

JAPAN: An Interpretation

By LAFCADIO HEARN

Each member of the family supposes himself, or herself, under perpetual ghostly surveillance. Spirit-eyes are watching every act; spirit-ears are listening to every word. Thoughts too, not less than deeds, are visible to the gaze of the dead: the heart must be pure, the mind must be under control, within the presence of the spirits. Probably the influence of such beliefs, uninterruptedly exerted upon conduct during thousands of years, did much to form the charming side of Japanese character. Yet there is nothing stern or solemn in this home-religion to-day,—nothing of that rigid and unvarying discipline supposed by Fustel de Coulanges to have especially characterized the Roman cult. It is a religion rather of gratitude and tenderness; the dead being served by the household as if they were actually present in the body.

3. The Ancient Cult

THE real religion of Japan, the religion still professed in one form or other, by the entire nation, is that cult which has been the foundation of all civilized religion, and of all civilized society,—Ancestor-worship. In the course of thousands of years this original cult has undergone modifications, and has assumed various shapes; but everywhere in Japan its fundamental character remains unchanged. Without including the different Buddhist forms of ancestor-worship, we find three distinct rites of purely Japanese origin, subsequently modified to some degree by Chinese influence and ceremonial. These Japanese forms of the cult are all classed together under the name of "Shinto," which signifies, "The Way of the Gods." It is not an ancient term; and it was first adopted only to distinguish the native religion, or "Way from the foreign religion of Buddhism called

"Butsudo," or "The Way of Buddha." The three forms of the Shinto worship of ancestors are the Domestic Cult, the Communal Cult, and the State Cult;—or, in other words, the worship of family ancestors, the worship of clan or tribal ancestors, and the worship of imperial ancestors. The first is the religion of the home; the second is the religion of the local divinity, or tutelar god; the third is the national religion. There are various other forms of Shinto worship; but they need not be considered for the present.

Family Cult First

OF THE three forms of ancestor-worship above mentioned, the family-cult is the first in evolutionary order,—the others being later developments. But in speaking of the family-cult as the oldest, I do not mean the home-religion as it exists to-day;—

neither do I mean by "family" anything corresponding to the term "household." The Japanese family in early times meant very much more than "household": it might include a hundred or a thousand households: it was something like the Greek *vevos* or the Roman *gens*,—the patriarchal family in the largest sense of the term. In prehistoric Japan the domestic cult of the house-ancestor probably did not exist;—the family-rites would appear to have been performed only at the burial-place. But the later domestic cult, having been developed out of the primal family-rite, indirectly represents the most ancient form of the religion, and should therefore be considered first in any study of Japanese social evolution.

The evolutionary history of ancestor-worship has been very much the same in all countries; and that of the Japanese cult offers remarkable evidence in support of Herbert Spencer's exposition of the law of religious development. To comprehend this general law, we must, however, go back to the origin of religious beliefs. One should bear in mind that, from a sociological point of view, it is no more correct to speak of the existing ancestor-cult in Japan as "primitive," than it would be to speak of the domestic cult of the Athenians in the time of Pericles as "primitive." No persistent form of ancestor-worship is primitive; and every established domestic cult has been developed out of some irregular and non-domestic family-cult, which, again, must have grown out of still more ancient funeral-rites.

Our knowledge of ancestor-worship, as regards the early European civilizations, cannot be said to extend to the primitive form of the cult. In the case of the Greeks and the Romans, our knowledge of the subject dates from a period at which a domestic religion had long been established; and we have documentary evidence as to the character of that religion. But of the earlier cult that must have preceded the home-worship, we have little testimony; and we can surmise its nature only by study of the natural history of ancestor-worship among peoples not yet arrived at a state of civilization. The true domestic cult begins with a settled civilization. Now when the Japanese race first established itself in Japan, it does not appear to have brought with it any civilization of the kind which we would call settled, nor any well-developed ancestor-cult. The cult certainly existed; but its ceremonies would seem to have been irregularly performed at graves only. The domestic cult proper may not have been established until about the eighth century, when the spirit-tablet is supposed to have been introduced from China. The earliest ancestor-cult, as we shall presently see, was developed out of the primitive funeral-rites and propitiatory ceremonies.

The existing family religion is therefore a comparatively modern development; but it is at least as old as the true civilization of the country, and it conserves beliefs and ideas which are indubitably primitive, as well as ideas and beliefs derived from these. Before treating further of the cult itself, it will be necessary to consider some of these older beliefs.

Cult of Spirits

THE earliest ancestor-worship,—“the root of all religions,” as Herbert Spencer calls it,—was probably coeval with the earliest definite belief in ghosts. As soon as men were able to conceive the idea of a shadowy inner self, or double, so soon, doubtless, the propitiatory cult of spirits began. But this earliest ghost-worship must have long preceded that period of mental development in which men first became capable of forming abstract ideas. The primitive ancestor-worshippers could not have formed the notion of a supreme deity; and all evidence existing as to the first forms of their worship tends to show that there primarily existed no difference whatever between the conception of ghosts and the conception of gods. There were, consequently, no definite beliefs in any future state of reward or of punishment,—no ideas of any heaven or hell. Even the notion of a shadowy underworld, or Hades, was of much later evolution. At first the dead were thought of only as dwelling in the tombs provided for them,—whence they could issue, from time to time, to visit their former habitations, or to make apparition in the dreams of the living. Their real world was the place of burial,—the grave, the tumulus. Afterwards there slowly developed the idea of an underworld, connected in some mysterious way with the place of sepulture. Only at a much later time did this dim underworld of imagination expand and divide into regions of ghostly bliss and woe . . . It is a noteworthy fact that Japanese mythology never evolved the ideas of an Elysium or a Tartarus,—never developed the notion of a heaven or a hell. Even to this day Shinto belief represents the pre-Homeric stage of imagination as regards the supernatural.

Gods and Ghosts

Among the Indo-European races likewise there appeared to have been at first no difference between gods and ghosts, nor any ranking of gods as greater and lesser. These distinctions were gradually developed. “The spirits of the dead,” says Mr. Spencer, “forming, in a primitive tribe, an ideal group the members of which are but little distinguished from one another, will grow more and more distinguished;—and as societies advance, and as traditions, local and general, accumulate and complicate, these once similar human souls, acquiring in the popular mind differences of character and importance, will diverge—until their original community of nature becomes scarcely recognizable.” So in antique Europe, and so in the Far East, were the greater gods of nations evolved from ghost-cults; but those ethics of ancestor-worship which shaped alike the earliest societies of West and East, date from a period before the time of the greater gods,—from the period when all the dead were supposed to become gods, with no distinction of rank.

No more than the primitive ancestor-worshippers of Aryan race did the early Japanese think of their dead as ascending to some extra-mundane region of

light and bliss, or as descending into some realm of torment. They thought of their dead as still inhabiting this world, or at least as maintaining with it a constant communication. Their earliest sacred records do, indeed, make mention of an underworld, where mysterious Thunder-gods and evil goblins dwelt in corruption; but this vague world of the dead communicated with the world of the living; and the spirit there, though in some sort attached to its decaying envelope, could still receive upon earth the homage and the offerings of men. Before the advent of Buddhism, there was no idea of a heaven or a hell. The ghosts of the departed were thought of as constant presences, needing propitiation, and able in some way to share the pleasures and the pains of the living. They required food and drink and light; and in return for these, they could confer benefits. Their bodies had melted into earth; but their spirit-power still lingered in the upper world, thrilled its substance, moved in its winds and waters. By death they had acquired mysterious force;—they had become “superior ones,” *Kami* gods.

General Deification

That is to say, gods in the oldest Greek and Roman sense. Be it observed that there were no moral distinctions, East or West, in this deification. “All the dead become gods,” wrote the great Shinto commentator, Hirata. So likewise, in the thought of the early Greeks and even of the later Romans, all the dead became gods. M. de Coulanges observes, in *La Cite Antique*:—“This kind of apotheosis was not the privilege of the great alone: no distinction was made . . . It was not even necessary to have been a virtuous man: the wicked man became a god as well as the good man,—only that in this after-existence, he retained the evil inclinations of his former life.” Such also was the case in Shinto belief: the good man became a beneficent divinity, the bad man an evil deity,—but all alike became *Kami*. “And since there are bad as well as good gods,” wrote Motowori, “it is necessary to propitiate them with offerings of agreeable food, playing the harp, blowing the flute, singing and dancing and whatever is likely to put them in a good humour.” The Latins called the maleficent ghosts of the dead, *Larvae*, and called the beneficent or harmless ghosts, *Lares*, or *Manes*, or *Genii*, according to Apuleius. But all alike were gods,—*dii-manes*; and Cicero admonished his readers to render to all *dii-manes* the rightful worship: “They are men,” he declared, “who have departed from this life;—consider them divine beings . . .”

IN SHINTO, as in old Greek belief, to die was to enter into the possession of superhuman power,—to become capable of conferring benefit or of inflicting misfortune by supernatural means . . . But yesterday, such or such a man was a common toiler, a person of no importance;—to-day, being dead, he becomes a divine power, and his children pray to him for the

prosperity of their undertakings. Thus also we find the personages of Greek tragedy, such as Alcestis, suddenly transformed into divinities by death, and addressed in the language of worship or prayer. But, in despite of their supernatural power, the dead are still dependent upon the living for happiness. Though viewless, save in dreams, they need earthly nourishment and homage,—food and drink, and the reverence of their descendants. Each ghost must rely for such comfort upon its living kindred;—only through the devotion of that kindred can it ever find repose. Each ghost must have shelter,—a fitting tomb;—each must have offerings. While honourably sheltered and properly nourished the spirit is pleased, and will aid in maintaining the good-fortune of its propitiators. But if refused the sepulchral home, the funeral rites, the offerings of food and fire and drink, the spirit will suffer from hunger and cold and thirst, and, becoming angered, will act malevolently and contrive misfortune for those by whom it has been neglected . . . Such were the ideas of the old Greeks regarding the dead; and such were the ideas of the old Japanese.

ALTHOUGH the religion of ghosts was once the religion of our own forefathers—whether of Northern or Southern Europe,—and although practices derived from it, such as the custom of decorating graves with flowers, persist to-day among our most advanced communities,—our modes of thought have so changed under the influences of modern civilization that it is difficult for us to imagine how people could ever have supposed that the happiness of the dead depended upon material food. But it is probable that the real belief in ancient European societies was much like the belief as it exists in modern Japan. The dead are not supposed to consume the substance of the food, but only to absorb the invisible essence of it. In the early period of ancestor-worship the food-offerings were large; later on they were made smaller and smaller as the idea grew up that the spirits required but little sustenance of even the most vapoury kind. But, however small the offerings, it was essential that they should be made regularly. Upon these shadowy repasts depended the well-being of the dead; and upon the well-being of the dead depended the fortunes of the living. Neither could dispense with the help of the other; the visible and the invisible worlds were forever united by bonds innumerable of mutual necessity; and no single relation of that union could be broken without the direst consequences.

Religious Sacrifices

THE history of all religious sacrifices can be traced back to this ancient custom of offerings made to ghosts; and the whole Indo-Aryan race had at one time no other religion than this religion of spirits. In fact, every advanced human society has, at some period of its history, passed through the stage of ancestor-worship; but it is to the Far East that we must look to-day in order to find the cult co-existing with

an elaborate civilization. Now the Japanese ancestor-cult—though representing the beliefs of a non-Aryan people and offering in the history of its development various interesting peculiarities—still embodies much that is characteristic of ancestor-worship in general. There survive in it especially these three beliefs, which underlie all forms of persistent ancestor-worship in all climes and countries:

- I. The dead remain in this world,—haunting their tombs, and also their former homes, and sharing invisible in the life of their living^s descendants;
 - II. All the dead become gods, in the sense of acquiring supernatural power; but they retain the characters which distinguished them during life;
 - III. The happiness of the dead depends upon the respectful service rendered them by the living; and the happiness of the living depends upon the fulfillment of pious duty to the dead.
- To these very early beliefs may be added the following, probably of later development, which at one time must have exercised immense influence:
- IV. Every event in the world, good or evil,—fair seasons or plentiful harvests,—flood and famine,—tempest and tidal-wave and earthquake,—is the work of the dead.
 - V. All human actions, good or bad, are controlled by the dead.

The first three beliefs survive from the dawn of civilization, or before it—from the time in which the dead were the only gods, without distinctions of power. The latter two would seem rather of the period in which a true mythology—an enormous polytheism—had been developed out of the primitive ghost-worship. There is nothing simple in these beliefs; they are awful, tremendous beliefs; and before Buddhism helped to dissipate them, their pressure upon the mind of a people dwelling in a land of cataclysms, must have been like an endless weight of nightmare. But the elder beliefs, in softened form, are yet a fundamental part of the existing cult. Though Japanese ancestor-worship has undergone many modifications in the past two thousand years, these modifications have not transformed its essential character in relation to conduct; and the whole framework of society rests upon it, as on a moral foundation. The history of Japan is really the history of her religion. No single fact in this connection is more significant than the fact that the ancient Japanese term for government—*matsuri-goto*—signifies literally “matters of worship.” Later on we shall find that not only government, but almost everything in Japanese society, derives directly or indirectly from this ancestor-cult; and that in all matters the dead, rather than the living, have been the rulers of the nation and the shapers of its destinies.

4. *The Religion of the Home*

THREE stages of ancestor-worship are to be distinguished in the general course of religious and social evolution; and each of these finds illustration in the history of Japanese society. The first stage is that which exists before the establishment of a settled civilization, when there is yet no national ruler, and when the unit of society is the great patriarchal family, with its elders or war-chiefs for lords. Under these conditions, the spirits of the family-ancestors only are worshipped;—each family propitiating its own dead, and recognizing no other form of worship. As the patriarchal families, later on, become grouped into tribal clans, there grows up the custom of tribal sacrifice to the spirits of the clan-rulers;—this cult being superadded to the family-cult, and marking the second stage of ancestor-worship. Finally, with the union of all the clans or tribes under one supreme head, there is developed the custom of propitiating the spirits of national rulers. This third form of the cult becomes the obligatory religion of the country; but it does not replace either of the preceding cults; the three continue to exist together.

Funeral Customs

Though, in the present state of our knowledge, the evolution in Japan of these three stages of ancestor-worship is but faintly traceable, we can divide tolerably well, from various records, how the permanent forms of the cult were first developed out of the earlier funeral-rites. Between the ancient Japanese funeral customs and those of antique Europe, there was a vast difference,—a difference indicating, as regards Japan, a far more primitive social condition. In Greece and in Italy it was an early custom to bury the family dead within the limits of the family estate; and the Greek and Roman laws of property grew out of this practice. Sometimes the dead were buried close to the house. The author of *La Cite Antique* cites, among other ancient texts bearing upon the subject, an interesting invocation from the tragedy of Helen, by Euripides:—“All hail! my father’s tomb! I buried thee, Proteus, at the place where men pass out, that I might often greet thee; and so, even as I go out and in, I, thy son Theoclymenus, call upon thee, father! . . .” But in ancient Japan, men fled from the neighbourhood of death. It was long the custom to abandon either temporarily, or permanently, the house in which a death occurred; and we can scarcely suppose that, at any time, it was thought desirable to bury the dead close to the habitation of the surviving members of the household. Some Japanese authorities declare that in the very earliest ages there was no burial, and that corpses were merely conveyed to desolate places, and there abandoned to wild creatures. Be this as it may, we have documentary evidence, of an unmistakable sort concerning the early funeral-rites as they existed when the cus-

tom of burying had become established,—rites weird and strange, and having nothing in common with the practices of settled civilization. There is reason to believe that the family-dwelling was at first permanently, not temporarily, abandoned to the dead; and in view of the fact that the dwelling was a wooden hut of very simple structure, there is nothing improbable in the supposition. At all events the corpse was left for a certain period, called the period of mourning, either in the abandoned house where the death occurred, or in a shelter especially built for the purpose; and, during the mourning period, offerings of food and drink were set before the dead, and ceremonies performed without the house. One of these ceremonies consisted in the recital of poems in praise of the dead,—which poems were called *shinobigoto*. There was music also of flutes and drums, and dancing; and at night a fire was kept burning before the house. After all this had been done for the fixed period of mourning—eight days, according to some authorities, fourteen according to others—the corpse was interred. It is probable that the deserted house may thereafter have become an ancestral temple, or ghost-house,—prototype of the Shinto *miya*.

At an early time,—though when we do not know,—it certainly became the custom to erect a *moya*, or “mourning-house” in the event of a death; and the rites were performed at the mourning-house prior to the interment. The manner of burial was very simple; there were yet no tombs in the literal meaning of the term, and no tombstones. Only a mound was thrown up over the grave; and the size of the mound varied according to the rank of the dead.

The custom of deserting the house in which a death took place would accord with the theory of a nomadic ancestry for the Japanese people: it was a practice totally incompatible with a settled civilization like that of the early Greeks and Romans, whose customs in regard to burial presuppose small landholdings in permanent occupation. But there may have been, even in early times, some exceptions to general customs—exceptions made by necessity. Today, in various parts of the country, and perhaps more particularly in districts remote from temples, it is the custom for farmers to bury their dead upon their own lands.

Food Offerings

At regular intervals after burial, ceremonies were performed at the graves; and food and drink were then served to the spirits. When the spirit-tablet had been introduced from China, and a true domestic cult established, the practice of making offerings at the place of burial was not discontinued. It survives to the present time,—both in the Shinto and the Buddhist rite; and every spring an Imperial messenger presents at the tomb of the Emperor Jimmu, the same offerings of birds and fish and seaweed, rice and rice-wine, which were made to the spirit of the Founder of the

Empire twenty-five hundred years ago. But before the period of Chinese influence the family would seem to have worshipped its dead only before the mortuary house, or at the grave; and the spirits were yet supposed to dwell especially in their tombs, with access to some mysterious subterranean world. They were supposed to need other things besides nourishment; and it was customary to place in the grave various articles for their ghostly use,—a sword, for example, in the case of a warrior; a mirror in the case of a woman,—together with certain objects, especially prized during life,—such as objects of precious metal, and polished stones or gems . . . At this stage of ancestor-worship, when the spirits are supposed to require shadowy service of a sort corresponding to that exacted during their life-time in the body, we should expect to hear of human sacrifices as well as of animal sacrifices. At the funerals of great personages such sacrifices were common. Owing to beliefs of which all knowledge has been lost, these sacrifices assumed a character much more cruel than that of immolations of the Greek Homeric epoch. The human victims¹ were hurled up to the neck in a circle about the grave, and thus left to perish under the beaks of birds and the teeth of wild beasts. The term applied to this form of immolation,—*hitogaki*, or “human hedge,”—implies a considerable number of victims in each case. This custom was abolished, by the Emperor Suinin, about nineteen hundred years ago; and the *Nihongi* declares that it was then an ancient custom. Being grieved by the crying of the victims interred in the funeral mound erected over the grave of his brother, Yamato-hiko-no-mikoto, the Emperor is recorded to have said: “It is a very painful thing to force those whom one has loved in life to follow one in death. Though it be an ancient custom, why follow it, if it is bad? From this time forward take counsel to put a stop to the following of the dead.” Nomi-no-Sukune, a court-noble—now apotheosized as the patron of wrestlers—then suggested the substitution of earthen images of men and horses for the living victims; and his suggestion was approved. The *hitogaki* was thus abolished; but compulsory as well as voluntary following of the dead certainly continued for many hundred years after, since we find the Emperor Kotoku issuing an edict on the subject in the year 646 A. D.:

“When a man dies, there have been cases of people sacrificing themselves by strangulation, or of strangling others by way of sacrifice, or of compelling the dead man’s horse to be sacrificed, or of burying valuables in the grave in honour of the dead, or of cutting off the hair and stabbing the thighs and (in that condition) pronouncing a eulogy on the dead. Let all such old customs be entirely discontinued.”—*Nihongi*; Aston’s translation.

¹How the horses and other animals were sacrificed, does not clearly appear.

The Harakiri

AS regarded compulsory sacrifice and popular custom, this edict may have had the immediate effect desired; but voluntary human sacrifices were not definitively suppressed. With the rise of the military power there gradually came into existence another custom of *zyunsi*, or following one's lord in death,—suicide by the sword. It is said to have begun about 1333, when the last of the Hoozyoo regents, Takatoki, performed suicide, and a number of his retainers took their own lives by *harakiri*, in order to follow their master. It may be doubted whether this incident really established the practice. But by the sixteenth century *junshi* had certainly become an honoured custom among the samurai. Loyal retainers esteemed it a duty to kill themselves after the death of their lord, in order to attend upon him during his ghostly journey. A thousand years of Buddhist teaching had not therefore sufficed to eradicate all primitive notions of sacrificial duty. The practice continued into the time of the Tokugawa shogunate, when Iyeyasu made or parent in the invisible world. Perhaps the strangest laws to check it. These laws were rigidly applied,—the entire family of the suicide being held responsible for a case of *zyunsi*: yet the custom cannot be said to have become extinct until considerably after the beginning of the era of Meizi. Even during my own time there have been survivals,—some of a very touching kind: suicides performed in hope of being able to serve or aid the spirit of master or husband or parent in the invisible world. Perhaps the strangest case was that of a boy fourteen years old, who killed himself in order to wait upon the spirit of a child, his master's little son.

THE peculiar character of the early human sacrifices at graves, the character of the funeral-rites, the abandonment of the house in which death had occurred,—all prove that the early ancestor-worship was of a decidedly primitive kind. This is suggested also by the peculiar Shinto horror of death as pollution: even at this day to attend a funeral,—unless the funeral be conducted after the Shinto rite,—is religious defilement. The ancient legend of Izanagi's descent to the nether world, in search of his lost spouse, illustrates the terrible beliefs that once existed as to goblin-powers presiding over decay.

Between the horror of death as corruption, and the apotheosis of the ghost, there is nothing incongruous: we must understand the apotheosis itself as a propitiation. This earliest Way of the Gods was a religion of perpetual fear. Not ordinary homes only were deserted after a death: even the Emperors, during many centuries, were wont to change their capital after the death of a predecessor. But gradually, out of the primal funeral-rites, a higher cult was evolved. The mourning-house, or *moya*, became transformed into the Shinto temple, which still retains the shape of the primitive hut. Then under Chinese influence, the ancestral cult became estab-

lished in the home; and Buddhism at a later day maintained this domestic cult. By degrees the household religion became a religion of tenderness as well as of duty, and changed and softened the thoughts of men about their dead. As early as the eighth century, ancestor-worship appears to have developed the three principal forms under which it still exists; and thereafter the family-cult began to assume a character which offers many resemblances to the domestic religion of the old European civilizations.

LET us now glance at the existing forms of this domestic cult,—the universal religion of Japan. In every home there is a shrine devoted to it. If the family profess only the Shinto belief, this shrine, or *mitamaya*¹ ("august-spirit-dwelling"),—tiny model of a Shinto temple,—is placed upon a shelf fixed against the wall of some inner chamber, at a height of about six feet from the floor. Such a shelf is called *Mitama-San-no-tana*, or "Shelf of the august spirits." In the shrine are placed thin tablets of white wood, inscribed with the names of the household dead. Such tablets are called by a name signifying "spirit-substitutes" (*mitamasiro*), or by a probably older name signifying "spirit-sticks." . . . If the family worships its ancestors according to the Buddhist rite, the mortuary tables are placed in the Buddhist household-shrine, or *Butsudan*, which usually occupies the upper shelf of an alcove in one of the inner apartments. Buddhist mortuary-tablets (with some exceptions) are called *ihai*,—a term signifying "soul-commemoration." They are lacquered and gilded, usually having a carved lotos-flower as pedestal; and they do not, as a rule, bear the real, but only the religious and posthumous name of the dead.

Now it is important to observe that, in either cult, the mortuary tablet actually suggests a miniature tombstone—which is a fact of some evolutionary interest, though the evolution itself should be Chinese rather than Japanese. The plain gravestones in Shinto cemeteries resemble in form the simple wooden ghost-sticks, or spirit-sticks; while the Buddhist monuments in the old-fashioned Buddhist graveyards are shaped like the *ihai*, of which the form is slightly varied to indicate sex and age, which is also the case with the tombstone.

Mortuary Tablets

The number of mortuary tablets in a household shrine does not generally exceed five or six,—only grandparents and parents and the recently dead being thus represented; but the name of remoter ancestors are inscribed upon scrolls, which are kept in the *Butsudan* or the *mitamaya*.

Whatever be the family rite, prayers are repeated and offerings are placed before the ancestral tablets every day. The nature of the offerings and the character of the prayers depend upon the religion of the household; but the essential duties of the cult are

¹ It is more popularly termed *miya*, "august house,"—a name given also to the ordinary Shinto temples.

existence; and they should not be invoked or worshipped after the manner of the Shinto gods; prayers should be said for them, not, as a rule, to them.¹ But the vast majority of Japanese Buddhists are also followers of Shinto; and the two faiths, though seemingly incongruous, have long been reconciled in the popular mind. The Buddhist doctrine has therefore modified the ideas attaching to the cult much less deeply than might be supposed.

In all patriarchal societies with a settled civilization, there is evolved, out of the worship of ancestors, a Religion of Filial Piety. Filial piety still remains the supreme virtue among civilized peoples possessing an ancestor-cult . . . By filial piety must not be understood, however, what is commonly signified by the English term,—the devotion of children to parents. We must understand the word "piety" rather in its classic meaning, as the *pietas* of the early Romans,—that is to say, as the religious sense of household duty. Reverence for the dead, as well as the sentiment of duty towards the living; the affection of children to parents, and the affection of parents to children; the mutual duties of husband and wife, the duties likewise of sons-in-law and daughters-in-law to the family as a body; the duties of servant to master, and of master to dependent,—all these were included under the term. The family itself was a religion; the ancestral home a temple. And so we find the family and the home to be in Japan, even at the present day. Filial piety in Japan does not mean only the duty of children to parents and grandparents: it means still more, the cult of the ancestors, reverential service to the dead, the gratitude of the present to the past, and the conduct of the individual in relation to the entire household. Hirata therefore declared that all virtues derived from the worship of ancestors; and his words, as translated by Sir Ernest Satow, deserve particular attention:

"It is the duty of a subject to be diligent in worshipping his ancestors, whose minister he should consider himself to be. The custom of adoption arose from the natural desire of having some one to perform sacrifices; and this desire ought not to be rendered of no avail by neglect. Devotion to the memory of ancestors is the mainspring of all virtues. No one who discharges his duty to them will ever be disrespectful to the gods or to his living parents. Such a man also be faithful to his prince, loyal to his friends, and kind and gentle to his wife and children. For the essence of this devotion is indeed filial piety."

Basis of Ideas of Duty

FROM the sociologist's point of view, Hirata is right: it is unquestionably true that the whole system of Far-Eastern ethics derives from the religion of the household. By aid of that cult have been evolved all ideas of duty to the living as well as to the dead,—the sentiment of reverence, the sentiment of loyalty,

the spirit of self-sacrifice, and the spirit of patriotism. What filial piety signifies as a religious force can best be imagined from the fact that you can buy life in the East—that it has its price in the market. This religion is the religion of China, and of countries adjacent; and life is for sale in China. It was the filial piety of China that rendered possible the completion of the Panama railroad, where to strike the soil was to liberate death,—where the land devoured labourers by the thousand, until white and black labour could no more be procured in quantity sufficient for the work. But labour could be obtained from China—any amount of labour—at the cost of life; and the cost was paid; and multitudes of men came from the East to toil and die, in order that the price of their lives might be sent to their families . . . I have no doubt that, were the sacrifice imperatively demanded, life could be as readily bought in Japan,—though not, perhaps, so cheaply. Where this religion prevails, the individual is ready to give his life, in a majority of cases, for the family, the home, the ancestors. And the filial piety impelling such sacrifice becomes, by extension, the loyalty that will sacrifice even the family itself for the sake of the lord,—or, by yet further extension, the loyalty that prays, like Kusunoki Masahige, for seven successive lives to lay down on behalf of the sovereign. Out of filial piety indeed has been developed the whole moral power that protects the state,—the power also that has seldom failed to impose the rightful restraints upon official despotism whenever that despotism grew dangerous to the common weal.

Probably the filial piety that centred about the domestic altars of the ancient West differed in little from that which yet rules the most eastern East. But we miss in Japan the Aryan hearth, the family altar with its perpetual fire. The Japanese home-religion represents, apparently, a much earlier stage of the cult than that which existed within historic time among the Greeks and Romans. The homestead in Old Japan was not a stable institution like the Greek or the Roman home; the custom of burying the family dead upon the family estate never became general; the dwelling itself never assumed a substantial and lasting character. It could not be literally said of the Japanese warrior, as of the Roman, that he fought *pro aris et focis*. There was neither altar nor sacred fire: the place of these was taken by the spirit-shelf or shrine, with its tiny lamp, kindled afresh each evening; and, in early times, there were no Japanese images of divinities. For Lares and Penates there were only the mortuary-tablets of the ancestors, and certain little tablets bearing names of other gods—tutelar gods. . . . The presence of these frail wooden objects still makes the home; and they may be, of course, transported anywhere.

¹ Certain Buddhist rituals prove exceptions to this teaching.

Ghostly Surveillance

TO apprehend the full meaning of ancestor-worship as a family religion, a living faith, is now difficult for the Western mind. We are able to imagine only in the vaguest way how our Aryan forefathers felt and thought about their dead. But in the living beliefs of Japan we find much to suggest the nature of the old Greek piety. Each member of the family supposes himself, or herself, under perpetual ghostly surveillance. Spirit-eyes are watching every act; spirit-ears are listening to every word. Thoughts too, not less than deeds, are visible to the gaze of the dead: the heart must be pure, the mind must be under control, within the presence of the spirits. Probably the influence of such beliefs, uninterruptedly exerted upon conduct during thousands of years, did much to form the charming side of Japanese character. Yet there is nothing stern or solemn in this home-religion to-day,—nothing of that rigid and unvarying disci-

pline supposed by Fustel de Coulanges to have especially characterized the Roman cult. It is a religion rather of gratitude and tenderness; the dead being served by the household as if they were actually present in the body. . . . I fancy that if we were able to enter for a moment into the vanished life of some old Greek city, we should find the domestic religion there not less cheerful than the Japanese home-cult remains to-day. I imagine that Greek children, three thousand years ago, must have watched, like the Japanese children of to-day, for a chance to steal some of the good things offered to the ghosts of the ancestors; and I fancy that Greek parents must have chidden quite as gently as Japanese parents chide in this era of Meiji,—mingling reproof which instruction, and hinting of weird possibilities.¹

¹Food presented to the dead may afterwards be eaten by the elders of the household, or given to pilgrims; but it is said that if children eat of it, they will grow up with feeble memories, and incapable of becoming scholars.