

In the writings of the sages and philosophers of the period just referred to—of *Laô-tsze* (b. 604 B.C.), of *Confucius* (551–478 B.C.), of their respective great successors and exponents, *Chwang-tsze* (b. 330 B.C.), and *Mencius* (372–289 B.C.), and of others—frequent references are made to an earlier time when public and private religion was unaffected, and social and personal morality unstained; and, occasionally, to a still earlier primeval and golden age, when men lived lives of simplicity and innocence, free from care and strife and evil. All four philosophers dealt with the same materials handed down from the past; all four recognized how far mankind had fallen; all four wished above all things to lead men back to the original happy state. They took, however, divergent roads. *Confucius* and *Mencius*, men of critical intellect, could find no solid ground in traditional belief or in metaphysical speculation, on which to rest. They could rely on nothing but authority supported by evidence; and could accept as their ethical standard only codified rules and observances dealing solely with the duty of man to man—rules and observances based on innate reason and conscience, learned under instruction by laborious application, and carried into practice by sheer force of will. On the other hand, *Lão-tsze* and *Chwang-tsze*, the founders of *Taoism*, sought to guide men into the old paths not by any human effort, and still less by any system of external rules, but by the entire surrender of the will and of the whole being to the creating and preserving self-existing Existence behind the universe; whose personal attributes—infinite power, wisdom, justice, righteousness, and love (in which last all the others found their summation)—would then, in proportion to that surrender, be so spontaneously developed on man's immortal spirit as to save it from destruction “on the lathe of heaven,” and be so outwardly manifested in man's mortal life as to draw all men into harmony and peace and rest. The wonderful system of doctrine and morals thus elaborated—a system which carried man to the very edge of that impassable gulf over which he can cross only by the light of the revelation of God in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit—not only far transcended the teaching and practice of any other heathen school, Eastern or Western, but was diametrically and in all points opposed to that of *Confucius*, and particularly to that of his great successor, *Mencius*. It was the last dim, struggling outflash, as it were, of the light which had been vouchsafed to the nation in its youth; and its speedy extinction marked the *second great downward step* of the nation in religious life. This step the people took when they turned to ungodliness (human righteousness) from that which might be known of God, and was manifest to them, which God had showed them—the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world, even His eternal power and godhead; so that they were left without excuse (Rom. 1: 18–20).

Deprived of help in this life and of hope for the next by their first downward step, when they forgot God, and shut in to themselves, by the deliberate declension of their second step, when they turned away from