

THE VIEWS OF SHINTO REVIVAL SCHOLARS REGARDING ETHICS.

BY HARRIS LEARNER LATHAM, A. M., S. T. M.

SOME years ago Sir Earnest Satow after a painstaking investigation, prepared and later revised an essay on the "Revival of Pure Shiñ-tau." He deals with the life and teachings of a number of men, who, having studied the ancient documents of Japan, set about expounding the original religion of the Japanese people, that is, the religion which has left the oldest records. These scholars are principally Kada Adzuma-marō (1669-1736), Kamo Mabuchi (1697-1769), Motowori Norinaga (1730-1801), Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843). These men, while differing naturally in many points, yet have one great aim in common. Their influence during their lifetime was immense; their learned writings have continued to mould the thought of the succeeding generations. They turned the light from ancient days on the doings of their generation and did a large part in preparing the way for the Great Restoration of 1868.

Whether these and other scholars of similar ideas properly interpret the ancient documents or not, can be determined only by present day investigators of equal or superior attainments in Japanese lore. Whatever be the truth in the case, it remains quite evident that the Revival School challenges investigation both on account of its learning and also because of the present trend of Japanese thought attributable to its labors. Of course, Japanese minds are receiving more inspiration from Western sources than either Chinese or Japanese literature and religion or philosophy afford. But, underneath all the foreign ideas, there is the bed-rock of the Japanese mind; apart from foreign influence, it is a real entity, self-directing and self-conscious. This mind is fed every day from Japanese store-houses, and the supplies are thoroughly permeated by a strong flavor of Shintoism and Bushido.

To analyse the situation further is unnecessary in a note intro-

ductory to a number of extracts from Sir Earnest Satow's pages. The present aim is to let these venerable scholars tell us, as far as possible in their own words, what they have to say regarding ethics and ethical systems. According to Western notions, they deal strangely with the subject; Shintoism in one respect at least is the antipode of Confucianism, which is little else than a system of ethics.

These extracts are reproduced as nearly as possible with the punctuation of the learned author. In a few instances my summary of one or more sentences will be found enclosed in brackets, thus: []. At the close of the quotations, I have ventured to append a summary in the form of a few very obvious conclusions.

A CHARACTERIZATION OF CHINESE ETHICS.

[In foreign countries, particularly China, bad men dominate, and such men becoming rulers are examples to the remainder.] "In China the name *Sei-shiñ* ("Holy Men") has been given to these men. But it is an error to look upon these so-called Holy Men as in themselves supernatural and good beings, as superior to the rest of the world as are the gods. The principles which they established are called *michi* (ethics), and may be reduced to two simple rules, namely, to take other people's territory and to keep fast hold of it."

[The Chinese people imitating the Holy Men have gone to philosophizing and this has brought on internal dissensions.] "When things go right of themselves, it is best to leave them alone. In ancient times, although there was no prosy system of doctrine in Japan, there were no popular disturbances, and the empire was peacefully ruled. It is because the Japanese were truly moral in their practice that they required no theory of morals, and the fuss made by the Chinese about theoretical morals is owing to their laxity in practice. It is not wonderful that the students of Chinese literature should despise their own country for being without a system of morals, but that Japanese who were acquainted with their own ancient literature should have pretended that Japan also had such a system, simply out of a feeling of envy, is ridiculous."

"Wherein lies the value of a rule of conduct? In its conducting to the good order of the state." [China has been the scene of endless collision and parricide concerning the dynasties; Japan has been free from all this, remaining true to one dynasty.] "A philosophy which produced such effects must be founded on a false system."

[After the adoption of the Chinese customs and ideas] "this

foreign pomp and splendor covered the rapid deprivation of mens' hearts and created a wide gulf between the Mikado and his people. So long as the sovereign maintains a simple style of living, the people are contented with their own hard lot. . . . If the Mikado had continued to live in a house roofed with shingles and whose walls were of mud, to wear hempen clothes, to carry his sword in a scabbard wound round with the tendrils of some creeping plant, and to go to the chase carrying his bow and arrows, as was the ancient custom, the present state of things would never have come about. But since the introduction of Chinese manners, the sovereign, while occupying a highly dignified place, has been degraded to the intellectual level of a woman."

[Some one observed to Mabuchi that it was owing to the Chinese systems of morals that the practice of marriage between brothers and sisters was discontinued. He explains in reply that] "according to ancient custom the children of the same mother were alone regarded as united by the fraternal tie; that it was not considered in any way objectionable for children of the same father by different mothers to intermarry."

"In ancient times when men's dispositions were straightforward, a complicated system of morals was unnecessary. It would naturally happen that bad acts might occasionally be committed, but the straightforwardness of men's dispositions would prevent the evil from being concealed and growing in extent. So that in those days it was unnecessary to have a doctrine of right and wrong. But the Chinese, being bad at heart, in spite of the teaching which they got, were only good on the outside, and their bad acts became of such magnitude that society was thrown into disorder. The Japanese being straightforward could do without teaching. It is said on the other side that as the Japanese had no names for benevolence, righteousness, propriety, sagacity, and truth, they must have been without those principles. To this Mabuchi replies that they exist in every country, in the same way as the four seasons which make their annual rounds. In the spring the weather does not become mild all at once. Nor the summer hot. Nature proceeds by gradual steps. According to the Chinese view it is not spring or summer unless it becomes mild or hot all of a sudden. Their principles sound very plausible, but are impractical."

"Human beings, having been produced by the spirit of the two Creative Deities, are naturally endowed with the knowledge of what they ought to do and what they ought to refrain from. It is unnecessary for them to trouble their heads with systems of morality,

If a system of morals were necessary, men would be inferior to animals, all of whom are endowed with the knowledge of what they ought to do, only in an inferior degree to men. If what the Chinese call Benevolence (*jen*), Righteousness (*i*), Propriety (*li*), Retiringness (*jang*), Filial Piety (*hsiao*), Brotherly Love (*ti*), Fidelity (*chung*), and Truth (*Shin*), really constitute the duty of man, they would be so recognized and practised without any teaching, but as they were invented by the so-called Holy Men as instruments for ruling a viciously inclined population, it became necessary to insist on more than the actual duty of man. Consequently, although plenty of men profess these doctrines, the number of those who practise them is very small. Violations of this teaching were attributed to human lusts. As human lusts are a part of man's nature, they must be a part of the harmony of the universe, and cannot be wrong according to Chinese theory. It was the vicious nature of the Chinese that necessitated such strict rules, as, for instance, that person descended from a common ancestor, no matter how distantly related, should not intermarry. These rules, not being founded on the harmony of the universe, were not in accordance with human feelings, and were, therefore, seldom obeyed."

NO ETHICS IN SHINTOISM.

"To have acquired the knowledge that there is no *michi* ([*tao*], ethics) to be learnt and practised is really to have learnt to practise the 'way' of the gods."—Motowori.

"All moral ideas which man requires are implanted in his bosom by the gods, and are of the same nature as the instincts which impel him to eat when he is hungry and to drink when he is thirsty. But the morals inculcated by the Chinese philosophers are inventions, and contain something more in addition to natural morality.

"To the end of time, each Mikado is the goddess' son. His mind is in perfect harmony of thought and feeling with hers. He does not seek out new inventions, but rules in accordance with the precedents which date from the age of the gods, and if he is ever in doubt, he has resort to divination, which reveals to him the mind of the great goddess. In this way the age of the gods and the present age are not two ages, but one, for not only the Mikado, but his Ministers and people also, act up to the tradition of the divine age. Hence, in ancient times the idea of *michi* or way (ethics) was never broached. The word was only applied to ordinary thoroughfares, and its application to systems of philosophy, government, morals, religion and so forth, is a foreign notion."

THE MIKADO IS SUPREME.

"The Sun-Goddess never said, 'Disobey the Mikado, if he be bad,' and therefore, whether he be good or bad, no one attempts to deprive him of his authority. He is the immovable ruler who must endure to the end of time, as long as the sun and moon continue to shine. In ancient language the Mikado was called a god, and that is his real character. Duty, therefore, consists in obeying him implicitly, without questioning his acts."

[An opponent named Ichikaha said that "to obey and revere a sovereign, no matter whether he be good or bad, is the part of women." Motowori replied:] "Thus, even, if the prince be bad, to venerate, respect and obey him in all things, though it may seem like a woman's duty, is the right way of action, which does not allow of the obligations of a subject towards his prince ever being violated."

EXAMPLE IS SUPERIOR TO PRECEPT.

"Most people are wont to suppose that the only way to attain to a knowledge of right conduct is to read books full of precepts, but they labor under a mistake. Precept is far inferior to example, for it only arises in the absence of example, while it is unnecessary when example exists. . . . The story of Oishi Kuranosuke and the forty-seven faithful retainers who underwent a thousand hardships and perils in order to slay Kira Kodzuke-no-Suke, the enemy of their lord, Asano Takumi-no-kami, will do far more to keep alive the flame of loyalty than any simple precepts about the duty of avenging a master. The ethical writings of the T'ang dynasty are full of the most admirable teachings of this kind, but when we find that the authors were themselves guilty of murdering their sovereigns and of treason, their words lose all their effect."—HIRATA.

OFFENSES.

"Evil acts and words are of two kinds, those of which we are ourselves conscious, and those of which we are not conscious. Every one is certain to commit accidental offenses, however careful he may be, and hence the practice of our ancient tongue was to say 'deign to correct those failings of which I have been guilty.' But it is better to assume that we have committed such unconscious offenses. If we pray that such as we have committed may be corrected the gods are willing to pardon them. By 'evil gods' are meant bad deities and demons who work harm to society and individuals.

They originated from the impurities contracted by Izanagi during his visit to the nether world, and cast off by him during the process of purification. They subsequently increased in number, especially after the introduction of Buddhism. The two deities of wind can, of course, blow away anything it pleases them to get rid of, and among other things the calamities which evil gods endeavor to inflict. As man is dependent on them for the breath which enables him to live, it is right to pray to them to give long life."—HIRATA.

PUNISHMENT AND REWARDS.

"The most fearful crimes which a man commits go unpunished by society, so long as they are undiscovered, but they draw down on him the hatred of the invisible gods. The attainment of happiness by performing good acts is regulated by the same law. Even if the gods do not punish secret sins by the usual penalties of the law, such as strangulation, decapitation, and transfixion on the cross, they inflict diseases, misfortunes, short life, and extermination of the race. Sometimes they even cause a clue to be given by which secret crime is made known to the authorities who have power to punish. The gods bestow happiness and blessings on those who practise good, as effectually as if they were to manifest themselves to our sight and give treasures, and even if the good do not obtain material rewards, they enjoy exemption from disease, good luck, and long life: and prosperity is granted to their descendents."—HIRATA.

FEAR OF THE GODS SHOULD INSPIRE GOOD CONDUCT.

"Never mind the praise or blame of fellow-men, but act so that you need not be ashamed before the gods of the Unseen. If you desire to practise true virtue, learn to stand in awe of the unseen and that will prevent you from doing wrong. Make a vow to the god who rules over the Unseen, and cultivate the conscience (*ma-go-koro*) implanted in you, and then you will never wander from the way. You cannot hope to live more than a hundred years under the most favorable circumstances, but as you will go to the Unseen Realm of O-kuni-nushi after death, and be subject to his rule, learn betimes to bow down before him."—HIRATA.

"All that comes to pass in the present world, whether good or bad in its nature, is the act of the gods, and men have generally little influence over the course of events. To insist on practising the ancient 'way of the gods,' in opposition to the customs of the present age, would be rebellion against that 'way,' and equivalent

to trying to excel it. If men in their daily life practise the laws made from time to time by the authorities, and act in accordance with general custom, they are practising *Shinto*."—MOTOWORI.

The principal ideas expressed in the above extracts seem to be:

1. The Japanese people are naturally virtuous.
2. The Japanese have become bad through foreign influence, which, among other evil effects, corrupted the monarch and led him to become the object of envy.

3. Straightforwardness in disposition leads to the confession of sin and the limitations of its growth.

4. The Chinese are bad at heart.

[Had these scholars known other foreign peoples doubtless they too would have been included in this general condemnation.]

5. The Emperor rules according to the divine will.

6. The Emperor must be obeyed whether he be good or bad.

7. Men know by nature what is right and what is wrong.

8. It is best not to disturb natural good conduct by attempting to inflict ethical rules on the people.

9. Human lusts must be right because they are natural.

10. Sins are of two kinds: conscious and unconscious.

11. The gods observe men's sins and by some means or other inflict punishment on the evil-doer.

12. The gods reward the good with moral and temporal blessings.

13. Both the evil and the good in this world are attributable to the gods: men cannot change the course of events to any appreciable degree.

14. The words of a teacher of ethics are valued by referring to his manner of life.

15. To influence conduct one must resort to examples; mere mouthing of precepts is of little worth.

16. One's conduct should be so ordered as to avoid shame before the gods.

17. Learn to do right before death ends your existence.

18. The ancient method of practice needs not be insisted on; readjustment to the present age is necessary; men must be guided by the laws of today.