

SOME RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

AMONG the truly religious sentiments of the Japanese are those of loyalty and filial piety. Having already given them considerable attention, we need not delay long upon them here. The point to be emphasized is that these two principles are exalted into powerful religious sentiments, which have permeated and dominated the entire life of the nation. Not only were they at the root of courage, of fidelity, of obedience, and of all the special virtues of Old Japan, but they were also at the root of the larger part of her religion. These emotions, sentiments, and beliefs have built 190,000 Shinto shrines. Loyalty to the daimyo was the vital part of the religion of the past, as loyalty to the Emperor is the vital part of the popular religion of to-day. Next to loyalty came filial piety; it not only built the cemeteries, but also maintained god-shelves and family ancestral worship throughout the centuries. One of the first questions which many an inquirer about Christianity has put to me is as to the way we treat our parents living and dead, and the tombs and memories of our ancestors. These two religious sentiments of loyalty and filial piety were essential elements of primitive Shinto. The imported religions, particularly Confucianism and Christianity, served to strengthen them. In view of the indubitable religious nature of these two sentiments it is difficult to see how anyone can deny the name of religion to the religions that inculcate them, Shinto and Confucianism. It shows how defective is the current conception of the real nature of religion.

Despite the reality of these religious sentiments, however, many things are done in Japan quite opposed to

them. Of course this is so. These violations spring from irreligion, and irreligion is found in every land. Furthermore, many things done in the name of loyalty and piety seem to us Westerners exceedingly whimsical and illogical. Deeds which to us seem disloyal and unfilial receive no rebuke. Filial piety often seems to us more active toward the dead than toward the living.

Closely connected with loyalty and filial piety, and in part their expression, is one further religious sentiment, namely, gratitude. In his chapter in "Kokoro" "About Ancestor-Worship," Mr. Hearn makes some pertinent remarks as to the nature of Shinto. "Foremost among the moral sentiments of Shinto is that of loving gratitude to the past." This he attributes to the fact that "To Japanese thought the dead are not less real than the living. They take part in the daily life of the people, sharing the humblest sorrows and the humblest joys . . . and they are universally thought of as finding pleasure in the offerings made to them or the honors conferred upon them." There is much truth in these statements, though I by no means share the opinion that in connection with the Japanese belief in the dead there "have been evolved moral sentiments wholly unknown to Western civilization," or that their "loving gratitude to the past" is "a sentiment having no real correspondence in our own emotional life." Mr. Hearn may be presumed to be speaking for himself in these matters; but he certainly does not correctly represent the thought or the feelings of the circle of life known to me. The feeling of gratitude of Western peoples is as real and as strong as that of the Japanese, though it does not find expression in the worship of the dead. That the Japanese are profuse in their expressions of gratitude to the past and to the powers that be is beyond dispute. It crops out in sermons and public speeches, as well as in the numberless temples to national heroes.

But it is a matter of surprise to note how often there is apparent ingratitude toward living benefactors. Some years ago I heard a conversation between some young men who had enjoyed special opportunities of travel and of study abroad by the liberality of American gentlemen.

It appeared that the young men considered that instead of receiving any special favors, they were conferring them on their benefactors by allowing the latter to help such brilliant youth as they, whose subsequent careers in Japan would preserve to posterity the names of their benefactors. I have had some experience in the line of giving assistance to aspiring students, in certain cases helping them for years; a few have given evidence of real gratitude; but a large proportion have seemed singularly deficient in this grace. It is my impression that relatively few of the scores of students who have received a large proportion of their expenses from the mission, while pursuing their studies, have felt that they were thereby under any special debt of gratitude. An experience that a missionary had with a class to which he had been teaching the Bible in English for about a year is illustrative. At the close of the school year they invited him to a dinner where they made some very pleasant speeches, and bade each other farewell for the summer. The teacher was much gratified with the result of the year's work, feeling naturally that these boys were his firm friends. But the following September when he returned, not only did the class not care to resume their studies with him, but they appeared to desire to have nothing whatever to do with him. On the street many of them would not even recognize him. Other similar cases come to mind, and it should be remembered that missionaries give such instruction freely and always at the request of the recipient. In the case cited the teacher came to the conclusion that the elaborate dinner and fine farewell speeches were considered by the young men as a full discharge of all debts of gratitude and a full compensation for services. This, however, is to be said: the city itself was at that time the seat of a determined antagonism to Christianity and, of course, to the Christian missionary; and this fact may in part, but not wholly, account for the appearance of ingratitude.

The Japanese pride themselves on their gratitude. It is, however, limited in its scope. It is vigorous toward the dead and toward the Emperor, but as a grace of daily life it is not conspicuous.

Few achievements of the Japanese have been more remarkable than the suppression of certain religious phenomena. Any complete statement of the religious characteristics of the Japanese fifty years ago would have included most revolting and immoral practices under the guise of religion. Until suppressed by the government in the early years of Meiji there were in many parts of Japan phallic shrines of considerable popularity, at which, on festivals at least, sexual immorality seemed to be an essential part of the worship. At Uji, not far from Kyoto, the capital of the Empire, for a thousand years and more, and the center of Buddhism, there was a shrine of great repute and popularity. Thither resorted the multitudes for bacchanalian purposes. Under the auspices of the Goddess Hashihime and the God Sumiyoshi, free rein was given to lust. Since the beginning of the new régime such revels have been forbidden and apparently stopped; the phallic symbols themselves are no longer visible, although it is asserted by the keeper of the shrine that they are still there, concealed in the boxes on the pedestals formerly occupied by the symbols. When I visited the place some years since with a fellow missionary we were told that multitudes still come there to pray to the deities; those seeking divorce pray to the female deity, while those seeking a favorable marriage pray to the male deity; on asking as to the proportion of the worshipers, we were told that there are about ten of the former to one of the latter, a significant indication of the unhappiness of many a home. Prof. Edmund Buckley has made a special study of the subject of phallic worship in Japan; in his thesis on the topic he gives a list of thirteen places where these symbols of phallic worship might be seen a few years since. It is significant that at Uji, not a stone's throw from the phallic shrine, is a temple to the God Agata, whose special function is the cure of venereal diseases.

But though phallic worship and its accompanying immorality have been extirpated, immorality in connection with religion is still rampant in certain quarters. Not far from the great temples at Ise, the center of Shintoism and the goal for half a million pilgrims yearly, are large

and prosperous brothels patronized by and existing for the sake of the pilgrims. A still more popular resort for pilgrims is that at Kōpira, whither, as we have seen, some 900,000 come each year; here the best hotels, and presumably the others also, are provided with prostitutes who also serve as waiting girls; on the arrival of a guest he is customarily asked whether or not the use of a prostitute shall be included in his hotel bill. It seems strange, indeed, that the government should take such pains to suppress phallicism, and allow such immorality to go on under the eaves of the greatest national shrines; for these shrines are not private affairs; the government takes possession of the gifts, and pays the regular salaries of the attending priests. It would appear from its success in the extermination of distinctly phallic worship that the government could put a stop to all public prostitution in connection with religion if it cared to do so.

One point of interest in connection with the above facts is that the old religions, however much of force, beauty, and truth we may concede to them, have never made warfare against these obscene forms of worship, nor against the notorious immorality of their devotees. Whatever may be said of the profound philosophy of life involved in phallic worship, for many hundreds of years it has been a source of outrageous immorality. Nevertheless, there has never been any continued and effective effort on the part of the higher types of religion to exterminate the lower. But Japan is not peculiar in this respect. India is even now amazingly immoral in certain forms of her worship.

Another point of interest in this connection is that the change of the nation in its attitude to this form of religion was due largely, probably wholly, to contact with the nations of the West. The uprooting of phallic worship was due, not to a moral reformation, but to a political ambition. It was carried out, not in deference to public opinion, but wholly by government command, though without doubt the nobler opinion of the land approved of the government action. But even this nobler public sentiment was aroused by the Occidental stimulus. The success of the effort must be attributed not a little to the

age-long national custom of submitting absolutely to governmental initiative and command.

Another point of interest is that, in consequence of official pressure, the religious character of a large number of the people seems to have undergone a radical change. The ordinary traveler in Japan would not suspect that phallicism had ever been a prominent feature of Japanese religious life. Only an inquisitive seeker can now find the slightest evidences of this once popular cult. Here we have an apparent change in the character of a people sudden and complete, induced almost wholly by external causes. It shows that the previous characteristic was not so deeply rooted in the physical or spiritual nature of the race as many would have us believe. Can we escape the conclusion that national characteristics are due much more to the circle of dominant ideas and actual practices, than to the inherent race nature?

The way in which phallicism has been suppressed during the present era raises the general question of religious liberty in Japan. In this respect, no less than in many others, a change has taken place so great as to amount to a revolution. During two hundred and fifty years Christianity was strictly forbidden on pain of extreme penalties. In 1872 the edict against Christianity was removed, free preaching was allowed, and for a time it seemed as if the whole nation would become Christian in a few decades; even non-Christians urged that Christianity be made the state religion. What an amazing volte-face! Religious liberty is now guaranteed by the constitution promulgated in 1888. There are those who assert that until Christianity invaded Japan, religious freedom was perfect; persecutions were unknown. This is a mistake. When Buddhism came to Japan, admission was first sought from the authorities, and for a time was refused. When various sects arose, persecutions were severe. We have seen how belief in Christianity was forbidden under pain of death for more than two hundred and fifty years. Under this edict, many thousand Japanese Christians and over two hundred European missionaries were put to death. Yet, on the whole, it may be said that Old Japan enjoyed no little religious

freedom. Indeed, the same man might worship freely at all the shrines and temples in the land. To this day multitudes have never asked themselves whether they are Shinto or Buddhist or Confucianist. The reason for this religious eclecticism was the fractional character of the old religions; they supplemented each other. There was no collision between them in doctrine or in morals. The religious freedom was, therefore, not one of principle but of indifference. As Rome was tolerant of all religions which made no exclusive claims, but fiercely persecuted Christianity, so Japan was tolerant of the two religions that found their way into her territory because they made no claims of exclusiveness. But a religion that demanded the giving up of rivals was feared and forbidden.

New Japan, however, following Anglo-Saxon example, has definitely adopted religious freedom as a principle. First tacitly allowed after the abolition of the edict against Christianity in 1872, it was later publicly guaranteed by the constitution promulgated in 1888. Since that date there has been perfect religious liberty for the individual.

Yet this statement must be carefully guarded. If we may judge from some recent decrees of the Educational Department, it would appear that a large and powerful section of the nation is still ignorant of the real nature and significance of "religious liberty." Under the plea of maintaining secular education, the Educational Department has forbidden informal and private Christian teaching, even in private schools. An adequate statement of the present struggle for complete religious liberty would occupy many pages. We note but one important point.

In the very act of forbidding religious instruction in all schools the Educational Department is virtually establishing a brand-new religion for Japan, a religion based on the Imperial Educational Edict.* The essentially religious nature of the attitude taken by the government toward this Edict has become increasingly clear in late years. In the summer of 1898 one who has had special opportunities of information told me that Mr. Kinoshita, a high official in the Educational Department, suggested

* Cf. chapter xxiii. p. 271.

the ceremonial worship of the Emperor's picture and edict by all the schools, for the reason that he saw the need of cultivating the religious spirit of reverence together with the need for having religious sanctions for the moral law. He felt convinced that a national school system without any such sanctions would be helpless in teaching morality to the pupils. His suggestion was adopted by the Educational Department and has been enforced.

In this attitude toward the religious character of entirely private schools, the government is materially abridging the religious liberty of the people. It is abridging their liberty of carrying belief into action in one important respect, that, namely, of giving a Christian education. It virtually insists on the acceptance of that form of religion which apotheosizes the Emperor, and finds the sanctions for morality in his edict; it excludes from the schools every other form of religion. It should, of course, be said that this attitude is maintained not only toward Christian schools, but theoretically also toward all religious schools. It, however, operates more severely on Christian schools than upon others, because Christians are the only ones who establish high-grade schools for secular education under religious influences.

It is evident, therefore, that in the matter of religious liberty the present attitude of the government is paradoxical, granting in one breath, what, in an important respect, it denies in the next. But throughout all these changes and by means of them we see more and more clearly that even religious tolerance is a matter of the prevailing social ideas and of the dominant social order, rather than of inherent race character. By a single transformation of the social order, Japan passed from a state of perfect religious intolerance to one just the reverse, so far as individual belief was concerned.

Taking a comprehensive review of our study thus far, we see that the forms of Japanese religious life have been determined by the history, rather than by any inherent racial character of the people. Although they had a religion prior to the coming of any external influence,

yet they have proved ready disciples of the religions of other lands. The religion of India, its esoteric, and especially its exoteric forms, has found wide acceptance and long-continued popularity. The higher life of the nation readily took on in later times the religious characteristics of the Chinese, predominantly ethical, it is true, and only slightly religious as to forms of worship. When Roman Catholic Christianity came to Japan in the sixteenth century, it, too, found ready acceptance. It is true that it presented a view of the nature of religion not very different from that held by Buddhism in many respects, yet in others there was a marked divergence, as for instance, in the doctrine of God, of individual sin, and of the nature and method of salvation. The Japanese have thus shown themselves ready assimilators of all these diverse systems of religious expression. Just at present a new presentation of Christianity is being made to the Japanese; some are urging upon them the acceptance of the Roman Catholic form of it; others are urging the Greek; and still others are presenting the Protestant point of view. Each of these groups of missionaries seems to be reaping good harvests. Speaking from my own experience, I may say, that many of the Japanese show as great an appreciation of the essence of the religious life, and find the ideas and ideals, doctrines and ceremonies, of Christianity as fitted to their heart's deepest needs, as do any in the most enlightened parts of Christendom. It is true that the Christian system is so opposed to the Buddhist and Shinto, and in some respects to the Confucian, that it is an exceedingly difficult matter at the beginning to give the Buddhist or Shintoist any idea of what Christianity is. Yet the difficulty arises not from the structure of the brain, nor from the inherent race character, but solely from the diversity of hitherto prevailing systems of thought. When once the passage from the one system of thought to the other has been effected, and the significance of the Christian system and life has been appreciated,—in other words, when the Japanese Buddhist or Shintoist or Confucianist has become a Christian,—he is as truly a Christian and as faithful as is the Englishman or American.

Of course I do not mean to say that he looks at every doctrine and at every ceremony in exactly the same way as an Englishman or American. But I do say that the different point of view is due to the differing social and religious history of the past and the differing surroundings of the present, rather than to inherent racial character or brain structure. The Japanese are human beings before they are Japanese.

For these reasons have I absolute confidence in the final acceptance of Christianity by the Japanese. There is no race characteristic in true Christianity that bars the way. Furthermore, the very growth of the Japanese in recent years, intellectually and in the reorganization of the social order, points to their final acceptance of Christianity and renders it necessary. The old religious forms are not satisfying the religious needs of to-day. And if history proves anything, it proves that only the religion of Jesus can do this permanently. Religion is a matter of humanity, not of nationality. It is for this reason that the world over, religions, though of so many forms, are still so much alike. And it is because the religion of Jesus is pre-eminently the religion of humanity and has not a trace of exclusive nationality about it, that it is the true religion, and is fitted to satisfy the deepest religious wants of the most highly developed as well as the least developed man of any and every race and nation. In proportion as man develops, he grows out of his narrow surroundings, both physical and mental and even moral; he enters a larger and larger world. The religious expressions of his nature in the local provincial and even national stages of his life cannot satisfy his larger potential life. Only the religion of humanity can do this. And this is the religion of Jesus. The white light of religion, no less than that of scientific truth, has no local or national coloring. Perfect truth is universal, eternal, unchangeable. Occidental or Oriental colorations are in reality defects, discolorations.