THE GODS AND WAR

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By NORITAKE TSUDA

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IN an American paper some time ago a writer wittily remarked that if the Almighty hears and answers the petitions of all the belligerents now appealing to heaven, who shall say that miracles have ceased? But, as a matter of fact are all the warring nations really appealing to the same god? If they are it is most remarkable that they should have conceived such divergent views of the divine character. The god of the German is more different from the god of the British than Buddha is from Christ. Indeed the gods of to-day seem just as much the creations of human imagination as gods ever have been; so much so that the only god a Teuton or a Briton can understand is a god just like himself. War brings out all this crude anthropomorphism with a vengeance. But to many it will no doubt appear probable that a really responsible, self-respecting deity could hardly be expected to approve fully of either side to the quarrel.

At a time when most of the most civilized nations are slaying one another in the most approved and effective manner, and civilizations are appealing to their gods in support of policies and methods wrought by civilized slaughter, it is interesting to note that Japan too has her war gods. She has not, however, been so rash as to assume
that the god who approves of war is really the same as the deity who is bent on peace. Old Japan could not conceive of a deity loving both war and peace, as the deity or deities of Europe appear to do. All the gods of Japan are not warlike; for the supervision of the arbitrament of the sword there is one special deity, Hachiman, the god of war. Whether one god in whom are believed to inhere all the qualities that make for both war and peace is more rational than a belief in a plurality of gods representing such divergent proclivities as those of war and peace, we do not now undertake to decide, but certainly it would seem that the god now appealed to in war is somewhat different from the deity worshipped in ordinary times. In Britain the clergy are being forbidden to shoulder the rifle or draw the sword, which looks as if in England no less than in Japan there was somehow a conviction that the god of the Church is after all not the god of war. Needless to say, it has not always been so understood by the representatives of the Church. Has the god changed or have the representatives of the Church changed gods? The Japanese at any rate have always assumed that the god of battles was different from the god of things as they ought to be, and that the god of war was the one deity that took a hand in the emergency of war.
MYOCHIN HELMET AND ARMOUR, WITH RELIGIOUS INSCRIPTIONS
At all events if there be really a god who interests himself to any practical degree in the disputes of men, he surely must know that they who are bent on making most progress in perfecting the weapons of warfare will be of all people the most likely to seek opportunity to test them. Even a dolt of a deity could see that he could not be a god of war without war. Gods no less than men do not make weapons for nothing. When the science and wealth of a people are devoted to inventing and creating instruments of destruction what kind of deity do such people worship, if not the god of war; and with such devotion there must naturally to the conviction that the god of war and the god of peace are permanently irreconcilable. Does not this suggest a most disastrous confusion, perilous to men and nations alike? But if peace and righteousness can come only through war, then is not the war god right after all; and the only problem between contestants is to know which side the war god is on. Presumably the war god, if he be worthy of his title, is on the side of war, and therefore on the side of those that want to fight. This is apparently the Teutonic idea. Every man's god seems to be a war god when the man wants to fight,
and every man's god is on his side in the quarrel. It is then only a question of superior fighting deities. There are doubtless some nations who would fight even though the god of battles were against them. They are fated to destruction. To them the god of other nations is never in the right. Certainly the world's war theology is as much in need of straightening out as ever it was, and ignorance of deity is just as cosmopolitan as in ages past.

All this confusion is simplified to a degree by the Japanese theory, of war gods as distinct from peace and other divinities. That a plurality of gods is not wholly irrational has been shown by the writings of the late Professor William James, of Harvard. The Japanese never assumed that the war god was so stupid as to be on both sides in a quarrel, and so each side appealed to the same tribunal to judge between them. The notions of the war deity held by the various warring tribes and clans of old Japan do not suggest that there was any great difference of opinion as to the character of the war god, such as is indicated in the British and German conceptions respectively. There appears to have been no theory that might is right, or that the deity was on the side of the strongest battalions. It seems to have been taken for granted on both sides that a being of godlike qualities would find his own reasons, without any human assistance, for arriving at verdict. There was nothing to do but make to him a final appeal. The reasons why the war god took the side of one contestant or the other always were mysterious in the eyes of many,
especially to the losing side. But man proposes and God disposes, and so there was an end to it. How far the nations now at war can get beyond the wisdom of this pragmatic sanction is a question.

To those who believe in the arbitrament of the sword as the surest way to a solution of international disputes, there is little help or consolation in considering the question whether war is sinful or inhumane: they apparently leave that to the god of war to decide, and if he can make it all right with the god of peace, well and good; but if not, what then? Presumably the case must in that event come before a heavenly conclave and be adjusted on a more elevated plane, man caring little, so long as the region of conflict be removed from earth. The while, on earth, each nation or people, is fighting for its own interests, and appears to think it can do no wrong for its country's sake. With most people it is "my country right or wrong"; and this notion that one's country is invariably in the right will be found to be based somehow on a religious sanction, which inevitably associates war with religion and makes the war god necessary. There is no
nation on earth but thinks that religion is necessary to assurance of victory in war.
This relation between war and religion is a very old one, as old as man, perhaps, and it as real to-day as ever it was. My present task is to trace as briefly as I may the history of this idea as suggested by the banners, war weapons and symbols of war in old Japan.
WAR BANNERS OF OLD JAPAN, BEARING RELIGIOUS INSCRIPTIONS

And first as to why Hachiman became the war god of the
Japanese. In the Iwashimizu Hachiman shrine there is a banner said to have floated over the victorious army of the great Minamoto Yoshiiye of the 11th century. This banner is of silk, and is 3 feet wide and 9 in length. Over two black lines across the bottom are written in ideographs, the words: *Hachiman Daibosatsu*. Now it is well known that the war god, Hachiman, is a deification of the Emperor Ojin. Hachiman is one of the most popular divinities in the Japanese pantheon, and in some parts of the country, more especially in the northwestern districts, there are shrines sacred to his memory set up every few miles. Then how did this divinity come to be regarded with such great honor?

It was this way. When Minamoto Yoriyoshi marched to Oshu for the subjugation of the Abe family he built a shrine to Hachiman every 5 miles of the way, praying to that deity for victory. It will be remembered that on the banner already alluded to the war god is represented as a Bosatsu, or Buddhist deity; for when Buddhism came to Japan it soon discovered that it could make no headway without cooperation with the national or Shinto deities, and it even found a place in its pantheon for a war god, hitherto foreign to its genius; and consequently the Shinto god of war, Hachiman, was incorporated with the Buddhist divinities. This explains how Hachiman came to be regarded as a war god by the Buddhists, but we have yet to explain how he came to be so regarded by the Shintoists or people of Japan.
Hachiman, or in other words, the Emperor Ojin, was a child of miraculous birth. During a war that threatened the Imperial sovereignty in the 2nd century the national deities revealed to the Emperor Chuai that the best way to suppress the rebels was to turn their attention to foreign conquest, and so they were induced to invade Korea. Before the invasion could be carried out the Emperor passed away, and the campaign was undertaken by the Empress jingo. Before setting out on so perilous an expedition her Majesty invoked the aid of the gods at the national altars, whereupon the four guardian deities descended from on high bearing a heavy floating banner on which were inscribed the main points of the strategy to be observed on the campaign in Korea. Under those divine auspices she set out on the expedition to the long coveted peninsula. As the war proceeded prosperously the Imperial lady one day burned a holy war book and drank the ashes thereof as a divine potion; and the Imperial prince thereafter born was found able to recite the whole of the holy war book even from the day of birth. Moreover, at the very moment of his birth eight banners appeared let down from heaven to convince
the world of the divinity of the Imperial child. The word Hachiman in Japanese means "eight banners." Over the birthplace of the wonderful prince a shrine was erected, and the prince in due time became the Emperor Ojin, who was posthumously exalted as the god of war, and called Hachiman, or Eight Banners.

To the highly sophisticated intellectualists of western lands the pedigree above outlined may seem complicated and of somewhat doubtful theology, but it is surely as rational and respectable as that of the war gods of Europe, so highly bred and yet so capable, if all reports be true, of such very questionable tactics. War is something, we admit, which even a deity cannot make decent or humane; and if war must be, it is as well to have a god to supervise it as to have gods for the supervision of other less dangerous matters; and when all scores are paid off, we feel convinced that the war gods of Japan will have come out of the fracas, suffering less from loss of reputation than some others, whom we shall forbear to name, since comparisons are odious.

But this is not all. We can do much better still. In the Hodarakuji temple at Kamakura there is an ancient banner of the Heike family, 3 feet by 2, bearing 6 ideographs meaning "98,000 gods of war." Here is enough to go around surely, and even some to spare for Europe, should they come short there. In a world where the causes of disputation and quarrel are so various and notions of right
and wrong so divided, it is well to have enough war gods to satisfy all, and Japan offers a more assorted and excellent selection than other nations.

Other evidences of the esteem in which the war god was held by our ancestors, no less than by ourselves, are to be found on the old offensive and defensive weapons in our war museums. In the Tokyo Imperial Museum there is a helmet from the deft hand of the famous Myochin Fusamune on the outside of which is engraved Han-nya-kyo, while within arc the names of the deities, Amaterasu, Hachiman and Kasuga, a triad not uncommonly found on weapons and war banners. Doubtless the wearer of such a piece of armour believed that these could defend him in battle; and to make sure of not prejudicing the case on the score of race, he had the Buddhist as well as the Shinto deities represented, for even in godly matters two heads are also better than one etc. This triad of deities has been associated on martial weapons and banners since the 12th century when great military families like the Fujiwara began to appear in Japan. The theology of the triad is as involved and complicated as any other, but it seems that Hachiman, the god of war, was regarded as an incarnation of Amaterasu the creator of Japan.

Another religious war symbol in the Imperial Museum is a banner bearing seven Chinese ideographs in gold, signifying the Hokkekyo, or sacred scriptures of the Buddhists, the suggestion being that all who repeat the title
Buddhists, the suggestion being that all who repeat the title on the banners will have the same protection in war as if he were able to recite the entire scriptures. In old Japan the warrior's faith in gods was also indicated by inscriptions and emblems on his sword. In the Tokyo Imperial Museum there are swords bearing the image of Fudo or some other Buddhist divinity. On an iron cuirass of the 16th century there is the ideograph for Heaven, to the right of which is inserted in the blade a skull of bronze.

This signified that in the opinion of the owner of the weapon the fate of the warrior is in the hand of Heaven, and he must accept his fate, even though it mean the leaving of his skull on the battle field. The same brave spirit is suggested in one of our oldest war songs coming down from the 8th century:

Our corse to the deep if we fight on the sea.
Or the weeds o'er our bones if they bleach on the field,
Since 'tis all for the sake of our Emperor dear,
And with honor and joy we go forth for this!

A similar faith is found in the oath taken by the great warriors of old before going forth to battle, numerous
examples of which are to be found in Japanese history. The
gods of heaven and earth were invoked, including those of
Buddhism as well as Shinto. Temples and shrines were
erected in honor of gods, in token of divine assistance and
victory, an example of which is seen in the great Hachiman
temple at Kamakura built by Yoritomo. The Buddhists had
their war-god theory worked out to perfection, for they had
special war prayers which the deity would not hear unless
signed by the Emperor, thus precluding their use by rebels
or either enemies. And consistently the Buddhists gave the
images of their war god the most horrifying aspect, with
four grotesque faces and his body equipped with 8 hands,
which is really the only kind of warrior that stands any
chance of survival, even in modern warfare.

This custom of seeking help from whatever source, whether
of Shinto or Buddhism, India or China, in peace or in war,
from religion or science, is thoroughly typical of the
Japanese mind, which has no prejudices when it comes to
practical affairs. It makes no difference to the Japanese
what god it is or whose, so long as he can help, which after
all is the main question. Naturally native divinities have had
and still have the preference, as in Europe, but the God of
the Christians as well as those of India and China have
their devotees too, beside and with the Shinto gods. There
is nothing like being all things to all gods as well being all
things to all nations and all men! In a game which is one of
hit or miss the scope should be was wide as possible.
This disposition to honor and trust in the national gods has been no less emphasized in recent years than in times past, especially in time of war. Both in the conflict with China and that with Russia, as well as in the present rupture with Germany the national messengers have invariably been despatched to the great shrines to inform the ancestral gods of the nation's plans and to ask their aid in the campaign; and when the war is over the messengers are likewise again despatched officially to inform the gods of the results of the war and to thank them for the help given.