

## SOME RELIGIOUS CONCEPTIONS

THE conceptions of the common people in regard to deity are chaotic. They believe in local spirits who are to be worshiped; some of these are of human origin, and some antedate all human life. The gods of the Shinto pantheon are "yaoyorodzu" in number, eight thousand myriads; yet in their "norito," or prayer rituals, reference is made not only to the "yaoyorodzu" who live in the air, but also to the "yaoyorodzu" who live on earth, and even to the "yaoyorodzu" who live beneath the earth. If we add these together there must be at least twenty-four thousand myriads of gods. These of course include sun, moon, stars, and all the forces of nature, as well as the spirits of men. Popular Buddhism accepts the gods of Shinto and brings in many more, worshiping not only the Buddha and his immediate "rakan," disciples, five hundred in number, but numberless abstractions of ideal qualities, such as the varieties of Kwannon (Avelokitesvara, gods and goddesses of mercy), Amida (Amitabha, the ideal of boundless light), Jizo (Kshitigarbha, the helper of those in trouble, lost children, and pregnant women), Emma O (Yama-rajā, ruler of Buddhist hells), Fudo (Achala, the "immovable," "unchangeable"), and many others. Popular Buddhism also worships every man dead or living who has become a "hotoke," that is, has attained Buddhahood and has entered Nirvana. The gods of Japan are innumerable in theory and multitudinous in practice. Not only are there gods of goodness but also gods of lust and of evil, to whom robbers and harlots may pray for success and blessing.

In the Japanese pantheon there is no supreme god, such, for instance, as the Roman Jupiter, or the Greek Chronos, nor is there a thoroughgoing divine hierarchy.

According to the common view (although there is no definite thought about it), the idea seems to be that the universe with its laws and nature were already existent before the gods appeared on the scene; they created specific places, such as Japan, out of already existing material. Neither in Shinto nor in popular Buddhism is the conception formed of a primal fount of all being with its nature and laws. In this respect Japanese thought is like all primitive religious thought. There is no word in the Japanese language corresponding to the English term "God." The nearest approach to it are the Confucian terms "Jo-tei," "Supreme Emperor," "Ten," "Heaven," and "Ten-tei," "Heavenly Emperor"; but all of these terms are Chinese, they are therefore of late appearance in Japan, and represent rather conceptions of educated and Confucian classes than the ideas of the masses. These terms approach closely to the idea of monotheism; but though the doctrine may be discovered lying implicit in these words and ideas it was never developed. Whether "Heaven" was to be conceived as a person, or merely as fate, was not clearly thought out; some expressions point in one direction while others point in the other.

I may here call attention to a significant fact in the history of recent Christian work in Japan. Although the serious-minded Japanese is first attracted to Christianity by the character of its ethical thought—so much resembling, also so much surpassing that of Confucius, it is none the less true that monotheism is another powerful source of attraction. I have been repeatedly told by Christians that the first religious satisfaction they ever experienced was upon their discovery of monotheism. How it affected Dr. Neesima, readers of his life cannot have overlooked. He is a type of multitudes. In the earlier days of Christian work many felt that they had become Christians upon rejection of polytheism and acceptance of monotheism. And in truth they were so far forth Christian, although they knew little of Christ, and felt little need of His help as a personal Saviour. The weakness of the Church in recent years is due in part, I doubt not, to the acceptance into its membership of num-

bers who were, properly speaking, monotheistic, but not in the complete sense of the term Christian. Their discovery later that more was needed than the intellectual acceptance of monotheism ere they could be considered, or even be, truly "Christian," has led many such "believers" to abandon their relations with the Church. This, while on many accounts to be regretted, was nevertheless inevitable. The bare acceptance of the monotheistic idea does not secure that transformation of heart and produce that warmth of living faith which are essential elements in the altruistic life demanded of the Christian.

Nor is it difficult to understand why monotheism has proved such an attraction to the Japanese when we consider that through it they first recognized a unity in the universe and even in their own lives. Nature and human nature took on an intelligibility which they never had had under the older philosophy. History likewise was seen to have a meaning and an order, to say nothing of a purpose, which the non-Christian faiths did not themselves see and could not give to their devotees. Furthermore the monotheistic idea furnished a satisfactory background and explanation for the exact sciences. If there is but one God, who is the fount and cause of all being, it is easy to see why the truths of science should be universal and absolute, rather than local and diverse, as they would be were they subject to the jurisdiction of various local deities. The universality of nature's laws was inconceivable under polytheism. Monotheism thus found a ready access to many minds. Polytheism pure and simple is the belief of no educated Japanese to-day. He is a monist of some kind or other. Philosophic Buddhism always was monistic, but not monotheistic. Thinking Confucianists were also monistic. But neither philosophic Buddhism nor Confucianism emphasized their monistic elements; they did not realize the importance to popular thought of monistic conceptions. But possessing these ideas, and being now in contact with aggressive Christian monotheism, they are beginning to emphasize this truth.

As Japan has had no adequate conception of God, her

conception of man has been of necessity defective. Indeed, the cause of her inadequate conception of God is due in large measure to her inadequate conception of man, which we have seen to be a necessary consequence of the primitive communal order. Since, however, we have already given considerable attention to Japan's inadequate conception of man, we need do no more than refer to it in this connection.

Corresponding to her imperfect doctrines of God and of man is her doctrine of sin. That the Japanese sense of sin is slight is a fact generally admitted. This is the universal experience of the missionary. Many Japanese with whom I have conversed seem to have no consciousness of it whatever. Indeed, it is a difficult matter to speak of to the Japanese, not only because of the etiquette involved, but for the deeper reason of the deficiency of the language. There exists no term in Japanese which corresponds to the Christian word "sin." To tell a man he is a sinner without stopping to explain what one means would be an insult, for he is not conscious of having broken any of the laws of the land. Yet too much stress must not be laid on this argument from the language, for the Buddhistic vocabulary furnishes a number of terms which refer to the crime of transgressing not the laws of the land, but those of Buddha.

In Shinto, sin is little, if anything, more than physical impurity. Although Buddhism brought a higher conception of religion for the initiated few, it gave no help to the ignorant multitudes; rather it riveted their superstitions upon them. It spoke of law indeed, and lust and sin; and of dreadful punishments for sin; but when it explained sin it made its nature too shallow, being merely the result of mental confusion; salvation, then, became simply intellectual enlightenment; it also made the consequences of sin too remote and the escape from them too easy. The doctrine of "Don," suddenness of salvation, the many external and entirely formal rites, short pilgrimages to famous shrines, the visiting of some neighboring temple having miniature models of all the other efficacious shrines throughout the land, the wearing of charms, the buying of "o fuda," and even the single

utterance of certain magic prayers, were taught to be quite enough for the salvation of the common man from the worst of sins. Where release is so easily obtained, the estimate of the heinousness of sin is correspondingly slight. How different was the consciousness of sin and the conception of its nature developed by the Jewish worship with its system of sin offerings! Life for life. Whatever we may think of the efficacy of offering an animal as an expiation for sin, it certainly contributed far more toward deepening the sense of sin than the rites in common practice among the Buddhists. So far as I know, human or animal sacrifice has never been known in Japan.

In response to the not unlikely criticism that sacrifice is the result of profound sense of sin and not its cause, I reply that it is both. The profound sense is the experience of the few at the beginning; the practice educates the multitudes and begets that feeling in the nation.

Ceremonial purification is an old rite in Japan. In this connection we naturally think of the "Chozu-bachi" which may be found before every Shinto shrine, containing the "holy water" with which to rinse the mouth and wash the hands. Pilgrims and worshipers invariably make use of this water, wiping their hands on the towels provided for the purpose by the faithful. To our eyes, few customs in Japan are more conducive to the spread of impurity and infectious disease than this rite of ceremonial purification. No better means could be devised for the wide dissemination of the skin diseases which are so common. The reformed religion of New Japan—whether Buddhist, Shinto, or Christian—could do few better services for the people at large than by entering on a crusade against this religious rite. It could and should preach the doctrine that sin and defilement of the hearts are not removed by such an easy method as the rite implies and the masses believe. If retained as a symbol, the purification rite should at least be reformed as a practice.

Whether the use of purificatory water is to be traced to the sense of moral or spiritual sin is doubtful to my mind; in view of the general nature of primitive Shinto. The

interpretation given the system by W. E. Griffis, in his volume on the "Religions of Japan," is suggestive, but in view of all the facts does not seem conclusive. "One of the most remarkable features of Shinto" he writes, "was the emphasis laid on cleanliness. Pollution was calamity, defilement was sin, and physical purity at least was holiness. Everything that could in any way soil the body or clothing was looked upon with abhorrence and detestation."\* The number of specifications given in this connection is worthy of careful perusal. But it is a strange nemesis of history that the sense of physical pollution should develop a religious rite fitted to become the very means for the dissemination of physical pollution and disease.

Japanese personal cleanliness is often connected in the descriptions of foreigners with ceremonial purification, but the facts are much exaggerated. In contrast to nearly if not quite all non-Christian peoples, the Japanese are certainly astonishingly cleanly in their habits. But it is wholly unnecessary to exaggerate the facts. The "tatami," or straw-mats, an inch or more in thickness, give to the room an appearance of cleanliness which usually belies the truth. The multitudes of fleas that infest the normal Japanese home are convincing proof of the real state of the "tatami." There are those who declare that a Japanese crowd has the least offensive odor of any people in the world. One writer goes so far as to state that not only is there no unpleasant odor whatever, but that there is even a pleasant intimation of lavender about their exhalations. This exactly contradicts my experience. Not to mention the offensive oil with which all women anoint their hair to give it luster and stiffness, the Japanese habit of wearing heavy cotton wadded clothing, with little or no underwear, produces the inevitable result in the atmosphere of any closed room. In cold weather I always find it necessary to throw open all the doors and windows of my study or parlor, after Bible classes of students or even after the visits of cultured and well-to-do guests. That the Japanese bathe so frequently is certainly an interesting

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fact and a valuable feature of their civilization; it indicates no little degree of cleanliness; but for that, their clothing would become even more disagreeable than it is, and the evil effect upon themselves of wearing soiled garments would be much greater. In point of fact, their frequent baths do not wholly remove the need of change in clothing. To a Japanese the size of the weekly wash of a foreigner seems extravagant.

As to the frequent bathing, its cleanliness is exaggerated by Western thought, for instead of supplying fresh water for each person, the Japanese public baths consist usually of a large tank used by multitudes in common. Clean water is allowed for the face, but the main tank is supplied with clean hot water only once each day. In Kumamoto, schoolgirls living with us invariably asked permission to go to the bath early in the day that they might have the first use of the water. They said that by night it was so foul they could not bear to use it. Each hotel has its own private bath for guests; this is usually heated in the afternoon, and the guests take their baths from four o'clock on until midnight, the waiting girls of the hotel using it last. My only experience with public baths has been mentioned already. At first glance the conditions were reassuring, for a large stream of hot water was running in constantly, and the water in the tank itself was quite transparent. But on entering I was surprised, not to say horrified, to see floating along the margin of the tank and on the bottom of it suggestive proofs of previous bathers. On inquiry I learned that the tank was never washed out, nor the water entirely discharged at a single time; the natural overflow along the edge of the tank being considered sufficient. In the interest of accuracy it is desirable to add that New Japan is making progress in the matter of public baths. In some of the larger cities, I am told, provision is sometimes made for entirely fresh water for each bather in separate bathrooms.

In view of these facts—as unpleasant to mention as they are essential to a faithful description of the habits of the people—it is clear that the “horror of physical impurity” has not been, and is not now, so great as some

would have us believe. Whatever may have been the condition in ancient times, it would be difficult to believe that the rite of ceremonial purification could arise out of the present practices and habits of thought. One may venture the inquiry whether the custom of using the “purificatory water” may not have been introduced from abroad.

But whatever be the present thought of the people on the general subject of sin, it may be shown to be due to the prevailing system of ideas, moral and religious, rather than to the inherent racial character. In an interesting article by Mr. G. Takahashi on the “Past, Present, and Future of Christianity in Japan” I find the statement that the preaching of the monks who came to Japan in the sixteenth century was of such a nature as to produce a very deep consciousness of sin among the converts. “The Christians or martyrs repeatedly cried out ‘we miserable sinners,’ ‘Christ died for us,’ etc., as their letters abundantly prove. It was because of this that their consciences were aroused by the burning words of Christ, and kept awake by means of contrition and confession.” Among modern Christians the sense of sin is much more clear and pronounced than among the unconverted. Individual instances of extreme consciousness of sin are not unknown, especially under the earlier Protestant preaching. If the Christians of the last decade have less sense of sin, it is due to the changed character of recent preaching, in consequence of the changed conception of Christianity widely accepted in Protestant lands. Who will undertake to say that Christians in New England of the nineteenth century have the same oppressive sense of sin that was customary in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries? The sense of sin is due more to the character of the dominant religious ideas of the age than to brain structure or to race nature. I cannot agree with Mr. Takahashi that “To be religious one needs a Semitic tinge of mind.” It is not a question of mind, of race nature, but of dominant ideas.

In this connection I may refer to an incident that came under my notice some years ago. A young man applied

for membership in the Kumamoto Church, who at one time had been a student in one of my Bible classes. I had not known that he had received any special help from his study with me, until I heard his statement as to how he had discovered his need of a Saviour, and had found that need satisfied in Christ. In his statement before the examining committee of the church, he said that when he first read the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, he was so impressed with its beauty as a poem that he wrote it out entire on one of the fusuma (light paper doors) of his room, and each morning, as he arose, he read it. This practice continued several weeks. Then, as we continued our study of the Bible, we took up the third chapter of John, and when he came to the sixteenth verse, he was so impressed with its statement that he wrote that beside the poem from Corinthians, and read them together. Gradually this daily reading, together with the occasional sermons and other Christian addresses which he heard at the Boys' School, led him to desire to secure for himself the love described by Paul, and to know more vitally the love of God described by John. It occurred to him that, to secure these ends, he should pray. Upon doing so he said that, for the first time in his life, his unworthiness and his really sinful nature overwhelmed him. This was, of course, but the beginning of his Christian life. He began then to search the Scriptures in earnest, and with increasing delight. It was not long before he wished to make public confession of his faith, and thus identify himself with the Christian community. This brief account of the way in which this young man was brought to Christ illustrates a good many points, but that for which I have cited it is the testimony it bears to the fact that under similar circumstances the human heart undergoes very much the same religious experience, whatever be the race or nationality of the individual.

In regard to the future life, Shinto has little specific doctrine. It certainly implies the continued existence of the soul after death, as its ancestral worship shows, but its conception as to the future state is left vague in the extreme. Confucius purposely declined to teach anything on this point, and, in part, for this reason, it has been

maintained that Confucianism cannot properly be called a religion. Buddhism brought to Japan an elaborate system of eschatological ideas, and so far as the common people of Japan have any conception of the future life, it may be attributed to Buddhistic teachings. Into their nature I need not inquire at any length. According to popular Buddhism, the future world, or more properly speaking, worlds (for there are ten of them, into any one of which a soul may be born either immediately or in the course of its future transmigrations), does not differ in any vital way from the present world. It is a world of material blessings or woes; the successive stages or worlds are graded one above the other in fantastic ways. Salvation consists in passing to higher grades of life, the final or perfect stage being paradise, which, once attained, can never be lost. Transmigration is universal, the period of life in each world being determined by the merits and demerits of the individual soul.

Here we must consider two widely used terms, "ingwa" and "mei." The first of these is Buddhistic and the other Confucianistic; though differing much in origin and meaning, yet in the end they amount to much the same thing. "Ingwa" is the law of cause and effect. According to the Buddhistic teaching, however, the "in," or cause, is in one world, while the "gwa," or effect, is in the other. The suffering, for instance, or any misfortune that overtakes one in this present life, is the "gwa" or effect of what was done in the previous, and is thus inevitable. The individual is working off in this life the "gwa" of his last life, and he is also working up the "in" of the next. He is thus in a kind of vise. His present is absolutely determined for him by his past, and in turn is irrevocably fixing his future. Such is the Buddhistic "wheel of the law." The common explanation of misfortune, sickness, or disease, or any calamity, is that it is the result of "ingwa," and that there is, therefore, no help for it. The paralyzing nature of this conception on the development of character, or on activity of any kind, is apparent not only theoretically but actually. As an escape from the inexorable fatality of this scheme of thought, the Buddhist faith of the common people has

resorted to magic. Magic prayers, consisting of a few mystic syllables of whose meaning the worshiper may be quite ignorant, are the means for overcoming the inexorableness of "ingwa," both for this life and the next. "Namu Amida Butsu," "Namu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo," "Namu Hen Jo Kongo," are the most common of such magic formulæ. These prayers are heard on the lips of tens of thousands of pious pilgrims, not only at the temples, but as they pass along the highways. It is believed that each repetition secures its reward. Popular Buddhism's appeal to magic was not only winked at by philosophical Buddhism, but it was encouraged. Magic was justified by religious philosophy, and many a "hoben," "pious device," for saving the ignorant was invented by the priesthood. It will be apparent that while Buddhism has in certain respects a vigorous system of punishment for sin, yet its method of relief is such that the common people can gain only the most shallow and superficial views of salvation. Buddhism has not served to deepen the sense of responsibility, nor helped to build up character. That the more serious-minded thinkers of the nation have, as a rule, rejected Buddhism is not strange.

One point of great interest for us is the fact that this eschatological and soteriological system was imported, and is not the spontaneous product of Japan. The wide range of national religious characteristics thus clearly traceable to Buddhistic influence shows beyond doubt how large a part of a nation's character is due to the system of thought that for one reason or another prevails, rather than to the essential race character.

The other term mentioned above, "mei," literally means "command" or "decree"; but while the English terms definitely imply a real being who decides, decrees, and commands, the term "mei" is indeterminate on this point. It is frequently joined to the word "Ten," or Heaven; "Ten-mei," Heaven's decree, seeming to imply a personality in the background of the thought. Yet, as I have already pointed out, it is only implied; in actual usage it means the fate decreed by Heaven; that is, fated fate, or absolute fate. The Chinese and the Japa-

nese alike failed to inquire minutely as to the implication of the deepest conceptions of their philosophy. But "mei" is commonly used entirely unconnected with "Ten," and in this case its best translation into English is probably "fate." In this sense it is often used. Unlike Buddhism, however, Confucianism provided no way of escape from "mei" except moral conduct. One of its important points of superiority was its freedom from appeal to magic in any form, and its reliance on sincerity of heart and correctness of conduct.

Few foreigners have failed to comment on the universal use by the Japanese of the phrase "Shikataga nai," "it can't be helped." The ready resignation to "fate," as they deem it, even in little things about the home and in the daily life, is astonishing to Occidentals. Where we hold ourselves and each other to sharp personal responsibility, the sense of subjection to fate often leads them to condone mistakes with the phrase "Shikataga nai."

But this characteristic is not peculiar to Japan. China and India are likewise marked by it. During the famines in India, it was frequently remarked how the Hindus would settle down to starve in their huts in submission to fate, where Westerners would have been doing something by force, fighting even the decrees of heaven, if needful. But it is important to note that this characteristic in Japan is undergoing rapid change. The spirit of absolute submission, so characteristic of the common people of Old Japan, is passing away and self-assertion is taking its place. Education and developing intelligence are driving out the fear of fate. Had our estimate of the Japanese race character been based wholly on the history of Old Japan, it might have been easy to conclude that the spirit of submission to rulers and to fate was a national characteristic due to racial nature; but every added year of New Japan shows how erroneous that view would have been. Thus we see again that the characteristics of Japan, Old and New, are not due to race nature, but to the prevailing civilization in the broadest sense of the term. The religious characteristics of a people depend primarily on the dominant religious ideas, not on the inherent religious nature.