

Omachi and its Gods.

REV. C. K. HARRINGTON.

No. V.

THE GODS OF OMACHI.

In the third shrine on the god shelf is the *fuda* of the local divinity, Uji-Gami. Each town has its Uji-gami, and each village either has one or a share in one; for if the villages are small they club together and have their Uji-gami and his temple in common. The word *uji* denotes a family stock or line, and Uji-gami may denote that this god is in some way the founder and forbear of the community. The local divinity of Omachi is Wakaaji, which may mean "the young prince." He is said to have been the son of an emperor, and to have founded Omachi, or made preparation for the settlement of the place, by reducing to subjection or destroying the savages or rebels who then infested the region. His temple is just beyond the north limit of the town. Here stands a magnificent grove of cryptomerias, their tall, straight, smooth trunks forming noble rows of pillars. In the midst of the grove is an open square, in which stand the various buildings that go to make up the temple, which we may not enumerate and describe at present. His festival falls on the 10th of August, and is a great occasion in Omachi. The people flock in from the neighboring villages. Fantastic structures several stories in height, mounted on wheels, are drawn through the principal streets of the town by crowds of men in holiday attire, with much noise. In the first and second stories are crowds of children, or men playing on various instruments. In the top storey is some gay looking image of a woman, or an old man perhaps. These *koshi* move lumberingly along, several succeeding one another, amid great throngs of people, with a policeman here and there to preserve order. One part of the festival is a great gathering at the temple grounds. A number of children, ten or a dozen, of tender age, are mounted on horses. Both they and their steeds are gaily decked out. Each child has a bow and quiver. Each horse is led by a man in special dress. A lane is opened through the crowd leading up to the gateway in front of the temple, and up and down this lane the children ride, their horses kicking and prancing, and taxing the skill of the grooms to keep them from inflicting damage on the people near. After a few turns up and down the children are led one by one to a spot near the gateway, where each shoots an arrow at a mark and makes way for his successor. When all have had their turns there is a second round, and a third, after the same manner. This shooting of arrows by the brightly dressed children, mounted in state on their gaily caparisoned steeds, may be in memory of the exploits of Wakaaji, the young prince, whose arrows discomfited the barbarians or the mountain robbers, so many hundred years ago. Wakaaji is believed to exercise a kindly watch-care over the town, to contribute toward the abundance of the harvests and to prosper trade and commerce. He is also a special patron of the children, if indeed they are not considered as in some way his gift. When a babe reaches its thirty-first day, if a boy, its thirty-third if a girl,—that is when the period of its ceremonial purification has been completed,—it is taken by a relative and presented before the temple, with gifts of money for the priests and offerings of food for the god. The child's mother may come to worship when seventy days have passed after the birth of the child. One is strongly reminded of the regulations in Leviticus, chapter 12. Wakaaji is also thought to have the power of healing diseases. His worship in the home is like that of the deities already mentioned, and need not be described.

Without tarrying longer at the *Kami-dana*, or shelf of the Shinto gods, let us now take a look at the *Butsu-dan*, or altar of the Buddhist idols. This will commonly be found in an interior or rear room, usually that occupied by the head of the house. The altar, or stand, or temple, which ever you may choose to call it, looks like a small cabinet, being about 4½ feet high, 3 feet wide and 1½ feet deep, to give average dimensions. It is of wood, stained or lacquered. It is placed on the floor in an alcove of the room. The lower portion of it is simply a base, the upper part alone being occupied by the idols. This upper part is shut in by swinging doors, which, when open, disclose an interior made rich with gilding. In the foreground are various utensils of worship, and in the rear, on a higher level, are seated the gods. These are usually three in number, like the *Kami* on the god-shelf. The centre and most important one is commonly either Amida or Shaka. Shaka is he whom we call Buddha,—though he is but one of countless Buddhas,—the great sage of India, Sakya-muni, the founder of Buddhism, and himself the Buddha par-excellence. Amida is merely Shaka in an earlier incarnation, or we may say if we prefer that Shaka is a later incarnation of Amida. To worship one is to worship the other, though I imagine the mass of the people think of them as distinct deities. But I do not intend to take my readers into the abysmal depths of Buddhist philosophy. One of the side idols in the *butsu-dan* is that of the founder of the sect of Buddhism to which the family belongs. If the household is of the Monto sect, the image is that of its founder, Shinran; if of the Jodo sect, that of Honen,

and so forth. These great disciples of Buddhism, and developers of its tenets, are themselves now buddhas, and worthy of worship. The remaining place on the *dan* may be bestowed on any one of a number of Buddhas, or gods, according to the fancy of the worshipper. It is not uncommon to give this third seat in the tritheon to the founder of one of the other sects. For example, while the family may be of the Monto sect, and place its founder, Shinran, at one side of Amida, the other side may be given to Honen, the founder of Jode, with a fine absence of sectarianism. Or the goddess Kwan-on, said to be one of the incarnations of Amida, and a god in great repute in Japan, may gain the situation. She is a sort of goddess of mercy and benevolence, and even the wicked may hope for her help. In token of her character she is usually represented with many hands, and is spoken of as the thousand-handed Kwan-on, though I have never seen an image of her with so many. It was she who, when all this plain of Matsumoto was one wide and barren lake or marsh, mounted upon a *Sai*, a kind of unicorn I take it, and caused it to plough a path through the mountains, to the Shinano river, by which the waters might reach the sea. That this plain was once a lake I suppose no geologist would doubt, and it is now rich in rice-fields and mulberry plantations, and if one needs further evidence of the historicity of the story, here is still the *Sai-gawa*, the river of the Unicorn, for corroboration. Under these circumstances Kwan-on is held in just esteem by the people of the valley. Several stone images of her are among the most common objects of devotion one sees by the wayside, and she has an ancient and widely celebrated temple about an hour's walk from Omachi. One of the five or six temples of Omachi is also sacred to her worship. This very night her festival is observed there by crowds of people.

Not to mention at present other divinites who may share the *butsu-dan*, let us notice briefly the arrangements for worship and the method thereof. In front of the three idols, upon the same level on which they sit, are various bronze dishes, for ornament only I am told. Below, on the first floor so to speak, is the incense dish, the light-stands, the vases for flowers, and so forth. Offerings of food are made before the family begins to eat, a little rice usually, to which may be added tea, soup or other accompaniments, according to the devotion of the worshipper, and the sacred or secular nature of the day. When the family has finished its meal, some of the older members eat the material portion of the feast, of which the gods have imbibed the essence. Worship before the shrine is usually performed by the superannuated members of the family, if there are such, who have leisure for such pursuits. Kneeling before the shrine, and striking a small bell, which rests in a cushion before the idols, the old man goes through many prostrations and repetitions of "Namu Amida Butsu," or portions of the Buddhist scriptures, as the case may be, probably with little, if any, idea of what his words may mean. Some thirty minutes is necessary to a satisfactory performance of this service, but if one is in a hurry he merely strikes the bell, lights a taper or incense stick, makes his bow and goes about his work.

Let it not be supposed that we have seen all the household gods when we have examined the *Kami-dana* and the *Butsu-dan*. Home piety is here not such a simple matter. Properly we should have begun with the gods whose pictures or titles are pasted up beside or over the entrance, the Gods of the Threshold, who ward off diseases and evil spirits, who bless the going out and the coming in of the family. Then there are the gods that dwell in the *loko-no-ma*, the raised alcove in the best room. And there are the gods who have special relations to the kitchen, and have a secondary god-shelf near that useful part of the home. And we should not forget the departed members of the family, who are now numbered among its gods. In Shinto, as Percival Lowell says in his "Occult Japan," "anyone may become a god, and it is of the entailed responsibilities of greatness, that the very exalted must do so." If one does not become outright a *Kami*, he at least is advanced to the dignity of a *Rei*, or divinity, and as such must be revered. If one is a Buddhist he becomes after certain funeral rites have been performed, and the sacred writings intoned on his behalf, a *hotoke*, that is a Buddha, and worthy of worship, and receives his *hotoke* name from the priests. This name is inscribed in gilt letters—Chinese characters—on a black tablet, which in shape bears some resemblance to the entrance to a shrine, and this, which is called his *ihai* represents him, and bears the same relation to him that the *fuda* does to a Shinto god, or an image to a buddhist deity. There may indeed be several *ihai* of the same person. One is preserved in the temple, where it stands with hundreds of others in the *ihai-dan*. One is kept in the family, and placed in the *butsu-dan*, to share the worship paid to Amida or Shaka. Others may be distributed to his sons, who have set up homes of their own. The *hotoke* which the deceased has become, may dwell in some sense in all these different tablets, and so one man may be transformed into many gods. As nearly all Japanese are both Shintoists and Buddhists, it would seem that at death a man might become both a *Rei*,—or a *Kami*,—and a *Hotoke*, and

practically as many of each as his friends chose, but I have no data on this subject.

So far we have only made acquaintance, and that of the scantiest sort, with the household gods of Omachi, or rather with the household worship of a few of these gods. We have not noticed the wayside gods, Fudo, and Jizo, and Daikokuji, and Koshin, and Dozogen, and the rest of them, the account of the deeds and worship of each of which might fill a volume. We have not visited the shrines of the deities who preside over the different sections of the town. We have merely glanced at the temple of Wakaaji, the patron god of the town. We have not explored the several other temples which stand just outside the town, each with different gods, and different rites, nor gone on pilgrimage to the larger or more famous ones farther off, beside or within the mountains, the Reishoji, and the Daitakuji, and the temple of Kwan-on at Hotoke-zaki. These all in some measure are Omachi places of worship, and their gods Omachi gods. The gods of the wayside and the temples, and the forms of their worship, we would find equally interesting with those of the household, but we must postpone our study of them to some future time, for I have already trespassed far beyond my original intention in the columns of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR.

Who, and what, are the gods of Omachi? Their name is legion, but the God of Omachi is but One, and he is God of all, and His glory will He not give to another, nor His praise to graven images. All the idols He will utterly abolish. Though those who acknowledge Him in the town, are but two or three, though the preaching of the gospel all these years has had but little apparent effect, though the hearts of the people seem hard, and their ears dull of hearing, and their eyes closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and God should heal them, yet in Omachi, too, and in all the towns and cities of Japan, He shall yet be acknowledged. The god-shelf, and the *butsu-dan* shall give place to the Christian family altar, and the gods of Shinto and of Buddhism, shall be remembered only as we remember the gods of Egypt, and Babylon, and Greece and Rome, and of our Celtic or Saxon forefathers. He will bring it to pass in His own time, who is the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords. For this we work, who are fellow-laborers together with Him, and to that day, far off perhaps, we look. When we look merely at the gods and the ceremonies of their worship, there is a ludicrous side to it, the absurdity of much of it almost prevents us from taking it seriously. It is such a burlesque on what we consider religion, such a mass of contradictions and childish credulities. But there is something infinitely pathetic about it, too, for it is all of religion that forty millions of human beings know. We feel like smiting at the gods, but who can think of their worshippers without sorrow? And what Christian can be unmoved with indignation, that before such things as those a whole nation should offer that worship which is due only to our God and to His Anointed? But in Japan, too, the desire of the Lord shall be satisfied, and the prayer He taught His disciples answered. Omachi, Shinano, Japan.

A. M. J.

Apostles of Missions.

BY REV. R. OSGOOD MORSE, M. A.

NO. 5.

Ansgar, the Apostle to Scandinavia.

The earliest efforts to Christianize Jutland and Scandinavia were practically fruitless. In 826, God's hour for that work struck and Ansgar was sent on his noble mission to those northern lands.

Ansgar was born in 801. He was the son of a Frankish nobleman. Educated in the monastery of Old Corbir, Picardy, on the founding of New Corbir, in 822, he was placed at its head. His mother died when he was but five years old, and in this event he received his first religious impressions. He was a lad of thirteen when it was told to the empire that the great Karl was gone. Anew he was summoned to the Christian life and this time he obeyed the summons. Vision succeeded vision with the meditative monk. Finally his missionary call came in a vision as of God speaking to him in tones inexpressibly sweet, "Go hence and return to me with the martyr's crown." The missionary call and the missionary training were complete. The missionary work was ready.

In 826, Harold Klok, of Denmark, was on a visit to Louis of France, in the interests of his own succession to the Danish throne. Here he was baptized. He desired missionaries to return with him to convert the fierce sea kings of Jutland and Scandinavia. Ansgar volunteered readily; Antbert, reluctantly. Antbert asked Ansgar if he really intended to venture upon so perilous an enterprise. Ansgar replied, "When I was asked whether I would go for God's name to the heathen to establish the Gospel, I could not decline such a call. With all my power I wish to go hence, and no man can make me waver in this resolution."

Ansgar at once established a school at Hadeby, bought Danish boys to train for the ministry, redeemed prisoners of war, and preached throughout the country. He spent two years in Denmark, but over his difficulties and successes here, his biographer passes with unsatisfactory rapidity.

But the more opened to the ze Sweden pronounce receive the Gosp His trip across and rough pira In Sweden he four still, full liberty to successful wor the Frankish Sweden.

Meanwhile the founded. About invested with M ern missions. No Hamburg, ravage from Sweden. A for he lived by pr Ansgar was a m for the sick at missionary and th sick. He thus ascribed to him such power in th "If I were thou I would beseech by His grace He Prayer and pa apostle, John E of Denmark an intolerance, so fa and to allow the Ansgar was in his time. Not o but he was forem and black, until force. For thirt in the sense of h dant, and sufferi words of Stephe hope, to be hono not realized. Bu patience and self a martyr's crow fruitage nearly great King of En of heathenism to the North to Canute, himsel, doms to the feet

Since my last VISITOR, I have magnificent pro with so many No of whom are doi in various walks cover city are make themselv cities on the cor and stability. C simplicity and e attractive and de in the First Chu and soon, we ho Mount Pleasant, ment, and the p Thence I went to five to six thous doing a good wo place here, and near future. At where we are se is opening up th for Baptists. The next plac two good churc Good work is b forward movem cover, some fir East. Their w gave evidence o who come to th dition, but mus encouraging. a good thing in of a thousand most shortly b The Japanese a considered hea Mrs. Trotter a greeted us kind permeate Victo recent vote ag was royally ent ing wife, and regret and gra Emmanuel chu