, giving the keynote of the second half of the book, it is thought that the general title means the Book of Tao and of Teh; that is, the book, the first half of which is concerned with Tao, the second half with Teh.

39

These are the things which have gained Unity.

Heaven is pure because it has gained Unity.

Earth is still because it has gained Unity.

The spirits of men are wise because they have gained Unity.

The valleys are filled because they have gained Unity.

The myriad beings are born because they have gained Unity.

Princes and kings are the standard of the world because they have gained Unity.

Such is the fruit of Unity.

If Heaven lost its purity, it would dissolve.

If Earth lost its stillness, it would crumble.

If the spirits of men lost their wisdom, they would cease to be.

If the valleys were not filled, they would dry up.

If the myriad beings were not born, they would come to nothingness.

If princes and kings grew proud of their high station, and ceased to be standards, they would be overthrown.

Therefore nobles remember their common humanity; men of high station remember the lowliness of their beginning.

Therefore princes and kings call themselves orphans, lowly, meek.

Do they not show by this that they remember their common humanity? And they are right!

This is why, if you take a wagon to pieces, you no longer have a wagon.

The wise man seeks no extrinsic value as precious jade, nor would he be despised as a worthless stone.

The Chinese commentator quoted, says: “Unity is the Way (the Logos). From the Way, all beings have received that which constitutes their nature. Men see beings and forget the Way. They are content to know that Heaven is pure, that Earth is still, that spirits are endowed with intelligence, that valleys may be filled, that myriad beings are born, that princes and kings are standards for mankind. But they forget that it is from

the Way that all these qualities are drawn. The greatness of Heaven and Earth, the nobility of princes and kings, is the Unity which has brought them into being. But what is this Unity? You look for it and cannot see it; you wish to touch it and cannot lay hands on it. It is clear that it is the most subtle thing in the world.”

If we remember that “the Kingdom” means also the kingdom of heaven, we may believe that princes and kings mean disciples and their Masters, who are in truth the standards of mankind, full of humility, and, therefore, thinking of themselves as meek and lowly of heart.

The cryptic sentence about the wagon is thus explained by a Chinese commentary: “With a multitude of materials you make a wagon. Wagon is the collective name of the different materials of which a wagon is made. If you count them one by one, if you take the wagon to pieces, you have nave, wheels, spokes, axle, pole and so on, and if you give these different parts their names, the name wagon disappears; there is no longer a wagon. In the same way, the unity of the people brings the prince or king into being. If you take the people away, the ruler disappears. Therefore princes and kings should be lowly in their honours; they should be simple and humble, like the Way.”

40

The return to the unmanifest causes the movement of the Way.

Weakness is the method of the Way.

All things in the world are born from the manifest (Logos); the manifest is born from the unmanifest.

One might write a treatise on these three sentences. It is better, perhaps, to suggest certain clues to their meaning.

It is said, for example, that “the whole personality must be dissolved”, in order that the real individuality may be born. In this sense, the “return” causes the forward movement.

To carry the same thought to its conclusion, he who would become a Master goes back into the hidden depths of Being, in order that he may later come forth to work.

As commentary on the second sentence, we may take the phrases of Saint Paul: “It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power”; “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”; and even the mysterious saying: “For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God.”

When those of the highest order of learning hear the Way declared, they follow it with zeal. When those of the second order of learning have heard the Way declared, they now follow it, now lose it.

When those of the lowest order of learning have heard the Way declared, they mock at it. If they did not mock at it, it would not deserve to be called the Way.

Therefore those of old said:

He who has the understanding of the Way, seems hidden in darkness.

He who has gone far along the Way, seems backward.

He who has ascended the Way, seems of low estate.

The man of high virtue is like the valley.

The man of perfect purity is as though despised.

The man of infinite worth seems full of weakness.

The man of true virtue appears inert.

The man who is simple and true seems low and degraded.

It is a square so great that its corners cannot be seen. It is a vessel so great that it seems uncompleted. It is a voice so great that its sound is imperceptible. It is an image so great that its shape is not perceived.

The Way is hidden, so that none can name it.

It lends its aid and leads all beings to perfection.

A Chinese commentator says: “Those of the highest order of learning understand both what is hidden and what shines forth in the Way; they penetrate beyond the limits of the body. This is why, as soon as they hear the Way declared, they put their faith in it and follow it with zeal. Those of the second order of learning are on the border between the hidden and that which shines forth; between what is hidden from the senses, and what the senses perceive. They stand between the Way and the material world. Therefore, when they have heard the Way declared, they stand half in faith and half in doubt. This is why they now follow the Way, and now lose it. Those of the lowest order of learning see what shines forth, what is perceived by the senses, but not what is hidden. They remain wrapped in matter. Therefore, when they have heard the Way declared, they mock at it.”

Another commentator adds: “The Way is hidden, deep, inscrutable. Those of the lowest order of learning mock at it because they seek it with their senses and cannot find it. If they could reach it, if they could grasp it in its sublimity with their senses, they would not mock at it; but, becoming accessible to their gross vision, it would lose all its grandeur, and would no longer deserve to be called the Way.”

Concerning the dozen axioms quoted from those of old, the commentators say: “The ordinary man uses craft, boasting of it and thinking himself able. The saint has light, but lets it not shine outwardly, nor does he use craft. The ordinary man boasts and pushes

himself forward insatiably. The saint dwells in humility, full of the sense of his own abjection and unworthiness. The ordinary man exalts himself. The saint unites himself in heart to the Way. The ordinary man has a narrow soul, which could not hold an atom. The saint holds in his heart the heavens and the earth. The ordinary man is inwardly full of sins and uncleanness; he decks himself outwardly, to appear pure and spotless. The saint is upright and simple, he is pure and white as snow. His righteousness is untarnished by the dust of the world; therefore he is able to bear shame and suffer ignominy. The ordinary man boasts of his least virtue. He wishes to be paid for each of his good acts. The saint sends forth his righteousness and his benefits over all beings, taking no credit to himself for it. Therefore he appears to lack righteousness.”

42

The Way produced the One; the One produced the Two; the Two produced the Three; the Three produced all beings.

All beings flee from stillness and seek movement.

An immaterial Breath forms harmony.

Men hate to be orphans, lowly and meek; yet the kings so describe themselves.

Therefore, among beings some are exalted because they abase themselves; others are abased because they exalt themselves.

I teach what men teach.

The violent and unbending do not meet a natural death.

I shall take their example as the basis of my teachings.

The meaning of the first sentence would seem to be: The Unmanifest produced the Manifest; the Manifest has two aspects, the masculine and feminine Logos. These two produced the Great Breath of manifestation, thus constituting a triad. The Chinese commentaries are in harmony with this interpretation. The Great Breath is also harmony, because it is the universal law of Karma, which “ordains all things wisely through perpetual ages.”

The teaching that “whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted,” needs little comment. He who humbles his personal will before the Divine Will, becomes one with that Divine Will and, therefore, invincible; but he who asserts his personal, rebellious will, is brought low by the Divine Will, in order that he may learn humility. The kings are those rulers of the heavenly kingdom who are “meek and lowly in heart,” knowing that the Divine Will is all in all.

The next phrase, “I teach what men teach,” has divided the commentators; it may be simply the introduction to the next sentence: “The violent and unbending do not meet a natural death”; their fate teaches the need of humility; this I also teach. This would accord well with the following sentence: “I shall take their example as the basis of my teachings.”

43

The softest things in the world overcome the hardest things in the world.

The Unmanifest passes through things impenetrable. From this I know that non-action (detachment) is useful.

In the world there are few who know how to teach without words, and to draw profit from non-action.

“The Way is bodiless,” says a Chinese commentator, “therefore it can penetrate minds and hearts and the multitude of beings.”

Another commentary says: “He who acts actively may fail and lose the merit which he seeks; he who acts without acting gains limitless success. In this way Heaven and Earth act; in this way men and beings spring up.” It is exactly the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* concerning detachment.

The same wise Celestial goes on to say: “The voice which expresses itself in sounds cannot be heard even for a hundred miles; the Voice, which is soundless penetrates beyond Heaven, and moves the kingdom. The words of men are not understood by other races of men; but at the Word of the Being which speaks not, the two principles, masculine and feminine, send forth their fructifying powers, and Heaven and Earth join to bring forth beings. Now the Way and Righteousness do not act, yet Heaven and Earth give beings their entire development. Heaven and Earth do not speak, but the four seasons follow their courses.”

This is not only the substance of the Logos doctrine, but the wording also.

44

Which is nearer to us, our renown or our own being?

Which is dearer, our own being or riches?

Which is the greater misfortune, to gain wealth, or to lose it?

Therefore he who has limitless desires is exposed to limitless misfortunes.

He who lays up rich treasures, inevitably suffers great losses.

He who suffices for himself dreads no dishonour.

He who holds himself in check risks no falls.

Such a one endures.

The commentator says, in his dry way: “Putting aside questions, this means that our own being is nearer to us than renown, dearer to us than riches; that it is a greater misfortune to gain wealth than to lose it.”

Another commentator says: “He who possesses righteousness knows that the fairest nobility dwells in him, therefore he expects nothing from renown. He knows that the most precious treasure abides in him, and therefore expects nothing from what wealth

procures. This is why he can hold himself in check, and does not fall. Since he is exposed neither to dishonour nor to danger, he endures.”

This is once again the teaching of the goodly pearl, the hidden treasure, which is the divine life hidden in the heart within:

45

The holy man is nobly perfect, yet he appears full of imperfections; his riches are not consumed.

He is nobly filled, yet he appears empty; his riches waste not away.

He is nobly upright, yet he appears faulty.

He is nobly discerning, yet he appears simple.

He is nobly eloquent, yet he appears to stammer.

Movement overcomes cold, but quietness overcomes heat. The pure and still become the model of the universe.

“The prince,” says the commentator, “who possesses the perfection of the Way and of Righteousness, conceals his glory and hides the praises he receives. The prince who possesses the fullness of the Way and of Righteousness appears empty; that is, he is full of honours, and yet dares not to exalt himself; he is rich, and dares not yield to luxury and indulgence.” The prince is the disciple of the “kings.”

Concerning the last sentence, a commentator has this to say:

“When a man becomes pure, still, detached, though he seek not to triumph over beings, no being can resist him. Therefore Lao Tse says that the pure and still become the model of the universe.”

46

When the Way ruled the world, the horses were sent to till the fields.

When the Way no longer rules, war horses are bred on the frontier.

There is no greater crime than to yield to desires.

There is no greater ill than not to be self-sufficing.

There is no greater loss than the lust of possessions.

He who is self-sufficing is ever content with his fate.

The commentators tend to take the simile of the horses literally, in a sense inclined toward Chinese pacifism. But Lao Tse so constantly approaches the thought and even the phrases of the Upanishads, drawing, it would seem, from the same perennial springs which inspired the Upanishads, that we are justified in holding that in this instance also he is speaking not in the spirit of pacifism but in the spirit of the hidden wisdom, using the symbols which are called the Mystery language.

If this be so, then we may compare the sentences concerning the horses with a passage in *Katha Upanishad*: “Know the Higher Self as the lord of the chariot, and the body as the chariot; know the soul as the charioteer, and the mind and emotional nature as the reins. They say that the powers of perception and action are the horses, and that objective things are the roadways for these.”

To apply this directly to our text: When we are under the rule of the Way, the Logos, the powers till the inner fields of our hearts and minds; the inner senses, the inner powers of action, come into activity; but when the Way does not rule, the powers are active only on the frontier, the outer fringe of our natures.

In the phrase, “self-sufficing,” it should be remembered that we are speaking of the Higher Self, concerning which one of the Upanishads says: “This is the mighty Soul unborn, who is consciousness among the life-powers. This is the heaven in the heart within, where dwells the ruler of all, master of all, lord of all. He is lord of all, overlord of beings, shepherd of beings. He is the bridge that holds the worlds apart, lest they should flow together. This is he whom the followers of the Eternal seek to know through their scriptures, sacrifices, gifts and penances, through ceasing from evil toward others. He who knows this becomes a sage. This is the goal in search of which pilgrims go forth on pilgrimages.”

We are the pilgrims, pilgrims of eternity, and manifested life is the pilgrimage.

47

Without leaving my house, I know the universe; without looking through my window, I discover the ways of Heaven.

The farther one goes afield, the less he learns.

This is why the sage goes whither he will without going abroad; he names things without setting eyes upon them; without acting, he accomplishes great things.

A Chinese commentator says: “Such is the essence of our nature, that it embraces and traverses the whole universe; it knows neither distance nor nearness of time or space. The saint knows everything without passing through his door or opening his window, because his nature is absolutely perfect; but men of the world are blinded by material things, their nature is limited by the limits of the senses; they are perturbed by their bodies and their emotions. Outwardly they are stopped by mountains and rivers, they see not beyond the scope of their eyes, they hear not beyond the reach of their ears. The slightest obstacle may paralyse either of these faculties.”

Lao Tse's thought appears to be exactly that of the sentences in *Kena Upanishad*: “Without moving, that One is swifter than mind. Nor did the bright Powers overtake It; It went swiftly before them. That outstrips the others, though they run, while It stands still.”

48

He who gives himself to studies, each day increases (his information).

He who gives himself to the Way, each day diminishes (his desires).

He diminishes them continually until he attains non-action.

When he has attained non-action all things are possible for him.

Through non-action he becomes master of the kingdom.

He who follows action cannot become master of the kingdom.

The Chinese phrase *wu-wei* is here translated non-action; its meaning is: abstinence from action inspired by selfishness; just as it has been said that we should do nothing which is desired by the lower self for that reason alone.

The whole matter is set forth at length in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and is, indeed, the most distinctive teaching of that Scripture of detachment and disinterested toil.

The Sanskrit word involved is *karma*. It may be interesting to try the experiment of re-writing Lao Tse's phrases, using this word:

“He who gives himself to the Way, each day diminishes his evil desires. He diminishes them continually until he attains freedom from karma. When he has attained to freedom from karma all things become possible for him. Through liberation from karma he becomes master of the kingdom of heaven. He who is bound by karma cannot become master of the kingdom of heaven.”

This is exactly the teaching of the closing passage of *Light on the Path*: “The operations of the actual laws of karma are not to be studied until the disciple has reached the point at which they no longer affect himself. . . . Therefore you who desire to understand the laws of karma, attempt first to free yourself from these laws; and this can only be done by fixing your attention on that which is unaffected by them.”

49

The sage has no set mental forms. He adapts himself to the minds of the people.

With the good, he is good; with the evil, he is also good. This is the perfection of goodness.

With the sincere, he is sincere; with the insincere, he is also sincere. This is the perfection of sincerity.

The holy sage, living in the world, dwells serene and unperturbed, keeping the same feeling for all.

The hundred families follow him with their ears and eyes.

The sage regards them as his children.

The best comment seems to be the following passage, quoted from the Revised Version: “Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you;

that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. . . . Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Here is another memorable phrase: “The men of old said: All men seek to conquer death; they do not know how to conquer life.”

50

Man departs from life to enter into death.

There are thirteen causes of life and thirteen causes of death.

No sooner is the man born, than these thirteen causes of death drag him swiftly toward his end.

What is the reason? It is because he desires to live too impetuously.

But I have learnt that he who rightly rules his life fears neither rhinoceros nor tiger in his path.

He enters the host and needs neither breastplate nor sword.

The rhinoceros finds no unguarded place to pierce with his horn, nor the tiger to tear him with its claws, nor the soldier to pierce him with his sword.

What is the cause? There is no place of death in him.

Commenting on the second line, one of the Chinese commentators says: “There are thirteen causes of life, that is, thirteen means for reaching spiritual life, namely: Emptiness of self, attachment to non-action, purity, quietude, humility, poverty, gentleness, tenderness, lowliness, simplicity, modesty, docility, economy. There are thirteen causes of death, which are the opposites of these, namely: Being filled with self, attachment to creatures, impurity, agitation, vanity, wealth, hardness, violence, pride, lavishness, haughtiness, rigidity, prodigality.”

Of the next sentences, a commentator says: “Lao Tse is speaking here of worldly men, who are passionately attached to worldly life and who know not the Way. How comes it that, thirstily seeking happiness, they find misery? It is because they work only to satisfy their passions and their personal interests; they do not know that, the more ardently they pursue the things of this life, the closer they come to death.”

Another commentator adds: “One of the men of old said: He who loves his life may be killed; he who is self-righteous may be soiled; he who thirsts for fame may be covered with shame; he who seeks perfection for himself may lose it. But if he stand apart from bodily life, who can kill him? If he stand apart from self-righteousness, who can soil him? If he stand apart from fame, who can put him to shame? If he seek not perfection for himself, who can make him lose it? He who understands this, has risen above life and death.”

51

The Way produces beings; righteousness nourishes them. These two give them a body and perfect them through a secret impulsion.

This is why all beings revere the Way and honour righteousness.

None conferred on the Way its dignity, nor on righteousness its nobility: they possess them eternally in themselves.

This is why the Way produces beings, nourishes them, increases them, perfects them, ripens them, feeds them, protects them.

It produces them, but does not appropriate them; It makes them what they are, but does not therefore exalt itself; It reigns over them and leaves them free.

This is what is called perfect righteousness.

The righteousness of which Lao Tse speaks here, says a Chinese commentator, is the manifestation of the Way in creatures. The Way expands like a river; it manifests itself outwardly, and becomes righteousness. When unmanifested, immaterial, void, it is called the Way; when it transforms and nourishes creatures, it is called righteousness.

Another commentator finds a striking parallel for the secret impulsion of the Way and of righteousness: By the force of impulsion, they perfect beings and lead them to their complete development. In the same way, if the force of Spring impels plants, they cannot resist coming to birth; if the force of Autumn impels them, they cannot resist coming to maturity. There is no being, says the same commentator, which from its birth to its complete development does not need the Way and righteousness. This is why all beings honour and revere them. There is no being that brings its nobility with it at birth. In order that the Emperor may be revered and surrounded with honours, he must have been consecrated by Heaven; that his vassals may be revered and surrounded with honours, they must have been appointed by the Emperor. But the Way and righteousness have no need that any should confer on them their dignity and their nobility; they are honourable of themselves.

The ruler of the kingdom, says a third commentator, must find all his glory in adhering closely to the Way and in emptying his heart, in order to attain to the perfection of righteousness.

The Principle of the world became the Mother of the world.

Gaining the Mother, one knows her children.

He who knows the children and retains their Mother, to the end of his days is exposed to no danger.

If he close his mouth, if he shut his ears and eyes, to the end of his days he shall feel no weariness.

But if he open his mouth and increase his desires, to the end of his life he cannot be saved.

He who sees the most subtle things is called enlightened; he who preserves his weakness is called strong.

He who uses the brightness of the Way and returns to its light, need fear no bodily calamity.

He is said to be doubly enlightened.

“Before the Way had a name,” says the commentator, “beings received their principle from It; when It had a name, they received their life from It. This is why the Way is first called Principle, and afterwards Mother. The words, “her children,” designate all beings. The Saint knows all beings, because he identifies himself with the Way, just as through the mother one knows the children. But, though his rare insight allows him to penetrate all beings, beings must never make him forget the Way. This is why to the end of his life he retains the Mother. The misfortune of the worldly is to forget the Way, through ardently seeking those things which flatter their senses.”

Concerning the shutting of the ears and eyes, a commentator says: “If a man allow himself to be drawn away by the enjoyment of music or the love of beauty, and forget to retrace his steps, he pursues beings and revolts against his nature. Therefore he should inwardly concentrate his hearing and his sight. Therefore Lao Tse advises him to dose his ears and eyes, in order that outward things may not enter into his soul. If he act thus, through his whole life he may use the Way, never suffering weariness. But if he gave himself up to the desires which flatter the ears and the eyes, if he let himself be drawn away by the impetuosity of the senses without returning to the good way, he would lose his heart under the influence of beings and, to the end of his life, he could not be saved.”

With this we may compare the sentences of *Light on the Path*: “Before the eyes can see they must be incapable of tears. Before the ear can hear it must have lost its sensitiveness.”

Concerning enlightenment by the light of the Way, a commentator says: “The Way may be considered as a tree of which its light is the root, and the emanation of its light, the branches. These branches spread themselves forth and produce in man the faculty of seeing, hearing, feeling, perceiving. The Way flows from the root to the branches.

Enlightenment sets forth from the branches to seek the root. This is why Lao Tse says: 'He who uses the brightness of the Way to return to its light, is called doubly enlightened.'

53

If I were endowed with perception, I would walk in the great Way.

The one thing that I fear is to be involved in action.

The great Way is one, but the people love by-ways.

If the palaces are splendid, the fields are untilled, the granaries are empty.

The princes are adorned with magnificent fabrics; they carry a sharp sword; they fill themselves with exquisite banquets; they are puffed up with riches.

This is what is called glorifying themselves through theft; it is not to follow the Way.

In the second sentence of the text, "to be involved in action" means, to be bound by the bonds of Karma. The cure is detachment: to do the right because it is the right, without thought of personal gain or loss.

For the fourth and following sentences, the best commentary is the saying, "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers." This is said to be the echo of a sentence in a ritual of Initiation. The spiritual Self, awakened and coming into his kingdom, sees that the personal selves that went before, the selves of egotism and sensual desire, were thieves and robbers, plundering and impoverishing the spiritual nature; prostituting divine powers and gifts for self-indulgence. In Lao Tse's words, "This is what is called glorifying themselves through theft."

54

He who knows how to establish, fears not destruction; he who knows how to preserve, fears not to lose.

His sons and grandsons will offer sacrifices to him in unbroken succession.

If he follow the Way within himself, his righteousness will become pure.

If he cultivate it in his family, his righteousness will become abounding.

If he cultivate it in the village, his righteousness will become extended.

If he cultivate it in the province, his righteousness will become flourishing.

If he cultivate it in the kingdom, his righteousness will become universal.

This is why I judge other men after myself; I judge other families after one family; I judge other villages after one village; I judge other provinces after one province; I judge the kingdom after the kingdom.

How do I know that it is thus with the kingdom? I know it solely by that (Way).

The Chinese commentator says that, if one plant a tree on a plain, a time will surely come when it will be torn up and thrown down. But that which is rightly established is

never torn up. If one hold an object between his hands, a moment will surely come when he will let it go. But that which we rightly preserve will never escape us. This double comparison refers to him who is established in righteousness and firmly keeps the Way.

We may cite in comparison: “Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.”

It would seem that the “sons and grandsons” are spiritual descendants, disciples of a Master of Wisdom, and that the sentences that follow may be taken to indicate the widening outlook of the disciple as he ascends from the branches toward the root of that tree of light, rooted in Heaven, which is the Way. Beginning by seeking the Way within himself, and looking within his own heart for the light, he is presently able to recognize that light in the hearts of others, a group of co-disciples, his own spiritual family. And so onward, until he becomes a Master of the kingdom.

55

He who possesses firmly established righteousness is like a child new born, who fears neither the stings of poisonous creatures, nor the claws of wild beasts, nor the talons of birds of prey.

His bones are weak, his muscles are soft, and yet he seizes objects firmly.

He is without the passions of sex, yet there is creative power within him. This comes from the perfection of the life-force.

The new-born will cry all day without losing his voice; this comes from the perfection of harmony in his powers.

To know harmony is to be firmly established.

To be firmly established is to be enlightened.

To extend his life outward is calamity.

When the impulse of vital energy springs from the heart, this is called strength.

When beings have thus reached their full growth, they begin to grow old.

This is what is called failure to follow the Way.

He who follows not the Way, soon perishes.

Lao Tse is here speaking of the birth of the spiritual man, of whom it is said: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God; except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The stinging, poisonous creature from whom the spiritual man is set free, is the snake of the lower self; the wild beasts are the passions; the birds of prey are the harpies of evil desires.

It is a quaint simile, the new-born child crying all day with unwearied voice; the thought appears to be the power of the spiritual man to “toil terribly,” with spiritual second wind.

To be firmly established is to be enlightened: “He who is perfected in devotion finds wisdom springing up within him.” Then comes the contrast, where all the vital impulses

go outward after sensual aims, and the heart is filled with impetuous desires. On the heels of that strength come decay and death.

56

The man who knows the Way speaks not; he who speaks knows it not.

He closes his lips, he shuts his ears and eyes, he controls his activity, he frees himself from all bonds, he tempers his light, he seems as one of the multitude. He may be said to be like the Way.

He is untouched by favour as by disgrace, by loss as by gain, by honour as by dishonour.

This is why he is the most honourable man under heaven.

The commentator says that the Saint keeps himself in calm and silence. He restrains the intemperance of the tongue. He pays no heed to the things which may flatter the ears and eyes. He concentrates inwardly his power of seeing and hearing.

He tempers his light; he brings light, but without dazzling anyone, giving to each the light he can receive. As he has few desires, the commentator adds, and few private interests, he cannot be rewarded; as he possesses the fullness of righteousness, he cannot be harmed; as he desires neither the favour of princes nor glory, he cannot be honoured; as he shrinks not from lowliness and abjection, he cannot be abased. This is the character of perfect righteousness; therefore he is the most honourable man under heaven.

Or, as an English poet has said of one who was thus perfected in righteousness, he was “the first true gentleman that ever breathed.”

57

With rectitude he governs the realm; with strategy he makes war; with detachment in action he becomes master of the kingdom.

How do I know that it is thus with the kingdom? By this:

The more the ruler multiplies interdictions and restrictions, the poorer become the people;

The more the people seek means of wealth, the more the realm is disturbed;

The more the people gain of craft and subtlety, the more fantastic possessions are multiplied;

The more the laws are complicated, the more robbers increase.

Therefore the Saint says: I practise detachment in action, and the people are converted spontaneously.

I love quietude, and the people become righteous of their own accord.

I do not busy myself, and the people spontaneously grow rich.

I free myself from desires, and the people of themselves return to simplicity.

The present commentator is inclined to think that Lao Tse has in mind a contrast between two methods of religious training: on the one hand, such a system of multiplied

commands and restrictions as that of the Pharisees; on the other, such an Order as that instituted by the Buddha, with renunciation of all possessions and all worldly activities, in order to secure inwardness and quietude of heart. There may be a reconciliation of the two which, with complete detachment and devotion, combines an ordered discipline of all the powers, and it would seem certain that, on the inner side of his Order, the Buddha perfected such a discipline.

58

When the government does not scrutinize too closely, the people become rich.

When the government is inquisitorial, the people lack all things.

Happiness is born from misfortune; misfortune is hidden in the heart of happiness. Who can foresee the outcome?

If the prince be not upright, upright men become deceitful, and righteous men perverse.

Men are plunged in errors, and this has already lasted long.

This is why the Saint is just, and injures not.

He is disinterested and harms not.

He is upright and does not chastise.

He is enlightened and does not dazzle.

The Chinese commentators are inclined to take this and the preceding, as well as the two following sections as aphorisms of practical politics, in the general sense of “less government in business,” and modern students of excessive government intervention may find much to agree with in this view.

But it seems to the present commentator that Lao Tse, while he may have been considering and criticizing the interfering and meticulous princes of his time, had also in mind something deeper; some such contrast as that between the legalistic Brahmans and the simplicity of the Buddha, or what Paul had in mind when he set faith against the works of the law.

The Chinese commentators go deeper when they take up the sentence: Happiness is born of misfortune. One of them declares that, when a man has fallen into some calamity, if he be able to repent of his faults, diligently to examine himself, and to be ceaselessly vigilant, he changes his misfortune into happiness. But when, on the contrary, a man sees all his desires fulfilled, if he grow haughty, abandoning himself to his passions without thinking of returning to righteousness, a host of misfortunes will descend upon him.

The same commentator, considering later sentences in this section, says that it is not only since yesterday that men are blind, abandoning rectitude. This blindness comes on insensibly; their misfortune is, that they are unconscious of it. This is why the Saint is careful of even the least things; he is always fearful that the people may come to

destruction. Unjust and greedy men become just and disinterested under the influence of the Saint's example, so that he has no need to punish them.

There is much in this part of Lao Tse's work that suggests the sentences: "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory."

59

To govern men and serve Heaven, nothing can be compared to moderation.

Moderation should be the first care of man.

When it has become his first care, it may be said that he is storing up righteousness abundantly.

When he stores up righteousness abundantly, there is nothing that he does not overcome.

When there is nothing that he does not overcome, no one knows his limits.

When no one knows his limits, he is able to possess the kingdom.

He who possesses the Mother of the kingdom maintains himself long.

This is to be deeply rooted, and to have a well set stem.

This is the way of long life and an existence that endures.

The Chinese commentators suppose that by moderation Lao Tse here means a wise governance both of outward possessions and of the inner powers of one's nature. One of them holds that the sovereign virtue, which is the Mother of the kingdom, is indeed the spirit and method of the Way. He who conforms himself to the spirit of the Way, the divine light that shines from above, both governs men and serves heaven.

Beginning to follow the Way, making the profound obeisance of the soul to the dim star that burns within, in the fullness of time he is able to possess the kingdom; rooted in the Eternal, he is conformed to the life of the Eternal and inherits eternal life.

60

To govern a great kingdom, one should imitate him who cooks a little fish.

When the ruler governs the kingdom according to the Way, the spirits do not show their power.

It is not that the demons lack power, but that the demons do not injure men.

It is not that the spirits cannot injure men, but that the Saint himself does not injure men.

Neither the Saint nor the spirits injure them; this is why their power is blended.

The simile in the first sentence, concerning the great kingdom and the little fish, has the same rather startling quaintness as a former simile for the impartiality of Heaven and Earth, which "regard all creatures as men regard the straw dogs" used in sacrifice. If we accept the text as being what Lao Tse actually wrote, we may imagine him watching

some peasant woman cooking little fish, handling them somewhat daintily, careful that they shall be cooked enough, but not too much; and saying to himself, or perhaps even to her: "That is exactly how a kingdom should be governed, with tact and discretion!"

There may be much more than our sceptical day and generation would willingly believe, in Lao Tse's thought that spirits are subject to the Saint; natural forces which we think of as merely mechanical, may have something of consciousness, and a consciousness responsive to the divine powers in man, so that "even the winds and the sea obey him."

61

The great kingdom shall be as the rivers and the seas, in which all the waters under heaven are united.

In the world, this is the part of the feminine: through quietude it constantly triumphs over the masculine. This quietude is a kind of abasement.

This is why, if the great kingdom abase itself before the little kingdoms, it will win the little kingdoms.

If the little kingdoms abase themselves before the great kingdom, they will win the great kingdom.

This is why some abase themselves in order to receive, while others abase themselves in order to be received.

The great kingdom desires only to unite and guide mankind.

The little kingdom desires only to be permitted to serve mankind.

Therefore both obtain what they desire.

But the great must abase themselves.

If the teaching of Lao Tse in many ways approaches the spirit of Christianity, this is, perhaps, the most distinctively Christian section in the whole work. We have not only the often repeated saying of the Master Christ, "He that shall humble himself shall be exalted," but the example of the Master, "who, being in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him."

We may believe that the Master Christ made himself pitiful, because pity is the final appeal to hard and self-centred human hearts, and that self-abasement in order to make this appeal is of the essence of his sacrifice. And we may also believe that what the Master Christ did visibly, all Masters do in the invisible world, making themselves bond-servants of mankind.

We have often found reason to believe that, when Lao Tse speaks of "the great kingdom," he means the spiritual kingdom, the Lodge of Masters. And it would seem

that “the little kingdom” here means mankind, and also the individual disciple. We can thus see a very real meaning in the saying that, “if the great kingdom abase itself before the little kingdom, it will win the little kingdom”; and, if “the little kingdom” means the disciple, then it is profoundly true that “the little kingdom desires only to be permitted to serve.”

62

The Way is the refuge of all beings; it is the treasure of the righteous man and the support of the wicked.

Excellent words can bring us riches, honourable acts can lift us above others.

If a man be not righteous, should he be driven away with contempt?

For his sake the Emperor was established and the three ministers were appointed.

It is good to hold up a tablet of jade, or to mount a chariot with four horses; but it is better to remain still, in order to advance in the Way.

Why did the ancients esteem the Way?

Is it not because the Way is found daily without seeking? Is it not because the guilty gain through It liberty and life?

This is why the Way is the noblest thing in the world.

Here again we have ideas in entire harmony with the teaching of Christ: “But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” That this is the meaning attributed to the words of Lao Tse by his followers is shown by the commentary: “If a man has faults, it is enough for him to amend in order to become righteous. This is why he should not be driven away because of his faults. If, in antiquity, the Emperor and three ministers were established, it was precisely in order to instruct and reform the vicious.” The tradition is, that the minister held a tablet of jade before his face when he entered the Emperor's presence; to hold up a tablet of jade thus means to enter the presence of the Emperor.

Regarding the closing sentences, the commentators say: “The wise men of old did not make long journeys in search of the Way; they returned to their pristine purity and found It within themselves.”

The wise man works without working, he is employed without being employed, he savours that which is without savour.

Great things or small things, many or few, are equal in his eyes.

He repays injuries with kindness.

He begins with easy things when considering hard things; with little things when planning great things.

The hardest things in the world began of necessity by being easy.

The greatest things in the world began of necessity by being small.

Therefore the Saint seeks not at all to do great things; this is why he can accomplish great things.

He who promises lightly, rarely keeps his word.

He who finds many things easy, of necessity meets many difficulties.

Therefore the Saint finds all things difficult; this is why, to his life's end, he meets with no difficulties.

The principle of detachment has already been considered. Of the later sentences, a commentator says: "Among the men of the world, there is not one who does not fear great things and disdain little things. It is only when things have become difficult that he plans them, and when they have become great that he undertakes them, and he continually fails. The Saint puts on the same level things great and small, many and few; he fears all equally; he finds them all equally difficult. How could he fail to succeed?"

Another commentator says: "A difficult thing did not become difficult all at once; it is born of easy things, and, through the insensible accumulation of these, it becomes difficult. This is why he who plans difficult things, must begin with what is easy in them. Great things did not become great all at once. They began by being little, and, by gradual progression and growth, they became great. This is why he who desires to accomplish a great thing, must begin with what is little in it. The Saint never seeks to accomplish great things all at once; he is content to accumulate little things; this is why he comes to accomplish great things."

What is at rest is easy to maintain; what has not yet appeared is easy to guard against; what is weak is easy to break; what is small is easy to scatter.

Stop the evil before it exists; quiet the disorder before it arises.

A tree of mighty trunk springs from a root as thin as a hair; a tower nine stories high began in a handful of clay; a journey of a thousand miles began with one step.

He who is absorbed in action fails; he who attaches himself to anything loses it.

Therefore the Saint is not absorbed in action, and does not fail.

He attaches himself to nothing, and loses nothing.

When the men of the world undertake anything, it always fails at the moment of success.

Pay heed to the end as well as to the beginning, and you will never fail.

Therefore the Saint makes his desire consist in the absence of all desire. He does not long for possessions that are difficult to gain.

He is zealous to be free from zeal, and escapes the faults of other men.

He guards himself against becoming absorbed in work, in order that he may help all beings to follow out their law.

The words “what is at rest,” says a commentator, indicate the time when no thought has yet been born in the heart, when joy or wrath have not yet shown themselves on the countenance, when the soul is perfectly serene and free from all emotion.

Regarding the simile of the tree, a commentator says: “This comparison shows that little things are the origin of great. If you wish to remove a tree, you must begin by tearing up the roots, otherwise it will grow again. If you wish to stop the flow of water, you must control the spring, otherwise it will flow anew. If you wish to end an evil, you must stop its source, otherwise it will burst forth once more.”

Regarding a later sentence a commentator says: “When common men see that an undertaking is on the point of succeeding, they yield to negligence and levity; then the undertaking changes its face, and they fail completely. Be on the watch, therefore, at the end of your undertakings, as men are at the beginning; then you will be able to bring them to perfect accomplishment and will never fail.”

Of the last sentence of the text a commentator says: “All beings have their proper nature. The men of the multitude do not follow the purity of their nature; they change themselves by giving themselves up to a disordered activity. They abandon candour and simplicity, to follow after cunning and astuteness; they give up what is easy and simple, to run after things arduous and complicated. In this they sin. The Saint sets himself to do the opposite.”

65

In antiquity, those who excelled in following the Way did not use it to enlighten the people; they used it to keep the people simple and ignorant.

The people is hard to govern because it has too much astuteness.

He who makes use of astuteness to govern the kingdom, is the scourge of the kingdom.

He who does not use astuteness to govern the kingdom, brings happiness to the kingdom.

When a man knows these two things, he is the model.

To know how to be the model, is to be endowed with heavenly virtue.

This heavenly virtue is deep, measureless, opposed to creatures.

By it he succeeds in gaining wide-extended peace.

“When the people,” says a commentator, “has not lost its simple and candid nature, it is easy to instruct and convert it; when the sincerity of its feelings has not been changed, it is easy to make it obey the laws. But as soon as it has gained much astuteness, its purity and simplicity vanish, while craft and hypocrisy grow in it from day to day. If one should wish to teach the people the Way, and to make it adopt upright and orderly conduct, he will meet with immense difficulties. This is the reason why the wise men of antiquity sought to keep the people simple and ignorant, instead of enlightening it.”

To put the matter in another way, the men of old thought that moral training should come before mental instruction.

66

Why are the rivers and the seas able to be the lords of all waters?

Because they know how to put themselves below them.

Because of this, they are able to become the lords of all waters.

So when the Saint wishes to rule the people, he must, by his words, put himself below the people.

When he desires to be placed in front of the people, he must put himself after the people.

So it comes that the Saint is set above the people, yet does not become a burden to the people; he is placed before all and the people suffers no hurt.

Thus all under heaven loves to serve him and does not weary of him.

As he does not claim precedence, there is none under heaven who can go before him.

“All the streams of the world,” says the commentator, “enter the rivers and the seas, giving themselves up to them; this is why the rivers and the seas are the lords of all streams. How do they bring the streams to them? Only because they are below them.”

One wonders whether, in those distant days, the people did in any general sense honour and obey the lowly and meek. It would seem to be the supreme sacrifice of the Masters, that, to help mankind, they must put themselves at the mercy of mankind; and mankind has as yet so little mercy.

All the world says my path is lofty, yet I am as one of low degree.

It is only because my path is mighty that I am as one of low degree.

As for the intelligent, their littleness has long been recognised.

I am the possessor of three precious things: I hold them and guard them as a treasure.

The first is called love; the second is called economy; the third is called humility, which forbids me to wish to be first under heaven.

I have love, and therefore I can be courageous.

I have economy, and therefore I can spend largely.

I dare not wish to be the first under heaven, therefore I can become the leader of all men.

But to-day they neglect love, to follow rashness; they neglect economy and spend largely; they neglect the lower place, to seek the higher place.

This path leads to death.

He who engages in warfare with a heart full of love gains the victory; if the city be guarded, it cannot be taken.

Whom Heaven would save, to him It gives love as a protection.

Perhaps the essence of this section may be summed up in the words: "He that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." The Greek word means the psychical life. He who hates the psychical, self-assertive principle in himself, guards his true life in the Eternal. This is a lofty path, yet he must be lowly who would tread it.

The three treasures are the reward of treading this path. Love is the life-breath of the Eternal, which breathes through the spiritual man, inspiring him with supreme courage to work for the purposes of the Eternal, and therefore to work courageously against the forces of self-assertion and self-seeking which seek to rob the Eternal. Economy is the wise use of all powers and resources, including the powers of the spiritual man; the right use of small efforts and small spaces of time. He who uses the moments for the Eternal, has time for much. He can spend and be spent for the purposes of the Eternal. Humility is to see oneself as being a part of the Eternal, having life only through the Eternal, seeking no purposes but the purposes of the Eternal. It is to burn up once for all the poisonous desire "to be the first under heaven," which is, whether avowed or not, the impulse of the lower self in every one; to surrender the heart utterly to the Eternal, in the spirit of reverent worship; and, in every thought and effort, to seek not self but the Eternal.

68

The excellent leader of armies is free from the spirit of contention.

The excellent warrior does not yield to wrath.

The excellent conqueror strives not.

The excellent leader of men puts himself below them.

This is called the possession of righteousness without contention.

This is called the wisdom to guide the powers of men.

This is called union with Heaven.

Such was the sublime wisdom of the ancients.

It is once more a question of the spiritual man inspired by the life-breath of the Eternal. He works valiantly and unwearingly for the purposes of the Eternal, yet he is free from the spirit of contention and wrath. He neither strives nor cries.

But, since the powers of the Eternal which inspire him dwell also in the hearts of other men, giving them all the life that they possess, he who understands and serves these forces can guide others into the way of righteousness.

69

A warrior of the ancients has said:

I dare not give the signal, as does the host; I had rather receive it, as does the guest.

I dare not advance an inch, I had rather withdraw a foot.

This is to have no rank to follow, no arm to stretch out, no enemy to pursue, no weapon to seize.

There is no greater error than to make light of the enemy.

To make light of the enemy is almost to lose our treasure.

Therefore, when two equally equipped armies meet, he who has the most love wins the victory.

According to one of the Chinese commentaries, this section is to be understood figuratively. It is intended to describe the humility and reserve of those who follow the Way.

Perhaps we shall be right, if we think of it as covering the same ground as certain sentences in *Light on the Path*: “Stand aside in the coming battle, and though thou fightest be not thou the warrior” ; “seek the way by retreating within.” The disciple is bidden to fasten the energies of the soul upon the task, the attitude opposite to making light of the determined and pitiless enemy. Carrying on the same thought, we may say that, in the conflict between the higher and lower nature, which is really a fight to the death, the higher nature wins because it has the greater love, love of the Eternal, as against self-love.

70

*My words are easy to understand, easy to carry out.
In the world, none can understand them, none can carry them out.
My words have a source, my acts have a rule.
Men understand them not, and therefore know me not.
Those who understand me are few, yet am I the more honoured.
Therefore the Saint is plainly clad, and carries his jewels in his bosom.*

The commentator says that the source of the Sage's words is the Way, that the rule of his acts is Righteousness, the practical following of the Way. Through the Way and Righteousness the Saint directs all the business of the kingdom, through them he clearly discerns success and failure, what is worthy of praise and what is worthy of blame; through them he distinguishes the portents of ill fortune and good fortune, of victory and defeat. Thus the Way is the source of his words, and Righteousness is the rule of his acts.

The last phrase in the text seems fairly paraphrased by the words: "That power which the disciple shall covet is that which shall make him appear as nothing in the eyes of men."

One of the Chinese commentators has this to say of it: "Inwardly, the Saint possesses sublime beauty; but, in his outward mien, he seems common and dull. He is like the oyster that hides a pearl under its rough shell; like the rude matrix that conceals a precious diamond. Therefore the herd cannot perceive his inner beauty or his hidden virtues."

71

*To know, and to think that we know not, is the crown.
Not to know, and to think we know, is the affliction.
If you are afflicted by this affliction, then you will not experience it.
The Saint does not experience this affliction, because he is afflicted by it.
This is why he does not experience it.*

The Chinese commentators thus explain this paradox: To know the Way, and to say we know It not, is the crown of righteousness. To be dazzled by the knowledge which is born of contact with things sensible, and not to possess the non-knowledge which constitutes true knowledge, is the general defect of the men of this world. He who knows not the Way is attached to false knowledge, which he mistakes for real knowledge. When false knowledge occupies his soul, it becomes an afflicting sickness. False knowledge is the afflicting sickness of our nature. When a man knows that false knowledge is an afflicting sickness, and is afflicted by this, then he no longer experiences the afflicting sickness of false knowledge. To know the Way, and to know that he knows It not, is the

condition of the Saint. The Saint is free from the afflicting sickness of false knowledge. This is why the afflicting sickness of false knowledge departs from him.

Perhaps we might put the same thought in another way: Real wisdom must always include a recognition of the great Mystery, the Unknowable. The Saint may know God; he cannot know why God is, or why He is Love. But he who is subject to the world-glamour of Maya, and is, therefore, continuously deceived, believes that he is facing realities. That very belief is the root of his delusion. But to recognize glamour, and to resent the tyranny of glamour, is to begin to free oneself from glamour. The Saint fights against the tyranny of glamour; therefore he is not the thrall of glamour.

72

When the people fear not what should be feared, then what is most to be feared descends upon them.

Beware of thinking your dwelling too narrow; beware of resentment over your lot.

I resent not my lot, therefore I find no cause for resentment in it.

Hence the Saint knows himself and does not make himself conspicuous; he exercises restraint and does not glorify himself.

This is why he shuns the one and follows the other.

In the course of life, say the commentators, the people have not the sense to fear what should be feared; they yield to their inclinations and indulge their passions, thinking there is no harm in this. Soon vices grow until they cannot be hidden, and crimes increase so that they cannot free themselves from them; then comes death, the thing most to be feared.

Your house may be low, or it may be lofty; in either, you can find content. Beware of thinking your house too small and narrow, as though it could not contain you. Your means may be abundant or restricted. In either case they will meet your needs. Beware of thinking them less than your deserts. Common people do not understand their destiny, and therefore they resent their lot. The Saint alone knows himself and his state, and gladly accepts the lot which Heaven sends him; he boasts not nor seeks outward things, and therefore he has enough. Common people are dissatisfied with their dwellings and think them narrow. But the Saint loves his home, and is everywhere content. He is not great in his own eyes, and seeks not to shine in the eyes of others.

Here again we may suggest a deeper meaning: Maya, glamour, personal delusion, is the root evil; he who is led by glamour is subject to death. The Saint, who has found his home in spiritual reality, understands and accepts his life as a part of spiritual reality. He resents nothing and is full of humility, knowing that he exists only through the grace of Divine Law.

73

He who dares to disobey, finds death.

He who dares to obey, finds life.

Of these two, one is helpful, one is hurtful.

When Heaven is offended, who can know the cause?

Therefore the Saint acts circumspectly.

This is the Way of Heaven:

It strives not, yet wins the victory.

It speaks not, yet wins obedience.

It calls not, yet men hasten thither.

It seems to delay, yet Its plans are wise.

The net of Heaven is spread out, its meshes are wide, yet none escapes it.

He who follows the headstrong lower self rashly disobeys the divine law, and takes the path of death. He who dares to control the lower self, thereby obeys divine law, and takes the path of life. He who follows the headstrong leading of the lower self, and thereby violates divine law, feels the penalty but does not recognize the reason why he is punished. But the Saint diligently seeks to understand divine law, and to obey it.

The Way, the Logos, works silently, guiding all life, and winning always; divine law is always triumphant. The powers of the Logos work slowly through immense periods of time, yet always toward the defined goal, the redemption of mankind and all life. None evades the meshes of divine law.

74

If the people fear not death, they will not be frightened by the threat of death.

If the people constantly fear death, and one of them does evil, then I can seize him and put him to death, so that none will dare to imitate him.

There is always a supreme authority to inflict death.

If anyone wish to usurp the place of this supreme authority, and himself inflict death, he is like one who wishes to cut wood in the place of the carpenter.

When one wishes to cut wood in the place of the carpenter, it is rarely that he wounds not his own hands.

The Chinese commentators take this literally, as a criticism of their criminal law: when death is the punishment for every fault, people no longer fear death. But we may find a deeper meaning, by following out the thought of the preceding section: the Logos in action, as the law of Karma, rules all life and adjusts all violation of law by what appears as punishment, but is really spiritual education. Those who do not realize the action of Karma, because they are blinded by the lower self, do not abstain from evil.

They are not restrained by the fear of violating the law, because they do not realize the existence of the law. But those who realize the law are deterred from evil through fear of violating that law. On the other hand, those who try to “take the law into their own hands” and to influence others while ignorant of their Karma, which means their real needs, are certain to “cut their own fingers.”

75

The people hunger because the prince consumes the produce of the land.

This is why the people hunger.

The people are hard to govern because the prince is too active.

This is why they are hard to govern.

The people despise death, because they seek the means of life too eagerly.

This is why they despise death.

But he who is not over busy with life is wiser than he who esteems life.

Once again the commentators take Lao Tse's meaning to be a criticism of political conditions. But it seems equally possible that his meaning is symbolical: the powers of the whole nature starve because the lower self usurps the field and appropriates the life forces. The powers are hard to control because the lower self is too active. The powers despise death and rush headlong into danger, because of the lower self's thirst for sensations and emotions. But he who is detached from life and does not seek sensations or emotions, is wiser than he who is immersed in life.

76

When a man is born, he is supple and weak; when he dies, he is strong and rigid.

When trees and plants first spring up, they are pliable and tender; when they die, they are dry and hard.

Hardness and force are the attendants of death; suppleness and weakness are the attendants of life.

This is why, when the army is strong, it does not win the victory.

When a tree has grown strong, it is cut down.

He who is strong and great occupies the lower rank; he who is pliable and weak occupies the higher rank.

A wise Chinese commentator says that this whole section has a symbolical meaning. Lao Tse wishes to say that he who draws near to the Way through yielding and obedience, is assured of life, and he who departs from the Way, seeking force and power, and striving against obstacles instead of yielding to them, will perish without fail.

This seems to be another version of the saying that he who will save his life shall lose it, but he who will lose his life shall save it, keeping it unto life eternal.

77

The Way of Heaven is like the maker of a bow, who lowers what is high and raises what is low; who removes excess and supplies what is lacking.

Heaven takes the excess of those who have it, in order to help those who are lacking.

It is not so with men, who take from those who lack, to give to those who have in excess.

Who can give from his abundance to all who are under Heaven? He alone, who possesses the Way.

Therefore the Saint does good without glorying in it.

He accomplishes great things, but is detached from them.

He does not wish his wisdom to be seen.

Heaven, says a commentator, seeks to bring about a balance in all things, taking the excess of some, and supplying the lack of others. Man is in opposition to Heaven, and does not follow the law of balance. He alone who possesses the Way understands the way of Heaven. The wise men of old who surpassed others, used their powers for the good of others.

Again, we may perhaps find a deeper meaning: the lower self, which is in excess, is to be diminished; the better self, which at present is deprived of its part in life, is to be made strong. This victory will mean humility, detachment, and a blessing to others.

78

Nothing under Heaven is softer and weaker than water, yet nothing can better break what is hard and strong.

In this, nothing can take the place of water.

The weak triumphs over the strong; the soft triumphs over the hard. No one in the world but knows this, yet no one can put it into practice.

This is why the Saint says: He who bears the reproach of the kingdom becomes the ruler of the kingdom.

He who bears the calamities of the kingdom becomes the king of the whole realm.

The words of truth seem contrary to reason.

Water is like the Way, says a commentator, because it can enter into all forms, and move in all directions. It bends or rises; it will fill a square vase as well as a round vase. If an obstacle blocks its way, it stops; if you open a passage for it, it will go wherever you desire. Yet it carries great ships, tears down rocks, hollows out valleys, pierces mountains, and upholds Heaven and earth.

Another commentator declares that the men of the world think that only the base will endure reproaches. But the Saint holds that they should be endured without complaint.

If his words seem foolish and contrary to reason, this is only because they are judged from the point of view of the multitude.

79

Though you appease the great hostilities of men, they will still retain a residue of hatred.

How could they become virtuous?

Therefore the Saint keeps the left half of the contract and expects nothing from others.

This is why the virtuous man thinks of giving, and he who is without virtue thinks of asking.

Heaven is without predilection, and gives constantly to the virtuous.

The thoughtful Chinese commentators may be summed up thus: It is better to remain indifferent, and to forget equally the good which we have imparted and the injuries which we have received. Hostilities are born of illusion, and illusion springs from our nature. He who knows his nature, and keeps it pure, has no illusions; how should he feel hostility? But those who cannot tear up the root of hostility are able only to cut off the branches; therefore, though outwardly calm, they nurse hatred in their hearts. He who is perfectly sincere, has no conflicts with others. He lets them follow their natures and does not arouse their hostility; he gives to each what he desires, and asks nothing from anyone.

The contract is a tablet of wood which can be split in two. On this the agreement to pay or deliver a certain thing is written. He who is to pay or deliver the thing agreed on, keeps the left half of the tablet, and he who is to receive it keeps the right half. When the receiver presents himself, holding in his hand the right half of the tablet, and it is found that the two halves fit accurately together, the giver delivers the object of the contract without raising the smallest question as to the rights or the sincerity of the receiver. When Lao Tse says that the Saint keeps the left half of the contract, he means that he asks nothing from anyone, and that he expects others to ask of him whatever they desire.

The Saint gives to others, and asks nothing in return. But Heaven gives to him constantly, loading him with gifts and blessings.

So far, the Eastern commentaries. A Western commentator would be inclined to point out the close resemblance between the thoughts of this most Christian of Orientals, born six centuries before Christ, and the words of the Master Christ; for example, the sentence quoted by Saint Paul: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus how he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount: "I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be the sons of your Father which is in Heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Had I a little kingdom with few inhabitants, if they had weapons for ten or for a hundred, they should not use them.

I should teach them to fear death and to remain at home.

If they had boats and chariots, they should not enter them.

If they had breastplates and spears, they should not equip themselves with them.

I should bring them back to the use of knotted cords for records.

They should eat their food with satisfaction, they should find their clothing pleasing, they should be satisfied with their dwellings, they should love simple customs.

Were there another kingdom so close to mine that the crowing of cocks and the barking of dogs could be heard from one to the other, my people should grow old and die without visiting the neighbouring people.

The Chinese commentators understand this eloquent little sermon in the sense of the simple life and the age of gold. But it is more likely that Lao Tse has in mind the life of the disciple, which is indeed simplicity, a return to the golden age. Perhaps the most illuminating parallel is this, from *Light on the Path*: “When the disciple has fully recognized that the very thought of individual rights is only the outcome of the venomous quality in himself, that it is the hiss of the snake of self which poisons with its sting his own life and the lives of those about him, then he is ready to take part in a yearly ceremony which is open to all neophytes who are prepared for it. All weapons of defence and offence are given up; all weapons of mind and heart, and brain, and spirit. Never again can another man be regarded as a person who can be criticized or condemned; never again can the neophyte raise his voice in self-defence or excuse. From that ceremony he returns into the world as helpless, as unprotected, as a new-born child. That, indeed, is what he is. He has begun to be born again on to the higher plane of life, that breezy and well-lit plateau from whence the eyes see intelligently and regard the world with a new insight.”

This is the site of Lao Tse's “little kingdom,” and this is the reason why those who dwell there will not arm themselves with spear or breastplate, nor seek again to return to “the other kingdom.”

81

Honest words are not ornate; ornate words are not honest.

The man of worth is not glib of speech; the glib of speech is not a man of worth.

He who knows the Way is not erudite; he who is erudite knows not the Way.

The Saint lays not up treasure.

The more he spends himself for men, the greater grows his power.

The more he gives to men, the richer he becomes.

Such is the Way of Heaven, which lavishes blessings on all beings and harms none.

Such is the Way of the Saint, who toils, yet without contention.

True words, say the commentators, need no adornment. Who acts rightly needs no eloquence. Who possesses the heart of the matter need not be learned in many things. The Saint uses the Way for mankind, he gives all his treasures to men. Though he lavish his treasure on all the men of the kingdom and on ages to come, the Way grows ever greater for him, and is inexhaustible; his treasure ever increases and knows no diminution.

Heaven nourishes all beings, helping all and harming none. The Saint furthers the kingdom through the Way; when his works are fulfilled, he is detached from them. He seeks neither reward nor glory.

Here ends the Tao-Teh-King