

IX.

LIFE IN ANCIENT JAPAN.

THE comparatively profound peace from the era of Sūjin Tennō to the introduction of Chinese civilization was occasionally interrupted by insurrections in the southern and western parts of the empire, or by the incursions of the unsubdued aborigines in the North and East.

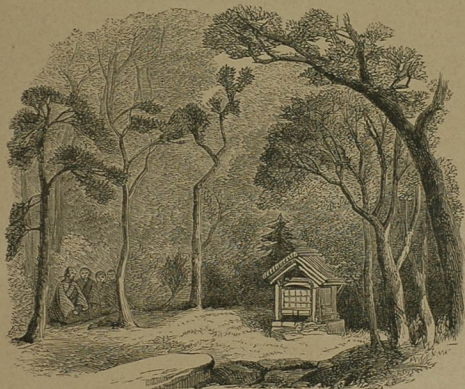
During these centuries there continued that welding of races—the Ainō, Malay, Nigrito, Corean, and Yamato—into one ethnic composite—the Japanese—and the development of the national temperament, molded by nature, circumstances, and original bent, which have produced the unique Japanese character. Although, in later centuries, Japan borrowed largely from China, blood, language, religion, letters, education, laws, politics, science, art, and the accumulated treasures of Chinese civilization, her children are to-day, as they have ever been, a people distinct from the Chinese, ethnologically, physically, and morally.

Though frequent fighting was necessary, and many of the aborigines were slaughtered, the great mass of them were tranquilized. To rude men, in a state of savagery whose existence is mainly animal, it matters little who are their masters, so long as they are not treated with intolerable cruelty. The aborigines attached to the land roamed over it to hunt, or remained upon it to till it, and, along the water-courses and sea-coast, to fish. With a soil that repaid generously the rude agriculture of that day, an ample food-supply in the sea, without severe labor, or exorbitant tribute to pay, the conquered tribes, when once quieted, lived in happiness, content, and peace. The government of them was the easiest possible. The invaders from the very beginning practiced that system of concubinage which is practical polygamy, and filled their harems with the most attractive of the young native females. The daughter of the former chief shared the couch of the conqueror, and the peasant became the wife of the soldier, securing that admixture of races that the merest tyro in ethnology notices in modern Japan. In certain portions, as in the extreme north of Hondo, the Ainō type of face and head, and the general physical characteristics of skin, hair, eyes, and form, have suffered the

his followers as gods or men divinely assisted. The conquerors were not slow in cultivating such a belief for their own benefit, and thus what was once the fancy of savages became the dogma of religion and the tool of the magistrate. The reverence and obedience of the people were still further secured by making the government purely theocratic, and its general procedure and ceremonial identical with those of worship. The forms of local authority among the once independent tribes were but little interfered with, and the government exercised over them consisted at first chiefly in the exaction of tribute. The floating legends, local traditions, and religious ideas of the aborigines, gathered up, amplified by the dominant race, transformed and made coherent by the dogmatics of a theocracy, became the basis of Shintō, upon which a modified Chinese cosmogony and abstract philosophical ideas were afterward grafted. It was this background that has made the resultant form of Shintō different from what is most probably its prototype, the ante-Confucian Chinese religion. In its origin, Shintō is from the main-land of Asia. In growth and development it is "a genuine product of Japanese soil." As yet, before the advent of Buddhism and Chinese philosophy, there were no moral codes, no systems of abstract doctrines, no priestly caste. These were all later developments. There were then no colossal temples with their great belfries and immense bells whose notes quivered the air into leagues of liquid melody; no sacred courtyards decked with palm-trees; no costly shrines decked out in the gaudy magnificence characteristic of Buddhism, or impure Shintō. No extensive monasteries, from which floated on the breeze the chanting of priests or the droning hum of students, were then built. No crimson pagodas peeped out from camphor groves, or cordons of firewarding firs and keyaki-trees. No splendid vestments, gorgeous ritual, waves of incense, blazing lights, antiphonal responses, were seen or heard in the thatched huts which served as shrines of the kami. No idols decked the altars. No wayside images dotted the mountain or the meadow paths. No huge portals (*torii*) of stone or red-lacquered timber stood fronting or opening the path to holy edifices.

On the hill-top, or river-side, or forest grove, the people assembled when invocations were offered and thanksgiving rendered to the gods. Confession of sin was made, and the wrath of the kami, therefore, was deprecated. The priest, after fasting and lustrations, purified himself and, robed in white, made offerings of the fruits of the earth or the trophies of the net and the chase.

At the court, a shrine of the Sun-goddess had been set up and sacrifices offered. Gradually in the towns and villages similar shrines were erected, and temples built; but for long centuries among the mountains, along the rivers and sea-coasts, the child of the soil set up his fetich, made the water-worn stone, the gnarled tree, or the storm-cloud his god. Wherever evil was supposed to lurk, or malignity reside, there were the emblems of the Ainō religion. On precipice, in gorge, in that primeval landscape, stood the plume of curled shavings to ward off the evil influences. In agony of terror in presence of the



Shintō Wayside Shrine in Modern Japan.

awful phenomenon of nature, earthquake, typhoon, flood, or tidal wave, the savage could but supplicate deified Nature to cease from wrath and tumult, and restore her face in peace of sunshine and calm.

The houses of the ancient Japanese were oblong huts, made by placing poles of young trees, with the bark on, upright in the ground, with transverse poles to make the frame, and fastened together with ropes made of rushes or vines. The walls were of matted grass, boughs, or rushes, the rafters of bamboo, and the sloping roof of grass-thatch, fastened down by heavy ridge-poles. The two larger rafters at each end projected and crossed each other, like two bayonets

in a stack of guns. Across the ridge-pole, and beneath it and another heavy tree laid lengthwise on top of the thatch, projected at right angles on either side short, heavy logs, which by their weight, and from being firmly bound by withes running under the ridge-pole, kept the thatch firmly in its place. This primeval hut is the model of the architecture of a pure Shintō temple. A short study of one easily reveals the fact. The floor, of hardened earth, had the fire in the centre; the doors and windows were holes covered at times with mats—in short, the Ainō hut of to-day. The modern Japanese dwelling is simply an improvement upon that ancient model.

The clothing of that period consisted of skins of animals, coarsely woven stuff of straw, grass, bark, palm-fibre, and in some cases of asbestos. Silk and cotton fabrics were of later invention and use. It is evident, even from modern proof, as exhibited in the normal Japanese of to-day, that the wearing of many garments was not congenial to the ancient people. As for straw and grass, these materials are even now universally used in town and country for hats, rain-coats, leggings, sandals, and a great variety of wearing apparel. A long loose garment, with the breech, or loin-cloth, and girdle, leggings, and sandals of straw, comprised a suit of ancient Japanese clothing. The food of the people consisted chiefly of fish, roots, and the flesh of animals. They ate venison, bear-meat, and other flesh, with untroubled consciences, until Buddhism came with its injunctions. The conquerors evidently brought cereals with them, and taught their cultivation; but the main reliance of the masses was upon the spoils of the rivers and sea. Even now the great centres and lines of the population are rivers and the sea-coast. Roots, sea-weed, and edible wild vegetables were, as at present, an important portion of native diet.

The landscape of modern Japan is one of minute prettiness. It is one continued succession of mountains and valleys. The irregularities of the surface render it picturesque, and the labors of centuries have brought almost every inch of the cultivable soil in the populous districts into a state of high agricultural finish. The peasant of to-day is in many cases the direct descendant of the man who first plunged mattock and hoe into the rooty soil, and led the water from a distance of miles to his new-made fields. The gullies, gorges, and valleys are everywhere terraced for the growth of rice. Millions of irrigated fields without fences or live-stock, bounded by water-courses, and animate with unharmed and harmless wild-fowl, the snowy heron, and the crane, and whose fertility astonishes the stranger, and the elaborate

system of reservoirs, ditches, and flumes, are the harvest of twenty centuries of toil. The face of nature has been smoothed; the unkempt luxuriance of forest and undergrowth has been sobered; the courses of rivers have been bridled; the once inaccessible sides of mountains graded, and their summits crossed by the paths of the traveler or pilgrim. The earth has been honey-combed by miners in quest of its metallic wealth.

In the primeval landscape of Japan there were no meadows, hedges, cattle, horses, prairies of ripening rice, irrigated fields, and terraced gulches. Then also, as now, the landscape was nude of domestic animal life. Instead of castled cities, fortified hills, gardens, and hedges, were only thatched villages, or semi-subterranean huts. There were no roads, no dikes. No water-courses had been altered, no slopes or hills denuded of timber. The plethora of nature was unpruned; the scrub bamboo, wild flowers, or grass covered the hills. The great plains of the East and North were luxuriant moors, covered with grass, reeds, or bamboo, populous with wild animal life. No laden junks moved up the rivers. The mulberry and tea plantations had not yet been set out. The conquerors found a virgin soil and a land of enrapturing beauty. They brought with them, doubtless, a knowledge of agriculture and metals. Gradually the face of nature changed. The hunter became a farmer. The women learned to spin and weave cotton and hemp. Division of labor began. The artisan and merchant appeared. Arts, sciences, skilled agriculture, changed the face of the land. Society emerged from its savage state, and civilization began.

As yet there was no writing. All communications were oral, all teachings handed down from father to son. Memory was the only treasury of thought. There is, indeed, shown in Japan at the present day a so-called ancient Japanese alphabet—the *kami*, or god, letters—which it is asserted the ancient Japanese used. This assertion is voided of truth by the testimony of the best native scholars to the contrary. No books or ancient inscriptions exist in this character. I



The Peasant of To-day. (Carrying Home the Sheaves of Rice.) Hokusai.

have myself sought in vain, in the grave-yards of Kiōtō and other ancient places, to discover any of these characters upon the old tombs. The best authorities, scholars who have investigated the subject, pronounce the so-called god-letters a forgery, that reveals their artificial and modern character upon a slight examination. They consist almost entirely of a system of straight lines and circles, which has, doubtless, either been borrowed from Corea, or invented by some person in modern times. Yet the morning of literature had dawned before writing was known. Poems, odes to the gods, prayers, fragments of the Shintō liturgy, which still exist in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, had been composed. From these fragments we may presume that a much larger unwritten literature existed, which was enjoyed by the men who, in those early days, by thought and reflection, attained to a certain degree of culture above their fellows. The early sovereigns worshiped the gods in person, and prayed that their people might enjoy a sufficiency of food, clothing, and shelter from the elements; and twice a year, in the Sixth and Twelfth months, the people assembled at the river-side, and, by washings and prayer, celebrated the festival of General Purification, by which the whole nation was purged of offenses and pollutions. This was the most characteristic of Shintō festivals, and the liturgy used in celebrating it is still in vogue at the present day. Time was measured by the phases of the moon, and the summer and winter solstices. The division of months and years was in use. The ancient laws and punishments were exceedingly severe. Besides the wager of battle to decide a quarrel, the ordeal still in use among the Ainōs was then availed of. The persons involved immersed their hands in boiling water. He whose hand was scalded most was the guilty one. The wholly innocent escaped without scath, or was so slightly injured that his hand rapidly healed.

Japanese art had its birth in mercy, about the time of Christ's advent on earth. A custom long adhered to among the noble classes was the burial of the living with the dead (*jun-shi*, dying with the master). The wife, and one or more servants, of the deceased lord committed suicide, and were inhumed with him. The mikado Suinin, son of Sūjin, attempted (B.C. 2) to abolish the cruel rite by imperial edict. Yet the old fashion was not immediately abandoned. In A.D. 3, the empress died. Nomi no Tsukuné, a courtier, having made some clay images, succeeded in having these substituted for the living victims. This was the birth of Japanese art. Henceforth these first products of man's unfolding genius stood vicarious for the breathing

beings they simulated. For this reform, the originator was given the honorable designation, Haji (*ha*, clay; *shi, ji*, teacher = clay-image teacher, or artist).

The domestic life and morals of those days deserve notice. There were no family names. The institution of marriage, if such it may be called, was upon the same basis as that among the modern Ainōs or North American Indians. Polygamy was common. Marriage between those whom we consider brothers and sisters was frequent, and a thing not to be condemned. Children of the same fathers by different mothers were not considered fraternally related to each other, and hence could marry; but marriage between a brother and sister born of the same mother was prohibited as immoral.

The annexed illustration is taken from a native work, and represents a chief or nobleman in ancient Japan. It will be noticed that beards and mustaches were worn in those days. The artist has depicted his subject with a well-wrinkled face to make him appear venerable, and with protruding cheeks to show his lusty physique, recalling the ideals of Chinese art, in which the men are always portly and massive, while the women are invariably frail and slender. His pose, expression, folded arms, and dress of figured material (consisting of one long loose robe with flowing sleeves, and a second garment, like very wide trousers, girded at the waist with straps of the same material) are all to be seen, though in modified forms, in modern Japan. The fashion of twenty centuries have changed but slightly. Suspended from his girdle may be seen the *magatama* chatelaine, evidently symbolizing his rank. The *magatama* are perforated and polished pieces of soap-stone or cornelian, of various colors, shaped something like a curved seed-pod. They were strung



A Court Noble in Ancient Japan. (From a Native Drawing.)

together like beads. Other ornaments of this age were the *kudatama*, jewels of gold, silver, or iron. The ancient sword was a straight, double-edged blade, about three feet long.

Buddhists and Confucianists assert that there existed no words in their language for benevolence, justice, propriety, sagacity, and truth. Doubtless these virtues existed, though not as necessary principles, to be taught, formulated, and incorporated into daily life. Chastity and restraint among the unmarried were not reckoned as necessary virtues; and the most ancient Japanese literature, to say nothing of their mythology, proves that marriage was a flimsy bar against the excursions of irregular passion. Great feasts and drinking-bouts, in which excessive eating was practiced, were common. They were fond of the chase, and hunting-parties were frequent from the most ancient times. Among the commendable features of their life were the habit of daily bathing and other methods of cleanliness. They treated their women with comparative kindness and respect. They loved the beautiful in Nature, and seemed to have been ever susceptible to her charms. In brief, they had neither the virtues nor vices of high civilization.

The arts were in the rudest state. Painting, carving, and sculpture were scarcely known. No theatre existed. Sacred dancing with masks, at the holy festivals, was practiced as part of the public worship, with music from both wind and stringed instruments.

Until the seventh century of our era, when the Chinese centralized system was adopted, the government of the Japanese empire was a species of feudalism. The invaders, on conquering the land, divided it into fiefs that were held sometimes by direct followers of Jimmu, or by the original Ainō chiefs, or nobles of mixed blood, on their rendition of homage or tribute to the conqueror. The frequent defection of these native or semi-Japanese chiefs was the cause of the numerous rebellions, the accounts of which enter so largely into the history of the first centuries of the empire. The mikado himself ruled over what is now called the Kinai, or Five Home Provinces, a space of country included between Lake Biwa and the bays of Ōzaka and Owari. The provinces in Shikokū, Kiushiu, and the circuits west, north, and east, were ruled by tributary chiefs who paid homage to the mikado as their suzerain, but most probably allowed him to interfere to a slight extent in the details of the administration of their lands. In cases of dispute between them, the mikado doubtless acted as umpire, his geographical position, superior power, and the sacredness of person insuring his supremacy at all times, even in the height of turbulence and riot so often prevailing.

In the ancient mikadoate, called by the Japanese the Ōsei era, or the government of monarchs, there were several features tending to increase the power of the suzerain, or central chief. The first was the essentially theocratic form of the government. The sovereign was the centre of that superstitious awe, as well as of loyalty and personal reverence, which still exists. There grew into being that prestige, that sense of hedging divinity and super-mortal supremacy of the mikado that still forms the most striking trait of the Japanese character, and the mightiest political, as it is a great religious and moral, force in Japan, overshadowing even the tremendous power of Buddhism, which is, as Shintō is not, armed with the terrors of eternity. In both a theological and political sense, in him dwelt the fullness of the gods bodily. He was their hypostasis. He was not only their chosen servant, but was himself a god, and the vicegerent of all the gods. His celestial fathers had created the very ground on which they dwelt. His wrath could destroy, his favor appease, celestial anger, and bring them fortune and prosperity. He was their preserver and benefactor. In his custody were the three sacred symbols. It was by superior intellect and the dogmatism of religion, as well as with superior valor, weapons, and skill, that a handful of invaders conquered and kept a land populated by millions of savages.

To the eye of a foreigner and a native of Japan, this imperfect picture of primitive Japan which I have given appears in very different lights. The native who looks at this far-off morning of Great Japan, the Holy Country, sees his ancestors only through the atmosphere in which he has lived and breathed. The dim religious light of reverent teaching of mother, nurse, father, or book falls on every object to reveal beauty and conceal defects. The rose-tints which innocent childhood casts upon every object here makes all things lovely. Heaven lies about his country's infancy. The precepts of his religion make the story sacred, and forbid the prying eye and the sandaled foot. The native loves, with passionate devotion, the land that nursed his holy ancestors, and thrills at the oft-told story of their prowess and their holy lives. He makes them his model of conduct.

The foreigner, in cold blood and with critical eye, patiently seeks the truth beneath, and, regarding not the dogma which claims to rest upon it, looks through dry light. To the one Nippon is the Land of the Gods, and the primal ages were holy. To the other, Japan is merely a geographical division of the earth, and its beginnings were from barbarism.