

JAPAN'S SEVEN JOLLY GODS.

BY THE EDITOR.

JAPAN is a happy country, not because her people are wealthier or more powerful than others, but because they are more contented with the simple life they lead. It is true they are not so far advanced in industry and some pursuits of civilization as the Europeans and Americans, but they have proved that in whatever line they wish to excel, they can accomplish as much as the Indo-Germanic races. During the last war they have shown that their guns can shoot as well as German artillery, and that their naval officers can guide a ship with the same ability as those of the British navy. It is these feats of warfare that have gained the respect of the world, but it would seem better for the Japanese if they would not be as hasty in accepting the habits and customs of the white race in other lines, because in many respects they are actually better off in their simpler conditions.

The religion of the Japanese is more primitive than ours, and the ancient notions and traditions of pagan origin are suffered to continue. While the educated classes who have become emancipated, have accepted a philosophy based either on Confucian ideals of ethical culture or upon the Buddhist world-conception, the common people still continue to practice what in the eyes of Europeans appears as idolatry. Their view of the world is perhaps neither better nor worse than that of the uncultured masses of Europeans and Americans, for we have also our superstitions. Volumes may be written on inveterate folklore notions which are founded on traditions of ancient beliefs, many of which date back to pre-Christian ages, but they are mostly silly or unpleasant, while the mythology in which the uneducated Japanese still indulge is quite poetical. They have their Shinto festivals and they have their gods, and among their deities the most popular and prominent ones are the Seven Gods of Bliss, who spread, as it were, sunshine upon the daily monotony of the drudgery of life.

It is peculiar that these seven gods of bliss agree at least in one point with our own hoary traditions, in so far as they are seven in number. In ancient Babylon seven gods were selected to correspond to what in those days was considered the seven planets, and these seven stellar deities presided consecutively over the days of man's life. Thus the week of seven days originated, and even at the present day we call our days after these gods, the names of which have been translated from Babylonian into Latin, and from Latin into Saxon.

The seven gods of bliss in Japan do not correspond to the seven gods of ancient Babylon except in number, and there is also this peculiar similarity, that in each set we have one goddess, who is the goddess of beauty and love. The Aryan gods are represented as vigorous men, most of them combative and great fighters. Such are Jupiter, the god of thunder, the Saxon Thor, whose day is Thursday; and Tiu, the Saxon Mars whose day is Tuesday. Even Mercury, identified with the Saxon Wodan, is a god of battle. Saturn is grim and of a sour disposition. He is the god who lacks so much in parental love that he is reported to have eaten his own offspring, and it was customary in ancient Babylon to abstain on his day from undertaking any kind of work because whatever was done on Saturday was inauspicious. This habit continued among the Jews, and Saturday was their day for abstaining from labor for the sake of spiritual rest and religious contemplation.

How different are the Japanese gods! They are a jolly and peaceful set of fellows, and their festival days too are celebrated by jollification. Some of them are the gods of special professions. There is Bishamon,* the god of strength and wealth. He is perhaps nearest to our own warlike deities of ancient date. He is dignified in appearance and deportment and is represented as a

* The pronunciation of the names of the seven gods of bliss is as follows:

1. Bish'amon. Short *i*, short *a*, short *o*, accent on the first syllable.
2. Benzai'ten. Both *e* short, both *a* (as in "father") and *i* (as in "hit") distinctly heard, accent on the second syllable.
3. Dai'koku. In the diphthong *ai* the *a* (pronounced as in "father") and the short *i* (as in "hit") are both distinctly heard; the *o* is short, and the *u* at the end is scarcely audible. The accent is on the first syllable.
4. Eb'isu. *E* and *i* are short and *u* scarcely sounded; the accent is on the first syllable.
5. Fu-ku-*rok*'u-ju. The first *u* and the last *u* are long, as *u* in "rude," the two *u* in the syllables "ku" (here italicized) are very short, the *o* is short, and the accent is on *rok*.
6. Ju'rôjin. The first *u* is accented and long, the other two vowels *o* and *i* are short.
7. Hotêi. The *o* is long but unaccented. The diphthong *ei* consists of a long and here accented *ê* (pronounced like *a* in "fate"), followed by a short *i* as in "hit."



BISHAMON, THE GOD OF STRENGTH AND VICTORY, STANDING
ON A CONQUERED FOE.

stately knight carrying arms. He is the god of the warrior class as well as the wealthy merchant, the gentleman. Since Bishamon is the god of strength, he is also commonly worshiped as the protector of towns and castles. He carries the model of a castle in his left hand. He is surrounded by a halo consisting of a wheel blazing up in flames of passion.

Very different in appearance is the god of the well-to-do farmer. His name is Daikoku. He carries a hammer and is seated on two



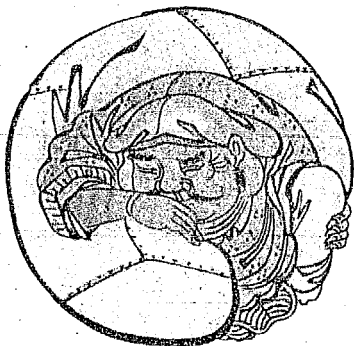
DAIKOKU WITH HIS HAMMER.

bags of rice. When he shakes his mallet money drops down, and thereby increases the wealth of his devotees. His picture is frequently found at the entrance doors to the houses even where the people have ceased to believe in the old Shintoism.

Traders worship Ebisu, a smiling good-natured man who carries a fish, or is represented with a rod by which he has just caught a fish.

Benzaiten (also in an abbreviated form called Benten) cor-

responds to Venus in Roman mythology. She is the goddess of love and beauty and everything that adorns life. In addition she



DAIKOKU.



EBISU.



BENZAITEN.



FUKUROKUJU.

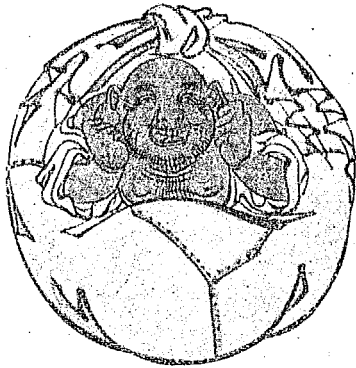


JURÔJIN.

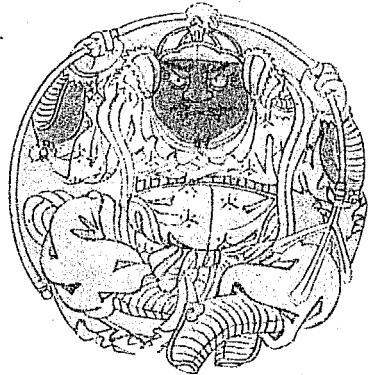
is invoked by sailors and all people who travel in ships, and this too constitutes a similarity to Venus who is believed to have risen

from the sea. As the goddess who carries across the waters she has become the goddess of bridges.

The three gods that are left do not belong to a special class, but shower their blessings upon mankind in general so far as they succeed in earning it. There are two gods who promote the length of our days. Fukurokuju is easily distinguished from the rest by an especially tall head, the forehead being at least twice as long as his face, sometimes even longer. His companion Jurôjin is frequently accompanied either by a white stag or a crane, both emblems of longevity. The stag in Chinese is called *loh* which is a homophone of the word longevity. The latter is written with a different character but is pronounced *loh* the same as stag. This accidental agreement of sound has led to symbolize the blessings of a long happy life under the picture of a stag, and in China the god of



HOTÊI.



BISHAMON.

longevity is also sometimes represented as riding on a stag. The seventh god, Hotêi, is the god of mirth. He is pictured as a stout jolly fellow, bald-headed and carrying a bag on his back. He loves children, and he is frequently represented as being surrounded by them.

A drawing by Hokusai, which is here reproduced, is characteristic of the influences which these divinities exercise upon Japan. It represents four of the gods of bliss. Ebisu with the fish is uppermost at the right hand, while underneath we see Daikoku who has just thrown his mantle over a carrot-like plant with two roots. It is a *daikong* (literally translated "horse radish") a typically Japanese plant, which is one of the most popular vegetables. In English it is called "the gigantic Japanese radish." The shape of the *daikong*, when possessed of two roots, reminds one of the human body,

and is regarded as especially lucky, not unlike the European mandrake. In Daikoku's company is a little mouse, which is never far from where there is a bag of rice. Next to the mouse is seen Fukurokuju, with his head covered with a kerchief, and he carries a paper lantern indicating that he is going to a masquerade.

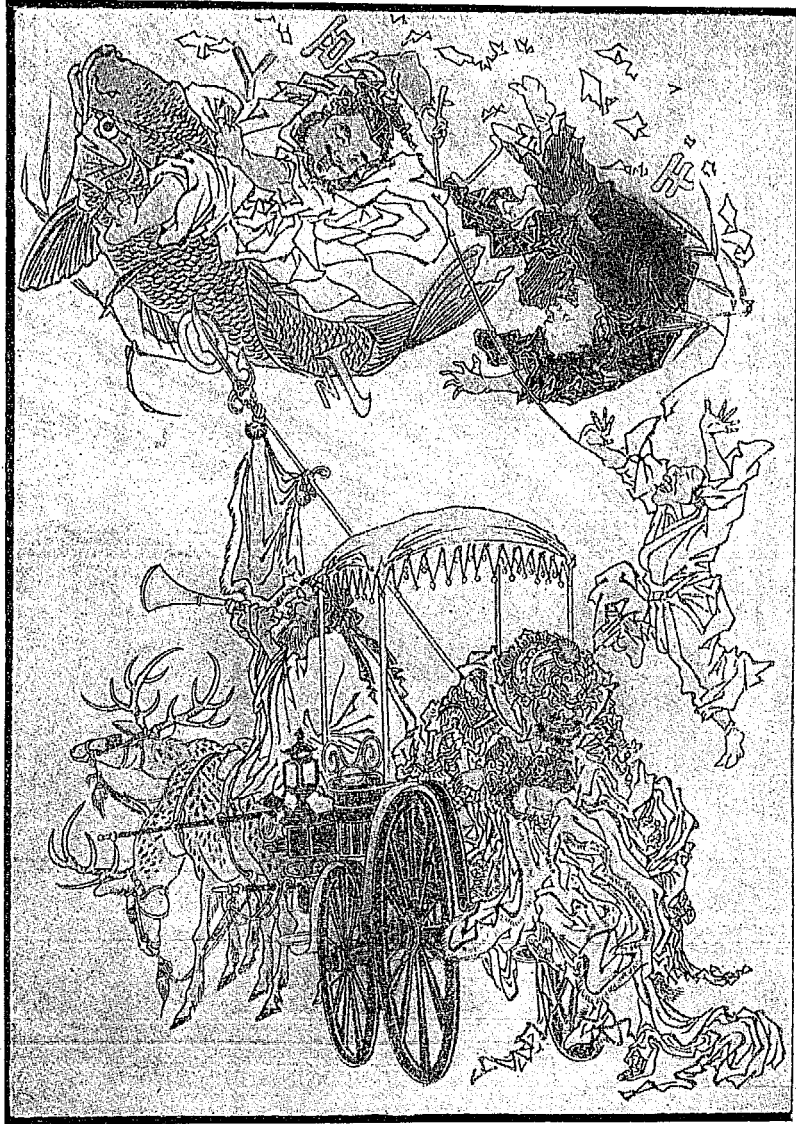
The fourth god is Hotêi who laughs and makes laugh. He has painted a face on his belly as if he were making a big jack-o-lantern of himself for the amusement of others. How he enjoys the merriment of the children who clap their hands in glee, and so the general disposition of this god is laughter and spreading laughter.



LAUGH AND LET LAUGH: FOUR GODS OF BLISS SPREADING JOY.
(Ebisu, Daikoku, Fukurokuju and Hotêi.)
By Hokusai.

Another picture of four gods of the seven shows a carriage drawn by two dappled stags. Jurôjin is the charioteer and blows a big trumpet. Bishamon gallantly helps the goddess Benzaiten to enter the carriage. The god Ebisu flies high in the air on his fish smiling with glee upon some poor fellows who are in desperate pursuit after good fortune. One of them is turned over in the blizzard, while the other one gesticulates wildly with his hands in despair at not being able to reach the god of luck. Everything typifies the spirit of good humor for which Ebisu has been especially famous.

All these pictures are characteristic of ancient Japan, and it may be a pity that the modern era is sweeping away many of the good



FOUR GODS OF BLISS (EBISU, JURÔJIN, BISHAMON AND BENZAITEN.)

features of bygone days, among them perhaps also the ancient Japanese contentedness and merry humor of its simple life.