The Ancient Cult.
The real religion of Japan, the religion still preferred 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 thousand 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, though subsequently modified to some degree by Chinese influence and ceremonial. These Japanese forms of the cult are all classed together under the name of "Dōhō," which signifies "The Way of the Gods." It is not an ancient term; and it was first adopted on to dis¬
distinguish the native religion, or "Way" from the foreign religion of Buddhism called "Budō," or "the Way of the Buddha". The three forms of the Dōhō 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, and the worship of imperial ancestors. The first is the religion of the home; the second is the religion of the local divinity, or national god; the third is the national religion. There are various other forms of Chinese worship; but they need not be considered for the present.

Of the three forms of ancestor-worship above men-
- tioned, the family cult is the first in evolutionary order; others being later developments.
But, in speaking of the family- cult as the oldest, I do not mean the home-religion as it exists today; 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 ἱέρως 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 rides would appear to have been formed one at the burial-place.
But the later domestic cult, having been developed out of the primal family rite, in direct representation of 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 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 line 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 civilisations, 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 cults that must
have preceded the home-
worship, we have little
testimony; and we can sur-
mise its nature only by
study of the natural history
of ancestor-worship among
peoples not yet arrived at
a state of civilization. The
the domestic cult begins with a settled civilization. Now when the Japanese race first estab-
lished itself in Japan, it does not appear I have 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 which seem I have been irre-
gularly performed at graves.

The domestic cult proper may not have been established until about the
eighteenth century, when the spirit-
table is supposed I have
been introduced from China.
The earlier ancestor-cult, as we shall presently see, was developed out of the primitive funeral-rules 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 in all probability primitive, as well as ideas and beliefs derived from these. Before dealing 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 con-
ceive the idea of a shadowy
inner self, or double, so soon,
doubtless, the propitiatory
cult of spirits began. But
this earliest ghost's worship
must have long preceded
that period of mental develop-
ment in which men first
became capable of forming
abstract ideas. The primitive
ancestor-worship could not
have formed the notion of a supreme deity; and all evidence existing as to the first forms of their worship leads to show that there primarily existed no difference whatever between the conception of ghosts and the conception of gods. There were, conse-

sequently, 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 ascend, from
line by line, to visit their former
habitations, or to make appearances
in the dreams of the living.
Their real world was the place
of burial, — the grave, the
humulus. Afterwards they
developed the idea
of an underworld, connected
in some mysterious way with
the place of sepulture.
Only at a much later time
did this idea underwrite
of inspiration expand and
divide into regions of
ghostly bliss and woe...
or a Parthian, nearer developed the notion of a heaven or a hell. Even in this day this belief represents the pre-Homeric stage of imagination as regards the supernatural.

Among the Indo-European races likewise there appears to have been at first no difference between gods or ghosts, nor any ranking of gods or ghosts as greater 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 prove more and more distin-
guished; and as societies advance, and as traditions, local and general, accumulate and compound, 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."

Do in ancient Europe, and so in the Far East, were the greater gods of nations evolved from shrill-calls; but these ethics of ancestor-worship which shaped alike the earliest
society, 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 the Aryan race did the Early Japanese think of their dead as ascending to some extra-ordinary region of light and bliss, or as descending to some realm of E"eminent. They thought of their dead as still inhabiting this world, or at least as maintaining with it a constant communication.
earliest sacred records do, indeed, make mention of an underworld, where mysterious Thunder-gods and evil goblins dwell in corruption; but this vague world of the dead communed with the world of the living; 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 as legitimate, and in return for these, they conferred 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 apotheosis. "All the dead become gods," wrote the great Obiin to commentator Hirata. To likewise, in the thought of the early Greeks and of the later Romans, all the dead became gods. M. de Coubures observes, in La Cité Antique: "This kind of apotheosis was not the privilege of the great alone; no distinction was made... It was not even necessary..."
have been a virtuous man: the wicked man became a god as well as the good man,—only that at this after-existence, he retained the evil inclinations of his former life."  And also was the case in Uma's 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 Modowori, "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 plea
They in a good humor." 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 dui — manes the rightful worship: "They are men," he declared, "who have departed from this life; — consider them divine beings...."
In Thincto, as in all Greek belief, Ætë was to end in 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 boîte, a person of no importance; today, being dead, he becomes a divine power, and his children pray to him for the prosperity of their undertakings. Thus also we find in 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 super-
natural power, the dead are still dependent upon the
living for happiness. Though
writers, save in dreams, they
need earthly nourishment and
honour, — food and drink,
and the reverence of their
descendants. Each ghost
must rely for such comfort
upon its living kindred;
— or through the degrading
of that kindred can it ever
find rest. Each ghost
must have shelter, — a foy-
and three...
offerings. While honorably sheltered and properly nourished, the spirit is pleased, and will aid in maintaining the good fortune of its propitators. 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 condemn 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 prac-
ices derived from it, such as the custom of decorating graves with flowers, persist today among our most advanced communities, — our modes of thought have so changed under the influences of modern civi-
ization that it is difficult for us to imagine how people could ever have supposed that the happiness of the dead de-
pended upon material food.
But it 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 spirit required but little sustenance of even the most vaporous kind. But, however small the offerings, it was essential that they should be made
regularly. Upon these shadowy reports 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 most consequences.

The history of all religious sacrifices can be traced back to this ancient custom of offerings made in peace; and the whole
In do. - Arge race had at one time no other religion than their religion of spirits. In fact, every ad
vanced 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 today in order to find the cult coexisting with an elaborate
civilization. Now the Japanese
ancestor-cult—though representing the beliefs of a non-Aryan people, and offering
in the history of its development various interesting per-
culiarities—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
I. — The dead remain in this world, — handing over their tombs and also their former houses, 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 respect due to service rendered them by the living; and the happiness of the living depends upon the fulfillment of pious duty to the dead.
To these very early beliefs may be added the following, of later development, which at one time were thought to have exercised immense influence:

IV. — Every event in the world, good or evil, fair or foul, seasons or plentiful harvests, flood and famine, tempest and tidewave 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.
the time in which the dead were the only gods, without distinction of powers. 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, delusive, murderous beliefs; and before Buddhism helped to dissipate 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—gōto—signifies literally "matters of worship." Later
or we shall find that not only
government, but almost every-
things 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.