



Japanese Myth

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15th, 1899.

THE PRESIDENT (Mr. E. S. Hartland) in the Chair.

The minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed.

The election of Mr. Hoey Dignem and Miss K. Schlessinger was announced.

The resignation of Mr. T. K. Hurlburt was also announced.

The President then read a paper by Mr. W. G. Aston, entitled "Japanese Myth," which was followed by a discussion, in which Mr. Crooke and the President took part.

Dr. Gaster then read a paper entitled "Two Thousand Years of the Charm against the Child-Stealing Witch."

Votes of thanks for these papers were passed.

JAPANESE MYTH.

BY W. G. ASTON, C.M.G.

I.

THE SACRED BOOKS OF JAPAN.

IN Japan, as elsewhere, the respective domains of myth, legend, and history merge into one another in such a way that it is often hard to say where one ends and another begins. The ancient annals give us continuous narratives in which all three are treated alike. It is generally agreed, however, that the mythical period comes to an end with the accession to the throne of Jimmu Tennō, the first Mikado, an event to which the date of B.C. 660 is usually assigned. Modern Japanese historians make history to begin from this point; but in reality legend predominates for many hundreds

of years longer, and it is not until the fifth century of our era that we have anything approaching to a genuine historical record.

Whatever grains of truth may be contained in the narrative from Jimmu Tennō onwards, there can be no question that all that precedes is pure myth. It is to this early period, known as the *kami-yo* or age of the gods, that I propose to confine myself in the present paper. The events which are stated to belong to it form the basis of the Shinto (*i.e.* Way of the Gods) religion.

It may be questioned whether the ancient myths of Japan are, in the strict sense of the word, "folklore." Their birthplace and home seems to have been the Court of the Mikado rather than the nation at large, and their original depositories were doubtless the two hereditary corporations termed *Nakatomi* and *Imbe*, which were attached to this court for the vicarious performance of the Mikado's sacerdotal functions. We hear later of a *Kataribe* or "corporation of reciters," whose business it was to recite "ancient words" before the Mikado on certain solemn state occasions, such as the beginning of a new reign. We unfortunately know very little of this body of functionaries, but it can hardly be doubted that their recitals helped to furnish material for the written mythical and historical narratives which have come down to us.

The most important of these are two works entitled the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*. The *Kojiki* or "Records of Ancient Matters" was completed in A.D. 712. It is said to have been taken down from the lips of one Hiyeda no Are, possibly one of the corporation of reciters just mentioned, who could "repeat with his mouth whatever was placed before his eyes, and record in his heart whatever struck his ears." The *Kojiki* has been literally and faithfully translated by Mr. B. H. Chamberlain in the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Supplement to vol. x., 1882.

The mythical narrative of the *Nihongi* or "Chronicles of Japan" (A.D. 720) is not quite so full as that of the *Kojiki*, and it has the disadvantage of being composed in the Chinese language. But it has one feature of great interest. The author, or some nearly contemporary writer, has added to the original text a number of variants of the current myths, thus enabling us to correct any impression of uniformity or consistency which might be left by the perusal of the *Kojiki* or *Nihongi* alone. These addenda show that there was then in existence a large body of frequently irreconcilable mythical material, which these works are attempts to harmonise. A translation of the *Nihongi* by the present writer forms Supplement I. of the *Transactions of the Japan Society* (1896).

A third source of information respecting the mythical lore of Japan is the *Kiujiki*. A work with this name was compiled A.D. 620, *i.e.* one hundred years before the *Nihongi*, but the book now known by that title has been condemned as a forgery by native critics. Their arguments, however, are not quite convincing. The *Kiujiki* is in any case a very old book, and there can be no harm in accepting it as of equal authority with the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*. Unlike them, the *Kiujiki* makes no attempt to be consistent. It is a mere jumble of mythical material, distinct and conflicting versions of the same narrative being often dovetailed into one another in the most clumsy fashion. It has not been translated.

The *Norito*, or liturgies of the Shinto religion, contain an element of mythical narrative. They were first reduced to writing early in the tenth century, but some of them must be in substance several hundreds of years older. A few of these prayers have been translated by Sir E. Satow for the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, another is appended to Dr. Florenz's translation of the *Nihongi* now in course of publication, and the most famous of all, *viz.* the Ôharai or "Great Purification" may be found in the

present writer's *History of Japanese Literature*, recently published by Mr. Heinemann.

The *Idzumo Fudoki* (A.D. 733) contains some mythical passages, and the *Kogoshiui* adds a few items to the information given in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*. Neither of these works has been translated.

Roughly speaking, we find in the authorities above enumerated the myths of Japan as they were current at the beginning of the eighth century of our era. They must naturally contain a far older element. Sun-worship, which is the central feature of Shinto, probably dates back to a time when the Japanese had not yet left their continental home. This is a widespread cult among Tartar tribes.

The condition of material civilisation to which Shinto belongs may be gathered from the mention of bridges, iron, copper, mirrors, bellows for smelting metal, weaving, silk-culture, brewing, and various agricultural operations. Indications of the degree of mental culture are afforded by the facts that Chinese learning, with the art of writing, had reached Japan early in the fifth century, and Buddhism towards the middle of the sixth.

II.

THE MYTHICAL NARRATIVE.

I shall now endeavour to give an outline of the narrative contained in these ancient records. In doing so, I shall not adhere to any one version of the story, but shall select those incidents which have an interest and significance for students of myth.

Both the *Nihongi* and the *Kinjiki* begin with a passage which is repudiated by the modern school of Shinto theologians, as in reality belonging to the materialistic philosophy of China. It runs as follows:—

“Of old, Heaven and Earth were not yet separated, and

the *In* and *Yō*¹ not yet divided. They formed a chaotic mass like an egg which was of obscurely defined limits and contained germs. The purer and clearer part was thinly diffused and formed heaven, while the heavier and grosser element settled down and became earth. The finer element easily became a united body, but the consolidation of the heavy and gross element was accomplished with difficulty. Heaven was therefore formed first, and Earth established subsequently. Thereafter divine beings were produced between them."

Next after this rationalistic essay we find the names, and little more, of a number of deities, intended apparently to provide a genealogy for Izanagi and Izanami, the twin creator-deities of Japanese myth. There is much confusion here among the different authorities, both in respect to the names of these deities and to the order of their birth. Some are never heard of again, and look like mere inventions of an individual fancy, but others were really worshipped in later times. Of their attributes and functions little or nothing is known beyond what may be gathered from their names. There is the "Land-eternal-stand-deity" (according to the *Nihongi*, the first of all the gods), the "Rich-formation-plain-deity," "Sweet-reed-shoot-prince-elder-deity" (described as resembling a reed-shoot, and produced from the earth when it was young and floated about like oil floating on water), the "Heaven-august-centre-master-deity" (identified by Hirata with the Polar Star), the "High-august-growth-deity," the "Mud-earth-deity," the "Face-perfect-deity," the "Awful deity," the "Eighty-myrriad-spirit-deity" the "Celestial-mirror-deity," &c. Most of these are nature deities, and some are evidently the gods of an agricultural community.

Japanese myth really begins with Izanagi and Izanami, whom the various accounts agree in describing as the seventh generation of deities.

¹ The Negative and Positive Principles of Chinese Philosophy.

At the behest of the other gods these two stood on the floating bridge of heaven, and thrusting down the jewel-spear of heaven groped about with it in the chaos below. When it was drawn up again some brine dripped down, and, coagulating, formed an island which received the name of Onogoro-shima, or the "Self-coagulating island." The divine pair descended, and erected there an eight-fathom house of which the jewel-spear was made the central pillar. Then, the male deity turning by the left and the female deity turning by the right, they went round this central pillar until they met at the other side. The female deity thereupon spoke first and exclaimed: "How delightful! a lovely youth!" The male deity was displeased at the woman for having spoken first, so they went round the pillar a second time, and having met anew, the male deity spoke first and said: "How delightful! a lovely maiden!" Thereupon they became united as husband and wife. Another account says that in consequence of the ill-luck produced by the female deity having been the first to speak, the child which was born to them was a leech, which they placed in a reed-boat and sent adrift.

The accepted etymology of the names Izanagi and Izanami derives them from a verb *isanau*, to invite. The terminations *gi* and *mi* mean respectively male deity and female deity. Hence the descriptive appellations "Male who invites" and "Female who invites," used by Mr. Chamberlain in his translation of the *Kojiki*. I have a strong suspicion that Iza is really the name of a place; but the ordinary derivation has an obvious pertinence, and it was probably present to the minds of the myth-makers.

The jewel-spear of Heaven (which reminds us of Maui's enchanted hook) is with some probability identified by native writers with the lingam. This is not the only evidence of the existence of phallic worship in ancient Japan. In modern times this cult has been notoriously prevalent there.

The phrase used in this passage of the original for "two

deities" means literally "two pillars." Historical Shinto has no idols; but is it not possible to trace in this expression a survival from a time when the gods of Japan were wooden posts, hewn at the top into the rude semblance of a human countenance, such as may be seen in many savage countries at the present day, and even in Corea, close to Japan, and nearly allied in race?

Much might be said of the rite of circumambulating the central pillar of the house, whether from left to right (following the sun) or in the contrary direction. That some primitive marriage ceremony is here adumbrated, there can, I think, be little doubt. The erection of a house by Izanagi and Izanami is not simply for practical reasons. It has in reality a ceremonial object. In ancient Japan it was the custom to provide a special nuptial hut, in order to avoid the ritual contamination of the dwelling-house by the consummation of a marriage within it. Child-birth and the presence of a dead body were attended with similar pollution, and special buildings were accordingly erected on these occasions also.

The reed-boat in which the leech-child was sent adrift, recalls the Accadian Sargon's ark of rushes, the casting away of the infant Moses, and other old-world stories.

Izanagi and Izanami then proceeded to procreate the various islands of Japan, the deity of trees, the deity of herbs and grasses, the Sun-Goddess, the Moon-God, the God Susa no wo, the Earth-Goddess, the Water-Goddess, the Wind-Gods, the Food-Goddess, the Fire-God, and others. In giving birth to the last-named deity, Izanami was injured so that she died. Izanagi, in his rage and grief, drew his sword and cut the new-born Fire-God into pieces, a number of other deities being generated by his doing so.

On her death, Izanami went to the land of Yomi or Hades. She was followed thither by her husband. But he was too late to bring her back, as she had already eaten of the cooking furnaces of Yomi. She forbade him to look at her, but

he disregarded her prayer. Breaking off the end-tooth of the comb which he had in his hair, he made of it a torch, and looked in where his wife was lying. Her body was already putrid and swarmed with maggots, and the "Eight Thunders" had been generated in various parts of it. Izanami was enraged at her husband for exposing her nakedness, and sent the "Eight Thunders" and the "Ugly Females" of Yomi to attack him. Izanagi took to flight and used various expedients to delay his pursuers. He first flung down his head dress. It became changed to grapes, which the "Ugly Females" stopped to gather and eat. Then he threw down his comb. It turned into bamboo-shoots, which the "Ugly Females" pulled up and ate before continuing their pursuit. Izanami herself overtook him at the "Even Pass of Yomi," where the formula of divorce was pronounced by Izanagi, and their final parting took place.

The usual etymology of *Yomi* connects it with *Yo* or *Yoru*, night. But this word has a suspicious resemblance to *Yama*, the name of the Indian God of the lower world. Mr. Andrew Lang has noted the fact that there are points of resemblance between the Japanese story and the Indian myth. In both we are told of the fatal consequences of tasting the food of the lower regions so well known to mythologists. It will be remembered that Proserpine's return to the upper world became impossible when once

*Puniceum curvâ decerpserat arbore pomum
Sumptaque pallenti septem de cortice grana
Presserat ore suo.*

On returning from Yomi, Izanagi's first care was to bathe in the sea, in order to purify himself from the pollutions which he had contracted by his visit to the Land of the Dead. A number of deities were generated by this process, among whom were the Gods of Good- and Ill-luck, and certain ocean deities held to be the ancestors of some

families of local chieftains, and worshipped by them. The Sun-Goddess was born from the washing of his left eye, and the Moon-God from that of his right, while a third deity named Susa no wo was generated from the washing of his nose. To the Sun-Goddess Izanagi gave charge of the "Plain of High-Heaven," and to the Moon-God was allotted the realm of Night. Susa no wo was at first appointed to rule the sea, but he preferred to rejoin his deceased mother Izanami, and was therefore made the Lord of Ne-no-kuni, *i.e.* the Root or Nether Country, another name for the Land of Yomi.

Izanagi's ablutions represent a widespread rite. They remind us of Juno's lustration by Iris after a visit to Hades, and of Dante's immersion in Lethe when he had completed his ascent through Purgatory and was preparing for admission to the circles of Paradise. They are clearly the mythical counterpart of a custom described by Chinese travellers to Japan centuries before the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* were written. It was then, we are informed, the practice, when the funeral was over, for the whole family of the deceased to go into the water and wash.

From this and other passages it would appear that ancestor-worship in ancient Japan was a very different institution from the Chinese form of this cult. In China its principal objects were, and are, the deceased parents of the worshipper. But in ancient Japan the ancestral deity was a remote mythical personage, who to all appearance had never been a human being, but a divinity of the mythical world to whom his worshippers and so-called descendants were no more related than the Heracleidae to Hercules, the Romans to Venus, or, it may be added, the Mikados to the Sun. These mythical ancestors are not eponymous.

The circumstance that the Sun-Goddess was produced from the left and the Moon-God from the right eye of Izanagi is suggestive of the influence of China, where the left takes precedence of the right. The Chinese myth of

P'anku states: "P'anku came into being in the great waste; his beginning is unknown. In dying he gave birth to the material universe. His breath was transmuted into the wind and clouds, his voice into thunder, his left eye into the sun, and his right eye into the moon." Hirata, a Shinto theologian of the nineteenth century, endeavours to combat the obvious inference from this comparison by pointing out that the sun is masculine in China and feminine in Japan. How little weight is due to this objection appears from the fact that two so nearly allied nations as the English and the Germans differ in the sex which they attribute to the sun, as do also closely-related tribes of Australian aborigines and Ainus of Yezo. And does not Shakespeare himself make the sun both masculine and feminine in the same sentence when he says: "The blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta?"¹

The ascription of the female sex to the most prominent among the Shinto Gods is not owing merely to caprice. Myth-makers have often more substantial reasons for their fancies than might be supposed. In the present case evidence is not wanting to show that women played a very important part in the real world of ancient Japan, as well as in that of imagination. Women rulers were at this time a familiar phenomenon. Not only Japanese but Chinese history gives us glimpses of a female Mikado who lived about A.D. 200, and whose commanding ability and strong character have not been wholly obscured by the mists of legend. Women chieftains are frequently mentioned. Indeed the Chinese seem to have thought that feminine government was the rule, for their historians frequently refer to Japan as the "Queen-country." In more historical times several of the Mikados were women, and at a still later

¹ The Australian coloured gentleman quoted in Mr. Andrew Lang's *Custom and Myth* was apparently fresh from a perusal of this passage when he compared the sun to "a woman of indifferent character in a coat of red kangaroo skins."

period the women of Japan gave proof of hereditary ability by the production of works which are recognised to this day as the masterpieces of the best age of Japanese literature.

The birth of the Sun-Goddess and the Moon-God is, it will be observed, differently accounted for in the various versions of the myth. Such inconsistencies trouble the myth-makers not a whit.

Izanagi's career having come to an end, he built himself an abode of gloom in the Island of Awaji, where he dwelt in silence and concealment. Another account says that he ascended to Heaven, where he dwelt in the smaller palace of the Sun. It will be observed that Izanagi was not immortal, and that he did not go to Yomi when he died.

The mythical narrative now turns to the doings of the Sun-Goddess and her brother Susa no wo.

Susa no wo, before proceeding to take up his charge as Ruler of the Nether Region, ascended to Heaven to take leave of his elder sister, the Sun-Goddess. By reason of the fierceness of his divine nature, there was a commotion in the sea, and the hills and mountains groaned aloud as he passed upwards. The Sun-Goddess, in alarm, arrayed herself in manly garb, and confronted her brother armed with sword and bow and arrows. The pair stood face to face on opposite sides of the River of Heaven.¹ Susa no wo then assured his sister of the purity of his intentions, and proposed to her that they should each produce children by biting off and crunching parts of the jewels and swords which they wore and blowing away the fragments. Eight children born in this way were worshipped in after-times as the Hachōji or eight princely children.

Susa no wo's subsequent proceedings were very rude and unseemly. He broke down the divisions between the rice-fields belonging to his sister, sowed them over again, let loose in them the piebald colt of Heaven, and committed

¹ The Milky Way.

nuisances in the hall where she was celebrating the solemn festival of first-fruits. The climax to his misdeeds was to flay a piebald colt of Heaven and to fling it into the sacred weaving-hall—where the Sun-Goddess was engaged in weaving the garments of the deities. She was so deeply indignant at this last insult that she entered the Rock-cave of Heaven and left the world to darkness.

Native etymologists derive the name Susa no wo from a verb *susamu*, to be eager, impetuous. Hence the "Impetuous Male" of English translators. I am persuaded, however, that this is only a folk's etymology (which may have suggested some features of the myth) and that the real meaning is the "Male of Susa," Susa being a town in the province of Idzumo, a prehistoric centre of Shinto worship. The name Idzumo, if I am not mistaken, means "sacred quarter."

It would be a mistake to pass over Susa no wo's mischievous and unseemly pranks with a smile as naive inventions of some early writer's fancy. They have a profound significance, and indeed form a tolerably comprehensive selection from the so-called "celestial offences" enumerated in the Great Purification Liturgy, a solemn state ceremonial by which the nation was purged of its sins twice a year. To complete the account of the rudimentary moral code of this period, I may add the earthly offences, viz. :—the cutting of living bodies, the cutting of dead bodies, leprosy, incest (within very narrow limits of relationship) calamities from creeping things, from the high gods, and from high birds, killing of cattle, and bewitchment.

Susa no wo's re-sowing of his sister's rice-fields reminds us of the wild-oats sown by Loki, the mischief-maker of Scandinavian myth.

The retirement of the Sun-Goddess to the Rock-cave of Heaven produced great consternation among the heavenly deities. They met on the dry bed of the River of Heaven and took counsel how they should entice her from her

seclusion. By the advice of Omoi-kane no Mikoto (the Thought-combiner or Counsellor-deity) the long-singing birds of the Eternal Land (cocks) were made to utter their prolonged cry before the door of the cave. Ame no Koyane no Mikoto, ancestor of the Nakatomi (a priestly tribe) and Futo-dama no Mikoto, ancestor of the Imbe, dug up by the roots a five-hundred branched true *Sakaki* tree of Heaven, and hung on its higher branches strings of jewels, on its middle branches a mirror, and on its lower branches pieces of cloth. Then they recited their liturgy in her honour. Moreover, Ame no Uzume (the Dread Female of Heaven) arrayed herself in a fantastic manner and standing on a tub which resounded when she stamped upon it, performed a (not very decent) mimic dance and gave forth an inspired utterance. The Sun-Goddess wondered how Ame no Uzume and the other gods could be so jolly while the world was wrapped in complete darkness, and peeped out from the half-opened door of the cave. She was at once seized by Ta-jikara no wo (Male of Great Strength) and prevented by main force from re-entering, to the great joy of all the deities.

Susa no wo was then tried by a council of Gods, who mulcted him in a fine of a thousand tables of purification-offerings. They also pulled out the nails of his fingers and toes, and banished him to the land of Yomi. Finally Ame no Kogane, the ancestor of the Nakatomi, recited his Ōharai or great purification liturgy.

The above episode is the pith and kernel of the mythical lore of Japan. Belonging to the class of night and day myths, it is ostensibly an attempt to trace the origin of some of the principal ceremonies of the Shinto religion as they were practised in the Mikado's court at the time. The Nakatomi long held office as the representatives of the Mikado in his priestly capacity, and in some versions of the narrative the Sun-Goddess is surrounded by other officials, such as mirror-makers, jewel-makers, &c., obviously

borrowed from the actual functionaries of the court. By a curious coincidence, the Smith-God attached to her train, like the Cyclops of Greek myth, has but one eye.

The duties of the Imbe were in *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* times confined to assisting the Nakatomi in the performance of the Shinto religious services. But the following notice by a Chinese traveller gives us a glimpse of them many centuries before. It shows them in their true character, and explains the name Imbe, which means literally "abstainer." "They (the Japanese) appoint a man whom they call an 'abstainer.' He is not allowed to comb his hair, to wash, to eat flesh, or to approach women. When they are fortunate, they make him presents, but if they are ill, or meet with disaster, they set it down to the abstainer's failure to keep his vows, and unite to put him to death." Almost every word of this description is applicable to the medicine-men of the North American Indians at the present day.

Ame no Uzume, the Dread Female of Heaven, who danced and gave forth an inspired utterance before the Rock-cave where the Sun-Goddess was hidden, is also a recognisable personage with whom Mme. Blavatsky might have claimed relationship. She was the ancestor of the Sarume (monkey-women) or female mimes attached to the Mikado's court, whose performances were the origin of the pantomimic religious dances still kept up in Japan and known as Kagura, while her divinely inspired utterance is the prototype of the revelations of the Miko, or Shinto priestesses.

One version of the story gives us the actual words used by Uzume on this occasion, viz.: *Hi, fu, mi, yo, itsu, mu, nana, ya, kokono, tari*. A Japanese baby knows that these are simply the numerals from one to ten. But they have given much trouble to later Shintoists, who have endeavoured to read into them a deep mythical signification. Another account states that the repetition of these words, combined

with the shaking of certain talismans, will drive away all manner of diseases and prolong life. Students of folklore will not be surprised to find such virtues attributed to the numerals.

Several other examples are given in the *Nihongi* of inspired messages from the gods. Chiuai Tennō was in this way urged to undertake the conquest of Corea. At the present time these female purveyors of X-material have fallen upon evil days. The Miko are now vagabonds of indifferent character, who for a trifling consideration will undertake to deliver messages from deceased relatives, and who, with their art, are held in the lowest estimation by all sensible people.¹

The punishments inflicted on Susa no wo are plainly suggested by the Japanese criminal code of the day. This is not the only passage from which we may infer that fines were originally meant to supply the means of making expiatory sacrifices to the gods.

After his banishment Susa no wo visited Corea, but not finding that country to his liking, returned to Japan, and went to the province of Idzumo. Here he slew the eight-headed serpent of Koshi (having first made him drunk) and delivered his intended victim, a young maiden who subsequently became his wife. On the occasion of his marriage to her, Susa no wo composed the following verses :

Many clouds arise,
On all sides a manifold fence :
To receive within it the spouses,
They form a manifold fence.
Ah ! that manifold fence !

Eventually he entered the Nether Land.

It cannot be necessary to point out the resemblance of this story to that of Perseus and Andromeda, of which there are so many variants current throughout the world.

¹ For some account of occult practices in Japan, see Mr. Percival Lowell's *Occult Japan*.

In the poem ascribed to Susa no wo (but which really belongs to the sixth or seventh century) we again meet with the nuptial hut already referred to in the myth of Izanagi and Izanami.

It will be observed that the ill-natured and mischievous character ascribed to Susa no wo is not sustained in this part of the story. He also appears to advantage in a legend which represents him as the giver of useful trees of all kinds, especially fruit-trees, to Japan. But his violent nature appears again in a legend which speaks of him as the slayer of the Goddess of Food, who had disgusted him by producing all manner of dainty things from her mouth, nose, and other parts of her body, for his entertainment. Another version of this incident makes the Moon-God the culprit, and gives it as the reason of his alienation from the Sun-Goddess, not the only attempt of myth-makers to account for the obvious aloofness maintained by these two deities.

Susa no wo had 181 children. One of these was Oho-namuchi (great-name-possessor) also called Oho-kuni-nushi (great-country-master). He dwelt in Idzumo, and with the aid of a guardian spirit reduced to order this part of Japan. Associated with him was the dwarf-deity Sukuna-bikona, who came floating over the sea in a tiny boat clothed in bird-skins. To these two is attributed the origin of the art of medicine and of charms against the powers of evil.

There is probably some reflection of real history in this passage. It is hardly doubtful that Idzumo was one of the earliest, if not quite the earliest, centre of civilisation and religion in Japan, while its position on the coast over-against Corea is significant, in view of the legends which connect Susa no wo with that country. The incident of Sukuna-bikona's arrival by sea clothed in bird-skins seems to indicate an acquaintance with some northern tribes who, like the Kurile islanders at this day, wore garments of this material.

The dynasty of Susa no wo was not recognised by the Gods of Heaven, who sent down several other deities to

subdue and govern the world, *i.e.* Japan. Ultimately Ohonamuchi and his son Koto-shiro-nushi (thing-know-master, or governor), agreed to yield the government to Hoho no ninigi, a grandchild of the Sun-Goddess, who accordingly descended to earth on a mountain in the western island of Kiushiu. He was attended by the ancestors of the five *Be*, or hereditary government corporations, *viz.*: the Nakatomi, the Imbe, the Sarume, the mirror-makers *be*, and the jewellers *be*, to which some accounts add several others.

Hoho no ninigi took to wife the daughter of a deity whom he found there. When the time came for her delivery, she shut herself up in a doorless shed, which, on the birth of her three children, she set fire to, with the object of clearing herself from certain suspicions which her husband had entertained of her fidelity. "If," said she, "the children are really the offspring of the Heavenly Grandchild, the fire cannot harm them." The children and their mother came forth unhurt, and were thereupon recognised by Hoho no ninigi as his true offspring and wife.

The "doorless shed" here mentioned, is a "parturition-house." It was the custom in ancient Japan, for women, when the time drew near for their delivery, to retire to a shed specially constructed to receive them, so that contamination to the dwelling-house might be avoided. This was still the practice in the island of Hachi-jō in 1878.

The burning of the parturition-house represents the ordeal by fire, which, with the ordeal by boiling water or mud, is well-known in Japan.

The story concerns itself no further with the eldest of these three children. Of the others, the senior, named Ho no Susori, became a fisherman, and the younger, Hohodemi, a hunter.

Ho no Susori once proposed to his brother to exchange their respective callings. Hohodemi accordingly gave over to his elder brother his bow and arrows, and received a fish-hook in return. But neither of them profited by the

exchange; so Ho no Susori gave back to his brother the bow and arrows, and demanded from him the fish-hook. Hohodemi, however, had in the meantime lost it in the sea. He took his sword and forged from it a number of new fish-hooks, which he piled up in a winnowing tray and offered to his brother by way of compensation. But the latter would have none but his own, and demanded it so vehemently of Hohodemi as to grieve him bitterly. Hohodemi went down to the sea-shore and stood there lamenting, when there appeared to him the Old Man of the Sea, by whose advice he descended into the sea-depths to the abode of the God of the Sea, a stately palace with lofty towers and battlements. Before the gate there was a well, and over the well grew a thick-branching cassia-tree, into which Hohodemi climbed. The Sea-God's daughter, Toyo-tamahime (rich-jewel-maiden), then came out from the palace to draw water. She saw Hohodemi's face reflected in the well, and, returning within, reported to her father that she had seen a beautiful youth in the tree which grew by the well. Hohodemi was courteously received by the Sea-God, Toyo-tamahiko (rich-jewel-prince), who, when he heard his errand, summoned before him all the fishes of the sea and made inquiry of them for the lost fish hook, which was eventually discovered in the mouth of the Tai. Toyo-tamahiko delivered it to Hohodemi, telling him when he gave it back to his brother to say "a hook of poverty, a hook of ruin, a hook of downfall," to spit twice, and to hand it over with averted face.

Hohodemi married the Sea-God's daughter, Toyo-tamahime, and remained with her for three years. He then became home-sick and returned to the upper world. On the beach where he came to land, he built for his wife, who was soon to follow, a parturition-house which he thatched with cormorant's feathers. The roofing was still unfinished when she arrived, riding on a great tortoise. She went straight into the hut, begging her husband not to look at

her. But Hohodemi's curiosity was too strong for him. He peeped in, and behold! his wife had become changed into a great sea-monster (or dragon), eight fathoms long. Deeply indignant at the disgrace put upon her, Toyo-tamahime returned hastily to her father's palace, abandoning her new-born child to the care of her sister, and barring behind her the sea-path in such a way that from that day to this all communication between the realms of land and sea has been cut off.

The child thus born was the father of Jimmu Tennō, the first human sovereign of Japan.

Hohodemi's troubles with his elder brother were renewed on his arrival home. He was obliged to use against him two talismans given him by his father-in-law. One of these had the virtue of making the tide flow and submerge Ho no Susori and thus compel him to sue for mercy. (Another account says that Hohodemi whistled and thereby raised the wind and the sea). Then by a second talisman the tide was made to recede, and Ho no Susori's life was spared. He yielded complete submission to his younger brother, and promised that he and his descendants to all generations would serve Hohodemi and his successors as mimes and bondservants. The *Nihongi* adds that in that day it was still customary for the Hayato (or Imperial guards) who were descended from Ho no Susori to perform a mimic dance before the Mikados, the descendants and successors of Hohodemi, in which the drowning struggles of their ancestor were represented.

The Castle-gate and the tree before it, at the bottom of which is a well which serves as a mirror, form a combination not unknown to European folklore.¹ The student will also note the partiality evinced for the younger of two brothers,

¹ "Then the giant's daughter came to the palace where Nicht, Nought, Nothing was, and she went up into a tree to watch for him. The gardener's daughter going to draw water in the well saw the shadow." Mr. Andrew Lang's *Custom and Myth*, p. 91.

the virtue of spitting and of set forms of speech to bring good or ill luck, and of whistling to raise the wind.

There are several features in this story which betray a recent origin and foreign influences. A comparatively advanced civilisation is indicated by the sword and fish-hooks forged of iron (the Homeric fish-hook was of horn); and the institution of the Hayato as Imperial Guards belongs to a period not very long antecedent to the date of the *Nihongi* and *Kojiki*. The palace of the sea-depths and its Dragon-king are of Chinese, and therefore of recent, origin. The comparatively modern character of this important link in the genealogy which traces back the descent of the Mikados to the Sun-Goddess confirms an impression that the ancestor-worship of the ancient Japanese is a later accretion upon what was in its origin a worship of the powers of Nature.

III.

THE PLACE OF SHINTO IN THE SCIENCE OF RELIGION.

The myths in which Shinto is embodied present special advantages to the student of religion in its earlier forms. They hold an almost unique position, intermediate between the crude conceptions of savages and such mythologies as those of ancient Greece and Rome. They have been recorded at ample length, and in several various and conflicting versions, thus affording scope for a tolerably comprehensive study. They have assumed their present shape comparatively uninfluenced by alien ideas. Something of Chinese philosophy and folklore, and perhaps a few echoes of Indian myth, have intruded to a small extent; but there is happily no room for suspicion of missionary or Christian influence. The Shinto nomenclature is for the most part transparent and reveals the natures and functions of the deities more clearly than is usual in mythology. There is some satisfaction in dealing with divine personages like Ame-terasu no Oho-mi

Kami, *i.e.* the Heaven-shining great-august-deity, whose names permit no possibility of misconception as to their attributes.

The following scrap of theory, prepared with a special view to the facts of Shinto, is meant only as a help towards defining its place among religions.

A species of animism forms the basis of Shinto, as it does of other religions. Early man, proceeding by a similar, though less tangible analogy, to that by which he recognises in his fellow-men and other living beings will and sensation resembling his own, extends to natural elements and objects, especially those which inspire gratitude, fear and wonder, something of the same quality. He regards the sun, fire, wind or sky as *alive*. Religion, at this stage, hardly amounts to theism. I have called it animism, using this word, it will be observed, in a more restricted sense than Dr. Tylor in his *Primitive Culture*.

The next step is to endow nature with human qualities, physical and moral. From this combination of humanity with the awe-inspiring might and majesty of nature, beneficent in some aspects and terrible in others, springs the first rude conception of divinity. As the organisation of society proceeds and individuals are aggregated into families, families into tribes, and tribes into nations, the original imperfect notion of deity is enriched and widened by analogies drawn from the father, the chief and the sovereign. This we may call the anthropomorphic stage of religious development. A later phase of it is where the material, natural object is supposed to be inhabited or governed by an unseen but not incorporeal anthropomorphic deity.

The third or spiritist stage of belief is that in which natural phenomena are attributed to the action of an invisible and incorporeal power or powers whose essential humanity has been refined and purged of the grosser ideas which accompanied it in the earlier stage of progress. There are two phases of spiritist belief, one in which the

corporeal anthropomorphic deity is supposed to have a spiritual counterpart, and the other in which the deity is himself a spiritual being. Spiritism seems to be the result of endeavours to explain away the obvious difficulties which attend the cruder anthropomorphism.

These three stages of belief may be represented by the following formulæ :

- I. The Sun is alive (Animism).
- II. The Sun is (*a*) a man, a father, a chief, a king, or (*b*) is a material object ruled by an unseen, but not incorporeal being with human form and passions (Anthropomorphism).
- III. The Sun is (*a*) a material object ruled by an anthropomorphic being which has a spiritual double, or (*b*) is animated by a spiritual being (Spiritism).

These stages do not succeed one another like geological strata, but overlap. Spiritism may and does appear at an early stage of anthropomorphic development, while on the other hand the most advanced religions find it hard to relinquish grosser conceptions which belong to an earlier stage of progress.

The most superficial examination of Shinto will satisfy us that it is substantially an anthropomorphic religion. Its deities are for the most part personified powers, elements and objects of nature. At their head stands the Sun-Goddess with her attendant courtiers. Then we have the Moon-God, the God of Growth, the Food-Goddess, Gods of Fire, Wind, Water, Earth, Seas, Mountains, Rivers, Thunder, Trees, and Islands. But, except in the case of a few principal deities, the process of personification has not gone far. Many so-called deities have hardly got beyond the first, or animist, stage of progress. When such objects as swords, stones, jewels, or mirrors have been dubbed *Kami* (gods) for their wonderful properties, real or imaginary, the impulse towards personification seems to have spent itself. And there are a good many others whose human quality is of the thinnest, there being frequently nothing even to show whether they

are male or female. This weakness of the personifying power is profoundly characteristic of the Japanese race. It is shown in their unimaginitive literature, their language, which has no grammatical gender and makes the most sparing use of personal pronouns, the feeble character-drawing of their fiction, and their equally feeble attempts at monumental sculpture and portrait-painting. It does not follow that the ancient Japanese were backward in their general intellectual development. Their aesthetic sensibilities were by no means uncultivated, and in the faculty of minute and accurate observation and description, they cannot be pronounced inferior to their European contemporaries.

The nomenclature of Shinto is wholly anthropomorphic. Its perspicuous character enables us to discern traces of the various phases in which the gods are considered alternately as fathers, chiefs and sovereigns. A good number have the root of the word *chi-chi*, father, incorporated into their names,¹ where it assumed the various forms of *chi*, *ji*, or oftener *tsuchi* or *tsutsu*.

The "chieftain" idea of divinity is represented by the use of the word *wo*, male, *i.e.* virile or valiant one, in many of the names of deities, and by the ascription to some of warlike qualities. There is nothing to show that these are deified chieftains. On the contrary, the term *wo* is applied, like *tsuchi*, father, to what are unmistakably nature deities, such as the sea-gods *Soko-tsutsu-wo* (bottom-father-male), *Naka-tsutsu-wo* (middle-father-male), and *Uwa-tsutsu-wo* (upper-father-male), produced by the lustrations of Izanagi in the sea after his return from Yomi.

Kami, the most common and comprehensive word for deity in the Japanese language, belongs to the tribal and national stages of social development. Its original meaning is "above," "superior." Just as our word "lord" embraces

¹ As in the case of our own minor deities, Father Christmas and Father Thames.

nobles and the sovereign as well as the Deity, *Kami* is used alike for nobles, Mikados and Gods. The following quotation from Motoōri, the famous Shinto theologian of the latter part of the eighteenth century, will help us to realise more fully what the Japanese understand by this word.

"The¹ term *Kami* is applied in the first place to the various deities of Heaven and Earth who are mentioned in the ancient records, as well as to their spirits (*mi-tama*) which reside in the shrines where they are worshipped. Moreover, not only human beings, but birds, beasts, plants and trees, seas and mountains, and all other things whatsoever which deserve to be dreaded and revered for the extraordinary and pre-eminent powers which they possess are called *Kami*. They need not be eminent for surpassing nobleness, goodness, or serviceableness alone. Malignant and uncanny beings are also called *Kami*, if only they are the objects of general dread. Among *Kami* who are human beings I need hardly mention first of all the successive Mikados—with reverence be it spoken. . . . Then there have been numerous examples of divine human beings both in ancient and modern times, who, although not accepted by the nation generally, are treated as gods, each of his several dignity, in a single province, village or family. . . . Amongst *Kami* who are not human beings, I need hardly mention thunder (in Japanese *Naru kami* or the Sounding God). There are also the dragon, the echo (called in Japanese *Ko-dama* or the Tree-Spirit), and the fox, who are *Kami* by reason of their uncanny and fearful natures. The term *Kami* is applied in the *Nihongi* and *Manyōshū* to the tiger and wolf. Izanagi gave to the fruit of the peach, and to the jewels round his neck, names which implied that they were *Kami*. . . . There are many cases of seas and mountains being called *Kami*. It is not their spirits which

¹ See also Sir E. Satow's *Revival of Pure Shinto*, in the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 1875.

are meant. The word was applied directly to the seas or mountains themselves, as being very awful things."

The myths of Japan contain abundant traces of the state and authority which surrounded the Mikados being ascribed by analogy to the Sun-Goddess and other celestial beings. But just as the ancient Mikados were by no means absolute monarchs, none of the Shinto Gods is what we understand by a Supreme Being. They are neither omnipotent, omniscient, nor immortal. The first deity in point of time cannot be regarded as supreme. The various authorities put forward several candidates for this position, all of whom are shadowy personages who are seldom or never mentioned afterwards. They are in no sense the chief gods of Shinto. Nor can we allow the title of Supreme Being to the Creator-deity, Izanagi, who was born and died, not to mention the eclipses of his marital authority, or of his having to take hastily to flight from the Ugly Females of Yomi. The Sun-Goddess, although the most eminent of the Shinto Gods, is grossly insulted by Susa no wo, and instead of inflicting on him the punishment which he deserves, hides in a cave from which she is partly enticed, partly dragged by the other deities. This is not the behaviour of a Supreme Being. When Susa no wo is punished, it is by a Council of the Gods, the large share taken by which in the Government of Heaven, shows that the celestial constitution, like its earthly counterpart, was an essentially limited monarchy.

The word "infinite," familiar to Buddhism, I do not find in the Shinto record. *Toko*, which we translate by "eternal," has a positive and not a negative signification, and means "permanent" rather than "without end." It occurs in the name of the deity *Kuni-toko-tachi* (earth-eternal-stand), and we also meet with it in the word *toko-yo*, the eternal world. We are told in the *Nihongi* that in A.D. 644 a man in the east country, then the most barbarous part of Japan, urged his fellow-villagers to worship "the God of the Ever-

lasting World" also called "the God of Gods," promising to those who did so long life and riches. He had many adherents who threw out their victuals and other property into the public roads, expecting to have "the new riches" given them in return. The craze spread to such an extent that the Government at length interfered and suppressed this movement by force. The God of the Everlasting World was a large caterpillar, a strange conjunction of the highest and the lowest in religion! Yet may we not extend some small measure of sympathy towards this blind and feeble aspiration after an Infinite, Supreme Being, crushed relentlessly at its very birth?

Of the later form of anthropomorphism in which the deities are regarded as distinct from the natural phenomena or objects which they rule, there is not much trace in the ancient authorities. Motoōri is true to the spirit of the old myths when he describes the Sun-Goddess as identical with the sun itself. But his most eminent pupil Hirata differs from him on this point and speaks of her as born on earth, and subsequently appointed to rule the sun. Hirata's view is an obvious step towards spiritism.

There are comparatively few traces of spiritism in Shinto. Although the creed of a tolerably cultured race, which had learned to attribute human qualities, physical and moral, to natural powers and objects, and to regard them with something of the affection, gratitude, and submissive awe inspired by their earthly fathers, chiefs, and sovereigns, it remains in all essential respects an anthropomorphic religion. Whatever Izanagi and Izanami were, their history, ending with their death, shows that they were as unspiritual beings as can well be imagined. The Sun-Goddess, who retires to a cave and leaves the world to darkness, is plainly the sun itself, and the Food-Goddess, who entertains her guests with dainties taken from various parts of her own person, is also an unmistakably material personage. Motoōri says in so many words that the Shinto deities had arms and legs, and

adds that if some of them are invisible now, this was not always so. He points out in the passage quoted above, that when a sea or mountain is called *Kami* it is not the spirit of the sea or mountain that is intended, but the sea or mountain itself.

But while Shinto is in the main an unspiritual religion, there are not wanting indications of an advance beyond the earlier type of religious thought.

The point to which the Japanese mind had at this period arrived in its transition to a more spiritist form of faith is marked by the use of the word *mi-tama*. *Mi* is an honorific prefix. *Tama* means ball, bead, jewel, precious thing, essence, spirit, and, at a later time, soul. The metaphorical use of this word can be best explained by a few concrete examples. When the Sun-Goddess¹ and the High-integrating-Deity sent down Hoho no Ninigi to rule the lower world, he was given, among other things, a sacred mirror with the injunction, "Regard this mirror exactly as our *mi-tama* and reverence it as if reverencing us." It is in the same spirit, which surely savours of make-believe rather than belief, that the gods are frequently represented in the *Norito* as *dwelling* in the places where they are worshipped. Even Motoōri speaks of the Shinto shrines as being occupied by the *mi-tama* of the gods.

Again, when Ohonamuchi boasted that he alone had subdued the Central Land (Japan) he was reproved by something which floated towards him over the sea, surrounded by a divine radiance, and which said: "It is because of my presence that thou hast been able to accomplish this mighty task." "Who art thou?" asked Ohonamuchi. It replied and said: "I am thy *tama* of good luck, the wondrous *tama*." Human beings may also have *tama* of this kind, which are plainly the counterpart of our guardian spirits. Jingo Kōgu was accompanied by a *nigi*

¹ See Chamberlain's *Kojiki*, p. 108.

(gentle)-*tama* when she undertook her celebrated expedition against Corea. The word *tama* occurs in the names of a few deities, such as *Iku* (live) *dama*; and the *Kiujiki* has mention of the "Eighty times ten thousand *tama* of Heaven." The Chinese character used for *tama* in all these cases is one for which no closer English equivalent can be given than "spirit."

On the other hand, a number of gods have incorporated into their names the word *mimi* (august body), an indication of a more materialistic conception of deity.

On the second phase of Spiritism, in which the gods themselves are spirits distinct from nature, I can find little trace.

The feeble grasp of Spiritism by the Japanese nation at this period is further illustrated by the total absence of ghosts from the ancient literature. This can hardly be owing to the imperfection of the record, for these old writers have a marked fondness for X-material, and have accumulated a considerable quantity of it. Moreover, there are occasions when ghosts might naturally have made their appearance, and do not. When Izanagi follows Izanami to the land of Yomi, he finds there, not a spirit or ghost, but a putrefying corpse in which maggots had already bred. When Prince Yamato-dake died, his *mitama* became changed into a white bird and ascended to heaven. In another case a wreath hung up in a mortuary is termed the deceased's *mikage* or "august shade," a synonym for *mitama*.

We are told in the *Nihongi* that on the 2nd day of A.D. 689, "the Department of Great Learning presented eighty staves." These staves were for the ceremony of *Oni-yarahi*, or demon-expelling, which was performed at the beginning of every year by men who rushed about beating the air and discharging arrows in all directions. Now we learn from the *Wamiôshô*, a Chinese-Japanese dictionary of the 10th century, that the word *oni* also comprised "the spirits of dead men," and it notes that they "refuse to reveal their

form." The *oni* were therefore invisible but not incorporeal, a description which by no means corresponds to our idea of a ghost. Motoöri denies that the *oni* are spirits of the dead. In the old literature, he says, this word means simply "devil."

Motoöri could find no proof that the ancient Japanese believed in the immortality of the soul. But that they believed in some sort of continued existence after death can hardly be doubted. It is testified to by the practice of human sacrifices at the tombs of great men, which, as we know from incontestable evidence, prevailed in Japan centuries before the *Nihongi* and *Kojiki* were written.

There is something to be said for the contention that the absence of ghosts from the X-record of ancient Japan is not owing to backward development, but to a "later change in the intellectual course, a divergence from, or rejection of, ancestral faiths,"¹ brought about by the influence of sceptical Chinese literature, and confined to a cultured class. But surely the weight of evidence forbids this conclusion. It rather tends to show that the ancient Japanese were an unimaginative people, still in the anthropomorphic stage of religious progress and with a radical incapacity for grasping the complex conception which underlies our word "ghost." They had got so far as in some halting measure to separate spirit from body, but they had not yet learnt to conceive of the former as preserving the individuality of the deceased, and as capable of re-assuming a visible form more or less resembling its former mortal integument. The *mitama* required the assistance of some existing material object in order to become cognisable by our senses.

This view would have to be modified if ghosts were shown to be genuine objective phenomena. It is permissible, however, provisionally, and until psychical research has yielded more accurate and better digested results, to look upon a

¹ Dr. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, p. 426.

belief in them as an excrescence on religion in a secondary stage of its growth, to which it would be easy to attach undue importance. I would not be understood, however, to contest the doctrine that the notion of a more or less spiritual existence of the dead has been a cardinal factor in early religious development. No reader of *Primitive Culture* can doubt this. The case of Japan raises a presumption that a considerable advance must be made towards a Spiritist form of faith before ghosts can make their appearance. The modern popular literature, written after centuries of Buddhist and Chinese influence, teems with apparitions.

The deification of human beings, by which something of the superhuman power and glory already recognised in natural deities is reflected back upon heroes, ancestors, or sovereigns, does not occupy an important position in Shinto. As already pointed out, the ancestral gods are not really deified ancestors but existing deities who have been converted into ancestors, or others invented for this very purpose. The deification of living and deceased mikados and princes belongs to a comparatively recent period, and is open to strong suspicion of Chinese influence.

There is no summer and winter myth in these old records, no rainbow myth, and no eclipse myth. There is, strange to say, no earthquake myth, and but one solitary mention of a god of earthquakes. The most terrible exceptional convulsions would appear to have impressed the religious sense of the Japanese less than every-day, normal phenomena.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19th, 1899.

The PRESIDENT (Mr. E. S. Hartland) in the Chair.

THE minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed.

The following books, which had been presented to the Society since the last Meeting, were laid upon the table, viz:—

Vol. v., parts 1 and 2 of *Lud: Organ Towarzystwa Ludoznawczego we Lwowie*; and *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society*, vol. iii., part 2, both presented by the respective Societies; and *Biblical Antiquities*, by Cyrus Adler and I. M. Casanowicz; *Chess and Playing Cards*, by Stewart Culin; and *The Lamp of the Eskimo*, by Walter Hough, all presented by the President.

The Secretary read a paper by Dr. Jevons entitled "The Place of Totemism in the Evolution of Religion," and a discussion followed, in which Mr. Andrew Lang, Mr. Clodd, Mr. E. K. Chambers, Dr. Gaster, Mr. Nutt, Lieut.-Col. Temple, Mr. Jacobs, and the President took part.

Mr. Philip Redmond then read a paper entitled "Some Wexford Folklore" (see p. 362), upon which Mr. Crooke, Mr. Nutt, and the President offered some observations.

The Meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to Dr Jevons and Mr. Redmond for their papers.