

FOUR OUTSTANDING FEATURES OF SHINTO

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In the nature religion stage of Shinto the Mirror, Sword, Jewels and other such objects had a certain sanctity, as in ancient Greece Agamemnon's sceptre was considered as sacred, or as a chief's Churiga is also regarded as sacred among the Australians to-day. In the course of the development of Shinto, however, the Three Imperial Regalia, composed of the Mirror, Sword and Jewels, take not a literal but figurative, meaning, and they are interpreted as symbolizing, for instance, wisdom, courage, and benevolence, which are the Three Chinese Cardinal Virtues.

In the same way, different myths attributed by Shinto in ancient times to kami or gods obtained new interpretations, sometimes farfetched explanations, by Shinto scholars in the stage of culture religion, just as Homer's myths in ancient Greece were re-interpreted by 5th and 4th century B. C. Greek savants, like Sophokles, Euripides and Empedokles. Ichijokaneyoshi (1402-1481), Tanikawa-Kotosuga (1709-1776), Tachibana-no-Moribe (1781-1849) and many others are among the champions in this field in Japan. And thus, by degrees, Shinto, in the stage of culture or ethico-intellectualistic religion, reveals a henotheistic (even monotheistic) or pantheistic aspect evolved from polydemonistic and polytheistic Shinto

in the first stage of its development.

In the *Kogoshui*, *Gleanings from Ancient Stories*, we notice a tendency of Shinto from polytheism to henotheism in the worship of the Ancestral Sun-Goddess Amaterasu-Omikami.

We read in the *Kogoshui* :—

“ Since Amaterasu-Omikami is the greatest Ancestral Goddess, no Shinto God can claim equality, just as a son is ever inferior to his father, or a vassal to his lord.”

It is true that in Shinto there are “ gods many, lords many,” but the Sun-Goddess stands supreme above them, according to the *Kogoshui*. This is an expression of henotheism in the Sun-Goddess Amaterasu-Omikami.

The pantheistic expression of Shinto finds utterance in the following poem composed by Urabe-no-Kanekuni :

In e'en in the single leaf of tree,
Or tender blade of grass,
The awe-inspiring Deity
Manifests Itself.”

Shima-Shige-Oyu (1793-1870), a Shinto priest of the Grand Shrine of Izumo, expresses himself in pantheistic language, when he says :—

“ Deem not that only in this earthly shrine
The Deity doth reign ;
The earth entire and all the Heavens Divine,
His presence do proclaim.”

The fragment of an unknown Gospel, the words of
— which are attributed to Jesus, teaches us the same
八九 truth :—

“ Lift the stone, and thou shalt find me ; cleave the

wood, and there am I” (James B. Pratt, *Pilgrimage of Buddhism*, p. 669).

That the essence of such a god is not a material being but a purely spiritual existence is the final outcome of Shinto as a culture or ethico-intellectualistic religion, and such a divinity we must worship “in spirit and in truth.” With this verity in mind the Konko Sect builds a shrine in such a way as to enable the believers to worship the Holy of holies on all sides in the shrine. Thus, like the Deutero-Isaiah, for nearly the same reason, that the Deity transcends all material things, Ise-Teijo (1715-1784), a famous Japanese historian of the Tokugawa Regime, forbade worshiping the Deity by means of statues or images. Therefore, Shirai-Soin of the Tokugawa Regime says:—

“The Deity is absolute. It transcends human words, which are of a relative nature. It is incomprehensible, and yet it permeates all things, It is everywhere. People as a rule, not knowing this truth, visit a hundred shrines day by day to worship there, and make valuable offerings month by month, and yet they are not sure to obtain any reward, though they may perchance suffer misfortunes in the world” (*Jinshakeimo*).

(2) Ethical Progress

Purity is one of the fundamental religious categories of Shinto. However, in the stage of nature religion, the idea of Shinto purity is entirely physical or material, *ipso facto*, ritualistic, and not mental or spiritual or ethical. In early Shinto purity is meant bodily cleanliness, being free from physical pollution, and not purity of heart in

the ethical or spiritual sense of the term. Therefore, Izanagi, after his descent to Hades, the dark Underworld, Yomi-no-Kuni by name, which means the land of darkness, where he was defiled by touch of the cursed filth of the polluted Land of Death, had to cleanse his body in a river at Ahagigahara in Hyuga; in other words, he observed a physical or outer purification, by means of lustral water of the river. This is nothing but physical purity, and not mental, spiritual or ethical purity at all. So, in the *Ritual of the Great Purification*, the so-called Heavenly Offences and Earthly Offences are mostly physical, not yet spiritual or ethical. During the reign of the Emperor Richu of early times, blood defilement then existed, in the Island of Awaji, and caused Izanagi, the God of the island, displeasure. Death is also a pollution, according to ancient Shinto. So, in the Inland Sea isle of Itsukushima or Miyajima, one of the three loveliest sights of Japan, sacred to the Goddess Ichikishimahime, it is a striking fact that there exists not a single grave, just as in the Island of Delos, sacred to Apollon, according to Nilsson, a great authority on Greek religion, because graves for the dead are a pollution, which should be dispensed with, lest the holy island be polluted by them. This, likewise, is a ritualistic aspect of early Shinto, whereas, in Shinto in the stage of ethico-intellectualistic religion, not physical purity or bodily cleanliness, but inner purity or heart purity is forcibly emphasized. Thus purity and impurity have come to be expressed in the ethical or spiritual sense of the terms, when the compilers of the *Shinto Gobusho* or *Shinto-Pentateuch* say:

“To do good is to be pure; to commit evil is to be impure. The deities dislike evil deeds, because they are impure.”

Tomobe-no-Yasutaka in the 18th century, a Shinto scholar of the Tokugawa Regime, says:—

“What is ablution? It is not merely the cleansing of one’s body solely with lustral water, it means one’s following the Right and Moral Way. Pollution means moral evil or vice. Though a man wash off his bodily filth, he will yet fail to please the Deity if he restrains not his evil desires” (*Shinto-Shoden-Kuju*).

Ichijo-Kaneyoshi emphasizes the inner significance of purity, although he recognizes two kinds of purity, outer and inner, and says:—

“There are two significations of purity in Shinto: one is outer purity or bodily purity and the other inner purity of heart. If a man is truly sincere in mind he will be sure to succeed in realizing a communion with the Divine. This is no other than inner purity or Sincerity, which means purity of heart or uprightness of heart” (*Nihonshoki-Sanso*).

The late Shinto High Priest of the Izumo Grand Shrine, Senge-Takatomi by name (died 1918) teaches us the same truth:—

“Sincerity the single virtue is
That binds Divinity and man in one.”

He also says:—

“Action sincere, by noble-minded man,
Reflects the very Self of the Unseen.”

An edict issued in 838 by the Emperor Nimmyo (810-850) inculcates the ethical significance of the Shinto re-

ligion thus :—

“The Deity, though unseen, is ever ready to respond to prayer from a truthful heart, and the divine grace is assuredly bestowed upon a virtuous man” (*Shokunihonkoki*).

Thus we see that Sincerity or Uprightness, like the ethical principle of Universal Love in Christianity, or that of Unconditional Benevolence in Buddhism, has become a fundamental tenet or the guiding (regulative) ethical principle of Shinto in the ethico-intellectualistic stage of its development.

By way of illustrating this striking aspect of ethical Shinto, let us quote the two following beautiful stories.

Though, as related above, Izanagi the God of Awaji Island was displeased by it, blood, in the higher Shinto, is no more a pollution. So we read of Izumi-Shikibu, herself a famous court poetess and a contemporary of the renowned Lady Murasaki, authoress in the 11th century of the *Genji-Monogatari*, that in making a pilgrimage to the Deity of Kumano, she hesitated, because she was womanly unclean, to approach the precincts of the shrine for fear of defiling the sacredness of the holy place, when she was reassured by an oracular utterance of the Deity, giving her permission to enter, in these words :—

“Woman, why hesitate,
In lowly sorrow at thy uncleanness,
To come within the gate,
Where dwells unseen the Divine holiness?
Indeed, though spotless, I,
In primal essence of Divinity,
Spurn not in dust to lie,

In fellowship, with vile humanity” (*Fugashu*).

In connection with the same Deity of Kumano, the following narrative is preserved. Once upon a time, while a lady of great beauty was making pilgrimage thither, the religious leader of the party became smitten by her charms and made known to her his desire. Greatly perturbed, the lady took counsel of her attendant maid who loyally determined that in order to protect her lady's honour she would sacrifice her own, and this, under cover of the darkness of night, she actually did. Whereupon the divine anger inflicted immediate death upon the apostate leader as punishment for his thus defiling the sacred neighbourhood of the shrine; while, on the other hand, the sin of the maid-servant, having been committed of pure intent and under compulsion, was divinely condoned (*Shasekishu*). This story of men's impiety and divine justice recalls the Greek legend of a similar nature, which tells how, mistaking him for a robber, a man killed his own friend, yet was pronounced by the Delphic Oracle to be innocent, on the ground that the act of homicide was committed through a motive altogether pure and spotless.

The ethico-intellectualistic expression of higher Shinto reaches its climax, where Sakashibutsu, in the diary of his 14th century pilgrimage to worship the Ancestral Sun-Goddess at the Ise Shrine, emphasizes inner purity or purity of heart in the following impressive language:—

“It is quite customary for us neither to bring any offering to the Sun-Goddess nor to carry rosaries about us like Buddhists. In short, we have nothing special wherewith to recommend ourselves in petitioning her

Divinity. This is the true signification of inner purity. Washing oneself in the sea-water, and being cleansed of the bodily filth—this is outer purity. Being pure in mind and body, our soul is united with the Divine, and, divinity in humanity thus realized, there remains no desire unsatisfied—there is no occasion for further petition or prayer to the Goddess. This is the true esoteric meaning of worshipping the Sun-Goddess at the Ise Shrine. Being thus enlightened by the Shinto priest of the shrine, I was overwhelmed with a sense of pious joy, and burst into tears of gratitude" (*Daijingu-Sankeiki*).

CHAPTER II

SHINTO AS A LIVING, NOT DEAD, RELIGION

As regards time-relation, religions may be classified as living and as dead, just as the various languages of the earth are recognized as living tongues or dead tongues. Shinto, whether sectarian or national, is like Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, a living religion not a dead one. National Shinto is now, as ever, fully and vigorously alive and active in the mind of the Japanese people. True, it has been influenced to a great extent by alien faiths, Buddhism, Confucianism, for instance, and more or less by Christianity, yet it has never been annihilated by the imported foreign creeds. On the contrary, it has unfailingly maintained itself, generation after generation revealing in its turn new phases of a higher and higher order of religion. The national religion of ancient Greece

has long ceased to be. As Milton happily sang :—

“ Apollo from his shrine

Can no more divine,

With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving ”

(Christ Nativity).

The national religion of early Rome has shared the same sad fate. The religion of ancient Egypt, the old religions of Babylonia and Assyria have passed into oblivion.

All these religions are things of the past, gone forever, representing no faith of peoples of today. Quite otherwise is it with Shinto. Every one of the 13 Shinto sects had large numbers of professed believers, while the national Shinto faith stands as one of the fundamental spiritual characteristics of the Japanese race. Every year the Ise shrine attracts hundreds of thousands of devout pilgrims to pay homage to the Ancestral Sun-Goddess, while Shinto shrines with their picturesque red-coloured gate-ways in front, dotted everywhere throughout the length and breadth of the land, are objects of veneration and worship, eloquently testifying that Shinto endures as a national faith. In Europe, a world-religion, Christianity, has replaced or displaced the older national faiths of Greece and Rome, but, in Japan, the national Shinto religion has never been superseded by any universal religion, Buddhism or Christianity, imported into the Island Empire. Just herein lies one of the fundamental characteristics of the religious history of Japan.

CHAPTER III

SHINTO SEEN FROM THE VIEW-POINT OF CLASSIFICATION AS THEOCRATIC AND THEANTHROPIC

As comparative study of the religions of to-day shows, there are two main trends of the world's religious thought, that is to say there are two fundamentally different ways of conceiving Divinity. One is, Westerners might say, a mode of the Near-Eastern type and the other that of the Far-Eastern type. The former may be styled as belonging to the theocratic type or creative type of religion and the latter as of the theanthropic or genealogical type. The religion of the Hebrews (Judaism), Islam or Mohammedanism, and Christianity, born of the practical mind of the Semites, belong as a rule to the theocratic type; while Buddhism or the Indian religions in general, and the ancient Greek religion, along with the Roman religion, all of which perhaps with the exception of the last named are the products of the speculative mind of the Aryan or Indo-European race, and the religious consciousness of the Japanese, and that of the Chinese also, belong to the theanthropic category. In theocratic religion Divinity stands high above man and nature; with its formula "God is above us," it is transcendent of man and the world. Theanthropic religion, contrarily, sees Divinity in man and nature; it — is immanent or inherent in man and the universe and — its language proclaims "God is in us"

(To be concluded).