

WISDOM OF THE EAST

YANG CHU'S GARDEN OF PLEASURE

**TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE BY
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**WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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[LONDON, 1912]

{Reducted to HTML by Christopher M. Weimer, Sept. 2003}

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YANG CHU'S GARDEN OF PLEASURE

INTRODUCTION

THE period of the Warring States of the Western Chinese Empire, 480 to 230 B.C., embraces practically (almost) all of the philosophies of China, and is curiously coincident with the rise of philosophy in Greece under somewhat similar conditions.

To the capital of Liang, in the State of Wei, came all the philosophers, just as they came to Athens. Here came Mencius, perhaps one of the greatest of the exponents of Confucianism, a veritable St. Paul of the Confucian movement, and the chief opponent of Yang Chu. Here came Chuang-Tzŭ, most subtle among the Taoist sophists, Li Kuei the great statesman and law-giver, Hsün-tzŭ the philosopher of the doctrine of original evil, Wên-tzu the able follower of Lao-tzŭ, and Mo-Ti the apostle of brotherly love, whose name is frequently bracketed with Yang Chu in condemnation by Mencius. Seldom had any capital in the world attracted so many profound original and subtle thinkers as the capital of the State of Wei, in the third and second centuries before Christ. The spread of Christianity in Eastern Europe, and Confucianism in China, ultimately [p. 8](#) destroyed or diverted the philosophic spirit, substituting religious dogma and rites for philosophic inquiry and reason, and for centuries the the philosophies lay buried or perished altogether in the great burning of the books in 213 B.C., or passed, like Taoism, into the realms of rites and worship, or were preserved only in fragmentary form, like the single chapter of the philosophy of Yang Chu, that remains imbedded in the Taoist teachings of Lieh Tzu. But in the third and fourth centuries B.C., the golden period of Chinese philosophy, the minds of men were turned to the critical examination of life. Philosophers rose, exploring boldly the motives and mysteries of existence, gathered around them disciples, and went from court to court, gaining fresh adherents and disputing with rival teachers on the most diverse and subtle of subjects.

At the Court of Liang at the period of Yang Chu, about 300 B.C., the philosophers were treated as guests of the reigning king, who reserved for them lodging and maintenance, and encouraged all who had any pretence to the pursuit of truth and wisdom. Whether or not Yang Chu was actually a native of the Wei State, or whether he came there drawn by the attraction of a critical and unrivalled audience, it is at least certain that he settled there as small proprietor, probably in the reign of King Hwei, and continued there till his death, about 250 B.C. One [p. 9](#) may imagine a condition of life in many respects somewhat analogous to the life of Epicurus in his famous Athenian Garden. To the philosopher of pleasure and contentment came pupils and disciples, discourses were held in much the same way as at an identical period discourses were held in the garden at Athens, and it is to these discourses, memorised and recorded by his favourite pupil Meng-sun-Yang, that we most probably owe the single fragment of the teaching of Yang Chu that remains, a fragment complete and explicit enough to enable us to form a clear estimate of his teaching and philosophy.

Of his personal life, a little is to be gathered from Chapter XIV., where in an amusing interview with the King of Liang, the philosopher states the simple truth that what is possible and easy to some men is difficult and impossible of attainment to others, and that there is no more real merit in ruling a kingdom well than in guiding a flock of sheep. From this chapter we learn that he lived the customary life of the Chinese gentleman of his day. A wife, a

concubine and a garden are mentioned, and in surroundings quite simple and unpretentious he found, one may imagine, something of the pleasure and contentment of his philosophic ideal.

From the few authentic anecdotes contained partly in the book of Chuang Tzu and Lieh Tzu, one may gain but little more: that he had a [p. 10](#) brother called Yang Pu, the hero of the delightful story of the dog who failed to recognise his master; and that, like other philosophers of the period, he travelled frequently through other States, taking with him a few chosen disciples, putting up at wayside inns, expounding his philosophy in strange courts, or commenting wittily on the passing adventures of the journey. These few facts present to us a life in no way differing from the lives of the majority of philosophers of his time, both in Greece and China. They tell us little, but they tell us sufficient. They disclose a personality at once profound, even cynical, witty and singularly clear sighted.

That his philosophy failed to find permanent foothold is hardly to be wondered at. His ideas were too daring, too subversive of the accepted order of things, to attract the mass of people, who came, no doubt, to listen to the suave and witty philosopher of happiness and the cult of the senses, but returned, one may imagine, with a satisfied readiness to their rites of ancestor worship or the cultivation of their Taoist superstitions. His philosophy had no place for rites. It denied a ruling spirit, it was anti-deistic. It could disclose no signs and marvels. To the seekers after the Taoist secret of passing invisibly through the air he offered nothing but the most material and mundane of views. To the seekers for guidance he offered happiness in its most simple form, [p. 11](#) and that at the expense of vulgar self-assertion and self-glorification. His adherents could never have numbered more than a few.

Dr. Forke, in his extremely interesting introduction to the seventh chapter of *Lieh Tzu*, which contains all that remains of the teaching of Yang Chu, compares his philosophy to a study in scarlet on black, the scarlet symbolic of the joy of life, the black of his unyielding pessimism, and at first sight the comparison is so apt that one is inclined to accept it.

One feels the curious, almost mephitic profundity of the sage that stirred the wrath of his Christian commentators almost to the bounds of unseemliness. His bland indifference to virtue, civic and personal, his insistence on life only as a means of separate and individual expression, his negation of self-sacrifice, and his contempt of the good, the excellent and the successful, produce at first in the Western mind the sense of a moral atmosphere dark and sinister as the cloud from which emerges the evil genii of the East. "His teaching is quite detestable," says Dr. Legge, and elsewhere he refers to him as the "least-erected spirit who ever professed to reason concerning the duties of life and man." Balfour in his *Oriental Studies* speaks of "the irreproachable Kuan Chung, who is made to utter the most atrocious doctrines," and it is doubtful if anybody who has a preconceived or inherited basis of morality or [p. 12](#) dogma will cease to agree with the two opinions quoted above. For them the tower of philosophy from whence through many windows strangely tinted, opaque or clear, the philosophers view the world as a small thing viewed with interest and careful detachment, must ever seem something a little aloof, a little repellent. About all philosophy there lingers the haunting sense of the coldness, the dispassion of the philosopher. Marcus Aurelius will always, to most men, seem a little less than perfectly human, Socrates a little more than the perfect doctrinaire. The world will always turn for guidance to the idealists like Christ and Buddha rather than to the philosophers like Epictetus and Kanada. The garden of Epicurus has faded from the minds of men. The garden of Gethsemane will for ever remain like a picture engraved deeply in their hearts.

Unlike the poet, the philosopher has no country. And seldom is this so clearly to be seen as in the fragment of Yang Chu, that contains the essence of his philosophy. Elaborated and subtilised, it forms the basis for the Epicurean philosophy in Greece; in the calm summit of its indifference it attains the ultimate perfection of the ego realised many centuries later by Max Stirner, and is akin in some respects. to the Charvaka philosophy in India, while lacking the harsh note of combative scepticism which leaves the Indian doctrine less a philosophy than a rebellion in thought.

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Both philosophies press upon men the importance of happiness during life, but while to Yang Chu the study and cultivation of the senses are all, Bhrihaspati is content to leave the expression of pleasure in a formula at once singularly empty, and tinged with the indifference and cynicism of one to whom the subject is really of little moment.

While life remains let a man live happily. Let him feed on ghee, though he runs in debt.

When once the body becomes ashes, how can it ever return again?

The larger view of the Chinese philosopher in reality transcends the philosophy of Brihaspati by that quality of attention to and intense feeling for life, which in some respects brings him closer to Epicurus, his truer Western prototype, though he accepts no basis of semi-moral self-interest for life, postulates no far-living philosophic deities, and gives to man the solitary satisfaction of his senses, and that only for the brief space of his lifetime.

It is here that Dr. Forke traces the underlying pessimism of the sage, the blackness against which are silhouetted the scarlet pleasures of life. But this black pessimism is not real. It appears only in illustration of the folly of the desire for fame, or of the various means whereby man closes for himself the gateways of happiness. It is no part of his philosophy—rather it is the antithesis. That he dwells upon the shortness of life, p. 14 that he upholds no promise of an after-life, that he deprecates the retarding influence of virtues, where by their practice the full sense of life is dulled and warped, does not establish or even condone any pessimistic outlook on life; on the contrary, a full judgment of life, a clear sense of the futility of much that has been accepted as praiseworthy, would preclude any philosopher who has once accepted the individual standpoint as the primary and important standpoint from developing a pessimism which would absolutely nullify his philosophy. The keynote of this philosophy is disregard of life, disregard of death. Those things exist and are to be accepted. From them are to be taken what to each one is good. Only strife, insatiability, greed, anxiety, false striving for virtue or fame, are to be avoided as unnecessary and disturbing. The primary and the only gift of man is his individuality. That is all that he inherits, and with him it perishes. It is for him to preserve this single gift to the ultimate moment, neither striving to exceed nor to renounce. All those things that have ministered to this development of individuality are good, all those things that have warped or retarded it are bad, whether they be virtue, the desire for fame, for power, for regulating the affairs of others, or the regulation of one's own conduct in conformity with the views of others. By these things the lives of men are dominated and rendered unhappy. Their life p. 15 is passed in a state of fever. Their personalities are warped or destroyed or rendered miserable. They pursue chimeras, neglecting the happiness that lies at their very feet. Fainting, they fall and perish and are forgotten. The clear light of many days brings to them no pleasure. The very word pleasure has lost its meaning for them. They take nothing from life but disquiet of spirit, anxiety and discontent. Within each one are certain desires, certain appetites, certain wishes. These things

are normal and natural. They are in themselves the ultimate means whereby personality is fostered and preserved. The philosopher, viewing life clearly, neglecting nothing, fearing nothing, regarding nothing, pursues his way. True to himself, disquiet does not touch him. For him the simplest pleasures will suffice, for contentment is an axiom of his philosophy. Relying absolutely upon his senses, he comes to understand them, and when in the end they begin to fail he renounces the life which has become useless to him, and with the sage of Wei passes into final oblivion.

This philosophy of the senses, enunciated by the philosopher with a calm, smiling carelessness, has no real affinity with pessimism. Naturalism and sensism may find in him certain affinities, but pessimism, which is primarily at the base of all religions which regard the natural desires and appetites of man as a primary legacy of a nature [p. 16](#) naturally and originally evil, has no exponent in the sage of Liang, who, believing in nature and taking men as he finds them, urges them faithfully to follow their natures whithersoever they may lead them.

It is here that one may find perhaps the real answer to the riddle that has puzzled all the students of the great exponent of Taoism, Lieh Tzu, in whose work the solitary fragment of Yang Chu is imbedded.

The Taoist philosophy is the philosophy of naturalism. It teaches the following of nature. Obedience to the laws of nature is the primary axiom of the Taoist philosophy. Both Yang Chu and Lieh Tzu start from the same point—the close and acute study and observation of nature. They postulate existence as a natural thing, neither good nor bad in itself. To both thinkers an accepted morality is a hindrance.

"He who regards as common property a body appertaining to the universe and the things of the universe is a perfect man," says Yang Chu. And this sense of the oneness and freedom of nature is so distinctly true to Taoist teaching that one hesitates to accept the apparent complete antagonism between the two teachings. The doctrine of universal theft from nature is a purely Taoist doctrine, where all things in nature are common property and all things are stolen.

We steal our very existence from nature, says [p. 17](#) Lieh Tzu. Such thefts are unconscious thefts. The doctrine of disregard is also largely Taoist in thought. The ideal Taoist minimises desires and cravings:

"They followed their natural instincts, feeling neither joy in life, nor abhorrence of death. Thus they came to no untimely ends."

One may compare this with the saying of Yang Chu:

"Having once come into life, disregard it and let it pass, mark its desires and wishes and be drifted away to annihilation."

One may best compare the two teachings by saying that Yang Chu is the naturalist philosopher in youth; Lieh Tzu the naturalist philosopher in old age. It is at least possible that in the lost works of Yang Chu the link that binds him more closely with the Taoist doctrine existed, a link that would account for the inclusion of this fragment of his work in the book of *Lieh Tzu*.

It is only in actual theory of conduct as apart from metaphysical speculation that the divergence between the two is most marked. In that single sentence dealing with the oneness and freedom of nature we have the solitary expression of metaphysical speculation in the whole of the philosophy of Yang Chu, but that line of philosophic thought, one may conjecture, is either a solitary exception or a clue to the puzzle that has perplexed all students of Taoist philosophy.

p. 18

But theory of conduct takes up practically the whole of the solitary work of Yang Chu that remains, and it is this theory of conduct that marks the real divergence between the teaching of Yang Chu and that of Lieh Tzu. Both viewed all life and nature as it really exists as a natural phenomenon, governed by certain natural and unavoidable laws, and both drew from the same premises deductions of a different character. In the world of Yang Chu life is dominated and bounded by the senses. His philosophy is a sense philosophy. To live in accord with the senses man must renounce nothing, strive for nothing. All his conduct must be guided by his senses. Nature is not perverse, only man where he deflects from nature is perverse, where he builds systems of anti-natural morality, where he piles up useless riches, where he limits or destroys the full expression of individuality to the senses.

So he evolves a philosophy of life quite logical and quite unmoral, in which all life and all expression of life are centred in the senses, where the cultivation of the senses is the primary law and the gratification of them by the simplest means the ultimate object. Here at any rate, whatever we may dimly suspect, is no metaphysical subtlety. The theory is set before us so plainly, so uncompromisingly, that there is no loophole for escape. Even Epicurus is weak-kneed beside the calmly smiling sage of Liang. Here is no p. 19 philosophic minister to the senses, no subtle qualification. Pleasure is an actual thing, no mere negative phantom. All forms of pleasures are swept into his net. Nothing is bad, nothing is evil.

"Allow the ear to hear what it likes, the eye to see what it likes, the nose to smell what it likes, the mouth to say what it likes, the body to enjoy the comforts it likes to have, and the mind to do what it likes."

The careful study and cultivation of the senses is the true basis of egoistical philosophy, and it is logically unassailable. It is the basis, if not of much modern thought, at least of a great deal of modern action, and gathers impetus from its reiterated demand from all classes for a fuller, more complete individual expression.

Starting from the same premises, the Taoist philosopher, who is essentially a metaphysician, turns aside and plunges into the unknowable. To him life is a force, strange, inert, passive, and fecund, impermeable, intangible and mysterious. It is to the comprehension of this force that lies at the back of all natural phenomena, that the Taoist urges his disciples. Learn to know Tao which is the way, the way of nature; allow yourself to drift, to merge into nature. Desires and their satisfaction have no part in this philosophy.

"Those who excel in beauty become vain, says Lieh Tzu. Those who excel in strength become violent. To such it is useless to speak of Tao. Hence he who is not yet turning grey will surely err if he but speak of Tao. How much less can he put it into practice!"

p. 20

Here is the clear dividing line between the two. To Yang Chu the senses are all, their satisfaction everything. Youth and youth alone can obtain the full satisfaction that the senses demand. With age comes restraint and final renunciation.

To the Taoist, without this restraint and renunciation nothing can be done. The way of Tao is closed. Youth may not enter save by doing violence to his natural instincts.

Passivity, old age, introspection belong to Lieh Tzu; joyousness and contentment to Yang Chu.

The whole of his philosophy is sustained by this sense of happiness easily obtained, close at hand, a happiness that is independent of enforced and uncongenial labour, deadening the senses and turning men into unwilling beasts, and independent of the burden of riches, which in themselves are a direct means of limiting personality.

"Yuan Hsien lived in mean circumstances in Lu, while Tse Kung amassed wealth in Wei.

"Poverty galled the one and riches caused uneasiness to the other.

"So poverty will not do, nor wealth either.

"Enjoy life and take one's ease, for those who know how to enjoy life are not poor, and he that lives at ease requires no riches."

The philosopher does not say how this happy condition of life is to be brought about. To him it was possibly a corollary to the discovery of the uselessness of wealth for the purpose of happiness. There is no taint or suspicion of socialism [p. 21](#) or any tyranny limiting or defining the action of individuals; on the contrary his philosophy is purely individualist and non-authoritarian. He visualises quite clearly a kind of golden age, a fabulous pre-existing period in the history of the world, where strife for useless power and useless domination and useless fame did not exist, where a full knowledge of the importance of living so brief a life as happily as possible alone guided the actions of men. In speaking of this period and contrasting it with the later period in which strife and domination and wealth had reduced men to the unhappy condition of manacled slaves, he says:

"The Ancients knew that all creatures enter but for a short while into life and must suddenly depart in death. Therefore they gave way to their impulses and did not check their natural propensities.

"They denied themselves nothing that could give pleasure to their bodies; consequently, as they were not seeking fame but were following their own nature, they went smoothly on, never at variance with their own inclinations.

"They did not seek for posthumous fame. They never did anything criminal, and of glory and fame, rank and position, as well as of the span of their life, they took no heed."

He was essentially the philosopher of true egoism as opposed to the false egoism under which at his time the world laboured and suffered—the egoism that oversteps the limits of the true care and cultivation of self and persists, for quite selfish and vain and frequently petty motives, in assuming the care and control of others, and imposing upon them terms of slavery and hardship, [p. 22](#) terms that limit and ultimately destroy all individuality, and reduce men to the level of driven and unwilling slaves.

A recent writer who lent for a brief space a certain dignity to British letters has pointed out, quite truly, that "Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live. And unselfishness is letting other people's lives alone, not interfering with them."

With this selfishness, which is simply the product of a stupid and unreasonable vanity, true egoism has nothing whatever in common. True egoism is essentially unselfish. It suffices for the true egoist to live his own life. Others he will help and assist when help or assistance is required.

So, in the words of Yang Chu:

"We may give the feverish rest, satiety to the hungry, warmth to the cold and assistance to the miserable,"

but for ourselves we must be content to live our own lives, to discover for ourselves the ultimate method of expression for which our lives and natures are suited.

That this final expression of individuality may be what is called moral, or what is called unmoral, is to the sage a matter of complete indifference. A certain evenness of temperament, a certain sense of contentment and harmony easily attained, is suggested by the calm and restrained style of the philosopher. Alexandra David, in her interesting pamphlet *Les Théories Individualistes Chinoises*, p. 23 speaks of the influence of this curious simplicity of style—"La singulière simplicité d'expression de ce 'négateur du sacré'"—and the whole effect of his teaching is essentially quietistic, profound and indifferent. But the philosopher urges no definite course of conduct or life. What to one is happiness and pleasure, to another will be folly. So long as expression, whether it be what is called the moral or what is called unmoral, is true expression, it is of importance only to the individual concerned what intimate form it shall take. All forms of pleasure and all forms of happiness are purely relative. The warmth of the spring sun rejoices the heart of the old farmer of Sung; within their palaces, in the province of Cheng, the profligate brothers of Tse Chan, gladdening their senses with delicate wines and women of rare and perfect beauty. Among the wonderful pavilions at Wei lingers Tuan-Mu-Shu, counting the days that are left of his youth, when songs and gaiety shall no longer endure for him; and with a coarse fare of hemp stalks, cress and duckweed, the heart of the peasant of Sung is made glad. We may communicate our pleasures to others, we can never enforce them.

Riches may increase and multiply our desires; they cannot add to our happiness—they may even take away from it. It is only the things, few in number, that are absolutely necessary and essential to life that are of any real importance. p. 24 And it is just those things for the lack of which most lives are rendered worthless.

"If men could do without food and clothes there would be no more kings and princes."

It is the struggle, in itself so often futile and wasteful, for a bare and meagre existence that limits and thwarts the development of personality, or hardens it to an extent where it no longer becomes worth developing.

One may condemn or despise the voluptuary. That is purely a question of æsthetics. At least, however crude, however perverse he may seem, still he has in his lifetime attempted to express an individuality, attempted to achieve some ideal which to him appeared worthy of

attainment; but the man whose personality is dead, who can find no means of expression, who from hardship or from success hardly won has lost all that makes life of any value whatsoever, is beyond redemption. Consideration is wasted upon him. Already he is dead, and whether he be rich or poor his existence is no longer of use to himself and may only be a hindrance to others.

Such as these, says the philosopher with grim irony, are the fugitives of life. Whether they are killed or live, their lives have been regulated by externals.

"Urged and repelled by fame and laws, they are constantly rendered anxious; so they lose the happiest moments of the present, and cannot give way to their feelings for one hour."

p. 25

On the question of self-sacrifice the philosopher is quite clear. Life of itself is of no importance, save to the liver, and that only for the brief space of his existence. By self-sacrifice there is nothing to be gained, save perhaps a little fame, and if this be at the expense and to the detriment of personality, it is a wrong thing to do. From kindness of heart and a real desire to relieve suffering a man may dispose of and give away those things which are not absolutely essential to his existence. But to himself his life must be sacred. To spoil one's life for the sake of fame, or because it is considered a splendid thing to do, is to commit a wrong against one's self. And it is equally wrong that one should be expected to do so. If the world requires this ultimate self-sacrifice, then the world is wrong and the condition of things that calls for this self-sacrifice is wrong. In a chapter devoted to quite clear exposition of this view, a chapter which for its dispassionate contempt of obvious and accepted views has been most singled out for especial condemnation, Yang Chu takes the extreme case of the sage against the universe, and the greater part of the chapter is taken up with a justification of this extreme point of view.

"If the ancients," says the philosopher, referring to the golden age of his ideal, "by injuring a single hair could have rendered a service to the world they would not have done it, and had the universe been offered to a single person he would not have accepted it.

"As nobody would damage a single hair and nobody would do a favour to the world, the world was in a perfect state."

p. 26

To the philosopher self-sacrifice is simply the corollary of a wrong and unbalanced condition of life. In a community where neither fame nor self-glorification at the expense of others is desired, self-sacrifice would not exist. It would be unnecessary.

Where all are happy and all are contented, there would be no need of either self-sacrifice or self-aggrandisement. That is a simple truth, and if, by the adoption of a false and selfish egoism and a false and equally selfish racial egoism, humanity has reached a point where self-sacrifice has become a good or desirable thing, the fault really lies with the vanity and ignorance that have led humanity to this point, and have ultimately justified a code of morals philosophically unreasonable and unnecessary.

It is important to state this quite clearly, because a superficial and misleading view of the philosophic meaning of this much-abused chapter has provoked a number of commentators to a righteous but quite undue sense of anger, which, while possibly justified by the curious

makeshift view of modern morals, has no real bearing upon the philosophic position of the philosopher.

In the view of the philosopher the care of self, for the preservation and expression of personality, is the primary and natural duty of all mankind, and where this natural care is interfered with, warped or thwarted, a condition of affairs arises in which injustice, greed and vanity, in p. 27 themselves quite unnecessary things, call for antidotes which in themselves are equally unnecessary. And so the virtues are born as antidotes to vices that are in themselves the children of ignorance.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with a disquisition on the relative degrees of self-sacrifice which, while interesting from a logical point of view, is not of any particular importance. As in the chapter dealing with the justification of the two happy voluptuaries, Yang Chu here states the extreme case, and leaves the qualification to his disciples.

A certain number of chapters, notably Chapters III., IV., VIII., XI., XIII. and XV., deal fully or in part with an exposition of the conduct of life by a philosophic materialism, a materialism which is simply a statement of fact. Life is a natural and unavoidable phenomenon. There is no mystery about life, says the philosopher. We live and we cease to live; no matter whether we are virtuous or libertine, moral or immoral, we share the same fate and speedily are forgotten. In tears or silence our personalities perish with us, be they bad or be they good, and the body of a saint is no better than the body of a thief. This is simply a statement, and may be accepted or denied. It can only be pointed out that neither the earlier Taoists, nor the Confucians, nor the Buddhists, believe in a conscious after-life, and that, assuming as he does the ultimate end of life p. 28 to be a final and unavoidable thing, the philosopher is controverting no current belief of his period. All deductive philosophy must invariably concern itself with facts, and to those facts and by them all philosophy is limited. Whether man be a single expression of Tao, the highest form as yet evolved, his destiny is bounded by his life. Beyond, we know nothing. If we did, if we were certain, all philosophy, all speculation, possibly all religion, would cease. A thousand guesses at the life motive may be made; all are uncertain, all are speculative. Alone the philosopher, satisfied with the knowable, strives to present existence as at least something that may with care be rendered a little happy, a little less uncertain, or a little more worthy of the desire to live, which is the primary instinct of animals and men. If he pursues happiness, if he pursues self-sacrifice, if he pursues tears, or if he pursues power and the vast aggrandisement of the super-man, or remains, like the Taoist quiescent, submerged in life and content, at least he surveys, from one among the many windows in the tower of philosophy, a land where something better, something finer or at least something less miserable is being done; where the harshness and striving of life come to him like a distant echo of some old drama ill-played and no longer worth recording, or a mist that has suddenly lifted and taken with it the vanities and unhappiness of men.

p. 29

Philosophy can bring no further knowledge of life. It can but alter the terms by which life is known. In whatever terms we regard it, life remains the same; and so it is that the materialist philosopher, disregarding of all purely speculative things, realising that the unknowable will for all time remain, is concerned solely with the guidance of mankind to his Utopia, where in happiness in their lives and, having achieved this, prepare uncomplaining to depart.

This is the real strength of the materialist position that, having once proclaimed life as a final and unenduring thing, the philosopher must turn to the consideration of what makes most for happiness in men's lives, and if in his opinion happiness is only to be gained by the senses, it follows that all life will lead to the cultivation and perfecting of these senses as a means whereby this happiness may be most easily and perfectly obtained. A sense of beauty will ultimately take the place now occupied by vanity and aggression, because man, through the guidance of his senses, must ultimately desire what is beautiful; that is, he will begin by desiring what is actually necessary, then what is comfortable, and finally what is beautiful. A true cultivation of the senses can never degrade mankind. It is only by not cultivating or even by thwarting and limiting the senses that man becomes degraded. It is quite [p. 30](#) true that coarse natures will require coarse pleasures. These are always obtainable—too easily obtainable.

In dealing with the question of coarse pleasures Yang Chu does not say that drink is in itself a good or desirable thing, or that love of women carried to excess is a laudable and commendable thing. What he says is that all inclinations, however gross, however indefensible, are preferable to the perverse inclination for interference with others, for rule, for power and authority. It is possible for a man to ruin his health by overindulgence. By lust for power and command he may ruin the life of a whole nation. But a civilisation that pursues and cultivates happiness will ultimately raise the ideal of pleasure. Riches, useless display, orgies, self-aggrandisement at the expense of others, personal or racial aggressiveness, greed, vanity and insatiability—all the things that make life a thing of torment, a curtain of black which the faint light of a few virtues can only faintly illumine—will ultimately be assessed at their true value. It will be discovered that happiness can be obtained by the most simple of means. Men will begin to use their senses or at least to try and understand them a little, and so, each in his separate way, will aim at the happiness that lies most surely and easily at his hand.

That is the materialist Utopia. It is the final word of materialist philosophy.

[p. 31](#)

Beyond the solitary chapter in the book of Lieh-Tzu, which contains all that remains of the teaching of Yang Chu, there are, scattered through the book of Lieh-Tzu and the book of Chuang-Tzu, a few possibly authentic tales and anecdotes attributed to the philosopher of Liang and illustrative of his teaching. These with one exception have already been included in two recently published works on the Taoist Philosophers,[1](#) and may be omitted from the present work.

The single anecdote referred to may be given here, as it illustrates in a singularly happy fashion the smiling scepticism of the sage to whom in life the one final and certain thing is death.

The neighbour of Yang Chu once lost a sheep.

He began to search for it with all his kinsfolk, and asked assistance also from the servants of Yang Chu, who in astonishment said:

"Oh, oh! why do you require such a large number of persons to seek for a single lost sheep?"

The neighbour replied:

"There are many crossways to pursue and search out."

On his return he was asked if he had found his sheep, and replied that he had given up the search.

Yang Chu asked him why he had given up the search.

The neighbour answered:

"Among the crossways there were a great many small diverging tracts. Not knowing which to follow I gave up the search and returned."

Yang Chu became pensive and wrapped in thought. For a whole day he neither smiled nor spoke.

p. 32

His disciples, astonished at his attitude, asked him the reason, saying:

"A sheep is an animal of little value; furthermore this one did not belong to you, Master. Why does its loss disturb your usual amiable humour and gaiety?"

Yang Chu made no answer.

His disciples were unable to understand the significance of his silence, and Meng-Sun-Yang went out and asked Hsin-tu-tse on the subject.

Another day Hsin-tu-tse accompanied by Meng-Sun-Yang came to Yang Chu and asked him saying:

"Once three brothers travelled through the Provinces of Chi and Lu.

"They were instructed under the same master and had studied the doctrine of humanity and justice.

"When they came to their father's house their father asked them what was the final conclusion they had arrived at in regard to the doctrine of humanity and justice.

"The one answered:

"The study of humanity and justice teaches me to love and respect my body, and to consider of less importance what makes for fame and glory.'

"The second said:

"The study of humanity and justice teaches me to sacrifice my body in order to obtain fame and glory.'

"The third said:

"The study of humanity and justice teaches me to discover a method of conciliating the desire of my body and the desire for fame.'

"These three contradictory theories arise from the teaching of the same master. Which of them is true? which is false?"

Yang Chu said:

"There was once a man who lived on the banks of the river. He had a perfect knowledge of river lore, and was an expert swimmer. He was boatman of his state and gained his living managing his boat.

"His gains were considerable and would provide for the maintenance of a hundred persons.

"Those who desired instruction under his direction came to him bringing a sack of grain and became his pupils.

p. 33

"Quite half among them drowned themselves.

"In coming to him they had the intention of learning to swim, and not of drowning themselves. In the end the successes and failures were equal (since half learnt to swim and half were drowned).

"Which among them do you think were right, and which were wrong?"

Hsin-tu-tse kept silence. But Meng-Sun-Yang took him up saying:

"Well, is this not right? It is because your question was put in so vague a fashion that the answer of the Master is so evasive. Meanwhile I am in a greater darkness than before."

Hsin-tu-tse replied:

"Because the large roads divide into innumerable small pathways and tracks the sheep was lost.

"The aspects of wisdom being multiplied, many students lose themselves. It does not matter if at the beginning all start from the same aspect of wisdom, there are always divergencies at the end.

"The single thing that re-establishes equality is death and the annihilation of personality at death.

"It is indeed pitiable that you, an ancient disciple of the Master and a student of the Master's doctrine, should not comprehend the meaning of his parables."

Here, with all the grace and charm of a humour that is quite peculiar to the materialist sage of Liang, Yang Chu points out that with one basis to all philosophies the rest is entirely a question of personality—that from the solid premises of life, thought, and all the phenomena of existence, innumerable deductions may be drawn, all diverging, all opposed, all false and all true. What remains when the din and the shouting have died away is the solitary fact that we live and we die, and whether we live comfortably or uncomfortably, whether we do good or ill, whether we [p. 34](#) achieve happiness or unhappiness, whether pursue wisdom or achieve the pleasure of moment, is a matter of absolute unimportance; the end comes and forgetfulness swallows us up. At the most we may look back regretfully upon a few quite happy days, and memory may bring us a transient and ephemeral sense of happiness. These are the things we have gained from life, the things that are hidden away in the secret drawer of the treasure-chest of our life, the single true and perfect expression of personality that the fates and human selfishness have allowed us.

The sheep of the neighbour of Yang Chu are still lost amid the thousand branching pathways of thought and the wisdom of conflicting philosophies. Life still remains the simple thing that man has made so complex, and the ideal of life is still the ideal of happiness, and to each one happiness must come with different features and in a different guise. Alone we are sure of this, that it was happiness that touched us, and to that moment of happiness all our lives have led up; and here the philosopher draws down the heavy curtain of death. Life should be happy, says he, if men made happiness their business. If it is unhappy it is because men search for other things and so their lives are unhappy.

If men desired happiness for themselves they would be content with the happiness that the senses afforded them. That they struggle, that p. 35 they rob and slay and maim, may be a survival of the old tradition of aboriginal times, the tradition of bloodshed, rapine and self-aggrandisement, when expression found its only vent in slaughter and violence; but the pursuit of happiness solitary and profound and yet strangely simple, is, to the philosopher, the ultimate and final end that men should pursue when they have shaken off the old fetters of pride and arrogance of race or personality, and the scales have fallen from their eyes. For life at best can afford but happiness, and to all death comes alike, and no philosophy, however transcendent, however fine, can alter this solitary and immutable law of life.

Happiness from simple means in life and death to end it all is the basis of the philosophy of Yang Chu. You cannot avoid life, and the pursuit of wisdom avails not to close the final doorway. All wisdom, like all happiness, is relative. In life you must achieve your own happiness. Neither wisdom, nor virtue, nor wrong-doing, nor gain at the expense of others can help you. Alone and unaided you must pursue the way of your own happiness, a happiness that can be rarely communicated and still more rarely shared. The final solution of happiness must come through you. Let it suffice for you.

H. C.-B.

Note.—The author is indebted to Professor Anton Forke for his permission to use his translation of Yang Chu which appeared in the *Journal* of the Peking Oriental Society.

CHAPTER I

THE VANITY OF FAME

YANG CHU, when travelling in Lu, put up at Meng Sun Yang's.

Meng asked him: "A man can never be more than a man; why do people still trouble themselves about fame?"

Yang Chu answered: "If they do so their object is to become rich."

Meng: "But when they have become rich, why do they not stop?"

Yang Chu said: "They aim at getting honours."

Meng: "Why then do they not stop when they have got them?"

Yang Chu: "On account of their death."

Meng: "But what can they desire still after their death?"

Yang Chu: "They think of their posterity."

Meng: "How can their fame be available to their posterity?"

Yang Chu: "For fame's sake they endure all kinds of bodily hardship and mental pain. They dispose of their glory for the benefit of their clan, and even their fellow-citizens profit by it. How much more so do their descendants! Howbeit [p. 37](#) it becomes those desirous of real fame to be disinterested, and disinterestedness means poverty; and likewise they must be unostentatious, and this is equivalent to humble condition."

How then can fame be disregarded, and how can fame come of itself?

The ignorant, while seeking to maintain fame, sacrifice reality. By doing so they will have to regret that nothing can rescue them from danger and death, and not only learn to know the difference between ease and pleasure and sorrow and grief.

CHAPTER II

REAL AND FALSE GREATNESS

YANG CHU said:

"Kuan Ching filled his post as a minister of Ch'i in the following way. When his sovereign was wanton he was wanton too; when his sovereign was prodigal he was also prodigal. He met his wishes and obeyed him; following the right path, he made the kingdom prosper. But after the king's death, he was only Mr. Kuan again. Nothing more.

"But when Tien was minister of Ch'i he behaved as follows. When his sovereign was overbearing he was condescending. When his sovereign collected taxes he distributed money. Thus the people admired him, and in consequence he [p. 38](#) entered into the possession of the kingdom of Ch'i. His descendants hold it to this day.¹

"If anybody has real greatness he is poor; if his greatness is spurious, he is rich."

Yang Chu said:

"The really good man is not famous; if he be famous, he is not really a good man, for all fame is nothing but falsehood.

"Of old Yao and Shun pretended to yield the empire to Hsu-yu and Shan-Chuan, but they did not lose it, and enjoyed happiness for a hundred years.

"Po Yo and Shu-Ch'i really abdicated on account of the Prince Ku-Chu, and lost their kingdom at last, finally dying of starvation on the mountain of Shou-Yang.²

"This is the difference between the real and false."

Footnotes

p. 38

1 Kuan Chang died 645 B.C. Tien became King of Ch'i 370 B.C.

2 The Prince of Ku-Chu, the father of these two brothers, had appointed the younger brother Shu-Ch'i to be his successor. The latter not wishing to deprive his brother, and the former not desiring to act against his father's will, both left the principality and died in poverty.

CHAPTER III

THE BREVITY OF CONSCIOUS LIFE

YANG CHU said:

"One hundred years is the limit of a long life. [p. 39](#) Not one in a thousand ever attains to it. Yet if they do, still unconscious infancy and old age take up about half this time.

"The time he passes unconsciously while asleep at night, and that which is wasted though awake during the day, also amounts to another half of the rest. Again pain and sickness, sorrow and fear, fill up about a half, so that he really gets only ten years or so for his enjoyment. And even then there is not one hour free from some anxiety.

"What then is the object of human life? What makes it pleasant? Comfort and elegance, music and beauty. Yet one cannot always gratify the desire for comfort and elegance nor incessantly enjoy beauty and music.

"Besides, being warned and exhorted by punishments and rewards, urged forward and repelled by fame and laws, men are constantly rendered anxious. Striving for one vain hour of glory and providing for the splendour which is to survive their death, they go their own solitary ways, analysing what they hear with their ears and see with their eyes, and carefully considering what is good for body and mind; so they lose the happiest moments of the present, and cannot really give way to these feelings for one hour.

"How do they really differ from chained criminals?

"The Ancients knew that all creatures enter [p. 40](#) but for a short while into life, and must suddenly depart in death. Therefore they gave way to their impulses and did not check their natural propensities.

"They denied themselves nothing that could give pleasure to their bodies; consequently, as they were not seeking fame. but were following their own nature, they went smoothly on, never at variance with their inclinations. They did not seek for posthumous fame. They neither did anything criminal, and of glory and fame, rank and position, as well as of the span of their life they took no heed."

CHAPTER IV

DEATH THE EQUALISER

YANG CHU said:

"That in which all beings differ is life, that in which they are all alike is death.

"During life there is the difference of intelligence and dullness, honour and meanness, but in death there is the equality of rottenness and putrefaction. Neither can be prevented. Although intelligence and dullness, honour and meanness exist, no human power can affect them, just as rottenness and putrefaction cannot be prevented. Human beings cannot make life and [p. 41](#) death, intelligence and stupidity, honourableness and meanness, what they are, for all beings live and die equally, are equally wise and stupid, honourable and mean.

"Some die at the age of ten, some at one hundred. The wise and benevolent die as the cruel and imbecile.

"In life they are known as Yao and Shun ¹; dead they are so many bones which cannot be distinguished. But if we hasten to enjoy our life, we have no time to trouble about what comes after death."

Footnotes

p. 41

1 Yao and Shun, the two model emperors of antiquity.

CHAPTER V

FALSE VIRTUES

YANG CHU said:

"Po Yi was not without desire, for being too proud of his purity of mind, he was led to death by starvation.

"Chan-Chi 1 was not passionless, for being too proud of his virtue he happened to reduce his family.

"Those who in pursuit of purity and virtue do good in a false way resemble these men."

Footnotes

p. 41

1 Chan-Chi. The proper name of Fui-hsia-hui, an official in the state of Lu, famous for his continence, which prevented him from getting children, so that he reduced his family.

CHAPTER VI

THE IDEAL LIFE

YANG CHU said:

"Yuan Hsie lived in mean circumstances in Lu, while Tse Kung 1 amassed wealth in Wei.

"Poverty galled the one, and riches caused uneasiness to the other.

"So poverty will not do nor wealth either."

"But what then will do?"

"I answer enjoy life and take one's ease, for those who know how to enjoy life are not poor, and he that lives at ease requires no riches."

Footnotes

p. 42

1 Tse Kung was a disciple of Confucius.

CHAPTER VII

DUTY TO THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

YANG CHU said:

"There is an old saying, 'We must pity the living and part with the dead.' This is a good saying.

"Pity does not merely consist in an unusual feeling.

"So we may give the feverish rest, satiety to the hungry, warmth to the cold, and assistance to the miserable; but for the dead, when we have rightly bewailed them, to what use is it to place pearls and jewels in their mouths, or to dress them in state robes, or offer animals in sacrifice, or to expose effigies of paper?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE ART OF LIFE

YEN-PING-CHUNG asked Kuan-Yi-Wu ¹ as to cherishing life.

Kuan-Yi-Wu replied:

"It suffices to give it its free course, neither checking nor obstructing it."

Yen-Ping-Chung said: "And as to details?"

Kuan-Yi-Wu replied: "Allow the ear to hear what it likes, the eye to see what it likes, the nose to smell what it likes, the mouth to say what it likes, the body to enjoy the comforts it likes to have, and the mind to do what it likes.

"Now what the ear likes to hear is music, and the prohibition of it is what I call obstruction to the ear.

"What the eye likes to look at is beauty; and its not being permitted to regard this beauty I call obstruction of sight.

"What the nose likes to smell is perfume; and its not being permitted to smell I call obstruction to scent.

"What the mouth likes to talk about is right and wrong; and if it is not permitted to speak I call it obstruction of the understanding.

"The comforts the body enjoys to have are rich food and fine clothing; and if it is not permitted, [p. 44](#) then I call that obstruction of the senses of the body.

"What the mind likes is to be at peace; and its not being permitted rest I call obstruction of the mind's nature.

"All these obstructions are a source of the most painful vexation.

"Morbidly to cultivate this cause of vexation, unable to get rid of it, and so have a long but very sad life of a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand years, is not what I call cherishing life.

"But to check this source of obstruction and with calm enjoyment to await death for a day, a month, or a year or ten years, is what I understand by enjoying life."

Kuan-Yi-Wu said:

"Since I have told you about cherishing life, please tell me how it is with the burial of the dead."

Yen-Ping-Chung said:

"Burying the dead is but of very little importance. What shall I tell you about it?"

Kuan-Yi-Wu replied:

"I really wish to hear it."

Yen-Ping-Chung answered:

"What can I do when I am dead? They may burn my body, or cast it into deep water, or inter it, or leave it uninterred, or throw it wrapped up in a mat into some ditch, or cover it with princely apparel and embroidered garments and rest it in [p. 45](#) a stone sarcophagus. All that depends on mere chance."

Kuan-Yi-Wu looked round at Pao-Shu-huang-tse and said to him:

"Both of us have made some progress in the doctrine of life and death."

Footnotes

p. 43

1 Both famous statesmen of antiquity in the service of the dukes of Chi.

CHAPTER IX

THE HAPPY VOLUPTUARIES

TSE-CHAN was Minister in Cheng, and governed for three years, and governed well.¹

The good people complied with his injunctions, and the bad were in awe of his prohibitory laws.

So Cheng was governed, and the princes were afraid of it.

Tse-Chan had an elder brother, Kung-Sun-Chow, and a younger, Kung-Sun-Mu. The former was fond of feasting and the latter of gallantry.

In the house of Kung-Sun-Chow a thousand barrels of wine were stored, and yeast in piled-up heaps.

Within a hundred paces from the door the smell of drugs and liquor offended people's noses.

He was so much under the influence of wine that he ignored the feeling of remorse, was unconscious of the safe and dangerous parts of the path of life; what was present or wanting in his [p. 46](#) house, the near or remote degrees of relationship, ² the various degrees of relationship, the joy of living and the sadness of death.

Water, fire and swords might almost touch his person, and he would be unaware of it.

Within the house of Kung-Sun-Mu there was a compound of about thirty or forty houses, which he filled with damsels of exquisite beauty. So much was he captivated by their charms, that he neglected his relatives and friends, broke off all family intercourse, and retiring into his inner court turned night into day.

Within three months he only came forth once and yet he still did not feel contented.

Was there a pretty girl in the neighbourhood, he would try to win her with bribes or allurements, and only desisted with the impossibility of obtaining his desires.

Tse-Chan pondering over these things, stealthily betook himself to Teng-hsi to consult him, and said:

"I have heard that the care for one's own person has its influence on the family, and the care taken of a family influences the state. That is to say, starting from the nearest one reaches to what is distant. I have taken care of my kingdom, but my own family is in disorder. Perhaps this way is not the right one. What am I [p. 47](#) to do? what measures am I to take to save these two men?"

Teng-hsi replied:

"I have wondered for a long while at you. But I did not dare to speak to you first. Why do you not always control them? Administer exhortations based on the importance of life and nature, or admonitions regarding the sublimity of righteousness and proper conduct."

Tse-Chan did as Teng-hsi had advised, and taking an opportunity of seeing his brothers said to them:

"That in which man is superior to beasts and birds are his mental faculties. Through them he gets righteousness and propriety, and so glory and rank fall to his share. You are only moved by what excites your sense, and indulge only in licentious desires, endangering your lives and natures.

"Hear my words. Repent in the morning, and in the evening you will have already gained the wage that will support you."

Chow and Mu said:

"Long ago we knew it and made our choice.

"Nor had we to wait for your instructions to enlighten us.

"It is very difficult to preserve life, and easy to come by one's death. Yet who would think of awaiting death, which comes so easily, on account of the difficulty of preserving life?

p. 48

"You value proper conduct and righteousness in order to excel before others, and you do violence to your feelings and nature in striving for glory. That to us appears to be worse than death.

"Our only fear is lest, wishing to gaze our fill at all the beauties of this one life, and to exhaust all the pleasures of the present years, the repletion of the belly should prevent us from drinking what our palate delights in, or the slackening of our strength not allow us to revel with pretty women.

"We have no time to trouble about bad reputations or mental dangers. Therefore for you to argue with us and disturb our minds merely because you surpass others in ability to govern, and to try and allure us with promises of glory and appointments, is indeed shameful and deplorable.

"But we will now settle the question with you.

"See now. If anybody knows how to regulate external things, the things do not of necessity become regulated, and his body has still to toil and labour. But if anybody knows how to regulate internals, the things go on all right, and the mind obtains peace and rest.

"Your system of regulating external things will do temporarily and for a single kingdom, but it is not in harmony with the human heart, while our method of regulating internals can be
p. 49 extended to the whole universe, and there would be no more princes and ministers.

"We always desired to propagate this doctrine of ours, and now you would teach us yours."

Tse-Chan in his perplexity found no answer.

Later on he met and informed Teng-hsi.

Teng-hsi said:

"You are living together with real men without knowing it.

"Who calls you wise? Cheng has been governed by chance, and without merit of yours."

Footnotes

p. 45

1 The famous minister of Cheng, Kung-sun-chiao, who lived about B.C. 550.

p. 46

2 The nine degrees of relationship are counted from great-great-grandfather to the great-great-grandson.

CHAPTER X

THE JOYOUS LIFE OF TUAN-MU-SHU

TUAN-MU-SHU of Wei was descended from Tse-Kung.

He had a patrimony of ten thousand gold pieces.

Indifferent to the chances of life, he followed his own inclinations.

What the heart delights in he would do and delight in: with his walls and buildings, pavilions, verandahs, gardens, parks, ponds and lakes, wine and food, carriages, dresses, women and attendants, he would emulate the princes of Chi and Chu in luxury.

Whenever his heart desired something, or his ear wished to hear something, his eye to see or his [p. 50](#) mouth to taste, he would procure it at all costs, though the thing might only be had in a far-off country, and not in the kingdom of Chi.

When on a journey the mountains and rivers might be ever so difficult and dangerous to pass, and the roads ever so long, he would still proceed just as men walk a few steps.

A hundred guests were entertained daily in his palace. In the kitchens there were always fire and smoke, and the vaults of his hall and peristyle incessantly resounded with songs and music. The remains from his table he divided first among his clansmen. What they left was divided among his fellow-citizens, and what these did not eat was distributed throughout the whole kingdom.

When Tuan-mu-Shu reached the age of sixty, and his mind and body began to decay, he gave up his household and distributed all his treasures, pearls and gems, carriages and dresses, concubines and female attendants. Within a year he had disposed of his fortune, and to his offspring he had left nothing. When he fell ill, he had no means to buy medicines and a stone lancet, and when he died, there was not even money for his funeral. All his countrymen who had benefited by him contributed money to bury him, and gave back the fortune of his descendants.

When Ch'in-ku-li ¹ heard of this he said:

[p. 51](#)

"Tuan-mu-Shu was a fool, who brought disgrace to his ancestor."

When Tuan-Kan-Sheng heard of it he said:

"Tuan-mu-Shu was a wise man; his virtue was much superior to that of his ancestors. The commonsense people were shocked at his conduct, but it was in accord with the right doctrine. The excellent man of Wei only adhered to propriety. They surely had not a heart like his."

Footnotes

p. 50

1 Ch'in-ku-li is said to have been a pupil of the philosopher Me Ti.

CHAPTER XI

THE FOLLY OF DESIRE FOR LONG LIFE

MENG-SUN-YANG asked Yang Chu:

"There are men who cherish life and care for their bodies with the intention of grasping immortality. Is that possible?"

Yang Chu replied:

"According to the laws of nature there is no such thing as immortality."

Meng-sun-Yang: "Yet is it possible to acquire a very long life?"

Yang Chu: "According to the laws of nature there is no such thing as a very long life. Neither can life be preserved by cherishing or the body benefited by fostering."

Meng-sun-Yang: "What would be a long life?"

"All things were the same as they are now. [p. 52](#) The five good and bad passions were of old as they are now. So also the safety and peril of the four limbs. Grief and joy for the things of this world were of old as they are now, and the constant change of peace and revolution. Having seen and heard all these things, one would already be awearied of it at the age of a hundred. How much more after a very long life!"

Meng-sun-Yang: "If it be so a sudden death would be preferable to a long life; therefore we ought to run on to a pointed sword or jump into deep water to have what our heart yearns for."

Yang Chu: "No. Having once come into life regard it and let it pass; mark its desires and wishes, and so wait death.

"When death comes, disregard it and let it come. Mark what it brings you, and be drifted away to annihilation.

"If you pay no regard to life and death, and let them be as they are, how can you be anxious lest our life should end too soon?"

CHAPTER XII

SELF-SACRIFICE AND SELF-AGGRANDISEMENT

YANG CHU said:

"Po-chêng-tse-kao ¹ would not part with a hair of his body for the benefit of others. He quitted ^{p. 53} his country and became a ploughman. The great Yü ² did not profit by his own body, which grew quite emaciated.

"If the ancients by injuring a single hair could have rendered a service to the world, they would not have done it; and had the universe been offered to a single person, he would not have accepted it.

"As nobody would damage even a hair, and nobody would do a favour to the world, the world was in a perfect state."

Ch'in-Tse asked Yang Chu:

"If by pulling out a hair of your body you would aid mankind, would you do it?"

Yang Chu answered:

"Mankind is surely not to be helped by a single hair."

Ch'in-Tse said:

"But supposing it possible, would you do it?"

Yang Chu gave no answer.

Thereupon Ch'in-Tse told Meng-sun-Yang, who replied:

"I will explain the Master's meaning.

"Supposing for tearing off a piece of your skin you were offered ten thousand gold pieces, would you do it?"

Ch'in-Tse said:

"I would."

^{p. 54}

Meng-sun-Yang again asked:

"Supposing for cutting off one of your limbs you were to get a kingdom, would you do it?"

Ch'in-Tse was silent.

"See now," said Meng-sun-Yang. "A hair is unimportant compared with the skin, and the skin also is unimportant compared with a limb.

"However, many hairs put together form skin, and many skins form a limb. Therefore, though a hair is but one among the many molecules composing the body, it is not to be disregarded."

Ch'in-Tse replied:

"I do not know how to answer you. If I were to ask Lao-tse and Kuan-Yin, ³ your opinion would be found right, and so also if I were to consult great Yü and Me-ti."

Meng-sun-Yang upon this turned round to his disciples, and spoke of something else.

Footnotes

p. 52

1 Po-chêng-tse-kao was a Taoist of the time of Yao.

p. 53

2 The great Yü, the controller of the great flood, which task so occupied him that he entirely forgot his own wants.

p. 54

3 The Taoist philosopher.

CHAPTER XIII

THE VANITY OF REPUTATION

YANG CHU said:

"The world praises Shun-Yu, Duke Chow, and Confucius, and condemns Chieh and Chow. Now Shun had to plough in Ho-yang and to burn tiles in Lei-tse. His four limbs had no p. 55 rest, and rich food and warm clothing were unknown to him.

"His parents and his kinsfolk did not love him, and his brothers and sisters did not bear him affection.

"In his thirtieth year he was obliged to marry without telling his parents.

"When he received the empire from Yao he was already an old man and his mental powers were declining. His son Shang-Chun having no talents, he left the imperial dignity to Yü. Still he had to toil and slave till he died.

"Of all mortals he was the most pitiable and miserable.

"Kun's services in regulating the water and earthworks being impracticable, he was put to death on Mount Yu Shan.

"Yü, his son, continued his task, served his enemy, and spent all his energy on the earthworks. When a son was born to him he could not take him in his arms, nor in passing his door did he enter. His whole body became withered, his hands and feet hardened by toil. When Shun yielded the empire to him he still lived in a small house and wore only an elegant sash and a coronet. He also had to toil and slave till he died. Of all mortals he was the most overworked and fatigued.

"When King Yü died Cheng was still of tender age, and Duke Chow became Prince Regent.

p. 56

"The Duke of Chow was dissatisfied, and spread evil rumours about Chow throughout the empire. Chow stayed three years in the east, caused his elder brother to be beheaded and his younger to be banished, and nearly lost his own life. Till he died he had to toil and slave.

"Of all mortals, he was the most menaced and terrorised.

"Confucius was well acquainted with the principles of the old emperors. He accepted the invitations of the princes of his time. But a tree was felled over him in Sung and his footprints were wiped out in Wei. In Shang and Chow he came to distress, was assaulted in Chen and Tsai, humiliated by Chi and insulted by Yang-hu.

"Till he died he had to toil and slave.

"Of all mortals he was the most harassed and worried.

"All these four sages, while alive, had not one day's pleasure, and after their death a reputation lasting many years.

"Yet reputation cannot bring back reality.

"You praise them and they do not know it, and you honour them and they are not aware of it. There is now no distinction between them and a clod of earth.

"Chieh availed himself of the wealth of many generations, and attained to the honour of facing south as king. His wisdom was sufficient to [p. 57](#) restrain his many subjects, and his power great enough to shake the land within the four seas. He indulged in what was agreeable to his eyes and ears, and fulfilled his heart's desires. He was gay and merry till death.

"Of all mortals he was the most reckless and dissipated.

"Chow also availed himself of the wealth of many generations, and became King.

"Everything yielded to his will.

"Abandoning himself to his desires through the long night, he indulged in debauchery in his seraglio. Nor did he embitter his life with propriety and righteousness.

"He was merry and gay till he was put to death.

"Of all mortals he was the most licentious and extravagant.

"These two villains while alive took delight in following their own inclination and desires, and after death were called fools and tyrants. Yet reality is nothing that can be given by reputation.

"Ignorant of censure and unconscious of praise, they differed in no respect from the stump of a tree or a clod of earth.

"The four sages, though objects of admiration, were troubled up to their very end, and were equally and alike doomed to die.

"The two villains, though detested and hated by many, remained in high spirits up to the very end, and they too were equally doomed to die."

CHAPTER XIV

DIFFICULTY AND EASE OF GOVERNMENT

YANG CHU had an audience with the King of Leang.

Yang Chu said: "To govern the world is as easy as to turn round the palm of the hand."

The King of Leang said:

"You have a wife and a concubine, Master, but are unable to govern them. You have a garden of three acres, but are unable to weed it. How then can you say that governing the world is like turning round the palm of the hand?"

Yang Chu said:

"Observe, your Majesty, the shepherds. One allows a boy only five feet high to shoulder a whip and drive a hundred sheep. He wants them to go eastward, and they obey him, or westward, and they obey him. Now let Yao drag a sheep, and Shen follow with a whip, and they will never advance a yard. Fishes that swallow ships do not enter into small rivers.

"Wild geese that soar on high do not light on low marshes, but are borne over in their flights. The notes C and Cis do not harmonise with brisk and lively airs, for the sound is too different. Thus a man who manages important matters does not trouble himself about trifles. And he who accomplishes great deeds does no small ones. That was my meaning."

CHAPTER XV

ALL THINGS PASS

YANG CHU said:

"The memory of things of highest antiquity is faded. Who recollects them? Of the time of the three generations of Emperors ¹ something is preserved, but the rest is lost. Of the five rulers ² something is still known, the rest is only guessed at. Of the events during the time of the three emperors ³ some are veiled in deep obscurity, and some are clear, yet out of a hundred thousand not one is recollected. Of the things of our present life some are heard, others seen, yet not one out of ten thousand is recollected. It is impossible to calculate the number of years elapsed from remote antiquity to the present day. Only from Fw-hsi downwards there are more than three hundred thousand years.

"Every trace of intelligent and stupid men, of the beautiful and ugly, successful and unsuccessful, right and wrong, is effaced. And whether quickly or slowly is the only point of difference.

"If anybody cares for one hour's blame or praise ^{p. 60} so much that, by torturing his spirit and body, he struggles for a name lasting some hundred years after his death, can the halo of glory revive his dried bones, or give it back the joy of living?"

Footnotes

p. 59

1 The three generations of Emperors, namely, those of heaven, those of the earth, and the human emperors, forming the first fabulous epoch of Chinese history.

2 The five rulers are Fw-hsi, Shen-nung, Huang-ti, Yao and Shun.

3 The three emperors are, Yü, T'eng and Wen-Wang, the founders of the first three dynasties.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NATURE OF MAN

YANG CHU said:

"Men resemble heaven and earth in that they cherish five principles. ¹ Of all creatures, man is the most skilful. His nails and teeth do not suffice to procure him maintenance and shelter. His skin and sinews do not suffice to defend him; though running he cannot attain profit nor escape harm, and he has neither hair nor feathers to protect him from the cold and heat. He is thus compelled to use things to nourish his nature, to rely on his intelligence, and not to put his confidence in brute force; therefore intelligence is appreciated because it preserves us and brute force despised because it encroaches upon things.

"But I am not the owner of my own body, for I, when I am born, must complete it, nor do I possess things, for having got them, I must part with them again. The body is essential for birth, but things are essential for its maintenance.

p. 61

"If there were a body born complete I could not possess it, and I could not possess things not to be parted with. For possessing a body or things would be unlawfully appropriating a body belonging to the whole universe, and appropriating things belonging to the universe which no sage would do.

"He who regards as common property a body appertaining to the universe and the things of the of the universe is a perfect man.

"And that is the highest degree of perfection."

Footnotes

p. 60

1 The moral life of men is based on five principles (virtues), benvolence, uprightness, propriety, knowledge, and good faith.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FOUR CHIMERAS

YANG CHU said:

"There are four things which do not allow people to rest:

"Long life. Reputation. Rank. Riches.

"Those who have them fear ghosts, fear men, power, and punishment. They are always fugitives. Whether they are killed or live they regulate their lives by externals.

"Those who do not set their destiny at defiance do not desire a long life, and those who are not fond of honour do not desire reputation.

"Those who do not want power desire no rank.

"Those who are not avaricious have no desire for riches.

"Of this sort of men it may be truthfully said [p. 62](#) that they live in accordance with their nature. In the whole world they have no equal.

"They regulate their life by inward things.

"There is an old proverb which says:

"Without marriage and an official career a man would be free from half of his yearnings.

"If men could do without clothes and food there would be no more kings or subjects."

CHAPTER XVIII

ALL PLEASURES ARE RELATIVE

A COMMON saying of the Chow time is:

"Can a husbandman sit down and rest?

"At dawn he sets out, and at night returns.

"This he considers the perpetual course of human nature.

"He eats coarse fare, which seems to him to be great delicacies. His skin and joints are rough and swollen, and his sinews and joints thickened and swollen. If he could live for one day clothed in smooth furs, in a silken tent, and eat meat and millet, orchids and oranges, he would grow sick at heart and his body would grow weak and his interior fire cause him to fall ill.

"If on the other hand the Prince of Shang or Lu were to try to cultivate the land like the farmer it would not be long before they would both be utterly worn out. Yet each one says: In the [p. 63](#) world there is nothing better than these our comforts and delights.

"There was one old farmer of Sung who never wore anything else than coarse hempen clothes; even for the winter he had no others. In spring, when cultivating the land, he warmed himself in the sunshine.

"He did not know that there were such things as large mansions and winter apartments, brocade and silk, furs of fox and badger in the world.

"Turning one day to his wife he said:

"People do not know how pleasant it is to have warm sunshine on the back. I shall communicate this to our prince, and I am sure to get a rich present.

"A rich man of the village said to him: 'Once there was a man fond of big beans, hemp-stalks, cress and duckweed. He told the village elder of them. The village elder tasted them, and they burnt his mouth and gave him pains in his stomach.

"Everybody laughed, and was angry with the man, who felt much ashamed.

"Such a man do you resemble."

CHAPTER XIX

THE WISDOM OF CONTENTMENT

YANG CHU said:

"How can a body possessing the four things, a comfortable house, fine clothes, good food, and pretty women, still long for anything else? ^{p. 64} He who does so has an insatiable nature, and insatiableness is a worm that eats body and mind.

"Loyalty cannot set the sovereign at ease, but perhaps may imperil one's body. Righteousness cannot help the world, but perhaps may do harm to one's life. The sovereign's peace not being brought about by loyalty, the fame of the loyal dwindles to nothing, and the world deriving no profit from righteousness, the fame of the righteous amounts to nought.

"How the sovereign and subjects can alike be set at ease, and how the world and I can simultaneously be helped, is set forth in the dictum of the ancients."

Yu Tse 1 said:

"He who renounces fame has no sorrow."

Lao Tse said:

"Fame is the follower of reality. Now, however, as people pursue fame with such frenzy—does it not really come of itself if it is disregarded? At present fame means honour and regard. Lack of fame brings humbleness and disgrace. Again, ease and pleasure follow upon honour and regard. Sorrow and grief attend humbleness and disgrace. Sorrow and grief are contrary to human nature; ease and pleasure are in accord with it. These things have reality."

Footnotes

p. 64

1 Yu Tse, a philosopher reputed to have lived B.C. 1250.