

**K'UNG FU TZE; A
DRAMATIC POEM**

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K'ung Fu Tze; a dramatic poem by Paul Carus

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PAUL CARUS

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CANCELLED
B. M.

K'UNG FU TZE

A DRAMATIC POEM

BY
PAUL CARUS

己所不欲 勿施於人

"What ye wish not done unto you,
Do ye not unto others."
—Confucius.

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FOREWORD.

In the present work, "K'ung Fu Tze, a Dramatic Poem," the author does not intend to offer a drama of the usual style, with thrilling adventures, plots and hairbreadth escapes, but, as the subtitle states, "a dramatic poem." In a most concise form adapted to the stage, the composition represents Confucianism in its origin and according to the sources. Dramatic action and stage effects, which we would not be without in the drama, have not been overlooked; in fact they are obviously present. But the author's main object has been to work out for the English-speaking public a presentation of the Chinese religio-ethical world-conception in the dramatized life of its founder, K'ung Ni, commonly called K'ung Fu Tze, who has moulded the history of China and is still the main factor in the public and private life of his native country.

In undertaking a work of this kind, which in the author's opinion is a highly desirable task, the temptation at once offers itself to sacrifice truth to beauty, or rather to the taste of to-day; to neglect history for the sake of art, i. e., of ephemeral art interpretation; and to change the traditional figure of our hero into a modernized manikin who would be likely to arouse the applause of the galleries. It is a temptation, and the temptation is great because it promises success; it would be irresistible if the object were pecuniary profit. And it would be so easy! It is much easier to let a sage who lived almost two and a half millenniums ago speak like a reformer of to-day and to adapt the age in which he attempted to introduce his ideals, to the customs and thoughts of our own days. Moreover, we could invent thrilling and impossible stories of court intrigues, of our hero's rise to power and his final downfall, and the result would be that the audience

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would find entertainment for an evening, the spectators would applaud and go home satisfied. The author has abstained from modernizing the subject except where certain modernizations are indispensable to render it intelligently into a modern language. But the author has not written for glory, nor has he contemplated a business success on the stage. His intention is to chisel out in dramatically presentable form the character and destiny of a man who has been the hero in the moral development of a great nation. He has not ventured to change the main outlines of tradition, not because he was too pedantic to do so, but because he sees in the history of human development a higher mode of art. History to him appears as a divine drama, whose author is God himself.

In ancient Greece the drama was a religious performance and at Athens it was deemed so important that citizens were paid a day laborer's price to enable even the poor man to attend it. In this country the drama is a business proposition designed to while away the evening by a pleasing entertainment. The time may come when the artistic feature of the drama will be in demand. In many cities theaters are closed on Sundays; but the true drama is religious in its inmost nature and is or ought to be as good as, if not better than, a sermon in church.

Tradition is in the habit of idealizing its heroes, and that is part of history. It was not Jesus who founded the church, but Christ; not Gautama Siddhartha who gave rise to Buddhism, but the Tathagata, the World-honored Buddha; not Mohammed who established Islam, but the Prophet; and these factors existed before the persons in whom they became incarnate and who developed into superpersonalities after their deaths. This is the case also with Confucius. The ideal of a sage, a superior thinker, an overman, a master, existed before Confucius, and Confucius believed in the ideals of the past. He laid no claim to supernatural revelation, but later generations adopted his doctrines as inspired, as infallible, as divine.

Upon the whole the author has followed tradition, for he did not deem it right in this drama to make innovations or to

substitute modern views for the old Chinese ideals. Confucius appears here as he is represented in Confucian literature, not always to our taste, not as a warlike Saxon, not as a bold reformer like Luther, not as a brave fighter or original thinker, or as a pioneer, but as a prophet of peace, as a quiet enthusiast for authority and an admirer of the venerable past that has laid the basis for civilization. The changes which have been introduced for the sake of adapting certain events to dramatic effectiveness are few and of secondary significance. So in history the man who married the niece of Confucius was not Mang-I himself but Nan Yung, probably a cousin of Mang-I. The name of the sage's niece is not known nor is her character an absolute type of the Confucian ideal of womanhood, but this deviation is made purposely. The ideal woman of Confucian ethics would be almost impossibly monotonous, and we know from the Book of Odes that some of the actions and sentiments of Chinese women were more human than the sage himself would approve.

The scene that is placed near the end of Act II did not happen in Lo after the meeting with Lao Tze in 518 B. C., but much later in Confucius's life, in 495, in Chang, south of the state of Wei. I will also mention that Confucius was called to office in 497, much later than might be assumed by the context of this drama; at least, the lapse of nineteen years between Acts III and IV is not emphasized. Likewise the incident of the crazy man referred to in the second scene of Act IV also happened about ten years earlier.

The picture here given is genuine in all essential points, and the contrast between Confucius and his rival, the philosopher Lao Tan (*alias* Lao Tze), is true to life. We see the man K'ung as he was, and Confucianists will have no reason to find fault with the characterization of their master.

The author has neither added embellishments to, nor detracted aught from, the man and his ideals; nor have the defects of the great teacher been hidden. Indeed we can understand how the habitual teaching and moralizing must sometimes have excited the admiration of his contemporaries and sometimes have bored them. Above all, we shall find

here an opportunity to understand the great success of the sage by considering the impression he made on his contemporaries as well as on succeeding generations. We see before us the *esprit de corps* that ensouled his disciples whose love and faith finally elevated their master to the high plane of a divine prophet, to the rank of such men as Zarathustra, Buddha, Christ and Mohammed.

It is a question whether such subjects as the lives of these great religious leaders should be dramatized at all, but the author is strongly inclined to affirm that the deepest problems of mankind, the religious solutions of the world-riddle as offered under different conditions in past ages by the leaders of human thought, are most appropriate subjects for dramatic presentation, and the time will come when our theater-going public will demand to see them. Then the poet should not offer fantastic fabrications out of the wealth of his imagination, but should make himself the mouthpiece of that greatest of all poets, God,—the God of history, the God of human progress, the God of evolution.

In this spirit and with this ideal in view, the present dramatic poem has been written, and, if this style of dramatic treatment should not be according to the taste of the present generation, the author feels that the future is preparing when it will find response and be appreciated.

* * *

A few comments may be added to explain the Chinese world-conception.

God, in the proper sense of the word, the one and only God, creator and sustainer of the world, has been known in Chinese history since time immemorial under the name of SHANG T'ï, the Lord on High. However, Shang T'ï has not been in immediate touch with the minds and consciences of the Chinese people. His recognition is more theoretical and does not enter into practical life. He is worshiped by the emperor annually in a holocaust offered him at Peking on the altar of Heaven.

Though Shang T'ï is always spoken of as a personal God, he is frequently identified by philosophers with a philosophic

principle. Confucius speaks little of Shang Ti, but much of Heaven in the sense of Providence, and Lao Tze calls God *wan wuh chi tsung*, which means "Ancestor" or "Arch-Father of the ten thousand things" (see the *Tao Teh King* or *The Canon of Reason and Virtue*, Chap. IV, 1). Lao Tze practically lets aboriginal reason, the Tao, take the place of Shang Ti in the sense of the divine principle that governs the world, and these views are quite common throughout the writings of Chinese philosophers.

According to the Chinese world-conception all things are assumed to be mixtures of two opposites, the YANG and the YIN, of which Yang is the positive, and Yin the negative element. The former means strong, lord-like, luminous, and is represented in nature by heaven; the latter, being womanly, weak, submissive, is represented by earth. The former was originally pictured as a white disk, thus: ○, and later on as a straight whole line, thus: —; the latter originally as a black disk, thus: ●, later as a broken line, thus: — —. In their combination they were represented by a peculiar symbol, thus, ☯ called *T'ai Chi*, which means the Great Ultimate or the Grand Extreme, also translated the Ultimate or Absolute.* *Chi* originally denoted the gable of a roof, and so represents the idea of the topmost or ultimate outcome of thought, or as western philosophers would say, "the Absolute." In its undifferentiated form it is commonly represented as a luminous orb.

A Chinese philosopher would make the same statement that we find in the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;" but he would interpret the words "heaven and earth" in a more general sense, in a philosophical and almost mathematical conception, meaning by heaven the principle Yang and by earth the principle Yin.

In Chinese history the founder of civilization was Fu Hi. He was the first of the primitive five rulers of China, and he was credited with the invention of writing, or rather of

*Also transcribed *T'ai Kih*. See the author's *Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 24 ff.

thought symbols, especially the combinations of the Yang and Yin in sets of three, called in Chinese *kuva* or trigrams.

Later on, the trigrams were doubled and formed hexagrams, sixty-four combinations of which are possible, and the mystical meaning of these constitutes the subject matter of the ancient Book of Changes, called in Chinese *Yih King*.

The *Yih King*¹ is a book of divination, and tradition connects with it the fate of Wen Wang, the ancestor of the imperial house of Chow. Details with regard to this man and his sons, Wu Wang and Chow Kung, are well worth knowing on account of the significance they possessed in the opinion of Confucius. Wen Wang, i. e., "Scholarly Ruler," is the posthumous appellation of Ch'ang whose title in his lifetime was Si Peh, i. e., "Chief of the West." He was hereditary chieftain of the principality of K'i in the territory of the modern Shen-si. The last emperor of the house of Yin, Chow Sin, characterized in Chinese history as "the abandoned tyrant," caused Ch'ang, the Chief of the West, to be imprisoned, because one of the imperial advisers, Hu, the earl of Ts'ung, regarded him as dangerous on account of his virtues.

While held in durance for two years at Yew Li, the "Scholarly Ruler" pondered over the meaning of the *Yih*, the changes or permutations of the hexagrams, and derived from them the hope of a final delivery and a brighter future. His expectations were fulfilled, and his son Fa, best known under the posthumous title Wu Wang, crossed the Hwang Ho at the ford of Meng and overthrew the abandoned tyrant Chow Sin in battle on the plains of Muh, whereupon he was recognized as emperor.

Wu Wang was supported by his younger brother, Tan, the fourth son of the Chief of the West, Wen Wang, and known in history as Chow Kung, the Duke of Chow. On the death of his imperial brother, Wu Wang, this Duke of Chow acted

1. On the *Yih King* see the author's *Chinese Philosophy*, p. 7, and *Chinese Thought*, pp. 26-36. As to the probable connection which this method of divination had historically with the Urim and Thummim, see *The Oracle of Yavveh*, pp. 27-34.