

pher. The word *T'ao* signifies *reason*, and therefore a *T'aoist* is a *rationalist*, in name at least ; but, in fact, the T'aoists are the most *irrational* of all the religionists of the East. The tendency in rationalism is toward the utter destruction of belief in the existence of unseen spirits of evil. Enlightened reason dethrones devils ; but L'ao-tse created devils innumerable, and the chief concern of the T'aoist sect has always been to manipulate these emissaries of evil. Modern rationalists deny the existence of devils, and relegate them to the category of myths and to personified ideas.

Not so the rationalist of the Orient. He finds his greatest pleasure in contemplating the very atmosphere he breathes as filled with spirits constantly seeking his injury ; and to outwit his satanic majesty is the chief end of life.

The sect is founded on the monarchic plan. The chief high priest corresponds to the Pope in the Catholic religion, and all authority is vested in him. His decrees constitute the laws of the sect, and all power to perform miracles must come from him to the priesthood. He has the power to exorcise devils and to heal the sick and avert calamities, and this power he delegates to such of the priesthood as command his favor. Such delegated power, however, is held on sufferance and not on fee simple. It is not necessary that a priest gain favor with his royal highness to get this power, but he must retain said favor in order to hold the power. This has created a vast army of priests, who are the willing tools of the high priest ; and he is thus enabled to wield the most absolute and despotic power over the minds of the people.

The system has the most elaborated code of demonology, and it is likewise patterned after the political constitution of the empire. The head devil lives in the sea, and has been honored by the Chinese people by being adopted as their national emblem. The dragon flag which floats from every staff, from the dome of the royal palace at Peking to the mast-head of the humblest Chinese boat, testifies to the high esteem in which the chief devil of L'ao-tse's followers is held. Then the multitude of lesser devils is so great that no man can number them ; and these are on the track of every man, woman, and child, seeking in all methods their injury. To watch the movements of this devil host, and to frustrate their designs, is the province of the T'aoist priests.

Here we have a decidedly interesting state of things. The very earth teeming with malicious demons ! Man everywhere exposed to their attacks, and but one avenue of escape—viz., through the intervention of the priests ! Is it a matter of surprise, therefore, that this priesthood wields such absolute power over the minds of the people ? They live on the fat of the land. They are consulted on all occasions, and their instructions are obeyed to the letter by their deluded followers. It is not to be wondered at that these priests look with disfavor upon the advent of Europeans ; that they fill the minds of the people with such antipathy to all