

eat." Wang Hsi remarks that the good general can "secure success by modifying his tactics to meet those of the enemy."]

1. Sun Tzu said: The good fighters of old first put themselves beyond the possibility of defeat, and then waited for an opportunity of defeating the enemy.

2. To secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.

[That is, of course, by a mistake on the enemy's part.]

3. Thus the good fighter is able to secure himself against defeat,

[Chang Yu says this is done, "By concealing the disposition of his troops, covering up his tracks, and taking unremitting precautions."]

but cannot make certain of defeating the enemy.

4. Hence the saying: One may KNOW how to conquer without being able to DO it.

5. Security against defeat implies defensive tactics; ability to defeat the enemy means taking the offensive.

[I retain the sense found in a similar passage in ss. 1-3, in spite of the fact that the commentators are all against me. The meaning they give, "He who cannot conquer takes the defensive," is plausible enough.]

6. Standing on the defensive indicates insufficient strength; attacking, a superabundance of strength.

7. The general who is skilled in defense hides in the most secret recesses of the earth;

[Literally, "hides under the ninth earth," which is a metaphor indicating the utmost secrecy and concealment, so that the enemy may not know his whereabouts."]

he who is skilled in attack flashes forth from the topmost heights of heaven.

[Another metaphor, implying that he falls on his adversary like a thunderbolt, against which there is no time to prepare. This is the opinion of most of the commentators.]

Thus on the one hand we have ability to protect ourselves; on the other, a victory that is complete.

8. To see victory only when it is within the ken of the common herd is not the acme of excellence.

[As Ts'ao Kung remarks, "the thing is to see the plant before it has germinated," to foresee the event before the action has begun. Li Ch'u'an alludes to the story of Han Hsin who, when about to attack the vastly superior army of Chao, which was strongly entrenched in the city of Ch'eng-an, said to his officers: "Gentlemen, we are going to annihilate the enemy, and shall meet again at dinner." The officers hardly took his words seriously, and gave a very dubious assent. But Han Hsin had

already worked out in his mind the details of a clever stratagem,
whereby, as he foresaw, he was able to captur