



Remarks on Japanese Mythology

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From the SOCIETY.—Proceedings of the Royal Society. Vol. XXIV No. 167.

From the SOCIETY.—Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society. Vol. XIV. No. 95.

From the EDITOR.—Nature (to date).

A collection of Flint Implements and Arrow-heads from Ditchley, Oxfordshire, was exhibited by Captain DILLON.

The following paper was read by the author :

REMARKS on JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY. By EDWARD B. TYLOR.

A JAPANESE gentleman, resident in London, Mr. Tatui Baba, has, at my request, translated the opening part of the *Ko-zi-ki*, an important collection of Japanese annals, so far as I know, not accessible in any European language. The latter part of this work, which constitutes its main contents, is of a historical nature ; but the introductory part consists of legends of the Creation and other episodes, in which divinities take part, and it is to these legendary episodes that the following brief remarks relate. I have drawn also from Siebold's "*Nippon*," and Klaproth's introduction to Titsingh's "*Annales des Empereurs du Japon*."

It is evident at the first glance over the collected materials of Japanese tradition that the following three principal elements have contributed to them :—

1. The introduction of Buddhism into Japan has caused the reception of a mass of well-known Buddhist legends, which may be here set aside without further notice, the object of the present paper being to bring into view only what is distinctively Japanese.

2. Though the indigenes of Japan were of a race different, physically and philologically, from the Chinese, these latter have migrated into Japan in large numbers within historical times ; and in fact Japanese culture is largely of Chinese origin, or developed under Chinese influence. As might be expected, this Chinese influence is well-marked in Japanese mythology. Thus, the legend of the Creation starts with an original chaos, in which the female and male elements, the *me* and *o* (Chinese *yn* and *yang*), were not yet separated ; but water, air, and earth were mingled, like the yolk and white of an egg mixed up, till

matter divided itself by the heavy parts sinking to form the earth, while the light parts rose and became the heaven. The Chinese origin of all this is evident: and, again, the Japanese first man, Pan-ko-si, is obviously the Chinese Pwan-ku. These Chinese elements in Japanese tradition may also be set aside.

3. After thus eliminating the two classes of borrowed legends there is left what appears to be a genuine Japanese stratum, containing nature-myths of a very clearly marked character. Thus, in the narrative of the Creation, while the earth is still soft like mud, or like oil floating on the surface of water, there arises out of the mass the flag or rush called *asi* (*Erianthus japonicus*), from which there springs the Land-forming god (Kuni-soko-tatsino-mikoto). After him arise the god and goddess whose functions are the baking of mud-earth and the baking of sand-earth. As the rush or flag in question grows thickly in marshy places round the Japanese coast, we have here stated in mythological language the geological process of the formation and solidifying of new ground. One of the next proceedings is the production of the islands by the god Iza-na-gi, and the goddess Iza-na-mi, who stand on the heaven-bridge and dip a spear in the muddy waters; the drops from the spear form an island (or several). This is followed by the story of the loves of this divine pair, the male and female spirit, who descend on this island and meet near the imperial column with mutual expressions of admiration. But the goddess, by speaking first, gives an evil presage, and the first child born to them is accordingly set adrift in an ark of reeds. This episode of the setting adrift of a divine or heroic infant, which is found in the traditions of so many races, is noticeable as occurring in Japan.

The Sun-goddess, Ama-terasu-oo-kami, the heaven-enlightening Great Spirit, Ten-shu-dai-sin, is the heroine of several episodes, whose purely nature-descriptive character is evident. She is sent up to heaven to govern all things, and with her is her sister, Tsuki-no-kami, the Moon-goddess. Their brother is a god named Susanno-ono-mikoto, whom, even if the Japanese commentators did not recognise him as the God of Winds, we should see to be such by his description; he is gentle and mild, always with tears in his eyes, but if opposed becomes furious, tearing down everything, uprooting the trees and setting fire to the forests. Therefore his parents order him down to Hades, but he is allowed to visit first his sisters the Sun and Moon in heaven. So he rushes up to the sky, to the terror of the Sun-goddess, Ten-shu-dai-sin. When she sows the earth in spring he scatters and tramples the paths, and at harvest-time he drives

the rain and hail into the fields to destroy the crops. His unruly and offensive conduct at last drives his sister to take refuge in a cavern in the sky; closing the opening with a great stone, she thus leaves the world in darkness. Distressed at this, the 800,000 gods devise means to bring her out; they light a great fire outside, and set a goddess to dance ridiculously, with other joyous proceedings, setting birds to sing, and hanging up jewels, peculiarly cut pieces of paper, and a sacred mirror. The Sun-goddess, wondering that music and dancing should still go on, although she has darkened the world, pushes the great stone a little on one side and peeps out; then the god stationed on guard pushes it on one side and pulls the Sun-goddess out, and they stretch a cord across to prevent her from getting in again. Thus she is appeased, and the Wind-god is sent down below. The scene of the Sun hiding herself is now in the legend transferred to earth, and the very cave is shown; but it is evident that we have really here, in a very clear and perfect form, the nature-myth of the Sun driven into hiding by the storm and peeping out from her cloud-cave, when presently the great cloud is rolled away like a rock from a cave's mouth. Following out the same course of ideas, we read of the Wind-god descending to earth and slaying the eight-headed and eight-tailed serpent, who is about to destroy the "lady of the young rice field." The monster is known to the Japanese as being an eight-mouthed river, so the story seems really that of the wind and the flood.

Beside the main themes of these nature-legends, there occur, here and there, special episodes, and mention of ideas and customs of considerable interest. For example, when the god Iza-na-gi goes down to Hades to visit his wife, Iza-na-mi, to induce her to return to him, she replies, "Alas! thou art too late, I have already eaten the food of this world." We have here the interesting conception (which also occurs with great definiteness in New Zealand) that none can return from Hades who has once eaten of the food of the departed spirits. Again, the mention of the Sun-goddess being enticed out of her cave by the mirror to see herself in, and the pieces of cut paper, belongs to a special characteristic of Japanese worship. We have here evidently the mirror and the cut papers (*go-hei*) with which the Shin-to or Kami temples of Japan are furnished. (Mr. Franks mentions to me the interesting fact that these *go-hei* are used by the Ainos in their festivals, a point which bears on the problem of the relation of the Ainos to the original Japanese.)

It is obvious from the samples I have given that Japanese mythology, when cleared of Buddhist and Chinese elements,

contains nature-legend of value, and also episodes which may help to throw light on other branches of mythology and religion. I have intentionally avoided any full going into the subject, which can only be done by collating the whole set of documents with the aid of native Japanese scholars.

DISCUSSION.

MR. TATUI BABA—Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen, I am sorry to say that I cannot speak the English language so as to express myself clearly and distinctly. However, being asked so kindly by you, sir, I hope I may be permitted to make a remark or two on the subject. I have to express my best thanks to Mr. E. B. Tylor for bringing this subject before this learned society in a very interesting and able manner. As to the translation which I did, I must say it is a very imperfect one. I had great difficulty in translating that book, not only because I have an insufficient knowledge of the English language, but also because there are some commentators who differ very much as to the meaning of the words mentioned in "Roziki." Besides, the eight-necked serpent called Oroti, and killed by Susanō, is said to be a man who came from the place of that name and not a monster, for that heavenly bridge mentioned in the book is said to be a ship. But I translated it as literally as possible. Till recently there were castes in Japan. They were abolished three years ago; but while they existed the people of the higher caste eat the food cooked in their own fire, because they said they must not "mix fire," and if they did so they would belong to the lower caste. In Japan these castes had nothing to do with religion, and there was no such thing as excommunication. Only if any one did "mix fire" he was looked on as not respectable, and would be disliked but not excommunicated. There are many customs which may be traced in the same way.

MR. MONCURE CONWAY said—I have been exceedingly interested in the important statements made by Mr. Tylor, and by my friend Mr. Tatui Baba. It has seemed to me in studying Japanese religion that there are various indications of some early intercourse with the Aryan races. It is not only in the resemblance of the idea of the food of the under world preventing, if eaten, the return to life, to the story of Proserpine eating the fatal pomegranate seed that we see this. One of the Vedic descriptions of Brahma speaks of the sun and moon as his two eyes, and there is a very early Japanese myth which relates that the sun and moon were left when a deity bathed his eyes in the primal sea. But I attach still more importance to the fine hero and serpent myth of that country, told of the prince after whom Japan was named. The monster had eight heads instead of the hydra's seven, but in every other respect was a veritable hydra, or water snake. The kami or mirror is mysterious; it is said by Japanese scholars and rationalists to be the symbol of self-examination. Each worshipper on entering the temple immediately repairs to it as his confessional, and after-

wards at once passes for meditation and devotion to the curious pyramid-shaped figure, made of bits of paper. I believe these pieces of paper are diamond-shaped, and I should like very much to hear from Mr. Tylor or Mr. Baba more concerning their significance.

Mr. LEWIS said that it was a common belief that anyone visiting the fairies would be unable to return to ordinary human life if he partook of any of the fairy food, which was generally horseflesh or offal, though presenting by enchantment a beautiful appearance. Many details of this kind had been collected by Sir Walter Scott and embodied in the notes to his novels and poems. In "Red-gauntlet" he went even nearer to the Japanese notion, as he conducted one of his characters to the lower regions, where he was warned by a deceased friend to "to tak naething frae onybody here, neither meat, drink, or siller, except just the receipt that is your ain." Of course this was a modern tale, but Sir Walter was more likely to have got the notion from a North British than from a Japanese or New Zealand source. In reference to Mr. Charlesworth's remarks, he would say that they must not conclude that because an occurrence was mentioned in a mythical legend no occurrence of the kind could be historical. For instance, Mr. Tylor had found in Japanese mythology an instance of an infant being turned adrift in an ark of reeds; but not to mention Moses, one of the ancient Assyrian kings stated in an inscription that he himself had been so treated. He was not, however, sure that this statement had been accepted by Assyriologists.

Mr. HYDE CLARKE said that any similarities between Japanese and other mythologies must be sought, not in a communication in later times to or from Japan, but to the participation in common of prehistoric myths in descent. In the Japanese language there were many words which could be found in Africa, attesting the share of the Japanese in the general inheritance. The origin of mythology was to be found in early language, where several words were appropriated to one idea and several ideas to one word. In time selections took place, and afterwards the original meaning or application of the words was forgotten and new interpretations were placed on them.

Mr. BOUVERIE PUSEY, the PRESIDENT, and others took part in the discussion, and

Mr. TYLOR, in reply, said that the episode of the hero being set adrift was by no means necessarily mythic, as the custom of so exposing children was known to many countries. At the same time, from its picturesque character, it is often incorporated in mythic legends. With regard to ideas as to mortals eating the food of the departed souls not being allowed to return, he admitted the similarity of the superstition mentioned as to fairies' food and as to the pomegranate seeds eaten by Proserpine, but considered the New Zealand myth to correspond most exactly to the Japanese

notion. As to the meaning of the mirror in Japanese temples, it was true that the Buddhists considered the sacred mirror to symbolise self-examination, &c., but in Japan there is no doubt that its original meaning was that of an image of the sun, much as a polished gold disc was set up in the ancient Sun temple of Cuzco in Peru.

The following paper was read by the author :

On the term "RELIGION" as used in ANTHROPOLOGY. By W. L. DISTANT.

IN the interest of anthropology, it will, sooner or later, become necessary to form a synonymic catalogue of anthropological facts; in other words, to discriminate among the many physical and psychical phenomena recorded by actual observers and others as appertaining to primitive and little known races and varieties of mankind. Not but what we must own that the desire for exactitude is in general clear and unmistakable in the descriptions received from different observers of the same people, however divergent as to particular points these statements may be found. It however becomes necessary, before recording a reputed peculiarity either in belief, manners, customs, or physical conformity, over and above such as is vouched for by data, commensurate with the usual requirements of scientific research, to estimate the method of inquiry made, and the qualifications possessed by the observer, to arrive at a successful result. Thus we require to know the opportunity and time available for observation, the method pursued, the tact, experience, and, more particularly, the bias in the mind of the inquiring observer. The reticence of most savages (to use an inappropriate word for want of a better one) to impart information as to their beliefs and customs, and the extreme difficulty of questioning them on the same, either in a manner not calculated to give offence, or sufficiently clear to elicit the truth, often so formidable as to overcome the efforts of a careful and painstaking inquirer; whilst by duplicity, or a misunderstanding of terms completely unreliable or illusory, information is frequently acquired. Thus we have heard of the same people as possessing a religion and as having none whatever, of being addicted to cannibalism and as never practising it, of being ferocious and bloodthirsty and as harmless and friendly, except under provocation. And as anthropology is a popular science, and these statements are quoted by essayists and writers on social and religious subjects, sometimes to prove one thing and sometimes another, the need becomes greater that a careful analysis should be made similar to that selection