

AN EXPOSITION OF TAOISM.¹

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TAOISM and Confucianism are the oldest religions of China. Taoism originated with the originator of all religions. He transmitted it to Lao-tze, who was born about B. C. 604 under the Cheu dynasty, was contemporary with Confucius, and was keeper of the archives. His *Tao Teh King* treats of the origin and philosophy of nature, of the mystery behind and above the visible universe, in order to educate the ignorant.

In time, Taoism divided into four schools—the Original, the Mountain, the Barrier and the Orthodox schools. After ten generations these schools became one again. The Barrier school is probably represented to-day by the Pure Truth school, which really originated with Wang Chieh in A. D. 1161, and has flourished all the more since the rise of the Mongol dynasty. The present head of Taoism is of the Orthodox school.

At present Taoism has a northern and a southern branch. Our sacred books are divided into advanced, secondary and primary classes, the advanced class discussing the question how to find truth or the eternal, the secondary class the origin of things, and the elementary class treating of spirits. There are also three secondary classes in three books—*The Great Beginning*, *The Great Peace*, *The Great Purity*. The Orthodox school also has a literature divided into three independent classes, and called the sacred literature of the three classes.

If Taoists seek Taoism's deep meaning in earnest, and put unworthy desires aside, they are not far from its original goal. But in after generations the marvelous overclouded this; Taoists left the right way, and boasted wonders of their own. Legends of gods and

¹An essay communicated to the Religious Parliament held in 1893 at Chicago. See the editorial note on "The Pope of Taoism" on another page of this issue.

genii became incorporated in Taoism. In the Han dynasty Taoism had thirty-seven books and the genii religion ten. These were different at first. But from the time Taoism ceased to think purity and peaceableness sufficient to satisfy men, it became the genii religion [magic and spiritualism], though still called Taoism.

From B. C. 206 to A. D. 220 the doctrines of Hwangti and Lao-tze flourished together. The former ones related to miracles and wonders, the latter to truth and virtue.

The *Tao Teh King* had said nothing of the pellet of immortality (or an elixir of life), but about A. D. 420 this theory of a spiritual germ was read into it. Kwo Chang Keng held that what the *Tao Teh King* says about things being produced by what existed before nature is the source of the germ of immortality. The *Wu Chin Pien*, another of our orthodox books, discusses nothing except the importance of this eternal germ. The art of breathing the breath of life was practiced, and the fundamental nature of Taoism underwent change. Then the secret of the germ of life and the art of refining one's nature were sought; and its foundations experienced another change. Finally Chang Lu (*circa* A. D. 385-582?) used charms in his teaching, and employed fasting, prayer, hymns and incantations to obtain blessings and repel calamities; and Taoism's fundamental doctrines had utterly disappeared.

What does Taoism mean by the phrase, Carrying out heaven's will? It means that heaven is the first cause of religion, that man is produced by two forces, Yin and Yang;* that heaven gave the spiritual nature; and that when this is lost he cannot carry out heaven's will nor be a man. Heaven is called the great clearness, the great space, and this clear space is heaven's natural body. Taoism regards heaven as its lord, and seeks to follow heaven's way. If men, to preserve the heaven-given soul, can premise Yin and Yang as the foundation of truth and of the spiritual nature, and can nourish the heaven-given spiritual life, what need for the medicine of immortality?

Those who carry out heaven's will are able to fulfil their duties as men. Those who really study religion, cultivate their spiritual nature, preserve their souls, gather up their spiritual force, and watch their hearts. They believe that if the spiritual nature be not nurtured, it daily dwindles; if the soul be not preserved, it daily dies; if the spiritual force be not exercised, it is dissipated daily; if the heart be not watched, it is daily lost.

* For an explanation of Yin and Yang, the negative and the positive principles, see Carus, *Chinese Philosophy*, p. 3.

Taoism, though considering purity fundamental, adds patience to purity and holds to it with perseverance, overcomes the hard with softness, and the firmest with readiness to yield. Thus Taoism attains a state not far from man's original one of honesty and truth without becoming conscious of it.

Practice virtue in quietude and with persistence. The invisible make visible and let it return to the invisible. Collect your spirits till you have force. Collect your forces till you have living seeds. This is to produce existence from non-existence. Sow these seeds, nourish them with your influence, exercise your influence to keep your spirits, and lead them from the seen to the unseen. When human duties are fulfilled, not a particle of the eternal intelligent germ need be lost. Space and my body are but parts of one, and are of the same age. Without seeking immortality, the body becomes immortal. If not, this bit of divine light is Yin; and will be extinguished by the bad influences of this life.

Comprehension of the hereafter is one of the mysteries in which no religion can equal Taoism. The living force in my body fills space, influences everything, and is one with creation. If we can in reality attain to it [life-force?], we are able to know spirits in the dark domains. In the future life there is but one principle. Ghosts are the intelligent powers of Yin; gods those of Yang.

The benefits conferred by Taoism on the government cannot be exhausted by relating isolated instances.

Taoism and the genii-religion have deteriorated. Taoists only practice charms, read prayers, play on stringed or reed instruments, and select [for burial grounds] famous mountains to rest in. They rejoice in calling themselves Taoists, but few carry out the true learning of the worthies and the holy sages of the past. If we ask a Taoist what is taught in the *Yin Tu King*, he does not know. If you kneel for explanation of the *Tao Tch King*, he cannot answer.

Oh! that one would arise to restore our religion, save it from errors, help its weakness, expose untruth with truth, explain the mysteries, understand it profoundly and set it forth clearly, as Roman Catholics and Protestants assemble to hear the masses, and to explain the doctrines that their followers may know the ends for which their churches were established! If the coarse influences with which custom has obscured them were removed, the doctrines of Lao-tze, Chang-tze, Yin Hi and Lie-tze might shine forth brightly. Would not this be fortunate for our religion?