

Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation

Lafcadio Hearn

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JAPAN
AN ATTEMPT AT INTERPRETATION
BY LAFCADIO HEARN

1904

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"Perhaps all very marked national characters can be traced back to a time of rigid and pervading discipline"--WALTER BAGEHOT.

[1] DIFFICULTIES

A thousand books have been written about Japan; but among these,--setting aside artistic publications and works of a purely special character,--the really precious volumes will be found to number scarcely a score. This fact is due to the immense difficulty of perceiving and comprehending what underlies the surface of Japanese life. No work fully interpreting that life,--no work picturing Japan within and without, historically and socially, psychologically and ethically,--can be written for at least another fifty years. So vast and intricate the subject that the united labour of a generation of scholars could not exhaust it, and so difficult that the number of scholars willing to devote their time to it must always be small. Even among the Japanese themselves, no scientific knowledge of their own history is yet possible; because the means of obtaining that knowledge have not yet been prepared,--though mountains of material have been collected. The want of any good history upon a modern plan is but one of many discouraging wants. Data for the study of sociology [2] are still inaccessible to the Western investigator. The early state of the family and the clan; the history of the differentiation of classes; the history of the differentiation of political from religious law; the history of restraints, and of their influence upon custom; the history of regulative and cooperative conditions in the development of industry; the history of ethics and aesthetics,--all these and many other matters remain obscure.

This essay of mine can serve in one direction only as a contribution to the Western knowledge of Japan. But this direction is not one of the least important. Hitherto the subject of Japanese religion has been written of chiefly by the sworn enemies of that religion: by others it has been almost entirely ignored. Yet while it continues to

be ignored and misrepresented, no real knowledge of Japan is possible. Any true comprehension of social conditions requires more than a superficial acquaintance with religious conditions. Even the industrial history of a people cannot be understood without some knowledge of those religious traditions and customs which regulate industrial life during the earlier stages of its development Or take the subject of art. Art in Japan is so intimately associated with religion that any attempt to study it without extensive knowledge of the [3] beliefs which it reflects, were mere waste of time. By art I do not mean only painting and sculpture, but every kind of decoration, and most kinds of pictorial representation,--the image on a boy's kite or a girl's battledore, not less than the design upon a lacquered casket or enamelled vase,--the figures upon a workman's towel not less than the pattern of the girdle of a princess,--the shape of the paper-dog or the wooden rattle bought for a baby, not less than the forms of those colossal Ni-O who guard the gateways of Buddhist temples And surely there can never be any just estimate made of Japanese literature, until a study of that literature shall have been made by some scholar, not only able to understand Japanese beliefs, but able also to sympathize with them to at least the same extent that our great humanists can sympathize with the religion of Euripides, of Pindar, and of Theocritus. Let us ask ourselves how much of English or French or German or Italian literature could be fully understood without the slightest knowledge of the ancient and modern religions of the Occident. I do not refer to distinctly religious creators,--to poets like Milton or Dante,--but only to the fact that even one of Shakespeare's plays must remain incomprehensible to a person knowing nothing either of Christian beliefs or of the beliefs which preceded them. The real mastery of any European tongue is impossible [4] without a knowledge of European religion. The language of even the unlettered is full of religious meaning: the proverbs and household-phrases of the poor, the songs of the street, the speech of the workshop,--all are infused with significations unimaginable by any one ignorant of the faith of the people. Nobody knows this better than a man who has passed many years in trying to teach English in Japan, to pupils whose faith is utterly unlike our own, and whose ethics have been shaped by a totally different social experience.

[5]

STRANGENESS AND CHARM

The majority of the first impressions of Japan recorded by travellers are pleasurable impressions. Indeed, there must be something lacking, or something very harsh, in the nature to which Japan can make no emotional appeal. The appeal itself is the clue to a problem; and that problem is the character of a race and of its civilization.

My own first impressions of Japan,--Japan as seen in the white sunshine of a perfect spring day,--had doubtless much in common with the average of such experiences. I remember especially the wonder and the delight of the vision. The wonder and the delight have never passed away: they are often revived for me even now, by some chance happening, after fourteen years of sojourn. But the reason of these feelings was difficult to learn,--or at least to guess; for I cannot yet claim to know much about Japan Long ago the best and dearest

Japanese friend I ever had said to me, a little before his death: "When you find, in four or five years more, that you cannot understand the Japanese at [6] all, then you will begin to know something about them." After having realized the truth of my friend's prediction,--after having discovered that I cannot understand the Japanese at all,--I feel better qualified to attempt this essay.

As first perceived, the outward strangeness of things in Japan produces (in certain minds, at least) a queer thrill impossible to describe,--a feeling of weirdness which comes to us only with the perception of the totally unfamiliar. You find yourself moving through queer small streets full of odd small people, wearing robes and sandals of extraordinary shapes; and you can scarcely distinguish the sexes at sight. The houses are constructed and furnished in ways alien to all your experience; and you are astonished to find that you cannot conceive the use or meaning of numberless things on display in the shops. Food-stuffs of unimaginable derivation; utensils of enigmatic forms; emblems incomprehensible of some mysterious belief; strange masks and toys that commemorate legends of gods or demons; odd figures, too, of the gods themselves, with monstrous ears and smiling faces,--all these you may perceive as you wander about; though you must also notice telegraph-poles and type-writers, electric lamps and sewing machines. Everywhere on signs and hangings, and on the backs of people passing by, you will observe wonderful Chinese [7] characters; and the wizardry of all these texts makes the dominant tone of the spectacle.

Further acquaintance with this fantastic world will in nowise diminish the sense of strangeness evoked by the first vision of it. You will soon observe that even the physical actions of the people are unfamiliar,--that their work is done in ways the opposite of Western ways. Tools are of surprising shapes, and are handled after surprising methods: the blacksmith squats at his anvil, wielding a hammer such as no Western smith could use without long practice; the carpenter pulls, instead of pushing, his extraordinary plane and saw. Always the left is the right side, and the right side the wrong; and keys must be turned, to open or close a lock, in what we are accustomed to think the wrong direction. Mr. Percival Lowell has truthfully observed that the Japanese speak backwards, read backwards, write backwards,--and that this is "only the abc of their contrariety." For the habit of writing backwards there are obvious evolutionary reasons; and the requirements of Japanese calligraphy sufficiently explain why the artist pushes his brush or pencil instead of pulling it. But why, instead of putting the thread through the eye of the needle, should the Japanese maiden slip the eye of the needle over the point of the thread? Perhaps the most remarkable, out of a hundred possible examples of antipodal action, is furnished by the Japanese art of fencing. The [8] swordsman, delivering his blow with both hands, does not pull the blade towards him in the moment of striking, but pushes it from him. He uses it, indeed, as other Asiatics do, not on the principle of the wedge, but of the saw; yet there is a pushing motion where we should expect a pulling motion in the stroke These and other forms of unfamiliar action are strange enough to suggest the notion of a humanity even physically as little related to us as might be the population of another planet,--the notion of some anatomical unlikeness. No such unlikeness, however, appears to exist; and all this oppositeness probably implies, not so much the outcome of a human experience entirely independent of Aryan experience, as the outcome of an

experience evolutionally younger than our own.

Yet that experience has been one of no mean order. Its manifestations do not merely startle: they also delight. The delicate perfection of workmanship, the light strength and grace of objects, the power manifest to obtain the best results with the least material, the achieving of mechanical ends by the simplest possible means, the comprehension of irregularity as aesthetic value, the shapeliness and perfect taste of everything, the sense displayed of harmony in tints or colours,--all this must convince you at once that our Occident has much to learn from this remote civilization, not only in matters of art and taste, but in matters likewise of [9] economy and utility. It is no barbarian fancy that appeals to you in those amazing porcelains, those astonishing embroideries, those wonders of lacquer and ivory and bronze, which educate imagination in unfamiliar ways. No: these are the products of a civilization which became, within its own limits, so exquisite that none but an artist is capable of judging its manufactures,--a civilization that can be termed imperfect only by those who would also term imperfect the Greek civilization of three thousand years ago.

But the underlying strangeness of this world,--the psychological strangeness,--is much more startling than the visible and superficial. You begin to suspect the range of it after having discovered that no adult Occidental can perfectly master the language. East and West the fundamental parts of human nature--the emotional bases of it--are much the same: the mental difference between a Japanese and a European child is mainly potential. But with growth the difference rapidly develops and widens, till it becomes, in adult life, inexpressible. The whole of the Japanese mental superstructure evolves into forms having nothing in common with Western psychological development: the expression of thought becomes regulated, and the expression of emotion inhibited in ways that bewilder and astound. The ideas of this people are not our [10] ideas; their sentiments are not our sentiments their ethical life represents for us regions of thought and emotion yet unexplored, or perhaps long forgotten. Any one of their ordinary phrases, translated into Western speech, makes hopeless nonsense; and the literal rendering into Japanese of the simplest English sentence would scarcely be comprehended by any Japanese who had never studied a European tongue. Could you learn all the words in a Japanese dictionary, your acquisition would not help you in the least to make yourself understood in speaking, unless you had learned also to think like a Japanese,--that is to say, to think backwards, to think upside-down and inside-out, to think in directions totally foreign to Aryan habit. Experience in the acquisition of European languages can help you to learn Japanese about as much as it could help you to acquire the language spoken by the inhabitants of Mars. To be able to use the Japanese tongue as a Japanese uses it, one would need to be born again, and to have one's mind completely reconstructed, from the foundation upwards. It is possible that a person of European parentage, born in Japan, and accustomed from infancy to use the vernacular, might retain in after-life that instinctive knowledge which could alone enable him to adapt his mental relations to the relations of any Japanese environment. There is actually an Englishman named Black, born in Japan, whose proficiency [11] in the language is proved by the fact that he is able to earn a fair income as a professional storyteller (hanashika). But this is an extraordinary case As for the literary language, I need only

observe that to make acquaintance with it requires very much more than a knowledge of several thousand Chinese characters. It is safe to say that no Occidental can undertake to render at sight any literary text laid before him--indeed the number of native scholars able to do so is very small;--and although the learning displayed in this direction by various Europeans may justly compel our admiration, the work of none could have been given to the world without Japanese help.

But as the outward strangeness of Japan proves to be full of beauty, so the inward strangeness appears to have its charm,--an ethical charm reflected in the common life of the people. The attractive aspects of that life do not indeed imply, to the ordinary observer, a psychological differentiation measurable by scores of centuries: only a scientific mind, like that of Mr. Percival Lowell, immediately perceives the problem presented. The less gifted stranger, if naturally sympathetic, is merely pleased and puzzled, and tries to explain, by his own experience of happy life on the other side of the world, the social conditions that charm him. Let us suppose that he has the good fortune of being able to [12] live for six months or a year in some old-fashioned town of the interior. From the beginning of this sojourn he can scarcely fail to be impressed by the apparent kindness and joyousness of the existence about him. In the relations of the people to each other, as well as in all their relations to himself, he will find a constant amenity, a tact, a good-nature such as he will elsewhere have met with only in the friendship of exclusive circles. Everybody greets everybody with happy looks and pleasant words; faces are always smiling; the commonest incidents of everyday life are transfigured by a courtesy at once so artless and so faultless that it appears to spring directly from the heart, without any teaching. Under all circumstances a certain outward cheerfulness never falls: no matter what troubles may come,--storm or fire, flood or earthquake,--the laughter of greeting voices, the bright smile and graceful bow, the kindly inquiry and the wish to please, continue to make existence beautiful. Religion brings no gloom into this sunshine: before the Buddhas and the gods folk smile as they pray; the temple-courts are playgrounds for the children; and within the enclosure of the great public shrines--which are places of festivity rather than of solemnity--dancing-platforms are erected. Family existence would seem to be everywhere characterized by gentleness: there is no visible quarrelling, no loud harshness, no tears and reproaches. Cruelty, even [13] to animals, appears to be unknown: one sees farmers, coming to town, trudging patiently beside their horses or oxen, aiding their dumb companions to bear the burden, and using no whips or goads. Drivers or pullers of carts will turn out of their way, under the most provoking circumstances, rather than overrun a lazy dog or a stupid chicken For no inconsiderable time one may live in the midst of appearances like these, and perceive nothing to spoil the pleasure of the experience.

Of course the conditions of which I speak are now passing away; but they are still to be found in the remoter districts. I have lived in districts where no case of theft had occurred for hundreds of years,--where the newly-built prisons of Meiji remained empty and useless,--where the people left their doors unfastened by night as well as by day. These facts are familiar to every Japanese. In such a district, you might recognize that the kindness shown to you, as a stranger, is the consequence of official command; but how explain the

goodness of the people to each other? When you discover no harshness, no rudeness, no dishonesty, no breaking of laws, and learn that this social condition has been the same for centuries, you are tempted to believe that you have entered into the domain of a morally superior humanity. All this soft urbanity, impeccable honesty, ingenuous kindness of speech and act, you might naturally interpret [14] as conduct directed by perfect goodness of heart. And the simplicity that delights you is no simplicity of barbarism. Here every one has been taught; every one knows how to write and speak beautifully, how to compose poetry, how to behave politely; there is everywhere cleanliness and good taste; interiors are bright and pure; the daily use of the hot bath is universal. How refuse to be charmed by a civilization in which every relation appears to be governed by altruism, every action directed by duty, and every object shaped by art? You cannot help being delighted by such conditions, or feeling indignant at hearing them denounced as "heathen." And according to the degree of altruism within yourself, these good folk will be able, without any apparent effort, to make you happy. The mere sensation of the milieu is a placid happiness: it is like the sensation of a dream in which people greet us exactly as we like to be greeted, and say to us all that we like to hear, and do for us all that we wish to have done,—people moving soundlessly through spaces of perfect repose, all bathed in vapoury light. Yes—for no little time these fairy-folk can give you all the soft bliss of sleep. But sooner or later, if you dwell long with them, your contentment will prove to have much in common with the happiness of dreams. You will never forget the dream,—never; but it will lift at last, like those vapours of spring which lend preternatural [15] loveliness to a Japanese landscape in the forenoon of radiant days. Really you are happy because you have entered bodily into Fairyland,—into a world that is not, and never could be your own. You have been transported out of your own century—over spaces enormous of perished time—into an era forgotten, into a vanished age,—back to something ancient as Egypt or Nineveh. That is the secret of the strangeness and beauty of things,—the secret of the thrill they give,—the secret of the elfish charm of the people and their ways. Fortunate mortal! the tide of Time has turned for you! But remember that here all is enchantment,—that you have fallen under the spell of the dead,—that the lights and the colours and the voices must fade away at last into emptiness and silence.

* * * * *

Some of us, at least, have often wished that it were possible to live for a season in the beautiful vanished world of Greek culture. Inspired by our first acquaintance with the charm of Greek art and thought, this wish comes to us even before we are capable of imagining the true conditions of the antique civilization. If the wish could be realized, we should certainly find it impossible to accommodate ourselves to those conditions,—not so much because of the difficulty of learning the environment, as because of the much greater difficulty of feeling just as people used to feel some thirty centuries [16] ago. In spite of all that has been done for Greek studies since the Renaissance, we are still unable to understand many aspects of the old Greek life: no modern mind can really feel, for example, those sentiments and emotions to which the great tragedy of Oedipus made appeal. Nevertheless we are much in advance of our forefathers of the eighteenth century, as regards the knowledge of Greek civilization. In the time of the French revolution, it was

thought possible to reestablish in France the conditions of a Greek republic, and to educate children according to the system of Sparta. To-day we are well aware that no mind developed by modern civilization could find happiness under any of those socialistic despotisms which existed in all the cities of the ancient world before the Roman conquest. We could no more mingle with the old Greek life, if it were resurrected for us,--no more become a part of it,--than we could change our mental identities. But how much would we not give for the delight of beholding it,--for the joy of attending one festival in Corinth, or of witnessing the Pan-Hellenic games? ... And yet, to witness the revival of some perished Greek civilization,--to walk about the very Crotona of Pythagoras,--to wander through the Syracuse of Theocritus,--were not any more of a privilege than is the opportunity actually afforded us to study Japanese life. Indeed, from the evolutionary [17] point of view, it were less of a privilege,--since Japan offers us the living spectacle of conditions older, and psychologically much farther away from us, than those of any Greek period with which art and literature have made us closely acquainted.

The reader scarcely needs to be reminded that a civilization less evolved than our own, and intellectually remote from us, is not on that account to be regarded as necessarily inferior in all respects. Hellenic civilization at its best represented an early stage of sociological evolution; yet the arts which it developed still furnish our supreme and unapproachable ideals of beauty. So, too, this much more archaic civilization of Old Japan attained an average of aesthetic and moral culture well worthy of our wonder and praise. Only a shallow mind--a very shallow mind--will pronounce the best of that culture inferior. But Japanese civilization is peculiar to a degree for which there is perhaps no Western parallel, since it offers us the spectacle of many successive layers of alien culture superimposed above the simple indigenous basis, and forming a very bewilderment of complexity. Most of this alien culture is Chinese, and bears but an indirect relation to the real subject of these studies. The peculiar and surprising fact is that, in spite of all superimposition, the original character of the people and of their society should still remain recognizable. [18] The wonder of Japan is not to be sought in the countless borrowings with which she has clothed herself,--much as a princess of the olden time would don twelve ceremonial robes, of divers colours and qualities, folded one upon the other so as to show their many-tinted edges at throat and sleeves and skirt;--no, the real wonder is the Wearer. For the interest of the costume is much less in its beauty of form and tint than in its significance as idea,--as representing something of the mind that devised or adopted it. And the supreme interest of the old--Japanese civilization lies in what it expresses of the race-character,--that character which yet remains essentially unchanged by all the changes of Meiji.

"Suggests" were perhaps a better word than "expresses," for this race-character is rather to be divined than recognized. Our comprehension of it might be helped by some definite knowledge of origins; but such knowledge we do not yet possess. Ethnologists are agreed that the Japanese race has been formed by a mingling of peoples, and that the dominant element is Mongolian; but this dominant element is represented in two very different types,--one slender and almost feminine of aspect; the other, squat and powerful. Chinese and Korean elements are known to exist in the populations of

certain districts; and, there appears to have been a large infusion of Aino blood. Whether there be [19] any Malay or Polynesian element also has not been decided. Thus much only can be safely affirmed,--that the race, like all good races, is a mixed one; and that the peoples who originally united to form it have been so blended together as to develop, under long social discipline, a tolerably uniform type of character. This character, though immediately recognizable in some of its aspects, presents us with many enigmas that are very difficult to explain.

Nevertheless, to understand it better has become a matter of importance. Japan has entered into the world's competitive struggle; and the worth of any people in that struggle depends upon character quite as much as upon force. We can learn something about Japanese character if we are able to ascertain the nature of the conditions which shaped it,--the great general facts of the moral experience of the race. And these facts we should find expressed or suggested in the history of the national beliefs, and in the history of those social institutions derived from and developed by religion.

[20]

[21]

THE ANCIENT CULT

The real religion of Japan, the religion still professed in one form or other, by the entire nation, is that cult which has been the foundation of all civilized religion, and of all civilized society,--Ancestor-worship. In the course of thousands of years this original cult has undergone modifications, and has assumed various shapes; but everywhere in Japan its fundamental character remains unchanged. Without including the different Buddhist forms of ancestor-worship, we find three distinct rites of purely Japanese origin, subsequently modified to some degree by Chinese influence and ceremonial. These Japanese forms of the cult are all classed together under the name of "Shinto," which signifies, "The Way of the Gods." It is not an ancient term; and it was first adopted only to distinguish the native religion, or "Way" from the foreign religion of Buddhism called "Butsudo," or "The Way of the Buddha." The three forms of the Shinto worship of ancestors are the Domestic Cult, the Communal Cult, and the State Cult;--or, in other words, the worship of family ancestors, the worship of clan or tribal ancestors, [22] and the worship of imperial ancestors. The first is the religion of the home; the second is the religion of the local divinity, or tutelary god; the third is the national religion. There are various other forms of Shinto worship; but they need not be considered for the present.

Of the three forms of ancestor-worship above mentioned, the family-cult is the first in evolutionary order,--the others being later developments. But, in speaking of the family-cult as the oldest, I do not mean the home-religion as it exists to-day;--neither do I mean by "family" anything corresponding to the term "household." The Japanese family in early times meant very much more than "household": it might include a hundred or a thousand households: it was something like the Greek (Greek *genos*); or the Roman *gens*,--the

patriarchal family in the largest sense of the term. In prehistoric Japan the domestic cult of the house-ancestor probably did not exist;--the family-rites would appear to have been performed only at the burial-place. But the later domestic cult, having been developed out of the primal family-rite, indirectly represents the most ancient form of the religion, and should therefore be considered first in any study of Japanese social evolution.

The evolutionary history of ancestor-worship has been very much the same in all countries; and that [23] of the Japanese cult offers remarkable evidence in support of Herbert Spencer's exposition of the law of religious development. To comprehend this general law, we must, however, go back to the origin of religious beliefs. One should bear in mind that, from a sociological point of view, it is no more correct to speak of the existing ancestor-cult in Japan as "primitive," than it would be to speak of the domestic cult of the Athenians in the time of Pericles as "primitive." No persistent form of ancestor-worship is primitive; and every established domestic cult has been developed out of some irregular and non-domestic family-cult, which, again, must have grown out of still more ancient funeral-rites.

Our knowledge of ancestor-worship, as regards the early European civilizations, cannot be said to extend to the primitive form of the cult. In the case of the Greeks and the Romans, our knowledge of the subject dates from a period at which a domestic religion had long been established; and we have documentary evidence as to the character of that religion. But of the earlier cult that must have preceded the home-worship, we have little testimony; and we can surmise its nature only by study of the natural history of ancestor-worship among peoples not yet arrived at a state of civilization. The true domestic cult begins with a settled civilization. Now when the Japanese race first established itself in Japan, it does not appear to have [24] brought with it any civilization of the kind which we would call settled, nor any well-developed ancestor-cult. The cult certainly existed; but its ceremonies would seem to have been irregularly performed at graves only. The domestic cult proper may not have been established until about the eighth century, when the spirit-tablet is supposed to have been introduced from China. The earliest ancestor-cult, as we shall presently see, was developed out of the primitive funeral-rites and propitiatory ceremonies.

The existing family religion is therefore a comparatively modern development; but it is at least as old as the true civilization of the country, and it conserves beliefs and ideas which are indubitably primitive, as well as ideas and beliefs derived from these. Before treating further of the cult itself, it will be necessary to consider some of these older beliefs.

The earliest ancestor-worship,--"the root of all religions," as Herbert Spencer calls it,--was probably coeval with the earliest definite belief in ghosts. As soon as men were able to conceive the idea of a shadowy inner self, or double, so soon, doubtless, the propitiatory cult of spirits began. But this earliest ghost-worship must have long preceded that period of mental development in which men first became capable of forming abstract ideas. The [25] primitive ancestor-worshippers could not have formed the notion of a supreme deity; and all evidence existing as to the first forms of

their worship tends to show that there primarily existed no difference whatever between the conception of ghosts and the conception of gods. There were, consequently, no definite beliefs in any future state of reward or of punishment,--no ideas of any heaven or hell. Even the notion of a shadowy underworld, or Hades, was of much later evolution. At first the dead were thought of only as dwelling in the tombs provided for them,--whence they could issue, from time to time, to visit their former habitations, or to make apparition in the dreams of the living. Their real world was the place of burial,--the grave, the tumulus. Afterwards there slowly developed the idea of an underworld, connected in some mysterious way with the place of sepulture. Only at a much later time did this dim underworld of imagination expand and divide into regions of ghostly bliss and woe It is a noteworthy fact that Japanese mythology never evolved the ideas of an Elysium or a Tartarus,--never developed the notion of a heaven or a hell. Even to this day Shinto belief represents the pre-Homeric stage of imagination as regards the supernatural.

Among the Indo-European races likewise there appeared to have been at first no difference between gods and ghosts, nor any ranking of gods as greater [26] and lesser. These distinctions were gradually developed. "The spirits of the dead," says Mr. Spencer, "forming, in a primitive tribe, an ideal group the members of which are but little distinguished from one another, will grow more and more distinguished;--and as societies advance, and as traditions, local and general, accumulate and complicate, these once similar human souls, acquiring in the popular mind differences of character and importance, will diverge--until their original community of nature becomes scarcely recognizable." So in antique Europe, and so in the Far East, were the greater gods of nations evolved from ghost-cults; but those ethics of ancestor-worship which shaped alike the earliest societies of West and East, date from a period before the time of the greater gods,--from the period when all the dead were supposed to become gods, with no distinction of rank.

No more than the primitive ancestor-worshippers of Aryan race did the early Japanese think of their dead as ascending to some extra-mundane region of light and bliss, or as descending into some realm of torment. They thought of their dead as still inhabiting this world, or at least as maintaining with it a constant communication. Their earliest sacred records do, indeed, make mention of an underworld, where mysterious Thunder-gods and evil goblins dwelt in corruption; but this vague world of the dead communicated with the world of the living; [27] and the spirit there, though in some sort attached to its decaying envelope, could still receive upon earth the homage and the offerings of men. Before the advent of Buddhism, there was no idea of a heaven or a hell. The ghosts of the departed were thought of as constant presences, needing propitiation, and able in some way to share the pleasures and the pains of the living. They required food and drink and light; and in return for these; they could confer benefits. Their bodies had melted into earth; but their spirit-power still lingered in the upper world, thrilled its substance, moved in its winds and waters. By death they had acquired mysterious force;--they had become "superior ones," Kami, gods.

That is to say, gods in the oldest Greek and Roman sense. Be it observed that there were no moral distinctions, East or West, in this deification. "All the dead become gods," wrote the great Shinto

commentator, Hirata. So likewise, in the thought of the early Greeks and even of the late Romans, all the dead became gods. M. de Coulanges observes, in *La Cite Antique*: "This kind of apotheosis was not the privilege of the great alone. no distinction was made It was not even necessary to have been a virtuous man: the wicked man became a god as well as the good man,--only that in this after-existence, he retained the evil inclinations of his former life." Such also [28] was the case in Shinto belief: the good man became a beneficent divinity, the bad man an evil deity,--but all alike became Kami. "And since there are bad as well as good gods," wrote Motowori, "it is necessary to propitiate them with offerings of agreeable food, playing the harp, blowing the flute, singing and dancing and whatever is likely to put them in a good humour." The Latins called the maleficent ghosts of the dead, *Larvae*, and called the beneficent or harmless ghosts, *Lares*, or *Manes*, or *Genii*, according to Apuleius. But all alike were gods,--*dii-manes*; and Cicero admonished his readers to render to all *dii-manes* the rightful worship: "They are men," he declared, "who have departed from this life;-consider them divine beings"

In Shinto, as in old Greek belief, to die was to enter into the possession of superhuman power, to become capable of conferring benefit or of inflicting misfortune by supernatural means But yesterday, such or such a man was a common toiler, a person of no importance;--to-day, being dead, he becomes a divine power, and his children pray to him for the prosperity of their undertakings. Thus also we find the personages of Greek tragedy, such as *Alcestis*, suddenly transformed into divinities by death, and addressed in the language of worship or prayer. But, in despite of their supernatural [29] power, the dead are still dependent upon the living for happiness. Though viewless, save in dreams, they need earthly nourishment and homage,--food and drink, and the reverence of their descendants. Each ghost must rely for such comfort upon its living kindred;--only through the devotion of that kindred can it ever find repose. Each ghost must have shelter,--a fitting tomb;--each must have offerings. While honourably sheltered and properly nourished the spirit is pleased, and will aid in maintaining the good-fortune of its propitiators. But if refused the sepulchral home, the funeral rites, the offerings of food and fire and drink, the spirit will suffer from hunger and cold and thirst, and, becoming angered, will act malevolently and contrive misfortune for those by whom it has been neglected Such were the ideas of the old Greeks regarding the dead; and such were the ideas of the old Japanese.

Although the religion of ghosts was once the religion of our own forefathers--whether of Northern or Southern Europe,--and although practices derived from it, such as the custom of decorating graves with flowers, persist to-day among our most advanced communities,--our modes of thought have so changed under the influences of modern civilization that it is difficult for us to imagine how people could ever have supposed that the happiness of the dead depended upon material food. But it [30] is probable that the real belief in ancient European societies was much like the belief as it exists in modern Japan. The dead are not supposed to consume the substance of the food, but only to absorb the invisible essence of it. In the early period of ancestor-worship the food-offerings were large; later on they were made smaller and smaller as the idea grew up that the spirits required but little sustenance of even the most vapoury kind. But, however small the offerings, it was essential that

they should be made regularly. Upon these shadowy repasts depended the well-being of the dead; and upon the well-being of the dead depended the fortunes of the living. Neither could dispense with the help of the other. the visible and the invisible worlds were forever united by bonds innumerable of mutual necessity; and no single relation of that union could be broken without the direst consequences.

The history of all religious sacrifices can be traced back to this ancient custom of offerings made to ghosts; and the whole Indo-Aryan race had at one time no other religion than this religion of spirits. In fact, every advanced human society has, at some period of its history, passed through the stage of ancestor-worship; but it is to the Far East that we must look to-day in order to find the cult coexisting with an elaborate civilization. Now the Japanese ancestor-cult--though representing the beliefs of a [31] non-Aryan people, and offering in the history of its development various interesting peculiarities--still embodies much that is characteristic of ancestor-worship in general. There survive in it especially these three beliefs, which underlie all forms of persistent ancestor-worship in all climes and countries:--

I.--The dead remain in this world,--haunting their tombs, and also their former homes, and sharing invisibly in the life of their living descendants;--

II.--All the dead become gods, in the sense of acquiring supernatural power; but they retain the characters which distinguished them during life;--

III.--The happiness of the dead depends upon the respectful service rendered them by the living; and the happiness of the living depends upon the fulfilment of pious duty to the dead.

To these very early beliefs may be added the following, probably of later development, which at one time must have exercised immense influence:--

IV.--Every event in the world, good or evil,--fair seasons or plentiful harvests,--flood and famine,--tempest and tidal-wave and earthquake,--is the work of the dead.

V.--All human actions, good or bad, are controlled by the dead.

The first three beliefs survive from the dawn of civilization, or before it,--from the time in which [32] the dead were the only gods, without distinctions of power. The latter two would seem rather of the period in which a true mythology--an enormous polytheism--had been developed out of the primitive ghost-worship. There is nothing simple in these beliefs: they are awful, tremendous beliefs; and before Buddhism helped to dissipate them, their pressure upon the mind of a people dwelling in a land of cataclysms, must have been like an endless weight of nightmare. But the elder beliefs, in softened form, are yet a fundamental part of the existing cult. Though Japanese ancestor-worship has undergone many modifications in the past two thousand years, these modifications have not transformed its essential character in relation to conduct; and the whole framework of society rests upon it, as on a moral foundation. The history of Japan is really the history of her religion. No single

fact in this connection is more significant than the fact that the ancient Japanese term for government--*matsuri-goto*--signifies liberally "matters of worship." Later on we shall find that not only government, but almost everything in Japanese society, derives directly or indirectly from this ancestor-cult; and that in all matters the dead, rather than the living, have been the rulers of the nation and--the shapers of its destinies.

[33]

THE RELIGION OF THE HOME

Three stages of ancestor-worship are to be distinguished in the general course of religious and social evolution; and each of these finds illustration in the history of Japanese society. The first stage is that which exists before the establishment of a settled civilization, when there is yet no national ruler, and when the unit of society is the great patriarchal family, with its elders or war-chiefs for lords. Under these conditions, the spirits of the family-ancestors only are worshipped;--each family propitiating its own dead, and recognizing no other form of worship. As the patriarchal families, later on, become grouped into tribal clans, there grows up the custom of tribal sacrifice to the spirits of the clan-rulers;--this cult being superadded to the family-cult, and marking the second stage of ancestor-worship. Finally, with the union of all the clans or tribes under one supreme head, there is developed the custom of propitiating the spirits of national rulers. This third form of the cult becomes the obligatory religion [34] of the country; but it does not replace either of the preceding cults: the three continue to exist together.

Though, in the present state of our knowledge, the evolution in Japan of these three stages of ancestor-worship is but faintly traceable, we can divine tolerably well, from various records, how the permanent forms of the cult were first developed out of the earlier funeral-rites. Between the ancient Japanese funeral customs and those of antique Europe, there was a vast difference,--a difference indicating, as regards Japan, a far more primitive social condition. In Greece and in Italy it was an early custom to bury the family dead within the limits of the family estate; and the Greek and Roman laws of property grew out of this practice. Sometimes the dead were buried close to the house. The author of *'La Cite Antique'* cites, among other ancient texts bearing upon the subject, an interesting invocation from the tragedy of *Helen*, by Euripides:--"All hail! my father's tomb! I buried thee, Proteus, at the place where men pass out, that I might often greet thee; and so, even as I go out and in, I, thy son Theoclymenus, call upon thee, father! ..." But in ancient Japan, men fled from the neighbourhood of death. It was long the custom to abandon, either temporarily, or permanently, the house in which a death occurred; [35] and we can scarcely suppose that, at any time, it was thought desirable to bury the dead close to the habitation of the surviving members of the household. Some Japanese authorities declare that in the very earliest ages there was no burial, and that corpses were merely conveyed to desolate places, and there abandoned to wild creatures. Be this as it may, we have documentary evidence, of an unmistakable sort, concerning the early funeral-rites as they existed when the custom of burying had become

established,--rites weird and strange, and having nothing in common with the practices of settled civilization. There is reason to believe that the family-dwelling was at first permanently, not temporarily, abandoned to the dead; and in view of the fact that the dwelling was a wooden hut of very simple structure, there is nothing improbable in the supposition. At all events the corpse was left for a certain period, called the period of mourning, either in the abandoned house where the death occurred, or in a shelter especially built for the purpose; and, during the mourning period, offerings of food and drink were set before the dead, and ceremonies performed without the house. One of these ceremonies consisted in the recital of poems in praise of the dead,--which poems were called shinobigoto. There was music also of flutes and drums, and dancing; and at night a fire was kept burning before the house. After all this had been [36] done for the fixed period of mourning--eight days, according to some authorities, fourteen according to others--the corpse was interred. It is probable that the deserted house may thereafter have become an ancestral temple, or ghost-house,--prototype of the Shinto miya.

At an early time,--though when we do not know,--it certainly became the custom to erect a moya, or "mourning-house" in the event of a death; and the rites were performed at the mourning-house prior to the interment. The manner of burial was very simple: there were yet no tombs in the literal meaning of the term, and no tombstones. Only a mound was thrown up over the grave; and the size of the mound varied according to the rank of the dead.

The custom of deserting the house in which a death took place would accord with the theory of a nomadic ancestry for the Japanese people: it was a practice totally incompatible with a settled civilization like that of the early Greeks and Romans, whose customs in regard to burial presuppose small landholdings in permanent occupation. But there may have been, even in early times, some exceptions to general custom--exceptions made by necessity. To-day, in various parts of the country, and perhaps more particularly in districts remote from temples, it is the custom for farmers to bury their dead upon their own lands.

[37]--At regular intervals after burial, ceremonies were performed at the graves; and food and drink were then served to the spirits. When the spirit-tablet had been introduced from China, and a true domestic cult established, the practice of making offerings at the place of burial was not discontinued. It survives to the present time,--both in the Shinto and the Buddhist rite; and every spring an Imperial messenger presents at the tomb of the Emperor Jimmu, the same offerings of birds and fish and seaweed, rice and rice-wine, which were made to the spirit of the Founder of the Empire twenty-five hundred years ago. But before the period of Chinese influence the family would seem to have worshipped its dead only before the mortuary house, or at the grave; and the spirits were yet supposed to dwell especially in their tombs, with access to some mysterious subterranean world. They were supposed to need other things besides nourishment; and it was customary to place in the grave various articles for their ghostly use,--a sword, for example, in the case of a warrior; a mirror in the case of a woman,--together with certain objects, especially prized during life,--such as objects of precious metal, and polished stones or gems At this stage of ancestor-worship, when the spirits are supposed to require shadowy service of a sort corresponding to that exacted during their

life-time in the body, we should expect to hear of [38] human sacrifices as well as of animal sacrifices. At the funerals of great personages such sacrifices were common. Owing to beliefs of which all knowledge has been lost, these sacrifices assumed a character much more cruel than that of the immolations of the Greek Homeric epoch. The human victims* were buried up to the neck in a circle about the grave, and thus left to perish under the beaks of birds and the teeth of wild beasts. [*How the horses and other animals were sacrificed, does not clearly appear.] The term applied to this form of immolation,--hitogaki, or "human hedge,"--implies a considerable number of victims in each case. This custom was abolished, by the Emperor Suinin, about nineteen hundred years ago; and the Nihongi declares that it was then an ancient custom. Being grieved by the crying of the victims interred in the funeral mound erected over the grave of his brother, Yamato-hiko-no-mikoto, the Emperor is recorded to have said: "It is a very painful thing to force those whom one has loved in life to follow one in death. Though it be an ancient custom, why follow it, if it is bad? From this time forward take counsel to put a stop to the following of the dead." Nomi-no-Sukune, a court-noble--now apotheosized as the patron of wrestlers--then suggested the substitution of earthen images of men and horses for the living victims; and his suggestion was approved. The hitogaki, was thus abolished; but compulsory as well as voluntary following of the [39] dead certainly continued for many hundred years after, since we find the Emperor Kotoku issuing an edict on the subject in the year 646 A.D.:--

"When a man dies, there have been cases of people sacrificing themselves by strangulation, or of strangling others by way of sacrifice, or of compelling the dead man's horse to be sacrificed, or of burying valuables in the grave in honour of the dead, or of cutting off the hair and stabbing the thighs and [in that condition] pronouncing a eulogy on the dead. Let all such old customs be entirely discontinued."--Nihongi; Aston's translation.

As regarded compulsory sacrifice and popular custom, this edict may have had the immediate effect desired; but voluntary human sacrifices were not definitively suppressed. With the rise of the military power there gradually came into existence another custom of junshi, or following one's lord in death,--suicide by the sword. It is said to have begun about 1333, when the last of the Hojo regents, Takatoki, performed suicide, and a number of his retainers took their own lives by harakiri, in order to follow their master. It may be doubted whether this incident really established the practice. But by the sixteenth century junshi had certainly become an honoured custom among the samurai. Loyal retainers esteemed it a duty to kill themselves after the death of their lord, in order to attend upon him during his ghostly journey. A thousand years [40] of Buddhist teaching had not therefore sufficed to eradicate all primitive notions' of sacrificial duty. The practice continued into the time of the Tokugawa shogunate, when Iyeyasu made laws to check it. These laws were rigidly applied,--the entire family of the suicide being held responsible for a case of junshi: yet the custom cannot be said to have become extinct until considerably after the beginning of the era of Meiji. Even during my own time there have been survivals,--some of a very touching kind: suicides performed in hope of being able to serve or aid the spirit of master or husband or parent in the invisible world. Perhaps the strangest case was that of a boy fourteen years old, who killed himself in order to wait upon

the spirit of a child, his master's little son.

The peculiar character of the early human sacrifices at graves, the character of the funeral-rites, the abandonment of the house in which death had occurred.--all prove that the early ancestor-worship was of a decidedly primitive kind. This is suggested also by the peculiar Shinto horror of death as pollution: even at this day to attend a funeral,--unless the funeral be conducted after the Shinto rite,--is religious defilement. The ancient legend of Izanagi's descent to the nether world, in search of his lost spouse, illustrates the terrible beliefs that once existed as to goblin-powers presiding over decay. [41] Between the horror of death as corruption, and the apotheosis of the ghost, there is nothing incongruous: we must understand the apotheosis itself as a propitiation. This earliest Way of the Gods was a religion of perpetual fear. Not ordinary homes only were deserted after a death: even the Emperors, during many centuries, were wont to change their capital after the death of a predecessor. But, gradually, out of the primal funeral-rites, a higher cult was evolved. The mourning-house, or moya, became transformed into the Shinto temple, which still retains the shape of the primitive hut. Then under Chinese influence, the ancestral cult became established in the home; and Buddhism at a later day maintained this domestic cult. By degrees the household religion became a religion of tenderness as well as of duty, and changed and softened the thoughts of men about their dead. As early as the eighth century, ancestor-worship appears to have developed the three principal forms under which it still exists; and thereafter the family-cult began to assume a character which offers many resemblances to the domestic religion of the old European civilizations.

Let us now glance at the existing forms of this domestic cult,--the universal religion of Japan. In every home there is a shrine devoted to it. If the family profess only the Shinto belief, this shrine, [42] or mitamaya* ("august-spirit-dwelling"),--tiny model of a Shinto temple,--is placed upon a shelf fixed against the wall of some inner chamber, at a height of about six feet from the floor. Such a shelf is called Mitama-San-no-tana, or--"Shelf of the august spirits." [*It is more popularly termed miya, "august house,"--a name given to the ordinary Shinto temples.] In the shrine are placed thin tablets of white wood, inscribed with the names of the household dead. Such tablets are called by a name signifying "spirit-substitutes" (mitamashiro), or by a probably older name signifying "spirit-sticks." ... If the family worships its ancestors according to the Buddhist rite, the mortuary tablets are placed in the Buddhist household-shrine, or Butsudan, which usually occupies the upper shelf of an alcove in one of the inner apartments. Buddhist mortuary-tablets (with some exceptions) are called ihai,--a term signifying "soul-commemoration." They are lacquered and gilded, usually having a carved lotos-flower as pedestal; and they do not, as a rule, bear the real, but only the religious and posthumous name of the dead. Now it is important to observe that, in either cult, the mortuary tablet actually suggests a miniature tombstone--which is a fact of some evolutionary interest, though the evolution itself should be Chinese rather than Japanese. The plain gravestones in Shinto cemeteries resemble in form the simple [43] wooden ghost-sticks, or spirit-sticks; while the Buddhist monuments in the old-fashioned Buddhist graveyards are shaped like the ihai, of which the form is slightly varied to indicate sex and age, which is also the case with the tombstone.

The number of mortuary tablets in a household shrine does not generally exceed five or six,--only grandparents and parents and the recently dead being thus represented; but the name of remoter ancestors are inscribed upon scrolls, which are kept in the Butsudan or the mitamaya.

Whatever be the family rite, prayers are repeated and offerings are placed before the ancestral tablets every day. The nature of the offerings and the character of the prayers depend upon the religion of the household; but the essential duties of the cult are everywhere the same. These duties are not to be neglected under any circumstances; their performance in these times is usually intrusted to the elders, or to the women of the household.*

[*Not, however, upon any public occasion,--such as a gathering of relatives at the home for a religious anniversary: at such times the rites are performed by the head of the household.]

Speaking of the ancient custom (once prevalent in every Japanese household, and still observed in Shinto homes) of making offerings to the deities of the cooking range and of food, Sir Ernest Satow observes: "The rites in honour of these gods were at first performed by the head of the household; but in after-times the duty came to be delegated to the women of the family" (Ancient Japanese Rituals). We may infer that in regard to the ancestral rites likewise, the same transfer of duties occurred at an early time, for obvious reasons of convenience. When the duty devolves upon the elders of the family--grandfather and grandmother--it is usually the grandmother who attends to the offerings. In the Greek and Roman household the performance of the domestic rites appears to have been obligatory upon the head of the household; but we know that the women took part in them.

[44] There is no long ceremony, no imperative rule about prayers, nothing solemn: the food-offerings are selected out of the family cooking; the murmured or whispered invocations are short and few. But, trifling as the rites may seem, their performance must never be overlooked. Not to make the offerings is a possibility undreamed of: so long as the family exists they must be made.

To describe the details of the domestic rite would require much space,--not because they are complicated in themselves, but because they are of a sort unfamiliar to Western experience, and vary according to the sect of the family. But to consider the details will not be necessary: the important matter is to consider the religion and its beliefs in relation to conduct and character. It should be recognized that no religion is more sincere, no faith more touching than this domestic worship, which regards the dead as continuing to form a part of the household life, and needing still the affection and the respect of their children and kindred. Originating in those dim ages when fear was stronger than love,--when the wish to please the ghosts of the departed must have been chiefly inspired by dread of their anger,--the cult at last developed into a religion of affection; and this it yet remains. The belief that the dead [45] need affection, that to neglect them is a cruelty, that their happiness depends upon duty, is a belief that has almost cast out the primitive fear of their displeasure. They are not thought of as dead: they are believed to remain among those who loved them. Unseen they

guard the home, and watch over the welfare of its inmates: they hover nightly in the glow of the shrine-lamp; and the stirring of its flame is the motion of them. They dwell mostly within their lettered tablets;--sometimes they can animate a tablet,--change it into the substance of a human body, and return in that body to active life, in order to succour and console. From their shrine they observe and hear what happens in the house; they share the family joys and sorrows; they delight in the voices and the warmth of the life about them. They want affection; but the morning and the evening greetings of the family are enough to make them happy. They require nourishment; but the vapour of food contents them. They are exacting only as regards the daily fulfilment of duty. They were the givers of life, the givers of wealth, the makers and teachers of the present: they represent the past of the race, and all its sacrifices;--whatever the living possess is from them. Yet how little do they require in return! Scarcely more than to be thanked, as the founders and guardians of the home, in simple words like these:--"For aid received, by day and by night, accept, August Ones, our reverential gratitude."... [46]

To forget or neglect them, to treat them with rude indifference, is the proof of an evil heart; to cause them shame by ill-conduct, to disgrace their name by bad actions, is the supreme crime. They represent the moral experience of the race: whosoever denies that experience denies them also, and falls to the level of the beast, or below it. They represent the unwritten law, the traditions of the commune, the duties of all to all: whosoever offends against these, sins against the dead. And, finally, they represent the mystery of the invisible: to Shinto belief, at least, they are gods.

It is to be remembered, of course, that the Japanese word for gods, Kami, does not imply, any more than did the old Latin term, dii-manes, ideas like those which have become associated with the modern notion of divinity. The Japanese term might be more closely rendered by some such expression as "the Superiors," "the Higher Ones"; and it was formerly applied to living rulers as well as to deities and ghosts. But it implies considerably more than the idea of a disembodied spirit; for, according to old Shinto teaching the dead became world-rulers. They were the cause of all natural events,--of winds, rains, and tides, of buddings and ripenings, of growth and decay, of everything desirable or dreadful. They formed a kind of subtler element,--an ancestral aether,--universally extending and [47] unceasingly operating. Their powers, when united for any purpose, were resistless; and in time of national peril they were invoked en masse for aid against the foe Thus, to the eyes of faith, behind each family ghost there extended the measureless shadowy power of countless Kami; and the sense of duty to the ancestor was deepened by dim awe of the forces controlling the world,--the whole invisible Vast. To primitive Shinto conception the universe was filled with ghosts;--to later Shinto conception the ghostly condition was not limited by place or time, even in the case of individual spirits. "Although," wrote Hirata, "the home of the spirits is in the Spirit-house, they are equally present wherever they are worshipped,--being gods, and therefore ubiquitous."

The Buddhist dead are not called gods, but Buddhas (Hotoke),--which term, of course, expresses a pious hope, rather than a faith. The belief is that they are only on their way to some higher state of existence; and they should not be invoked or worshipped after the

manner of the Shinto gods: prayers should be said FOR them, not, as a rule, TO them.* [*Certain Buddhist rituals prove exceptions to this teaching.] But the vast majority of Japanese Buddhists are also followers of Shinto; and the two faiths, though seemingly incongruous, have long been reconciled in the popular mind. The Buddhist doctrine has [48] therefore modified the ideas attaching to the cult much less deeply than might be supposed.

In all patriarchal societies with a settled civilization, there is evolved, out of the worship of ancestors, a Religion of Filial Piety. Filial piety still remains the supreme virtue among civilized peoples possessing an ancestor-cult.... By filial piety must not be understood, however, what is commonly signified by the English term,--the devotion of children to parents. We must understand the word "piety" rather in its classic meaning, as the pietas of the early Romans,--that is to say, as the religious sense of household duty. Reverence for the dead, as well as the sentiment of duty towards the living; the affection of children to parents, and the affection of parents to children; the mutual duties of husband and wife; the duties likewise of sons-in-law and daughters-in-law to the family as a body; the duties of servant to master, and of master to dependent,--all these were included under the term. The family itself was a religion; the ancestral home a temple. And so we find the family and the home to be in Japan, even at the present day. Filial piety in Japan does not mean only the duty of children to parents and grandparents: it means still more, the cult of the ancestors, reverential service to the dead, the gratitude of the present to the past, and the conduct of the individual in relation [49] to the entire household. Hirata therefore declared that all virtues derived from the worship of ancestors; and his words, as translated by Sir Ernest Satow, deserve particular attention:--

"It is the duty of a subject to be diligent in worshipping his ancestors, whose minister he should consider himself to be. The custom of adoption arose from the natural desire of having some one to perform sacrifices; and this desire ought not to be rendered of no avail by neglect. Devotion to the memory of ancestors is the mainspring of all virtues. No one who discharges his duty to them will ever be disrespectful to the gods or to his living parents. Such a man also will be faithful to his prince, loyal to his friends, and kind and gentle to his wife and children. For the essence of this devotion is indeed filial piety."

From the sociologist's point of view, Hirata is right: it is unquestionably true that the whole system of Far-Eastern ethics derives from the religion of the household. By aid of that cult have been evolved all ideas of duty to the living as well as to the dead,--the sentiment of reverence, the sentiment of loyalty, the spirit of self-sacrifice, and the spirit of patriotism. What filial piety signifies as a religious force can best be imagined from the fact that you can buy life in the East--that it has its price in the market. This religion is the religion of China, and of countries adjacent; and life is for sale in China. It was the filial piety of China that rendered [50] possible the completion of the Panama railroad, where to strike the soil was to liberate death,--where the land devoured labourers by the thousand, until white and black labour could no more be procured in quantity sufficient for the work. But labour could be obtained from China--any amount of labour--at the cost of life; and the cost was paid; and multitudes of men came from

the East to toil and die, in order that the price of their lives might be sent to their families.... I have no doubt that, were the sacrifice imperatively demanded, life could be as readily bought in Japan,--though not, perhaps, so cheaply. Where this religion prevails, the individual is ready to give his life, in a majority of cases, for the family, the home, the ancestors. And the filial piety impelling such sacrifice becomes, by extension, the loyalty that will sacrifice even the family itself for the sake of the lord,--or, by yet further extension, the loyalty that prays, like Kusunoki Masashige, for seven successive lives to lay down on behalf of the sovereign. Out of filial piety indeed has been developed the whole moral power that protects the state,--the power also that has seldom failed to impose the rightful restraints upon official despotism whenever that despotism grew dangerous to the common weal.

Probably the filial piety that centred about the domestic altars of the ancient West differed in little [51] from that which yet rules the most eastern East. But we miss in Japan the Aryan hearth, the family altar with its perpetual fire. The Japanese home-religion represents, apparently, a much earlier stage of the cult than that which existed within historic time among the Greeks and Romans. The homestead in Old Japan was not a stable institution like the Greek or the Roman home; the custom of burying the family dead upon the family estate never became general; the dwelling itself never assumed a substantial and lasting character. It could not be literally said of the Japanese warrior, as of the Roman, that he fought *pro aris et focis*. There was neither altar nor sacred fire: the place of these was taken by the spirit-shelf or shrine, with its tiny lamp, kindled afresh each evening; and, in early times, there were no Japanese images of divinities. For Lares and Penates there were only the mortuary-tablets of the ancestors, and certain little tablets bearing names of other gods--tutelar gods The presence of these frail wooden objects still makes the home; and they may be, of course, transported anywhere.

To apprehend the full meaning of ancestor-worship as a family religion, a living faith, is now difficult for the Western mind. We are able to imagine only in the vaguest way how our Aryan forefathers felt and thought about their dead. But in the [52] living beliefs of Japan we find much to suggest the nature of the old Greek piety. Each member of the family supposes himself, or herself, under perpetual ghostly surveillance. Spirit-eyes are watching every act; spirit-ears are listening to every word. Thoughts too, not less than deeds, are visible to the gaze of the dead: the heart must be pure, the mind must be under control, within the presence of the spirits. Probably the influence of such beliefs, uninterruptedly exerted upon conduct during thousands of years, did much to form the charming side of Japanese character. Yet there is nothing stern or solemn in this home-religion to-day,--nothing of that rigid and unvarying discipline supposed by Fustel de Coulanges to have especially characterized the Roman cult. It is a religion rather of gratitude and tenderness; the dead being served by the household as if they were actually present in the body I fancy that if we were able to enter for a moment into the vanished life of some old Greek city, we should find the domestic religion there not less cheerful than the Japanese home-cult remains to-day. I imagine that Greek children, three thousand years ago, must have watched, like the Japanese children of to-day, for a chance to steal some of the good things offered to the ghosts of the ancestors; and I fancy that Greek parents must have chidden quite as

gently as Japanese parents [53] chide in this era of Meiji,--mingling reproof with instruction, and hinting of weird possibilities.*

[*Food presented to the dead may afterwards be eaten by the elders of the household, or given to pilgrims; but it is said that if children eat of it, they will grow with feeble memories, and incapable of becoming scholars.]

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THE JAPANESE FAMILY

The great general idea, the fundamental idea, underlying every persistent ancestor-worship, is that the welfare of the living depends upon the welfare of the dead. Under the influence of this idea, and of the cult based upon it, were developed the early organization of the family, the laws regarding property and succession, the whole structure, in short, of ancient society,--whether in the Western or the Eastern world.

But before considering how the social structure in old Japan was shaped by the ancestral cult, let me again remind the reader that there were at first no other gods than the dead. Even when Japanese ancestor-worship evolved a mythology, its gods were only transfigured ghosts,--and this is the history of all mythology. The ideas of heaven and hell did not exist among the primitive Japanese, nor any notion of metempsychosis. The Buddhist doctrine of rebirth--a late borrowing--was totally inconsistent with the archaic Japanese beliefs, and required an elaborate metaphysical system to support it. But we may suppose the early ideas of the Japanese about the dead to have been much [56] like those of the Greeks of the pre-Homeric era. There was an underground world to which spirits descended; but they were supposed to haunt by preference their own graves, or their "ghost-houses." Only by slow degrees did the notion of their power of ubiquity become evolved. But even then they were thought to be particularly attached to their tombs, shrines, and homesteads. Hirata wrote, in the early part of the nineteenth century: "The spirits of the dead continue to exist in the unseen world which is everywhere about us; and they all become gods of varying character and degrees of influence. Some reside in temples built in their honour; others hover near their tombs; and they continue to render service to their prince, parents, wives, and children, as when in the body." Evidently "the unseen world" was thought to be in some sort a duplicate of the visible world, and dependent upon the help of the living for its prosperity. The dead and the living were mutually dependent. The all-important necessity for the ghost was sacrificial worship; the all-important necessity for the man was to provide for the future cult of his own spirit; and to die without assurance of a cult was the supreme calamity Remembering these facts we can understand better the organization of the patriarchal family,--shaped to maintain and to provide for the cult of its dead, any neglect of which cult was believed to involve misfortune.

[57] The reader is doubtless aware that in the old Aryan family the bond of union was not the bond of affection, but a bond of religion,

to which natural affection was altogether subordinate. This condition characterizes the patriarchal family wherever ancestor-worship exists. Now the Japanese family, like the ancient Greek or Roman family, was a religious society in the strictest sense of the term; and a religious society it yet remains. Its organization was primarily shaped in accordance with the requirements of ancestor-worship; its later imported doctrines of filial piety had been already developed in China to meet the needs of an older and similar religion. We might expect to find in the structure, the laws, and the customs of the Japanese family many points of likeness to the structure and the traditional laws of the old Aryan household,--because the law of sociological evolution admits of only minor exceptions. And many such points of likeness are obvious. The materials for a serious comparative study have not yet been collected: very much remains to be learned regarding the past history of the Japanese family. But, along certain general lines, the resemblances between domestic institutions in ancient Europe and domestic institutions in the Far East can be clearly established.

Alike in the early European and in the old Japanese civilization it was believed that the prosperity [58] of the family depended upon the exact fulfilment of the duties of the ancestral cult; and, to a considerable degree, this belief rules the life of the Japanese family to-day. It is still thought that the good fortune of the household depends on the observance of its cult, and that the greatest possible calamity is to die without leaving a male heir to perform the rites and to make the offerings. The paramount duty of filial piety among the early Greeks and Romans was to provide for the perpetuation of the family cult; and celibacy was therefore generally forbidden,--the obligation to marry being enforced by opinion where not enforced by legislation. Among the free classes of Old Japan, marriage was also, as a general rule, obligatory in the case of a male heir: otherwise, where celibacy was not condemned by law, it was condemned by custom. To die without offspring was, in the case of a younger son, chiefly a personal misfortune; to die without leaving a male heir, in the case of an elder son and successor, was a crime against the ancestors,--the cult being thereby threatened with extinction. No excuse existed for remaining childless: the family law in Japan, precisely as in ancient Europe, having amply provided against such a contingency. In case that a wife proved barren, she might be divorced. In case that there were reasons for not divorcing her, a concubine might be taken for the purpose of obtaining an heir. Furthermore, every family representative was privileged [59] to adopt an heir. An unworthy son, again, might be disinherited, and another young man adopted in his place. Finally, in case that a man had daughters but no son, the succession and the continuance of the cult could be assured by adopting a husband for the eldest daughter.

But, as in the antique European family, daughters could not inherit: descent being in the male line, it was necessary to have a male heir. In old Japanese belief, as in old Greek and Roman belief, the father, not the mother, was the life-giver; the creative principle was masculine; the duty of maintaining the cult rested with the man, not with the woman.*

[*Wherever, among ancestor-worshipping races, descent is in the male line, the cult follows the male line. But the reader is doubtless aware that a still more primitive form of society than the patriarchal--the matriarchal--is supposed to have had its

ancestor-worship. Mr. Spencer observes: "What has happened when descent in the female line obtains, is not clear. I have met with no statement showing that, in societies characterized by this usage, the duty of administering to the double of the dead man devolved on one of his children rather than on others,"--Principles of Sociology, Vol. III, section 601.]

The woman shared the cult; but she could not maintain it. Besides, the daughters of the family, being destined, as a general rule, to marry into other households, could bear only a temporary relation to the home-cult. It was necessary that the religion of the wife should be the religion of the husband; and the Japanese, like the Greek woman, on marrying into another household, necessarily became attached to the cult of her husband's family. For this reason especially the females in the patriarchal [60] family are not equal to the males; the sister cannot rank with the brother. It is true that the Japanese daughter, like the Greek daughter, could remain attached to her own family even after marriage, providing that a husband were adopted for her,--that is to say, taken into the family as a son. But even in this case, she could only share in the cult, which it then became the duty of the adopted husband to maintain.

The constitution of the patriarchal family everywhere derives from its ancestral cult; and before considering the subjects of marriage and adoption in Japan, it will be necessary to say something about the ancient family-organization. The ancient family was called *uji*,--a word said to have originally signified the same thing as the modern term *uchi*,--"interior," or "household," but certainly used from very early times in the sense of "name"--clan-name especially. There were two kinds of *uji*: the *o-uji*, or great families, and the *ko-uji*, or lesser families,--either term signifying a large body of persons united by kinship, and by the cult of a common ancestor. The *o-uji* corresponded in some degree to the Greek (Greek *genos*) or the Roman *gens*: the *ko-uji* were its branches, and subordinate to it. The unit of society was the *uji*. Each *o-uji*, with its dependent *ko-uji*, represented something like a phratry or curia; and all the larger groups making [61] up the primitive Japanese society were but multiplications of the *uji*,--whether we call them clans, tribes, or hordes. With the advent of a settled civilization, the greater groups necessarily divided and subdivided; but the smallest subdivision still retained its primal organization. Even the modern Japanese family partly retains that organization. It does not mean only a household: it means rather what the Greek or Roman family became after the dissolution of the *gens*. With ourselves the family has been disintegrated: when we talk of a man's family, we mean his wife and children. But the Japanese family is still a large group. As marriages take place early, it may consist, even as a household, of great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, and children--sons and daughters of several generations; but it commonly extends much beyond the limits of one household. In early times it might constitute the entire population of a village or town; and there are still in Japan large communities of persons all bearing the same family name. In some districts it was formerly the custom to keep all the children, as far as possible, within the original family group--husbands being adopted for all the daughters. The group might thus consist of sixty or more persons, dwelling under the same roof; and the houses were of course constructed, by successive extension, so as to meet the requirement. (I am mentioning these curious facts [62] only by way of illustration.) But the greater *uji*, after the race had settled down,

rapidly multiplied; and although there are said to be house-communities still in some remote districts of the country, the primal patriarchal groups must have been broken up almost everywhere at some very early period. Thereafter the main cult of the uji did not cease to be the cult also of its sub-divisions: all members of the original gens continued to worship the common ancestor, or uji-no-kami, "the god of the uji." By degrees the ghost-house of the uji-no-kami became transformed into the modern Shinto parish-temple; and the ancestral spirit became the local tutelary god, whose modern appellation, ujigami, is but a shortened form of his ancient title, uji-no-kami. Meanwhile, after the general establishment of the domestic cult, each separate household maintained the special cult of its own dead, in addition to the communal cult. This religious condition still continues. The family may include several households; but each household maintains the cult of its dead. And the family-group, whether large or small, preserves its ancient constitution and character; it is still a religious society, exacting obedience, on the part of all its members, to traditional custom.

So much having been explained, the customs regarding marriage and adoption, in their relation [63] to the family hierarchy, can be clearly understood. But a word first regarding this hierarchy, as it exists to-day. Theoretically the power of the head of the family is still supreme in the household. All must obey the head. Furthermore the females must obey the males--the wives, the husbands; and the younger members of the family are subject to the elder members. The children must not only obey the parents and grandparents, but must observe among themselves the domestic law of seniority: thus the younger brother should obey the elder brother, and the younger sister the elder sister. The rule of precedence is enforced gently, and is cheerfully obeyed even in small matters: for example, at meal-time, the elder boy is served first, the second son next, and so on,--an exception being made in the case of a very young child, who is not obliged to wait. This custom accounts for an amusing popular term often applied in jest to a second son, "Master Cold-Rice" (Hiameshi-San); as the second son, having to wait until both infants and elders have been served, is not likely to find his portion desirably hot when it reaches him Legally, the family can have but one responsible head. It may be the grandfather, the father, or the eldest son; and it is generally the eldest son, because according to a custom of Chinese origin, the old folks usually resign their active authority as soon as the eldest son is able to take charge of affairs. [64] The subordination of young to old, and of females to males,--in fact the whole existing constitution of the family,--suggests a great deal in regard to the probably stricter organization of the patriarchal family, whose chief was at once ruler and priest, with almost unlimited powers. The organization was primarily, and still remains, religious: the marital bond did not constitute the family; and the relation of the parent to the household depended upon his or her relation to the family as a religious body. To-day also, the girl adopted into a household as wife ranks only as an adopted child: marriage signifies adoption. She is called "flower-daughter" (hana-yome). In like manner, and for the same reasons, the young man received into a household as a husband of one of the daughters, ranks merely as an adopted son. The adopted bride or bridegroom is necessarily subject to the elders, and may be dismissed by their decision. As for the adopted husband, his position is both delicate and difficult,--as an old Japanese proverb bears witness: Konuka san-go areba, mukoyoshi to naruna ("While you have

even three go* of rice-bran left, do not become a son-in-law"). [*A go is something more than a pint.] Jacob does not have to wait for Rachel: he is given to Rachel on demand; and his service then begins. And after twice seven years of service, Jacob may be sent away. In that event his children do not any more belong to him. [65] but to the family. His adoption may have had nothing to do with affection; and his dismissal may have nothing to do with misconduct. Such matters, however they may be settled in law, are really decided by family interests--interests relating to the maintenance of the house and of its cult.**

[**Recent legislation has been in favour of the mukoyoshi; but, as a rule, the law is seldom resorted to except by men dismissed from the family for misconduct, and anxious to make profit by the dismissal.]

It should not be forgotten that, although a daughter-in-law or a son-in-law could in former times be dismissed almost at will, the question of marriage in the old Japanese family was a matter of religious importance,--marriage being one of the chief duties of filial piety. This was also the case in the early Greek and Roman family; and the marriage ceremony was performed, as it is now performed in Japan, not at a temple, but in the home. It was a rite of the family religion,--the rite by which the bride was adopted into the cult in the supposed presence of the ancestral spirits. Among the primitive Japanese there was probably no corresponding ceremony; but after the establishment of the domestic cult, the marriage ceremony became a religious rite, and this it still remains. Ordinary marriages are not, however, performed before the household shrine or in front of the ancestral tablets, except under certain circumstances. The rule, as regards such ordinary marriages, seems to be that [66] if the parents of the bridegroom are yet alive, this is not done; but if they are dead, then the bridegroom leads his bride before their mortuary tablets, where she makes obeisance. Among the nobility, in former times at least, the marriage ceremony appears to have been more distinctly religious,--judging from the following curious relation in the book Shorei-Hikki, or "Record of Ceremonies": "At the weddings of the great, the bridal-chamber is composed of three rooms thrown into one [by removal of the sliding-screens ordinarily separating them], and newly decorated The shrine for the image of the family-god is placed upon a shelf adjoining the sleeping-place." It is noteworthy also that Imperial marriages are always officially announced to the ancestors; and that the marriage of the heir-apparent, or other male offspring of the Imperial house, is performed before the Kashiko-dokoro, or imperial temple of the ancestors, which stands within the palace-grounds.**

[**That was the case at the marriage of the present Crown-Prince.] As a general rule it would appear that the evolution of the marriage-ceremony in Japan chiefly followed Chinese precedent; and in the Chinese patriarchal family the ceremony is in its own way quite as much of a religious rite as the early Greek or Roman marriage. And though the relation of the Japanese [67] rite to the family cult is less marked, it becomes sufficiently clear upon investigation. The alternate drinking of rice-wine, by bridegroom and bride, from the same vessels, corresponds in a sort to the Roman confarreatio. By the wedding-rite the bride is adopted into the family religion. She is adopted not only by the living but by the dead; she must thereafter revere the ancestors of her husband as her own ancestors; and should there be no elders in the household, it will become her duty to make the offerings, as representative of her husband. With the cult of her

own family she has nothing more to do; and the funeral ceremonies performed upon her departure from the parental roof,--the solemn sweeping-out of the house-rooms, the lighting of the death-fire before the gate,--are significant of this religious separation.

[*The translation is Mr. Mitford's. There are no "images" of the family-god, and I suppose that the family's Shinto-shrine is meant, with its ancestral tablets.]

Speaking of the Greek and Roman marriage, M. de Coulanges observes:--"Une telle religion ne pouvait pas admettre la polygamie." As relating to the highly developed domestic cult of those communities considered by the author of *La Cite Antique*, his statement will scarcely be called in question. But as regards ancestor-worship in general, it would be incorrect; since polygamy or polygyny, and polyandry may coexist with ruder forms of ancestor-worship. The Western-Aryan societies, in the epoch studied by M. de Coulanges, were practically [68] monogamic. The ancient Japanese society was polygynous; and polygyny persisted, after the establishment of the domestic cult. In early times, the marital relation itself would seem to have been indefinite. No distinction was made between the wife and the concubines: "they were classed together as 'women.'"^{*} [*Satow: *The Revival of Pure Shintau*] Probably under Chinese influence the distinction was afterwards sharply drawn; and with the progress of civilization, the general tendency was towards monogamy, although the ruling classes remained polygynous. In the 54th article of Iyeyasu's legacy, this phase of the social condition is clearly expressed,--a condition which prevailed down to the present era:--

"The position a wife holds towards a concubine is the same as that of a lord to his vassal. The Emperor has twelve imperial concubines. The princes may have eight concubines. Officers of the highest class may have five mistresses. A Samurai may have two handmaids. All below this are ordinary married men."

This would suggest that concubinage had long been (with some possible exceptions) an exclusive privilege; and that it should have persisted down to the period of the abolition of the daimiates and of the military class, is sufficiently explained by the militant character of the ancient society.* Though [69] it is untrue that domestic ancestor-worship cannot coexist with polygamy or polygyny (Mr. Spencer's term is the most inclusive), it is at least true that such worship is favoured by the monogamic relation, and tends therefore to establish it,--since monogamy insures to the family succession a stability that no other relation can offer. We may say that, although the old Japanese society was not monogamic, the natural tendency was towards monogamy, as the condition best according with the religion of the family, and with the moral feeling of the masses.

[*See especially Herbert Spencer's chapter, "The Family," in Vol. I, *Principles of Sociology*, section 315.]

Once that the domestic ancestor-cult had become universally established, the question of marriage, as a duty of filial pity, could not be judiciously left to the will of the young people themselves. It was a matter to be decided by the family, not by the children; for mutual inclination could not be suffered to interfere with the requirements of the household religion. It was not a

question of affection, but of religious duty; and to think otherwise was impious. Affection might and ought to spring up from the relation. But any affection powerful enough to endanger the cohesion of the family would be condemned. A wife might therefore be divorced because her husband had become too much attached to her; an adopted husband might be divorced because of his power to exercise, through affection, too [70] great an influence upon the daughter of the house. Other causes would probably be found for the divorce in either case--but they would not be difficult to find.

For the same reason that connubial affection could be tolerated only within limits, the natural rights of parenthood (as we understand them) were necessarily restricted in the old Japanese household. Marriage being for the purpose of obtaining heirs to perpetuate the cult, the children were regarded as belonging to the family rather than to the father and mother. Hence, in case of divorcing the son's wife, or the adopted son-in-law,--or of disinheriting the married son,--the children would be retained by the family. For the natural right of the young parents was considered subordinate to the religious rights of the house. In opposition to those rights, no other rights could be tolerated. Practically, of course, according to more or less fortunate circumstances, the individual might enjoy freedom under the paternal roof; but theoretically and legally there was no freedom in the old Japanese family for any member of it,--not excepting even its acknowledged chief, whose responsibilities were great. Every person, from the youngest child up to the grandfather, was subject to somebody else; and every act of domestic life was regulated by traditional custom.

Like the Greek or Roman father, the patriarch of the Japanese family appears to have had in early [71] times powers of life and death over all the members of the household. In the ruder ages the father might either kill or sell his children; and afterwards, among the ruling classes his powers remained almost unlimited until modern times. Allowing for certain local exceptions, explicable by tradition, or class-exceptions, explicable by conditions of servitude, it may be said that originally the Japanese paterfamilias was at once ruler, priest, and magistrate within the family. He could compel his children to marry or forbid them to marry; he could disinherit or repudiate them; he could ordain the profession or calling which they were to follow; and his power extended to all members of the family, and to the household dependents. At different epochs limits were placed to the exercise of this power, in the case of the ordinary people; but in the military class, the patria potestas was almost unrestricted. In its extreme form, the paternal power controlled everything,--the right to life and liberty,--the right to marry, or to keep the wife or husband already espoused,--the right to one's own children,--the right to hold property,--the right to hold office,--the right to choose or follow an occupation. The family was a despotism.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the absolutism prevailing in the patriarchal family has its justification in a religious belief,--in the conviction that everything should be sacrificed for the sake [72] of the cult, and every member of the family should be ready to give up even life, if necessary, to assure the perpetuity of the succession. Remembering this, it becomes easy to understand why, even in communities otherwise advanced in civilization, it should have seemed right that a father could kill or sell his children. The

crime of a son might result in the extinction of a cult through the ruin of the family,--especially in a militant society like that of Japan, where the entire family was held responsible for the acts of each of its members, so that a capital offence would involve the penalty of death on the whole of the household, including the children. Again, the sale of a daughter, in time of extreme need, might save a house from ruin; and filial piety exacted submission to such sacrifice for the sake of the cult.

As in the Aryan family,* property descended by right of primogeniture from father to son; the eldest-born, even in cases where the other property was to be divided among the children, always inheriting the homestead. The homestead property was, however, family property; and it passed to the eldest son as representative, not as individual. Generally speaking, sons could not hold property, without the father's consent, during such time as he retained his [73] headship. As a rule,--to which there were various exceptions,--a daughter could not inherit; and in the case of an only daughter, for whom a husband had been adopted, the homestead property would pass to the adopted husband, because (until within recent times) a woman could not become the head of a family. This was the case also in the Western Aryan household, in ancestor-worshipping times.

[*The laws of succession in Old Japan differed considerably according to class, place, and era; the entire subject has not yet been fully treated; and only a few safe general statements can be ventured at the present time.]

To modern thinking, the position of woman in the old Japanese family appears to have been the reverse of happy. As a child she was subject, not only to the elders, but to all the male adults of the household. Adopted into another household as wife, she merely passed into a similar state of subjection, unalleviated by the affection which parental and fraternal ties assured her in the ancestral home. Her retention in the family of her husband did not depend upon his affection, but upon the will of the majority, and especially of the el

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