

X.

THE ANCIENT RELIGION.

THE ancient religion of the Japanese is called *Kami no michi* (way or doctrine of the gods; *i. e.*, theology). The Chinese form of the same is Shintō. Foreigners call it Shintōism, or Sintooism. Almost all the foreign writers* who have professed to treat of Shintō have described only the impure form which has resulted from the contact with it of Buddhism and Chinese philosophy, and as known to them since the sixteenth century. My purpose in this chapter is to give a mere outline of ancient Shintō in its purity. A sketch of its traditional and doctrinal basis has been given. Only a very few Shintō temples, called *miya*, have preserved the ancient purity of the rites and dogmas during the overshadowing influences of Buddhism.

In Japanese mythology the universe is Japan, the legends relating to Japan exclusively. All the deities, with perhaps a few exceptions, are historical personages; and the conclusion of the whole matter of cosmogony and celestial genealogy is that the mikado is the descendant and representative of the gods who created the heavens and earth (Japan). Hence, the imperative duty of all Japanese is to obey him. Its principles, as summed up by the Department of Religion, and promulgated throughout the empire so late as 1872, are expressed in the following commandments:

1. "Thou shalt honor the Gods, and love thy country.
2. "Thou shalt clearly understand the principles of Heaven and the duty of man.
3. "Thou shalt revere the Mikado as thy sovereign, and obey the will of his court."

* By far the best writing on Shintō, based on profound researches, is the long article of Mr. Ernest Satow, entitled "The Revival of Pure Shintō," in the *Japan Mail*, 1874, and contained in the "Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Japan" for the same year. Also on "The Shintō Temples of Isé," by the same writer. A scholarly article, by Mr. P. Kemperman, secretary to the German legation in Japan, was published in the *Japan Mail* of August 26th, 1874.

The chief characteristic, which is preserved in various manifestations, is the worship of ancestors, and the deification of emperors, heroes, and scholars. The adoration of the personified forces of nature enters largely into it. It employs no idols, images, or effigies in its worship. Its symbols are the mirror and the *gohei*—strips of notched white paper depending from a wand of wood. It teaches no doctrine of the immortality of the soul, though it is easy to see that such a dogma may be developed from it, since all men (Japanese) are descended from the immortal gods. The native derivation of the term for man is *hito* ("light-bearer"); and the ancient title of the mikado's heir-apparent was "light-inheritor." Fire and light (sun) have from earliest ages been the objects of veneration.

Shintō has no moral code, no accurately defined system of ethics or belief. The leading principle of its adherents is imitation of the illustrious deeds of their ancestors, and they are to prove themselves worthy of their descent by the purity of their lives. A number of salient points in their mythology are recognized as maxims for their guidance. It expresses great detestation of all forms of uncleanness, and is remarkable for the fullness of its ceremonies for bodily purification. Birth and death are especially polluting. Anciently, the corpse and the lying-in woman were assigned to buildings set apart, which were afterward burned. The priest must bathe and don clean garments before officiating, and bind a slip of paper over his mouth, lest his breath should pollute the offerings. Many special festivals were observed for purification, the ground dedicated for the purpose being first sprinkled with salt. The house and ground were defiled by death, and those who attended a funeral must also free themselves from contamination by the use of salt. The ancient emperors and priests in the provinces performed the actual ablution of the people, or made public lustrations. Later on, twice a year, at the festivals of purification, paper figures representing the people were thrown into the river, allegorical of the cleansing of the nation from the sins of the past six months. Still later, the mikado deputed the chief minister of religion at Kiōto to perform the symbolical act for the people of the whole country.

After death, the members of a family in which death had occurred must exclude themselves from all intercourse with the world, attend no religious services, and, if in official position, do no work for a specified number of days.

Thanksgiving, supplication, penance, and praise are all represented

in the prayers to the gods, which are offered by both sexes. The emperor and nobles often met in the temple gardens to compose hymns or sacred poems to the gods. Usually in prayer the hands are clasped twice, the head or the knees bowed, and the petition made in silence. The worshiper does not enter the temple, but stands before it, and first pulls a rope dangling down over a double gong, like a huge sleigh-bell, with which he calls the attention of the deity. The kami are believed to hear the prayer when as yet but in thought, before it rises to the lips. Not being intended for human ears, eloquence is not needed. The mikado in his palace daily offers up petitions for all his people, which are more effectual than those of his subjects. Washing the hands and rinsing out the mouth, the worshiper repeats prayers, of which the following is an example: "O God, that dwellest in the high plain of heaven, who art divine in substance and in intellect, and able to give protection from guilt and its penalties, to banish impurity, and to cleanse us from uncleanness—hosts of gods, give ear and listen to these our petitions." Or this: "I say with awe, deign to bless me by correcting the unwitting faults which, seen and heard by you, I have committed; by blowing off and clearing away the calamities which evil gods might inflict; by causing me to live long, like the hard and lasting rock; and by repeating to the gods of heavenly origin, and to the gods of earthly origin, the petitions which I present every day, along with your breath, that they may hear with the sharp-earedness of the forth-galloping colt."

The offerings, most commonly laid with great ceremony by the priest, in white robes, before the gods, were fruit and vegetables in season, fish and venison. At night they were removed, and became the property of the priest. Game and fowls were offered up as an act of worship, but with the peculiarity that their lives were not sacrificed. They were hung up by the legs before the temple for some time, and then permitted to escape, and, being regarded as sacred to the gods, were exempt from harm. The new rice and the products furnished by the silk-worm and the cotton-plant were also dedicated.

Before each temple stood a *torii*, or bird-rest. This was made of two upright tree-trunks. On the top of these rested a smoother tree, with ends slightly projecting, and underneath this a smaller horizontal beam. On this perched the fowls offered up to the gods, not as food, but as chanticleers to give notice of day-break. In later centuries the meaning of the *torii* was forgotten, and it was supposed to be a gateway. The Buddhists attached tablets to its cross-beam, painted or

coppered its posts, curved its top-piece, made it of stone or bronze, and otherwise altered its character. Resembling two crosses with their ends joined, the *torii* is a conspicuous object in the landscape, and a purely original work of Japanese architecture.

All the *miyas* were characterized by rigid simplicity, constructed of pure wood, and thatched. No paint, lacquer, gilding, or any meretricious ornaments were ever allowed to adorn or defile the sacred structure, and the use of metal was avoided. Within, only the *gohei* and the daily offerings were visible. Within a closet of purest wood is a case of wood containing the "august spirit-substitute," or "gods'-seed," in which the deity enshrined in the particular temple is believed to reside. This spirit-substitute is usually a mirror, which in some temples is exposed to view. The principal Shintō temples are at Isé, in which the mirror given by Amaterasū to Ninigi, and brought down from heaven, was enshrined. Some native writers assert that the mirror was the goddess herself; others, that it merely represented her. All others in Japan are imitations or copies of this original.

The priests of Shintō are designated according to their rank. They are called *kannushi* (shrine-keepers). Sometimes they receive titles from the emperor, and the higher ranks of the priesthood are court nobles. They are, in the strictest sense of the word, Government officials. The office of chief minister of religion was hereditary in the Nakatomi family. Ordinarily they dress like other people, but are robed in white when officiating, or in court-dress when at court. They marry, rear families, and do not shave their heads. The office is usually hereditary. Virgin priestesses also minister at the shrines.

After all the research of foreign scholars who have examined the claims of Shintō on the soil, and by the aid of the language, and the sacred books and commentators, many hesitate to decide whether Shintō is "a genuine product of Japanese soil," or whether it is not closely allied with the ancient religion of China, which existed before the period of Confucius. The weight of opinion inclines to the latter belief. Certain it is that many of the Japanese myths are almost exactly like those of China, while many parts of the cosmogony can be found unaltered in older Chinese works. The *Kojiki* (the Bible of the Japanese believers in Shintō) is full of narrations; but it lays down no precepts, teaches no morals or doctrines, prescribes no ritual. Shintō has very few of the characteristics of a religion, as understood by us. The most learned native commentators and exponents of Shintō expressly maintain the view, that Shintō has no moral code. Mo-

toōri, the great modern revivalist of Shintō, teaches, with polemic emphasis, that morals were invented by the Chinese because they were an immoral people; but in Japan there was no necessity for any system of morals, as every Japanese acted aright if he only consulted his own heart. The duty of a good Japanese consists in obeying the commands of the mikado without questioning whether these commands are right or wrong. It was only immoral people, like the Chinese, who presumed to discuss the character of their sovereigns. Among the ancient Japanese, government and religion were the same.*

* In this chapter, I have carefully endeavored to exclude mere opinions and conjectures, and to give the facts only. I append below the views held by gentlemen of cosmopolitan culture, and earnest students of Shintō on the soil, whose researches and candor entitle them to be heard.

"Shintō, as expounded by Motoōri, is nothing else than an engine for reducing the people to a condition of mental slavery."—ERNEST SATOW, *English, the foremost living Japanese scholar, and a special student of Shintō.*

"There is good evidence that Shintō resembles very closely the ancient religion of the Chinese." "A distinction should be drawn between the Shintō of ancient times and the doctrine as developed by writers at the court of the mikado in modern times." "The sword and dragon, the thyrsus staff and ivy, the staff of Æsculapius and snakes, most probably had the same significance as the Japanese *gohei*; and, as Siebold has remarked, it symbolized the union of the two elements, male and female. The history of the creation of the world, as given by the Japanese, bore the closest resemblance to the myths of China and India; while little doubt existed that these (symbol and myth) were imported from the West, the difficulty being to fix the date. Little was known of Shintō that might give it the character of a religion as understood by Western nations."—J. A. VON BRANDT, *German, late minister of the German empire to Japan, and now to Peking, a student of Japanese archaeology, and founder of the German Asiatic Society of Japan.*

"Japanese, in general, are at a loss to describe what Shintō is; but this circumstance is intelligible if what was once an indigenous faith had been turned, in later days, into a political engine." "Infallibility on the part of the head of the state, which was naturally attributed to rulers claiming divine descent, was a convenient doctrine for political purposes in China or Japan, as elsewhere." "We must look to early times for the meaning of Shintō." "Its origin is closely allied to the early religion of the Chinese." "The practice of putting up sticks with shavings or paper attached, in order to attract the attention of the spirits, is observable among certain hill tribes of India, as well as among the Ainōs of Yezo. The Hindoos, Burmese, and Chinese have converted these sticks into flags, or streamers." "If Shintō had ever worked great results, or had taken deep hold on the Japanese people, it would scarcely have been superseded so completely as it had been by Buddhism."—SIR HARRY S. PARKES, *British minister plenipotentiary in Japan, a fine scholar, and long resident in both China and Japan.*

"The leading idea of Shintō is a reverential feeling toward the dead." "As to the political use of it, the state is quite right in turning it to account in support of the absolute government which exists in Japan." "The early records of Japan are by no means reliable."—ARINORI MORI, *Japanese, formerly chargé d'affaires of Japan at Washington, U. S. A., now Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in Japan.*