

SOME RELIGIOUS PHENOMENA

WITHOUT doubt, many traits are attributed to the Japanese by the casual observer or captious critic, through lack of ability to read between the lines. We have already seen how the stoical element of Japanese character serves to conceal from the sociologist the emotional nature of the people. If a Japanese conceals his ordinary emotions, much more does he refrain from public exhibition of his deeper religious aspirations. Although he may feel profoundly, his face and manner seldom reveal it. When torn with grief over the loss of a parent or son, he will tell you of his loss with smiles, if not with actual laughter. "The Japanese smile" has betrayed the solemn foreigner into many an error of individual and racial character interpretation. Particularly frequent have been such errors in matters of religion.

Although the light and joyous, "smiling" aspect of Japanese religious life is prominent, the careful observer will come incidentally and unexpectedly on many signs of an opposite nature, if he mingle intimately with the people. Japan has its sorrows and its tragedies, no less than other lands. These have their part in determining religious phenomena.

The student who takes his stand at a popular shrine and watches the worshipers come and go will be rewarded by the growing conviction that, although many are manifestly ceremonialists, others are clearly subjects of profound feeling. See that mother leading her toddling child to the image of Binzuru, the god of healing, and teaching it to rub the eyes and face of the god and then its own eyes and face. See that pilgrim before a

bare shrine repeating in rapt devotion the prayer he has known from his childhood, and in virtue of which he has already received numberless blessings. Behold that leper pleading with merciful Kwannon of the thousand hands to heal his disease. Hear that pitiful wail of a score of fox-possessed victims for deliverance from their oppressor. Watch that tearful maiden performing the hundred circuits of the temple while she prays for a specific blessing for herself or some loved one. Observe that merchant solemnly worshipping the god of the sea, with offering of rice and wine. Count those hundreds of votive pictures, thanksgiving remembrances of the sick who have been healed, in answer, as they firmly believe, to their prayers to the god of this particular shrine. These are not imaginary cases. The writer has seen these and scores more like them. Here is a serious side to Japanese religious life easily overlooked by a casual or unsympathetic observer.

In addition to these simpler religious phenomena, we find in Japan, as in other lands, the practice of ecstatic union with the deity. In Shinto it is called "Kamioroshi," the bringing down of the gods. It is doubtless some form of hypnotic trance, yet the popular interpretation of the phenomenon is that of divine possession.

Among Buddhists, the practice of ecstasy takes a different form. The aim is to attain absolute vacuity of mind and thus complete union with the Absolute. When attained, the soul becomes conscious of blissful superiority to all the concerns of this mundane life, a foretaste of the Nirvana awaiting those who shall attain to Buddhahood. The actual attainment of this experience is practically limited to the priesthood, who alone have the time and freedom from the cares of the world needful for its practice. For it is induced only by long and profound "meditation." Especially is this experience the desire of the Zen sect, which makes it a leading aim, taking its name "zen" (to sit) from this practice. To sit in religious abstraction is the height of religious bliss.

The practical business man of the West may perhaps find some difficulty in seeing anything particularly re-

religious in ecstasy or mental vacuity. But if I mistake not, this religious phenomenon of the Orient does not differ in essence from the mystical religious experience so common in the middle and subsequent ages in Europe, and represented to-day by mystical Christians. Indeed, some of the finest religious souls of Western lands have been mystics. Mystic Christianity finds ready acceptance with certain of the Japanese.

The critical reader may perhaps admit, in view of the facts thus far presented, that the ignorant millions have some degree of religious feeling and yet, in view of the apparently irreligious life of the educated, he may still feel that the religious nature of the race is essentially shallow. He may feel that as soon as a Japanese is lifted out of the superstitious beliefs of the past, he is freed from all religious ideas and aspirations. I admit at once that there seems to be some ground for such an assertion. Yet as I study the character of the samurai of the Tokugawa period, who alone may be called the irreligious of the olden times, I see good reasons for holding that, though rejecting Buddhism, they were religious at heart. They developed little or no religious ceremonial to replace that of Buddhism, yet there were indications that the religious life still remained. Intellectual and moral growth rendered it impossible for earnest and honest men to accept the old religious expressions. They revolted from religious forms, rather than from religion, and the revolt resulted not in deeper superstitions and a poorer life, but in a life richer in thought and noble endeavor. Muro Kyu-so, the "Japanese Philosopher" to whom we have referred more than once, rejected Buddhism, as we have already seen. The high quality of his moral teachings we have also noticed. Yet he had no idea that he was "religious." Those who reject Buddhism often use the term "Shukyo-kusai," "stinking religion." For them religion is synonymous with corrupt and superstitious Buddhism. To have told Muro that he was religious would doubtless have offended him, but a few quotations should satisfy anyone that at heart he was religious in the best sense of the term.

"Consider all of you. Whence is fortune? From Heaven. Even the world says, Fortune is in Heaven. So then there is no resource save prayer to Heaven. Let us then ask: what does Heaven hate, and what does Heaven love? It loves benevolence and hates malevolence. It loves truth and hates untruth. . . . That which in Heaven begets all things, in man is called love. So doubt not that Heaven loves benevolence and hates its opposite. So too is it with truth. For countless ages sun and moon and stars constantly revolve and we make calendars without mistake. Nothing is more certain. It is the very truth of the universe . . . I have noticed prayers for good luck, brought year by year from famous temples and hills, decorating the entrances to the homes of famous samurai. But none the less they have been killed or punished, or their line has been destroyed and house extinguished. Or at least to many, shame and disgrace have come. They have not learned fortune, but foolishly depend on prayers and charms. Confucius said: 'When punished by Heaven there is no place for prayer.' Women of course follow the temples and trust in charms, but not so should men. Alas! Now all are astray, those who should be teachers, the samurai and those higher still" (pp. 63-5). "Sin is the source of pain and righteousness of happiness. This is the settled law. The teaching of the sages and the conduct of superior men is determined by principles and the result is left to Heaven. Still, we do not obey in the hope of happiness, nor do we forbear to sin from fear. Not with this meaning did Confucius and Mencius teach that happiness is in virtue and pain in sin. But the 'way' is the law of man. It is said, 'The way of Heaven blesses virtue and curses sin.' That is intended for the ignorant multitude. Yet it is not like the Buddhist 'hoben' (pious device), for it is the determined truth" (p. 66). "Heaven is forever and is not to be understood at once, like the promises of men. Short-sighted men consider its ways and decide that there is no reward for virtue or vice. So they doubt when the good are virtuous and fear not when the wicked sin. They do not know that there is no victory against Heaven

when it decrees" (p. 67). "Reason comes from Heaven, and is in men. . . The philosopher knows the truth as the drinker knows the taste of *saké* and the abstainer the taste of sweets. How shall he forget it? How shall he fall into error? Lying down, getting up, moving, resting, all is well. In peace, in trouble, in death, in joy, in sorrow, all is well. Never for a moment will he leave this 'way.' This is to know it in ourselves" (p. 71).

One day, five or six students remained after the lecture to ask Kyu-so about his view as to the gods, stating their own dissatisfaction with the fantastic interpretations given to the term "Shinto" by the native scholars. Making some quotations from the Chinese classics, he went on to say for himself:

"I cannot accept that which is popularly called Shinto. . . I do not profess to understand the profound reason of the deities, but in outline this is my idea: The Doctrine of the Mean speaks of the 'virtue of the Gods' and Shu-shi explains this word 'virtue' to mean the 'heart and its revelation.' Its meaning is thus stated in the Saden: 'God is pure intelligence and justice.' Now all know that God is just, but do not know that he is intelligent. But there is no such intelligence elsewhere as God's. Man hears by the ear and where the ear is not he hears not . . . ; man sees with his eyes, and where they are not he sees not . . . ; with his heart man thinks and the swiftest thought takes time. But God uses neither ear nor eye, nor does he pass over in thought. Directly he feels, and directly does he respond. . . Is not this the divinity of Heaven and Earth? So the Doctrine of the Mean says: 'Looked for it cannot be seen, listened to it cannot be heard. It enters into all things. There is nothing without it.' . . . 'Everywhere, everywhere, on the right and on the left.' This is the revealing of God, the truth not to be concealed. Think not that God is distant, but seek him in the heart, for the heart is the House of God. Where there is no obstacle of lust, there is communion of one spirit with the God of Heaven and Earth. . . And now

for the application. Examine yourselves, make the truth of the heart the foundation, increase in learning and at last you will attain. Then will you know the truth of what I speak" (pp. 50-52).

In the above passage Dr. Knox has translated the term "Shin," the Chinese ideograph for the Japanese word "Kami," by the English singular, God. This lends to the passage a fullness of monotheistic expression which the original hardly, if at all, justifies. The originals are indefinite as to number and might with equal truth be translated "gods," as Dr. Knox suggests himself in a footnote.

These and similar passages are of great interest to the student of Japanese religious development. They should be made much of by Christian preachers and missionaries. Such writers and thinkers as Muro evidently was might not improperly be called the pre-Christian Christians of Japan. They prepared the way for the coming of more light on these subjects. Japanese Christian apologists should collect such utterances from her wise men of old, and by them lead the nation to an appreciation of the truths which they suggest and for which they so fitly prepare the way. Scattered as they now are, and seldom read by the people, they lie as precious gems imbedded in the hills, or as seed safely stored. They can bear no harvest till they are sown in the soil and allowed to spring up and grow.

The more I have pondered the implications of these and similar passages, the more clear has it become that their authors were essentially religious men. Their revolt from "religion" did not spring from an irreligious motive, but from a deeper religious insight than was prevalent among Buddhist believers. The irrational and often immoral nature of many of the current religious expressions and ceremonials and beliefs became obnoxious to the thinking classes, and were accordingly rejected. The essence of religion, however, was not rejected. They tore off the accumulated husks of externalism, but kept intact the real kernel of religion.

The case for the religious nature of modern, educated Japan is not so simple. Irreligious it certainly appears.

Yet it, too, is not so irreligious as perhaps the Occidental thinks. Though immoral, a Japanese may still be a filial son and a loyal subject, characteristics which have religious value in Japan, Old and New. It would not be difficult to prove that many a modern Japanese writer who proclaims his rejection of religion—calling all religion but superstition and ceremony—is nevertheless a religious man at heart. The religions he knows are too superstitious and senseless to satisfy the demands of his intellectually developed religious nature. He does not recognize that his rejection of what he calls "religion" is a real manifestation of his religious nature rather than the reverse.

The widespread irreligious phenomena of New Japan are, therefore, not difficult of explanation, when viewed in the light of two thousand years of Japanese religious history. They cannot be attributed to a deficient racial endowment of religious nature. They are a part of nineteenth-century life by no means limited to Japan. If the Anglo-Saxon race is not to be pronounced inherently irreligious, despite the fact that irreligious phenomena and individuals are in constant evidence the world over, neither can New Japan be pronounced irreligious for the same reason. The irreligion now so rampant is a recent phenomenon in Japan. It may not immediately pass away, but it must eventually. Religion freed from superstition and ceremonialism, resting in reality, identifying moral and scientific with religious truth, is already finding hearty support from many of Japan's educated men. If appeal is made under the right conditions, the Japanese manifest no lack of a genuine religious nature. That they seem to be deficient in the sense of reverence is held by some to be proof presumptive of a deficient religious nature. A few illustrations will make clear what the critic means and will guide us to an interpretation of the phenomena. Occidentals are accustomed to consider a religious service as a time of solemn quiet, for we feel ourselves in a special sense in the presence of God; His majesty and glory are realities to the believing worshiper. But much occurs during a Christian service in Japanese

churches which would seem to indicate a lack of this feeling. It is by no means uncommon for little children to run about without restraint during the service, for mothers to nurse their infants, and for adults to converse with each other in an undertone, though not so low but that the sound of the conversation may be heard by all. I know a deacon occupying a front mat in church who spends a large part of service time during the first two sabbaths of each month in making out the receipts of the monthly contributions and distributing them among the members. His apparent supposition is that he disturbs no one (and it is amazing how undisturbed the rest of the congregation is), but also that he is in no way interfering with the solemnity or value of the service. The freedom, too, with which individuals come and go during the service is in marked contrast to our custom. From our standpoint, there is lack of reverence.

I recently attended a young men's meeting at which the places for each were assigned by written quotations, from the Bible, one-half of which was given to the individual and the other half placed at the seat. One quotation so used was the text, "The birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." It would hardly seem as if earnest Christians could have made such use of this text. Some months ago at a social gathering held in connection with the annual meeting of the churches of Shikoku, one of the comic performances consisted in the effort on the part of three old men to sing through to the end without a break-down the song which to us is so sacred, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me." Only one man succeeded, the others going through a course of quavers and breaks which was exceedingly laughable, but absolutely irreverent. The lack of reverence which has sometimes characterized the social side of the Christmas services in Japan has been the source of frequent regret to the missionaries. In a social gathering of earnest young Christians recently, a game demanding forfeits was played; these consisted of the recitation of familiar texts from the Bible. There certainly seems to be a lack of the sense of the fitness of things.

But the question is, are these practices due to an inherent deficiency of reverence, arising from the character of the Japanese nature, or are they due rather to the religious history of the past and the conditions of the present? That the latter seems to me the correct view I need hardly state. The fact that the Japanese are an emotional people renders it probable, a priori, that under suitable conditions they would be especially subject to the emotion of reverence. And when we look at their history, and observe the actual reverence paid by the multitudes to the rulers, and by the superstitious worshipers to the "Kami" and "Hotoke," it becomes evident that the apparent irreverence in the Christian churches must be due to peculiar conditions. Reverence is a subtle feeling; it depends on the nature of the ideas that possess the mind and heart. From the very nature of the case, Japanese Christians cannot have the same set of associations clustering around the church, the service, the Bible, or any of the Christian institutions, as the Occidental who has been reared from childhood among them, and who has derived his spiritual nourishment from them. All the wealth of nineteen centuries of experience has tended to give our services and our churches special religious value in our eyes. The average Christian in Japan and in any heathen land cannot have this fringe of ideas and subtle feelings so essential to a profound feeling of reverence. But as the significance of the Christian conception of God, endowed with glory and honor, majesty and might, is increasingly realized, and as it is found that the spirit of reverence is one that needs cultivation in worship, and especially as it is found that the spirit of reverence is important to high spiritual life and vitalizing spiritual power, more and more will that spirit be manifested by Japanese Christians. But its possession or its lack is due not to the inherent character of the people, but rather to the character of the ideas which possess them. In taking now a brief glance at the nature and history of the three religions of Japan it seems desirable to quote freely from the writings of recognized authorities on the subject.

"*Shinto*, which means literally 'the way of the Gods,' is the name given to the mythology and vague ancestor- and nature-worship which preceded the introduction of Buddhism into Japan—Shinto, so often spoken of as a religion, is hardly entitled to that name. It has no set of dogmas, no sacred book, no moral code. The absence of a moral code is accounted for in the writings of modern native commentators by the innate perfection of Japanese humanity, which obviates the necessity for such outward props. . . It is necessary, however, to distinguish three periods in the existence of Shinto. During the first of these—roughly speaking, down to A. D. 550—the Japanese had no notion of religion as a separate institution. To pay homage to the gods, that is, to the departed ancestors of the Imperial family, and to the names of other great men, was a usage springing from the same soil as that which produced passive obedience to, and worship of, the living Mikado. Besides this, there were prayers to the wind-gods, to the god of fire, to the god of pestilence, to the goddess of food, and to deities presiding over the sauce-pan, the caldron, the gate, and the kitchen. There were also purifications for wrongdoing. . . But there was not even a shadowy idea of any code of morals, or any systematization of the simple notions of the people concerning things unseen. There was neither heaven nor hell—only a kind of neutral-tinted Hades. Some of the gods were good and some were bad; nor was the line between men and gods at all clearly drawn."

The second period of Shinto began with the introduction of Buddhism into Japan, in which period Shinto became absorbed into Buddhism through the doctrine that the Shinto deities were ancient incarnations of Buddhas. In this period Shinto retained no distinctive feature. "Only at court and at a few great shrines, such as those of Ise and Idzumo, was a knowledge of Shinto in its native simplicity kept up; and it is doubtful whether changes did not creep in with the lapse of ages. Most Shinto temples throughout the country were served by Buddhist priests, who introduced the architectural orna-

ments and the ceremonial of their own religion. Thus was formed the Ryobu Shinto—a mixed religion founded on a compromise between the old creed and the new, and hence the tolerant ideas on theological subjects of most of the middle-lower classes, who worship indifferently at the shrines of either faith."

The third period began about 1700. It was introduced by the scholarly study of history. "Soon the movement became religious and political—above all, patriotic. . . The Shogunate was frowned on, because it had supplanted the autocracy of the heaven-descended Mikados. Buddhism and Confucianism were sneered at because of their foreign origin. The great scholars Mabuchi (1697-1769), Motoori (1730-1801), and Hirata (1776-1843) devoted themselves to a religious propaganda—if that can be called a religion which sets out from the principle that the only two things needful are to follow one's natural impulses and to obey the Mikado. This order triumphed for a moment in the revolution of 1868." It became for a few months the state religion, but soon lost its status.*

Buddhism came to Japan from Korea *via* China in 552 A. D. It was already a thousand years old and had, before it reached Japan, broken up into numerous sects and subjects differing widely from each other and from the original teaching of Sakya Muni. After two centuries of propagandism it conquered the land and absorbed the religious life of the people, though Shinto was never entirely suppressed. "All education was for centuries in Buddhist hands; Buddhism introduced art, and medicine, molded the folklore of the country, created its dramatic poetry, deeply influenced politics and every sphere of social and intellectual activity. In a word, Buddhism was the teacher under whose instruction the Japanese nation grew up. As a nation they are now grossly forgetful of this fact. Ask an educated Japanese a question about Buddhism, and ten to one he will smile in your face. A hundred to one that he knows nothing about the subject and glories in his nescience." "The complicated metaphysics of Buddhism have awakened no interest in the Japanese nation. Another fact, curious but true, is that these people have never been at the trouble to translate

* Chamberlain's "Things Japanese," p. 358.

the Buddhist canon into their own language. The priests use a Chinese version, and the laity no version at all, though . . . they would seem to have been given to searching the Scriptures a few hundred years ago. The Buddhist religion was disestablished and disendowed during the years 1871-74, a step taken in consequence of the temporary ascendancy of Shinto." Although Confucianism took a strong hold on the people in the early part of the seventeenth century, yet its influence was limited to the educated and ruling classes. The vast multitude still remained Shinto-Buddhists.

As for doctrine, philosophic Buddhism with its dogmas of salvation through intellectual enlightenment, by means of self-perfecting, with its goal of absorption into Nirvana, has doubtless been the belief and aim of the few. But such Buddhism was too deep for the multitudes. "By the aid of hobens, or pious devices, the priesthood has played into the hands of popular superstition. Here, as elsewhere, there have been evolved charms, amulets, pilgrimages, and gorgeous temple services, in which the people worship not only the Buddha, who was himself an agnostic, but his disciple, and even such abstractions as Amida, which are mistaken for actual divine personages."* The deities of Shinto have been more or less confused with those of popular Buddhism; in some cases, inextricably so.

Confucianism, as known in Japan, was the elaborated doctrine of Confucius. "He confined himself to practical details of morals and government, and took submission to parents and political rulers as the corner stone of his system. The result is a set of moral truths—some would say truisms—of a very narrow scope, and of dry ceremonial observances, political rather than personal." "Originally introduced into Japan early in the Christian era, along with other products of Chinese civilization, the Confucian philosophy lay dormant during the middle ages, the period of the supremacy of Buddhism. It awoke with a start in the early part of the seventeenth century when Iccasu, the great warrior, ruler, and patron of learning, caused the Confucian classics to be printed in

* "Things Japanese," p. 70, and Murray's "Hand-book for Japan," p. 37.

Japan for the first time. During the two hundred and fifty years that followed, the intellect of the country was molded by Confucian ideas. Confucius himself had, it is true, labored for the establishment of a centralized monarchy. But his main doctrine of unquestioning submission to rulers and parents fitted in perfectly with the feudal ideas of Old Japan; and the conviction of the paramount importance of such subordination lingers on, an element of stability, in spite of the recent social cataclysm which has involved Japanese Confucianism, properly so-called, in the ruin of all other Japanese institutions."*

Christianity was first brought to Japan by Francis Xavier, who landed in Kagoshima in 1549. His zeal knew no bounds and his results were amazing. "The converts were drawn from all classes alike. Noblemen, Buddhist priests, men of learning, embraced the faith with the same alacrity as did the poor and ignorant. . . . One hundred and thirty-eight European missionaries" were then on the field. "Until the breaking out of the persecution of 1596 the work of evangelization proceeded apace. The converts numbered ten thousand yearly, though all were fully aware of the risk to which they exposed themselves by embracing the Catholic faith." "At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Japanese Christians numbered about one million, the fruit of half a century of apostolic labor accomplished in the midst of comparative peace. Another half-century of persecution was about to ruin this flourishing church, to cut off its pastors, more than two hundred of whom suffered martyrdom, and to leave its laity without the offices of religion. . . . The edicts ordering these measures remained in force for over two centuries." Tens of thousands of Christians preferred death to perjury. It was supposed that Christianity was entirely exterminated by the fearful and prolonged persecutions. Yet in the vicinity of Nagasaki over four thousand Christians were discovered in 1867, who were again subject to persecution until the pressure of foreign lands secured religious toleration in Japan.

Protestant Christianity came to Japan with the begin-

* "Things Japanese," p. 93.

ning of the new era, and has been preached with much zeal and moderate success. For a time it seemed destined to sweep the land even more astonishingly than did Romanism in the sixteenth century. But in 1888 an anti-foreign reaction began in every department of Japanese life and thought which has put a decided check on the progress of Christian missions.

This must suffice for our historical review of the religious life of the Japanese. Were we to forget Japan's long and repeated isolations, and also to ignore fluctuations of belief and of other religious phenomena in other lands, we might say, as many do, that the Japanese have inherently shallow and changeable religious convictions. But remembering these facts, and recalling the persecutions of Buddhists by each other, of Christianity by the state, and knowing to-day many earnest, self-sacrificing and persistent Christians, I am convinced that such a judgment is mistaken. There are other and sufficient reasons to account for this appearance of changeableness in religion.

I close this chapter with a single observation on the religious history just outlined. Bearing in mind the great changes that have come over Japanese religious thinking and forms of religion I ask if religious phenomena are the expressions of the race nature, as some maintain, and if this nature is inherent and unchangeable, how are such profound changes to be accounted for? If the religious character of the Japanese people is inherent, how is it conceivable that they should so easily adopt foreign religions, even to the exclusion of their own native religion, as did those who became Buddhist or Confucian or Christian? I conclude from these facts, and they are paralleled in the history of many other peoples, that even religious characteristics are not dependent on biological, but are wholly dependent on social evolution. It seems to me capable of the clearest proof that the religious phenomena of any age are dependent on the general development of the intellect, on the ruling ideas, and on the entire conditions of the civilization of the age rather than on brain structure or essential race nature.