

The Ancient Cult.

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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, 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 "Shintō," which signifies
 "The Way of the Gods". It is
 not an ancient term; and it
 was first adopted only to dis-
 -tinguish the native religion, or
 "Way" from the foreign religion
 of Buddhism called "Buddhō",
 or "The Way of the Buddha".
 The three forms of the Shintō
 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, 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.

~~Haruyoshi #1's line~~

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 house-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 γένος 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.

$\frac{1}{2}$ ¹¹¹ 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 time of Pericles as "primitive". No persisted forms 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

The domestic cult begins with a settled civilization. Now when the Japanese race first established itself in Japan, it does not appear to 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 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 earlier ancestor-cult, as we shall presently see, was developed out of the primitive funeral-rites and propitiatory ceremonies.

Dolan 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 dealing further of the cult itself, it will be necessary to consider some of these older beliefs.

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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 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, conse-
 -quently, 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 apparitions in the dreams of the living.

Their real world was the place of burial, — the grave, the *Amulus*. Afterwards there slowly developed the idea of an underworld, connected in some mysterious way with the place of sepulchre.

Only at a much later time did this dim underworld of imagination expand and divide into regions of ghastly bliss and woe...

It is a noteworthy fact that Japanese mythology never evolved the ideas of an Hell

or a Tartarus, — near developed
 the notion of a heaven or a hell.
 Even to this day Hindu 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 and
 ghosts, nor any ranking of
 gods 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 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 these edicts 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 distinctions of rank.

~~Evolution~~ 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 dwell in corruption; but this vague world of the dead communi-
-cated 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 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, whirled
 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 Chinese commentator Hirata. So likewise, in the thought of the early Greeks and ^{even} of the later Romans, all the dead became gods. M. de Coulanges 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 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 was the
 case in Shinto belief: the
 good man became a beneficent
 divinity, the bad man an
 evil deity, — but all alike be-
 -came kami. "And since
 there are bad as well as
 good gods," wrote Madanori,
 "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, Larvæ,
 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..."

~~Pope~~

In Hindu, 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; — today, 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 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 filling tomb; — each must have ~~day~~

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 contribute 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.

$\frac{1}{2}$ line

Although the religion of
 ghosts was once the religion of
 our own forefathers — whether
 of Northern or Southern
 Europe, — and although prac-
 tices 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 influence of modern civi-
 lization 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 periods 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 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 direst consequences.

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Dans

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 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 repre-
 -senting the beliefs of a non-
 -Aryan people, and offering
 in the history of its develop-
 -ment various interesting pe-
 -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

all times 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.

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Wood

To these very early beliefs may be added the following, 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.

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The first three beliefs survive from the dawn of civilization, or before it, — from

The time in which the dead were the only gods, without distinctions of power. The latter two words 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, de-mondous 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. That 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 literally "matters of worship". Later

or we shall find that not only
government, but almost every-
thing 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.

