

Curds

THE REMMON KYŌ.

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In Tamura Cho, Shiba, Tokyo, there stands a red-brick Presbyterian Church which will serve as a land-mark for my paper.

Immediately opposite the Church stands an old *Nagaya* with a large gateway leading into an extensive courtyard. When you enter the courtyard, there stands before you an oldish wooden building, not very ecclesiastic in appearance, and yet the lanterns, the alm's box, the glimmering candles, and the peep you get of an altar covered with offerings of rice-cake, all show that the building, originally a secular one, has been "made over" to suit some purposes of worship.

A few nights ago my footsteps took me in that direction about seven o'clock in the evening. As I passed the building, I noticed that it was lighted up, and that people kept entering it. There was evidently some service going on, so out of curiosity I entered.

I found a very large Japanese house, fitted up after the fashion of a Shinto temple. In the centre stood an altar, or rather rows of altars rising up one behind the other. On these were some twelve cakes of *mochi*, and behind them burned a couple of hanging lights. The sanctuary was fenced off from the rest by a low rail. Outside the rail was a candle-stick for votive candles, and I noticed that, every now and again, a worshipper would come in, light a candle, and fix it on the candle-stick, so that by the time the service was concluded there were fully twenty candles burning.

Near the candle-stick, on the left hand side of what I may call the Nave, was a regular Japanese office-desk, with *hibachi* and tea-kettle, at which sat the care-taker and his family, while behind them I could see living-rooms, and rooms used for storing furniture &c.

The Nave was entirely deserted, but on the right hand side of the Nave was a space of some 60 feet by 30, in which was assembled a pretty numerous congregation listening attentively to sermons. They were all people of a low class, about one half being men and the other women, and, as far as I could see, mostly middle-aged. They seemed to be listening with great attention, an audible murmur of assent running through the audience from time to time, while, at somewhat longer intervals, the whole congregation would give three quick crisp claps of the hands, and mutter what seemed to be some religious formula.



The preachers were four in number. When I entered, a woman of some thirty years of age was seated on a cane-bottomed chair on a platform, preaching in a very quiet and simple manner, without any raising of the voice or gesticulation. She wore a richly embroidered robe; and when her sermon was ended, her place was successively taken by two men, dressed in the ceremonial dress of Shinto priests. These men also talked simply and quietly, without any straining after effect. At the close of the third address it was announced that the next speaker would be "*Waga Shi*"—"our teacher," an announcement which immediately produced a hum of appreciative expectation. The cane-bottomed chair was removed, a plush-covered arm chair was put in its place, the attendant priests and women went out of the room, and presently returned in procession, leading in an elderly woman of sixty or thereabouts, clad in an embroidered vestment, very stout and short of breath, who had to be helped up on to the platform in a very undignified manner.

Her address did not differ either in manner or in matter from those of the other speakers. It was very hard indeed to gather from the sermons what was the body of doctrine that they wished to present to their hearers. Indeed, they seemed to try to discard doctrines and preach facts. One of the men said, and his words were in substance repeated by them all, "There is a great difference between *ri* and *butsu*, between theory and fact. It is very

difficult to talk about *ri*, but you all know as a fact that there are some amongst us here, whose crooked legs have been straightened, whose eyesight has been restored and whose general health has been recovered by following this teaching with faith."

In other words they claimed to be faith-healers, and whilst no mention was made of anything like a future life, present cure and present health and happiness were continually set before the audience as the object and reward of faith.

The interest centred in the woman spoken of as "*Waga Shi*," who seemed to claim to be the foundress of the sect, as she was always talking of "my doctrine," "my religion." It will be interesting to give some account of her.

On the 12th of November in the 5th year of Kwansei (1798) was born a man of the name of Yanagita Ichibei-mon, son of one of the retainers of the Daimyō of Kokura. In the 5th year of Bunsei (1821) he took his father's place in the Daimyō's household, first as Librarian, afterwards as Inspector or Superintendent, and later still as Master of Ceremonies. In February of the 14th year of Tempo (1841) he retired from active service, took the name of Sonyū ("religious novice"), and from that time until his death, which occurred at the age of 84, on the 12th October, in the 10th year of Meiji (1877), devoted himself entirely to a religious life.

His character was simple and studious; his public duties required from him a knowledge of fencing, and military science, of the routine of a large household, and of such political science as was known and needed in those days. He further took great interest in philosophy and religion, and, having access to the Daimyō's library, was able to give full scope to his inclinations. But about the time that he retired from active life he claimed to have attained, either by intuition or inspiration, to a direct knowledge of the Central Truth of all religion (*myō-hō*), and from that moment he gave up his books and set himself to practising *Tendō*, the way of Heaven.

About this time he came in contact with a woman named Shimamura Mitsu, who suffered from some malady which defied the skill of the physicians. Yanagita prayed over her (I have two accounts of this—one says that he prayed, the other that he performed a magic charm), and, as a result, the sickness was cured. Shimamura was extremely grateful, and from that time desired to become his disciple. This however he would not permit for some time. After watching her carefully for several weeks, he decided to initiate her into his doctrines. "Learned men," he told her, "wise men, and clever men, have great difficulty about this way. You are a woman and cannot even read, but you have the right dispositions (*kiryō*) and so I will teach you." Then he blew out the candle in front of him, and asked, "Where has the flame gone to? Think over your answer

for three or four days : and know that if you cannot understand this you had better be dead.”

Shimamura took time to consider the mystery of the flame, and, when the three days were over, communicated her conclusions to Yanagita, who professed himself satisfied with her answer, and from that day commenced a course of initiation by giving her daily subjects for meditation.

According to the account given by Shimamura Mitsu herself, Yanagita had for a long time been longing to find a suitable successor. He was very diligent in praying for the world's happiness and salvation, and was fearful lest on account of his age he should be called away before he had communicated the mystery of Myō-hō to some worthy personage. One night, in a vision, the Spirit of Myō-hō appeared to him and said : “ Fear not ; a *Saviour* (kyūsei-shū) will come to you in your lifetime, and will shortly come to see you.” Years afterwards, Shimamura, who was lame and troubled with defective eye-sight, hearing of Yanagita's great power, came to ask for the benefit of his intercessions. As soon as Yanagita saw her he greeted her with great joy. “ You,” he said, “ are the Saviour pointed out to me by the Spirit of Myō-hō. I have been waiting 20 years to see you.” Then she recovered from her lameness, the sight of her blind eye was restored, she became Yanagita's disciple, and, in process of time, his successor.

Yanagita and Shimamura now commenced a regular propaganda of their religion. A great Temple was built at

Kokura as an abiding centre for the faith, and, after Yanagita's death, Shimamura, who by this time was herself an old woman, came up to Tokyo to spread the doctrines.

The doctrines of the Remmon kyō are not committed to paper. The sect is called the Remmon kyō ("Lotus-Gate-Teaching"), because as the Lotus, rooted in mud, attains to a spotless purity, so the faith of the Lotus Gate Sect attains to purity in the midst of an evil world. It is needless to say how common the lotus is as a religious symbol in Japan.

The Remmon kyō claims to be a purified Shintō. There is a little poem which I got from a believer.

“ Myō-hō is not Buddha's lore,
But a great torch on the path of Shintō,
To enlighten all men,
And abundantly to bless the world.

Wise men learning it become wiser,
Benevolent men increase in benevolence.
It must never be committed to paper,
Yet it is the foundation of truth.

It changes and has various aspects :
Prayer is a superfluity.
Its virtue blesses all the earth ;
You must ever observe it faithfully.”

In the early stages of the movement, neither Yanagita nor Shimamura seem to have troubled themselves about theological tenets. They talked about *Myō-hō*, the mysterious law. But with that strong tendency to personification which is so marked in all ignorant people, very distinctly so among the lower class Japanese who form the bulk of their disciples, the mysterious law became personified, and *Myō-ho sama* is the God of the Remmon kyō.

When, however, Shimamura Mitsu came to Tōkyō to preach, and sought to obtain the recognition of the Government for her sect, she had great difficulty in doing so, because, as the sect worshipped no deities, it was suspected of being some form of magic and not a religion at all.

Shimamura therefore set up as the objects of worship the three gods who took part in the creation of the world — *Zōka san shin* —, i. e.

Ame no minaka nushi no Kami,
Takami musubi no Kami and,
Kami musubi no Kami.

These gods however are only considered as three manifestations of the *Ji-no Myō-hō*, "the mystery of things," and *Myō-hō sama* is still the God of the Remmon kyō.

The information I have hitherto given I obtained from a Manuscript note which one of my pupils got for me from a Remmon kyō believer. In the *Yorozu Chōhō* there appeared some years ago a long series of articles on this subject which I have been fortunate enough to secure.

Among other charges (among which, charges of immorality are frequently made though not so well proven), the writer of the Yorodzu Chōhō articles gives us a history of the development of the sect.

Its original founder, Yanagita, belonged to the *Fuju fuse* sub-sect of Nichiren Buddhism. This sub-sect is notorious for its fanaticism and was proscribed throughout the Tokugawa regime on account of supposed destructive tendencies. When Yanagita's doctrine of the Myō-hō (which he must have got from this sect, as Myō-hō sama is a great object of Nichiren worship) came to be enshrined in a religious community, application was made to the authorities of the Nichiren sect to be allowed to become affiliated to them. The Nichiren authorities, however, not wishing to compromise themselves by patronizing a body which had sprung from the proscribed Fujū fuse sect, declined the application. Shortly afterwards, and chiefly through the influence of a man named Hirayama, application for permission to affiliate was made to the Taisei sect of Shintoism, and this application was received, apparently on the condition of coming up to the requirements of the Shinto faith by adopting the three gods before mentioned, as objects of worship.

The authorities of the Taisei sect do not seem to have had quite an easy time with their adopted daughter. Remmon is not genuine Shinto: it is not even loyal Shinto.

Every Shinto temple has a *honzon* (principal idol), and

all Shinto makes much of the worship of the divine ancestors of the Imperial House. The Remmon kyō has no *honzon*, and no true object of worship except Ji-no Myō-hō, and pays no heed to the worship of the divine ancestors.

Its teachers, too, from Shimamura Mitsu downwards, are ignorant persons whose ignorance is not counter-balanced by superior sanctity. The authorities of the Taisei kyō have been obliged to protest against the employment of young women in the services of religion, against the allowing the sexes to sit together during service, and above all against the use and sale of holy water in the place of medicine.

The Holy water (*shin-sui*) is water consecrated by Shimamura Mitsu, and is drunk medicinally. Another form of administration is *fuki mizu*, the water being blown in fine spray from the mouth of the officiating priest after the manner employed by Japanese gardeners and laundrymen.

A third method of faith healing is one which has a strangely suggestive name, — *On iki wo itadaku* —, “to receive the divine breath.” In this ceremony, the believer is brought to Shimamura Mitsu for her to breathe on him, in order that he may recover his health.

A magazine (*Fushō shinshi*) is printed for private circulation and contains lists of persons who have been miraculously healed by the application of these methods. Only those who pay first-class dues are entitled to this magazine.

Every member pays 2 sen a month (*tsuki-gake-kin*), and a further sum, the amount and period of which I could not ascertain, named *Eizoku shi kin*, permanent fund. There are, further, members known as *Shayu* "friends," and *Tokushi sanscisha*, "special approvers," Only those friends and special approvers who pay at least 30 sen a month are entitled to the magazine, but all subscribers are entitled to Holy Water.

Another source of income comes from prayer fees. The Remmon kyō does not encourage its adherents to pray for themselves. Prayers should always be made through a priest, and there are fixed charges for priestly intercession.

The sale of charms is also said to be a source of great profit to the sect. The Remmon kyō has an amulet of its own, known as *Goshintai*, the Honourable Divine Body, which is said to contain the True Body of Myōhō sama. I remember a jinrikisha man showing me one with great pride and telling me it was his god. It is a little packet done up in the stiff paper known as Echizen Hōshō. On the outside are the words *Shin-ji*, "divine ball," and the name and address of the Temple issuing the amulet.

This charm is sold to believers at a high figure: and is said to cure diseases and avert danger — my jinrikisha man, who had just spilled me out of his *kuruma* ascribed to it the miraculous escape of his *kuruma* from what might have been a costly accident.

When the charm is sold the purchaser is warned that, if the packet be opened, he will be struck with blindness or, failing that, will die within three years.

The Editor of the Yorodzu Chōhō, however, opened the packet and found it to contain a strip of paper, 2 inches wide, 6 inches long, and bearing the words "Ji-no-Myōhō," "the mystery of things." The words are very indistinctly and very badly written; they are said to have been written by Shimamura Mitsu herself, and to be all that she knows how to write. It is said that in the Middle Ages, when the independent nobles of Germany had the privilege of waging private war, the privilege was so highly esteemed that many of them learned to write, solely in order to sign the declarations of war against their neighbours. So Shimamura Mitsu is said by her enemies to have learned to write, solely in order to sign the *go-shin-tai* as a source of revenue.

The power of the *go-shin-tai* is said to come not from the fact that it contains the sacred Name of Ji-no-Myōhō, but because it was actually written by Myōhō sama himself:—the identity between Myōhō sama and Shimamura Mitsu by a kind of hypostatic union, is so fully believed that what is predicated of the one is predicated equally of the other. Shimamura Mitsu is often spoken of as *Go sonshi sama*, or *Ikigami*, "the living deity."

Such are a few of the tenets and practices of one of the obscurest of Japanese sects. The Yorodzu Chōhō articles

contain a great deal of information, but they are of a polemic nature, and are mainly devoted to the examination of charges of immorality, fraud, speculation, and disloyalty brought against Shimamura Mitsu and her followers, But these are of no permanent value, and throw no light on the faith and practice of the sect.

It would be an interesting enquiry, if it could be prosecuted, to find out whether Yanagita the teacher of Shimamura had any access to Christian teachings. The one deity Ji-no-Myōhō, represented by the trinity of Shinto deities, the Zōka sanshin, the incarnation of Myōhō in Shimamura, the communication of the "divine body" to the believer in an amulet, the affusion of water in the *fuki mitsu* ceremony, and the ceremony of "receiving the holy breath" from Shimamura Mitsu, all lead one to the conclusion that possibly Yanagita during his researches in his lord's library at Kokura in Kyūshū may have come across some book of Christian teaching which he knew how to manipulate for his own purposes.



NOTE.

THE REMMON KYO.

In my paper "Dogmatische Anthropologie im Buddhismus," published in Volume viii Part 2 of the Transactions of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, a summary of which I delivered as a lecture before this Society, I reviewed a book entitled *Ekkyō Jūsei Ron* which contained, among other curious information, rules for ascertaining the probable destiny of a dying man's soul from the appearance of his body at death. Thus it is said that if a man at the time of death turns black, it is a sign of a future re-birth in hell: if green, or yellow, of a re-birth among beasts, or among the hungry demons known in Japanese Buddhism as gaki. If the face does not change colour at all, the dying person will be re-born as a man: if his complexion is rosy, the mourners may comfort themselves with the thought that the deceased has been re-born in some part of Heaven.

In the same way, if a man has been a good man, and if, at his death, his feet grow cold first and gradually the

rest of the body, it is a sign of a coming birth among men. If the head and skull remain warm, the destination of the soul is Heaven.

If a bad man, in dying, loses his warmth first in the head, and gradually over the rest of the body, it means a re-birth as a hungry demon; if he dies before the lower part of the legs have become cold, he will be a beast; if the whole body, except the soles of the feet, is cold, he is on his road to a re-birth in Hell. A dying Saint retains the warmth of his body, even after death.

The Remmon Kyō also claims to have its means of discovering, not only the future, but the antecedents of the soul. The method is simple, and should be easily verified.

When a man is dying they take the palm of his hand, and write on it, whether with a *fude* or simply with the finger, his name, his address, and the place where he is to be buried. This writing, they say, will remain on the hand, and when the man comes to be re-born, the palm will still bear the name, residence, and place of sepulture of his deceased predecessor. (If I may be allowed the term).

The marks are indelible; they cannot be washed out except by visiting the place of sepulture, and rubbing the place with earth taken from the tomb itself. They claim, though, as might perhaps be expected, they do not offer any data for verification, that such cases have occurred amongst them, and I believe that they never omit the ceremony of writing on a dying man's hand.

When asked why these markings on the hand were not more frequently seen, they replied that it was a rare thing for a Remmon Kyō believer to be re-born amongst his own people. He might be born in heavenly or, at least, non-human circles, or amongst men of a different nation or creed, who did not understand the meaning of the hand marks. The total number of Remmon Kyō believers is not very great, and no other sect practises the marking of the hand.

