

IV.

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY.

IN the beginning all things were in chaos. Heaven and earth were not separated. The world floated in the cosmic mass, like a fish in water, or the yolk in an egg. The ethereal matter sublimed and formed the heavens, the residuum became the present earth, from the warm mold of which a germ sprouted and became a self-animate being, called *Kuni-toko-tachi no mikoto*.* Two other beings of like genesis appeared. After them came four pairs of beings (*kami*). These were all single (*hitori-gami*, male, sexless, or self-begotten).

* It will be seen at once that the Japanese scheme of creation starts without a Creator, or any First Cause; and that the idea of space apart from matter is foreign to the Japanese philosophical system. *Mikoto* (masc.), *mikami* (fem.), mean "augustness." It is *not* the same term as *mikado*. *No* is the particle of.

The opening sentence of the *Kojiki* is as follows: At the time of the beginning of heaven and earth there existed three *hashira-gami* (pillar or chief *kami*, or gods). The name of one *kami* was *Amé-no-naka-nushi-no-kami* (Lord of the Middle of Heaven); next, *Taka-mi-musubi-no-kami* (High Ineffable Procreator); next, *Kami-musubi-no-kami* (Ineffable Procreator). These three, existing single, hid their bodies (died, or passed away, or became 'pure spirit [?]). Next, when the young land floated like oil moving about, there came into existence, sprouting upward like the *ashi* (rush) shoot, a *kami* named *Umagi-ashikabi-kikoji-no-kami* (Delightful Rush-sprout); next, *Amé-no-toko-tachi-no-kami*. These two chief *kami*, existing single, hid their bodies. Next, came into existence these three, *Kuni-no-toko-tachi-no-mikoto*, etc., etc.

The *Nihongi* opens as follows: Of old, when heaven and earth were not yet separated, and the *in* (male, active, or positive principle) and the *yo* (female, passive, or negative principle) were not yet separated, chaos, enveloping all things, like a fowl's egg, contained within it a germ. The clear and ethereal substance expanding, became heaven; the heavy and thick substance agglutinating, became earth. The ethereal union of matter was easy, but the thickened substance hardened with difficulty. Therefore, heaven existed first; the earth was fixed afterward. Subsequently deity (*kami*) was born (*umaru*). Now, it is said that, "in the beginning of heaven and earth, the soil floated about like a fish floating on the top of the water," etc.

Evidently in the *Kojiki* we have the purely Japanese theory of creation, and in the *Nihongi* the same account, with Chinese philosophical ideas and terms added. In both, matter appears before mind, and the deities have no existence before matter.

Proceeding now to the work of creation, the kami separated the primordial substance into the five elements—wood, fire, metal, earth, and water—and ordained to each its properties and combination. As yet, the division into sexes had not taken place. In [Chinese] philosophical language, the male (*yo*) and female (*in*) principles that pervade all things had not yet appeared. The first manifestation of the male essence was *Izanagi*; of the female, *Izanami*. Standing together on the floating bridge of heaven, the male plunged his jeweled falchion, or spear, into the unstable waters beneath them, and withdrawing it, the trickling drops formed an island, upon which they descended. The creative pair, or divine man and woman, designing to make this island a pillar for a continent, separated—the male to the left, the female to the right—to make a journey round the island. At their meeting, the female spirit spoke first, “How joyful to meet a lovely man!” The male spirit, offended that the first use of the tongue had been by a woman, required the circuit to be repeated. On their second meeting, the man cried out, “How joyful to meet a lovely woman!” They were the first couple; and this was the beginning of the art of love, and of the human race. The island (Awaji), with seven other large, and many thousand small ones, became the Everlasting Great Japan.* At *Izanami*’s first conception, the female essence

* The various names of Japan which I have found in the native literature, or have heard in colloquial use, are as follows: 1. *Nihon*, or *Nippon*, compounded of the words *ni*, *nichi*, or *nitsu* (sun, day) and *hon* (root, origin, beginning); hence Sunrise, Dawn, or Dayspring. Japan is the foreigner’s corruption of the Chinese *Ji-pun*, or *Ji-puan*. The name may have been given by the Chinese or Coreans to the land lying east of them, whence the sun rose, or by the conquerors coming from Manchuria, by way of Corea, eastward. Or, it may have arisen anciently among the natives of the western provinces of Japan. It is found in Chinese books from the time of the Tang dynasty (618-905 A.D.). 2. *Dai Nihon Koku* (Country of Great Japan). 3. *Ō Yashima no Kuni* (Country of the Eight Great Islands), created by *Izanagi* and *Izanami*. 4. *Onogorojima* (Island of the Congealed Drops), which fell from the jeweled falchion or spear of *Izanagi*. 5. *Shiki Shima* (Outspread Islands), a name common in poetry, and referring to their being spread out like stepping-stones in a Japanese garden. 6. *Toyohara Akitsu Kuni* (Country between Heaven and Earth). 7. *Toyookitsu Kuni* (Dragon-fly-shaped Country), from the resemblance to this insect with its wings outspread. 8. *Toyō Ashiwara Kuni* (Fertile Plain of Sweet Flags). 9. *Ō Yamato no Kuni* (Land of Great Peace). The same characters are read *Wa Koku* by the Chinese, and sometimes by the Japanese. 10. *Fuso Koku*. *Fuso* is the name of a tree which is fabled to petrify; hence, an emblem of national stability. 11. *On Koku* (Honorable Country). 12. *Shin Koku* (Land of the Holy Spirits). 13. *Kami no Kuni* (The God-land, or Land of the Gods). 14. *Horai no Kuni* (Land of the Elixir of Immortality), an allusion to the legend that a Chinese courtier came to

in being more powerful, a female child was born, greatly to the chagrin of the father, who wished for male offspring. The child was named Ama-terasū ō mikami, or, the Heaven-illuminating Goddess. She shone beautifully, and lighted the heavens and the earth. Her father, therefore, transferred her from earth to heaven, and gave her the ethereal realm to rule over. At this time the earth was close to heaven, and the goddess easily mounted the pillar, on which heaven rested, to her kingdom.

The second child was also a female, and was called Tsuki no kami, and became the Goddess of the Moon. The third child, Hiruko (leech), was a male, but not well formed. When three years old, being still unable to stand, his parents made an ark of camphor-wood, and set him adrift at sea. He became the first fisherman, and was the God of the Sea and of Storms.

After two girls and a cripple had thus been born, the father was delighted with the next fruit of his spouse, a fine boy, whom they named Sosanoō no mikoto. Of him they entertained the highest hopes. He grew up, however, to be a most mischievous fellow, killing people, pulling up their trees, and trampling down their fields. He grew worse as he grew up. He was made ruler over the blue sea; but he never kept his kingdom in order. He let his beard grow down over his bosom. He cried constantly; and the land became a desert, the rivers and seas dried up, and human beings died in great numbers. His father, inquiring the reason of his surly behavior, was told that he wished to go to his mother, who was in the region under the earth. He then made his son ruler over the kingdom of night. The august scape-grace still continued his pranks, unable to refrain from mischief. One day, after his sister, the Sun-goddess, had planted a field with rice, he turned a wild horse loose, which trampled down and spoiled all her work. Again, having built a store-house for the new rice, he defiled it so that it could not be used. At another time, his sister was sitting at her loom, weaving. Sosanoō, having skinned a live horse by drawing its skin off from the tail to the head, flung the reeking hide over the loom, and the carcass in the room. The goddess was so frightened that she hurt herself with the shuttle, and, in her wrath, retired to a

Japan in search of the elixir of immortality. He brought a troop of young men and maidens with him. Dying in Japan, he was buried in Kii, and the young couples, marrying, colonized Japan. 15. *Ko Koku* (The Mikado's Empire), Land ruled by a Theocratic Dynasty. 16. *Tei Koku Nihon* (The Empire ruled by a Theocratic Dynasty, or, Japan, the Empire governed by Divine Rulers).

cave, closing the mouth with a large rock. Heaven, earth, and the four quarters became enshrouded in darkness, and the distinction between day and night ceased. Some of the turbulent and ill-mannered gods took advantage of the darkness to make a noise like the buzzing of flies, and the confusion was dreadful.

Then all the gods (eight hundred thousand in number) assembled on the heavenly river-plain of Yasu, to discuss what was to be done to appease the anger of the great goddess. The wisest of the gods was intrusted with the charge of thinking out a stratagem to entice her forth. The main part of the plan was to make an image of the self-imprisoned goddess, which was to be more beautiful than herself, and thus excite at once her curiosity and her jealousy. It was to be a round mirror like the sun.

A large rock from near the source of the river was taken to form an anvil. To make the bellows, they took the whole skin of a deer, and, with iron from the mines of heaven, the blacksmith-god made two mirrors, which successively failed to please the gods, being too small. The third was large and beautiful, like the sun.

The heavenly artisans now prepared to make the finest clothes and jewelry, and a splendid palace for the Sun-goddess, when she should come out. Two gods planted the paper-mulberry and hemp, and prepared bark and fibre; while three other gods wove them into coarse, striped, and fine cloth, to deck her dainty limbs. Two gods, the first carpenters, dug holes in the ground with a spade, erected posts, and built a palace. Another deity, the first jeweler, made a string of *magatama* (curved jewels), the material for a necklace, hair-pins, and bracelets. Two other gods held in their hands the sacred wands, called *tama-gushi*.

Two gods were then appointed to find out, by divination, whether the goddess was likely to appear. They caught a buck, tore out a bone from one of its forelegs, and set it free again. The bone was placed in a fire of cherry-bark, and the crack produced by the heat in the blade of the bone was considered a satisfactory omen.

A sakaki-tree was then pulled up by the roots. To the upper branches was hung the necklace of jewels, to the middle was attached the mirror, and from the lower branches depended the coarse and fine cloth. This was called a *gohei*. A large number of perpetually crowing cocks was obtained from (what had been) the region of perpetual day. These irrepressible chanticleers were set before the cave, and began to crow lustily in concert. The God of Invincibly Strong Hands

was placed in concealment near the rocky door, ready to pull the goddess out at her first peering forth. A goddess with a countenance of heavenly glossiness, named Uzumé, was appointed manager of the dance. She first bound up her flowing sleeves close to her body, under the armpits, by a creeping plant, called *masaki*, and donned a head-dress made of long moss. While she blew a bamboo tube, with holes pierced in it between the joints, the other deities kept time to the music with two flat, hard pieces of wood, which they clapped together. Another kami took six bows, and, from the long moss hanging from the pine-trees on the high hills, she strung the bows, and made the harp called the *koto*. His son made music on this instrument by drawing across the strings grass and rushes, which he held in both hands. Bonfires were now lighted before the door of the cavern, and the orchestra of fifes, drums, cymbals, and harp began. The goddess Uzumé now mounted the circular box, having a bâton of twigs of bamboo grass in one hand, with a spear of bamboo twined with grass, on which small bells tinkled. As she danced, the drum-like box prepared for her resounded, and she, becoming possessed by a spirit of folly, sung a song in verses of six syllables each, which some interpret as the numerals, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 100, 1000, 10,000. The goddess, as she danced, loosened her dress, exposing her nude charms. All this was caused by the spirit which possessed her. It so excited the mirth of the gods that they laughed so loudly that heaven shook. The song and its interpretations are :

“Hito, futa, miyo.....One, two, three, four,
 Itsu, muyu, nana.....Five, six, seven,
 Ya, koko-no, tari.....Eight, nine, ten,
 Momo, chi, yorodzu.....Hundred, thousand, ten thousand.”

“Ye gods, behold the cavern doors!
 Majesty appears—hurra!
 Our hearts are quite satisfied;
 Behold my charms.”

or,

“Gods, behold the door!
 Lo! the majesty of the goddess!
 Shall we not be filled with rapture?
 Are not my charms excellent?”

The Sun-goddess within, unable to account for the ill-timed mirth, since heaven and earth were in darkness, rose, and approaching the rocky door, listened to the honeyed words of one of the gods, who was praising her. Impelled further by curiosity, she opened the

door slightly, and asked why Uzumé danced and the gods laughed? Uzumé replied, "I dance because there is an honorable deity who surpasses your glory." As she said this, the exceedingly beautiful god Futodama showed the mirror. The Sun-goddess within, astonished at her own loveliness, which she now first beheld in the reflection, stepped out a little further to gratify her curiosity. The God of Invincibly Strong Hands, who stood concealed, pulled the rock door open, caught her by the hand, and dragged her forth. The wisest of the gods, who superintended the whole proceedings, took a rope of twisted rice-straw, passed it behind her, and said, "Do not go behind this." They then removed the Sun-goddess to her new palace, and put a straw rope around it to keep off evil gods. Her wicked brother was punished by having each particular hair of his head pulled out, and his finger and toe nails extracted. He was then banished.

Izanami's fifth child, the last in whose conception the two gods shared, was a son, called the God of Wild Fire. In bringing him forth the goddess suffered great pain; and from the matter which she vomited in her agony sprung the God and Goddess of Metal. She afterward created the gods of Clay and Fresh Water, who were to pacify the God of Fire when inclined to be turbulent. Izanami had enjoined her consort not to look at her during her retirement, but he disregarded her wish. She fled from him, and departed to the nether regions. Izanagi, incensed at the God of Fire, clove him in three pieces with his sword. From these fragments sprung the gods of Thunder, of Mountains, and of Rain. He then descended into the region of night to induce Izanami to come back to the earth. There he met his consort, who would not return. He found the region to be one of perpetual and indescribable foulness, and, before he left, he saw the body of his wife had become a mass of putrefaction. Escaping into the upper world, he washed himself in the sea, and, in the act of escape and purification, many gods were created. According to one version, Amaterasu was produced out of his left eye, and Sosanoö out of his nose. Those deities created out of the filth from which he cleansed himself became the wicked gods, who now war against the good gods and trouble mankind. The God of Clay and the Goddess of Fresh Water married. Their offspring was Naka musubi. From his head grew the mulberry and silk-worm, and from his navel sprung the five cereals, rice, wheat, beans, millet, and sorghum.

Another legend, changing the sex of Sosanoö, says the Sun-goddess spoke to Sosanoö (the Moon-goddess), who reigned jointly with her

over the high plain of heaven, and said, "I have heard that there is a food-possession goddess in the central country of luxuriant reedy moors (Japan). Go and see." Descending from heaven, he came to the august abode of the Goddess of Food, and asked for refreshment. The goddess, creating various forms of food, such as boiled rice from the land, fish from the sea, beasts, with coarse and fine hair, from the hills, set them on a banqueting-table before Sosanoö, who, enraged at the manner of the creation of the food, killed her.

Reporting the matter in heaven, Amaterasü was angry at Sosanoö, and degraded her (the Moon-goddess) from joint rule, and condemned her to appear only at night, while she, the Sun-goddess, slept. Amaterasü then sent a messenger the second time to see whether the Food-goddess was really dead. This was found to be the case. Out of the dead body were growing, millet on the forehead; silk-worms and a mulberry-tree on the eyebrows; grass on the eyes; on the belly, rice, barley, and large and small beans. The head finally changed into a cow and horse. The messenger took them all, and presented them to Amaterasü. The Sun-goddess rejoiced, and ordained that these should be the food of human beings, setting apart rice as the seed of the watery fields, and the other cereals as the seed of the dry fields. She appointed lords of the villages of heaven, and began for the first time to plant the rice-seeds. In the autumn the drooping ears ripened in luxuriant abundance. She planted the mulberry-trees on the fragrant hills of heaven, and rearing silk-worms, and chewing cocoons in her mouth, spun thread. Thus began the arts of agriculture, silk-worm rearing, and weaving.

When Sosanoö was in banishment, there was a huge eight-headed dragon that had devastated the land and eaten up all the fair virgins. Sosanoö enticed the monster to partake of an intoxicating liquor set in eight jars, and then slew him while in stupor. In the tail of the dragon he found a sword of marvelous temper, which he presented to Amaterasü. This sword, called "Cloud-cluster," afterward became one of the three sacred emblems constituting the regalia of the Japanese sovereigns. In these last days of commerce, Sosanoö's exploit is pictured on the national paper money. He is also said to have invented poetry. Being as irregularly amorous as the Jupiter of another mythology, he was the father of many children by various mothers. One of the most illustrious of his offspring was Daikokü, now worshipped in every household as the God of Fortune. In the later stages of the mythology, heaven and earth are found peopled with myriads

of kami, some of whom have inhabited heaven from the beginning, while those on the earth have been ruling or contending together from an indefinite period. Finally, before ushering in the third or final stage of the mythical history, there are general war and confusion among the gods on earth, and Amaterasu resolves to bring order out of the troubles, and to subdue and develop the land for herself.

She desired to make a son of her own a ruler over the terrestrial world. One had been produced from her necklace, called Oshi-homi no mikoto, who married Tamayori himé no mikoto, one of the granddaughters of Izanagi and Izanami. Their offspring was Ninigi no mikoto. After much delay, caused by the dispatch and failure of envoys to the gods of the earth, he prepared to descend from heaven to his realm on earth. The Sun-goddess gave her grandson various treasures, chief of which were the mirror, emblem of her own soul, and now worshiped at Isé, the sword Cloud-cluster, taken by Sosanoô from the dragon's tail, and a stone or seal. Concerning the mirror she said, "Look upon this mirror as my spirit; keep it in the same house and on the same floor with yourself, and worship it as if you were worshipping my actual presence."

Another version of this divine investiture is given in these words: "For centuries upon centuries shall thy followers rule this kingdom. Herewith receive from me the succession and the three crown talismans. Should you at any future time desire to see me, look in this mirror. Govern this country with the pure lustre that radiates from its surface. Deal with thy subjects with the gentleness which the smooth rounding of the stone typifies. Combat the enemies of thy kingdom with this sword, and slay them on the edge of it."

Accompanied by a number of inferior gods of both sexes, he descended on the floating bridge of heaven, on which the first pair had stood when separating the dry land from the water, to the mountain of Kirishima, between Hiuga and Ôzumi, in Kiushiu. After his descent, the sun and earth, which had already receded from each other to a considerable distance, became further separated, and communication by the floating bridge of heaven ceased. According to the commentators on the sacred books, as Japan lay directly opposite to the sun when it separated from the earth, it is clear (to a devout Japanese) that Japan lies on the summit of the globe. As it was created first, it is especially the Land of the Gods, the Holy Land, the Country of the Divine Spirits. All other countries were formed later by the spontaneous consolidation of the foam and mud of the sea. All for-

eign countries were of course created by the power of the heavenly gods, but they were not begotten by Izanagi and Izanami, nor did they give birth to the Sun-goddess, which is the cause of their inferiority. Japan is superior to all the world for the reasons given above. The traditions current in other countries as to the origin of the world are of course incorrect, since, being so far from the sources of truth, they can not be accurate, and must be greatly distorted. From the fact of the divine descent of the Japanese people proceeds their immeasurable superiority to the natives of other countries in courage and intelligence. This opinion, long held by Japanese in general, still lingers among the fanatical Shintō scholars, and helps to explain the intense hatred and contempt manifested toward foreigners as late as within the last decade.

Ninigi no mikoto descended on Kirishima yama, and was received with due honors by one of the kami of the place. He had a son, who lived five hundred and eighty years. This son married a sea-monster, who appeared to him in the form of a woman, and by her he had a son, who became ruler, and was succeeded by a son born of an aunt. Ninigi, the heavenly descendant, was thus the great-grandfather of Jimmu Tennō, the first emperor of Japan.

It is not easy to weave into a continuous and consistent whole the various versions of the Japanese accounts of creation and the acts of the gods, or to be always safe in deciding their origin, sex, or relations to each other; for these spirits act like Milton's, and "as they please, they limb themselves." These myths arising among the primitive Japanese people of various localities, who never attempted to formulate them, are frequently at hopeless variance with each other; and the ingenuity and ability of the learned native commentators on the sacred books, especially the *Nihongi* and *Kojiki*, are exercised to the highest degree to reconcile them.

One author devotes twenty volumes of comment to two of the text of the *Kojiki* in these earnest efforts, making his works a rich mine to the student of Japanese antiquities. Translated into English, in the spirit of a devout Japanese, an exalted Biblical or Miltonic style should be used. Mr. Aston thus renders a passage from the *Nakatomi no harai*, one of the most ancient monuments of the language, describing the descent of the god Ninigi to the earth (Japan): "They caused him to thrust from him heaven's eternal throne, to fling open heaven's eternal doors, to cleave with might his way from out heaven's many-piled clouds, and then to descend from heaven."

A literal, or even free, translation into plain English could not, however, be made in a book to be read, unexpurgated, in the family circle. Many physiological details, and not a few references probably, pure to the native pure, would not be suffered by the tastes or moral codes in vogue among the mass of readers in Europe or America. Like the mythology of Greece, that of Japan is full of beauty, pathos, poetic fancy, charming story, and valorous exploit. Like that, it forms the soil of the national art, whether expressed in bronze, porcelain, colors; or poetry, song, picture, the dance, pantomime, romance, symbolism; or the æsthetics of religion.

In spite of Buddhism, rationalism, and skeptical philosophy, it has entered as fully into the life and art and faith of the people of Japan as the mythology of the Aryan nations has entered into the life and art of Europe. Like that of the nations classic to us, the Japanese mythology, when criticised in the light of morals, and as divorced from art, looked at by one of alien clime, race, and faith, contains much that is hideous, absurd, impure, and even revolting. Judged as the growth and creation of the imagination, faith, and intellect of the primitive inhabitants of Japan, influenced by natural surroundings, it is a faithful mirror of their country, and condition and character, before these were greatly modified by outside religion or philosophy. Judged as a religious influence upon the descendants of the ancient Nihonese—the Japanese, as we know them—it may be fairly held responsible for much of the peculiar moral traits of their character, both good and evil. The Japanese mythology is the doctrinal basis of their ancient and indigenous religion, called *Kami no michi*, or *Shintō* (way or doctrine of the gods, or, by literal rendering, theology).

One of the greatest pleasures to a student of Japanese art, antiquities, and the life as seen in the Japan of to-day, is to discover the survivals of primitive culture among the natives, or to trace in their customs the fashions and ceremonies current tens of centuries ago, whose genesis is to be sought in the age of the gods. Beneath the poetic and mythical costume are many beautiful truths.

One of the many Japanese rationalistic writers explains the hiding of Amaterasū in the cave as an eclipse of the sun. Ebisū, the third child of the first pair, is now worshiped as the God of Daily Food, fish being the staple of Japanese diet. He is usually represented as a jolly angler, with a red fish (*tai*) under one fat arm, and a rod and line under the other. One need not go far from Kiōto to find the identical spots of common earth which the fertile imagination of

the children of Nippon has transfigured into celestial regions. Thus, the prototype of "the dry bed of the river Ame no yasū" is now to be seen in front of the city of Kiōto, where the people still gather for pleasure or public ceremony. The "land of roots," to which Sosanoō was banished, is a region evidently situated a few miles north-west of Kiōto. The dancing of Suzumé before the cavern is imitated in the pantomimic dance still seen in every Japanese village and city street. The mirror made from iron in the mines of heaven by the Blacksmith-god was the original of the burnished disks before which the Japanese beauty of to-day, sitting for hours on knee and heels, and nude to the waist, heightens her charms. A mask of Suzumé, representing the laughing face of a fat girl, with narrow forehead, having the imperial spots of sable, and with black hair in rifts on her forehead, cheeks puffed out, and dimpled chin, adorns the walls of many a modern Japanese house, and notably on certain festival days, and on their many occasions of mirth. The stranger, ignorant of its symbolic import, could, without entering the palace, find its prototype in five minutes, by looking around him, from one of the jolly fat girls at the well or the rice-bucket. The *magatama* jewels, curved and perforated pieces of soap-stone occasionally dug up in various parts of Japan, show the work of the finger of man, and ancient pictures depict the chiefs of tribes decked with these adornments. In the preparations made to attract forth the Sun-goddess, we see the origin of the arts of music by wind and stringed instruments, dancing, divination, adornment, weaving, and carpentry. To this day, when the Japanese female is about to sweep, draw water, or perform household duties, she binds up her sleeves to her armpits, with a string twisted over her shoulders, like the sleeve-binder of the dancing goddess. Before Shintō shrines, trees sacred to the kami, at New-year's-day before gates and doors, and often in children's plays, one sees stretched the twisted ropes of rice-straw. In the month of August especially, but often at the fairs, festivals, and on holidays, the wand of waving jewels, made by suspending colored paper and trinkets to a branch of bamboo, and something like a Christmas-tree, is a frequent sight. The *gohei* is still the characteristic emblem seen on a Shintō shrine. All these relics, trivial and void of meaning to the hasty tourist, or the alien, whose only motive for dwelling on the island is purely sordid, are, in the eye of the native, and the intelligent foreigner, ancient, sacred, and productive of innocent joy, and to the latter, sources of fresh surprise and enjoyment of a people in themselves intensely interesting.