

V.

THE TWILIGHT OF FABLE.

BETWEEN the long night of the unknown ages that preceded the advent of the conquerors, and the morning of what may be called real history, there lies the twilight of mythology and fabulous narration.

The mythology of Nippon, though in essence Chinese, is Japanese in form and coloring, and bears the true flavor of the soil from whence it sprung. The patriotic native or the devout Shintōist may accept the statements of the *Kojiki* as genuine history; but in the cold, clear eye of an alien they are the inventions of men shaped to exalt the imperial family. They are a living and luxurious growth of fancy around the ruins of facts that in the slow decay of time have lost the shape by which recognition is possible. Chinese history does indeed, at certain points, corroborate what the Japanese traditions declare, and thus gives us some sure light; but for a clear understanding of the period antedating the second century of the Christian era, the native mythology and the fabulous narrations of the *Kojiki* are but as moonlight.

Jimmu Tennō, the first mikado, was the fifth in descent from the Sun-goddess. His original name was Kan Yamato Iware Hiko no mikoto. The title Jimmu Tennō, meaning "spirit of war," was posthumously applied to him many centuries afterward. When the *Kojiki* was compiled, pure Japanese names only were in use. Hence, in that book we meet with many very long quaint names and titles which, when written in the Chinese equivalents, are greatly abbreviated. The introduction of the written characters of China at a later period enabled the Japanese to express almost all their own words, whether names, objects, or abstract ideas, in Chinese as well as Japanese. Thus, in the literature of Japan two languages exist side by side, or imbedded in each other. This applies to the words only. Japanese syntax, being incoercible, has preserved itself almost entirely unchanged.

The *Kojiki* states that Jimmu was fifty years old when he set out

upon his conquests. He was accompanied by his brothers and a few retainers, all of whom are spoken of as *kami*, or gods. The country of Japan was already populated by an aboriginal people dwelling in villages, each under a head-man, and it is interesting to notice how the inventors of the *Kojiki* account for their origin. They declare, and the Japanese popularly believe, that these aboriginal savages were the progeny of the same gods (Izanagi and Izanami) from whom Jimmu sprung; but they were wicked, while Jimmu was righteous.

The interpretation doubtless is, that a band of foreign invaders landed in Hiuga, in Kiushiu, or they were perhaps colonists, who had occupied this part of the country for some time previous. The territory of Hiuga could never satisfy a restless, warlike people. It is mountainous, volcanic, and one of the least productive parts of Japan.

At the foot of the famous mountain of Kirishima, which lies on the boundary between Hiuga and Ōzumi, is the spot where Jimmu resided, and whence he took his departure.

Izanagi and Izanami first, and afterward Ninigi, the fourth ancestor of Jimmu, had descended from this same height to the earth. Every Japanese child who lives within sight of this mountain gazes with reverent wonder upon its summit, far above the sailing clouds and within the blue sky, believing that here the gods came down from heaven.

The story of Jimmu's march is detailed in the *Kojiki*, and the numerous popular books based upon it. A great many wonderful creatures and men that resembled colossal spiders were encountered and overcome. Even wicked gods had to be fought or circumvented. His path was to Usa, in Buzen; thence to Okada; thence by ship through the windings of the Suwo Nada, a part of the Inland Sea,*

* The "Inland Sea" (Séto Uchi) is a name which has been given by foreigners, and adopted by the Japanese, who until modern times had no special name for it as a whole. Indeed, the whole system of Japanese geographical nomenclature proves that the generalizations made by foreigners were absent from their conceptions. The large bays have not a name which unifies all their parts and limbs into one body. The long rivers possess each, not one name, but many local appellations along their length. The main island was nameless, so were Shikokū and Kiushiu for many centuries. Yezo, to the native, is a region, not an island. Even for the same street in a city a single name, as a rule, is not in use, each block receiving a name by itself. This was quite a natural proceeding when the universe, or "all beneath heaven," meant Japan. The Séto Uchi has been in Japanese history what the Mediterranean was to the course of empire in Europe, due allowance being made for proportions, both physical and moral. It extends nearly east and west two hundred and forty miles, with a breadth varying from ten to

landing in Aki. Here he built a palace, and remained seven years. He then went to the region of Bizen, and, after dwelling there eight years, he sailed to the East. The waves were very rough and rapid at the spot near the present site of Ōzaka,* where he finally succeeded in landing, and he gave the spot the name *Nami Haya* (swift waves). This afterward became, in the colloquial, and in poetry, Naniwa.

Hitherto the career of the invaders had been one of victory and easy conquest, but they now received their first repulse. After severe fighting, Jimmu was defeated, and one of his brothers was wounded. A council of war was held, and sacred ceremonies celebrated to discover the cause of the defeat. The solemn verdict was that as children of the Sun-goddess they had acted with irreverence and presumption in journeying in opposition to the course of the sun from west to east, instead of moving, as the sun moves, from east to west. Thereupon they resolved to turn to the south, and advance westward. Leaving the ill-omened shores, they coasted round the southern point

thirty miles, with many narrow passages. It has six divisions (*nada*), taking their names from the provinces whose shores they wash. It contains a vast number of islands, but few known dangers, and has a sea-board of seven hundred miles, densely populated, abounding with safe and convenient anchorages, dotted with many large towns and provincial capitals and castled cities, and noted for the active trade of its inhabitants. It communicates with the Pacific by the channels of Kii on the east, Bungo on the south, and by the Straits of Shimonoséki ("the Gibraltar of Japan"), half a mile wide, on the west. It can be navigated safely at all seasons of the year by day, and now, under ordinary circumstances, by night, thanks to the system of light-houses thoroughly equipped with the latest instruments of optical science, including dioptric and catoptric, fixed and revolving, white and colored lights, in earthquake-proof towers, erected by English engineers in the service of the mikado's Government. The tides and currents of the Séto Uchi are not as yet perfectly known, but are found to be regular at the east and west entrances, the tide-waves coming from the Pacific. In many parts they run with great velocity. The cut on page 57 shows one of these narrow passages where the eddying currents rush past a rock in mid-channel, scouring the shores, and leaving just enough room for the passage of a large steamer.

A very destructive species of mollusk inhabits the Inland Sea, which perforates timber, making holes one-third of an inch in diameter. Sailing-vessels bound to Nagasaki sometimes find it better in winter to work through the Inland Sea rather than to beat round Cape Chichakoff against the Kuro Shiwo. This latter feat is so difficult that sailors are apt to drop the *o* from the Japanese name (Satano) of this cape (*misaki*) and turn it into an English or Hebrew word. Those who are trying to prove that the Japanese are the "lost tribes" might make one of their best arguments from this fact. Kaempfer, it may be stated, derived the Japanese, by rapid transit, from the Tower of Babel, across Siberia to the islands.

* The spelling of Ōzaka (accent on the *ō*) is in accordance with the requirements of Japanese rules of orthography, and the usage of the people in Ōzaka and Kiōto.

be noticed that this primal form of general government was a species of feudalism. Such a political system was of the most rudimentary kind; only a little better than the Council of the Six Nations of the Iroquois, or was similar to that of the Aztecs of Mexico.

The country being now tranquilized, weapons were laid aside, and attention was given to the arts of peace. Among the first things accomplished was the solemn deposit of the three sacred emblems—mirror, sword, and ball—in the palace. Sacrifices were offered to the Sun-goddess on Torimino yama.

Jimmu married the princess Tatara, the most beautiful woman in Japan, and daughter of one of his captains. During his life-time his chief energies were spent in consolidating his power, and civilizing his subjects. Several rebellions had to be put down. After choosing an heir, he died, leaving three children, at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years, according to the *Nihongi*, and of one hundred and thirty-seven, according to the *Kojiki*.

It is by no means certain that Jimmu was a historical character. The only books describing him are but collections of myths and fables, in which exists, perhaps, a mere skeleton of history. Even the Japanese writers, as, for instance, the author of a popular history (*Dai Nihon Koku Kai Biaku Yurain Ki*), interpret the narratives in a rationalistic manner. Thus, the "eight-headed serpents" in the *Kojiki* are explained to be persistent arch-rebels, or valorous enemies; the "ground-spiders," to be rebels of lesser note; and the "spider-pits or holes," the rebels' lurking-places. The gigantic crow, with wings eight feet long, that led the host into Yamato was probably, says the native writer, a famous captain whose name was Karasü (crow), who led the advance-guard into Yamato, with such valor, directness, and rapidity, that it seemed miraculous. The myth of ascribing the guidance of the army to a crow was probably invented later. A large number of the incidents related in the *Kojiki* have all the characteristics of the myth.

Chinese tradition ascribes the peopling of Japan to the following causes: The grandfather (Taiko) of the first emperor (Buwo) of the Shu dynasty (thirty-seven emperors, eight hundred and seventy-two years, B.C. 1120-249) in China, having three sons, wished to bequeath his titles and estates to his youngest son, notwithstanding that law and custom required him to endow the eldest. The younger son refused to receive the inheritance; but the elder, knowing that his father Taiko would persist in his determination, and unwilling to cause trou-