

A WORD ABOUT THE AINU

In the study of anthropology there is at the present time no more interesting subject in the far east than that of the Ainu of Japan. And, notwithstanding the fact that many have of late years taken this people into special consideration the Ainu race is as enigmatical and inscrutable today as ever it was.

Dobrotworski pointed out some years ago that the people know themselves as Ainu and not Aino as some have called them. And he is right. But it is pertinent to remark here that when speaking of themselves in prayer and reciting some of their legends they call themselves *Enchiu*, a cognomen whose meaning is at present unknown among us.

That the ancient Japanese found the Ainu in Japan when they arrived and that for many hundreds of years thereafter they and the aborigines waged fearful wars upon each other no one now dreams of gainsaying. We are assured that the Japanese acted as a kind of wedge which forced some of them to the south while others gradually retreated to the north. Those in Hokkaido are without doubt the last remnant of these. Although they were very numerous in past ages at the present time they only number about sixteen thousand, and this figure includes those of Saghalien, and those of mixed descent.*

Geographical nomenclature proves the Ainu to have been a widely scattered people. The name Fuji in Fuji no Yama is as assuredly of Ainu origin as is Sapporo in Hokkaido, Mauka in Saghalien, and Parato in Siberia.

The Ainu would seem to have been a northern race in the beginning. The language shows Aryan characteristics in grammar and vocabulary. The idioms are of a northern cast.

*Although at one time the Ainu were very numerous the census taken in 1923 gave their numbers in Hokkaido as 15,461 only. Of these 7,430 were males and 8,031 females. They were living in 3,504 houses.

Their customs also point to the north and their religion has a great deal of northern Tungusic Shamanism in it.

On looking carefully at the Japanese it has been often noticed that quite down to the southern limits of the Empire many Ainu types of feature are to be met with. This is not to be wondered at seeing that from time immemorial inter-marriage has been going on between the two peoples, and is still in progress wherever the Japanese and Ainu are found together. There is no doubt a great fusion of Ainu blood in the veins of the Japanese of the south and also a strong admixture of Japanese blood in the Ainu of Hokkaido. Thus it may be said with truth that the Ainu as a race is dying out, not by the extinction of individuals but by their incorporation into the stronger ruling family.

A visitor to Hokkaido today will certainly not find so many bearded men among them as he may possibly have been led to expect or would have done sixty years ago. So that with regard to them they will not be so likely to remind him of the Russian peasants as they have done travellers in the past. Nor will he find them quite so hirsute otherwise as some artists have depicted them. The tattooing of the women will soon be quite a thing of the past. The traveller will find that the women, say from thirty years of age upwards, are tattooed a bluish black colour round their mouths, on their hands and arms, and some with a line across their foreheads. No one now knows the origin of the custom. It may possibly point to marriage as the blackening of the teeth is said to have done among the old-time Japanese women. It was done by incision, the wounds made being rubbed with liquor obtained by steeping bark in hot water. It was made darker by adding a little soot. It was a very painful process, done a very little at a time, and commenced at a very early age.

The Hokkaido Authorities are looking well after the Ainu and treating them with kindness and consideration. They have secured them land, and, where considered necessary, have built them schools and sent them duly qualified teachers to instruct them. As all now speak Japanese there are also many

mixed schools where all learn together. There is no distinction made between them, and the young men take their places side by side with the Japanese in the army and navy.

The native dress, both for men and women, was made of the bast of an elm tree (*Ulmus laciniata*) and consisted of one garment reaching nearly to the ankles. It was called *attush*, i.e. "elm bast." It was usually decorated by having patterns sewn in of Japanese material. Other coats were made of hemp and nettle bast. For winter wear the skins of dogs, seals, foxes, badgers, martens, deer and bears were used. In Saghalien coats were also made of the skins of otters for winter wear, and caps also.

In olden times the Ainu were divided into territorial groups the members of which had figures of their special totem animal, bird, or fish carved on their ceremonial crowns and moustache lifters. The moustache lifters were used for holding their moustaches out of whatever they might be drinking at the time, and for offering libation drops to the fire and the various other deities. Some of these carved objects may be seen used to-day at places though they are at present very scarce as the old people had their own which were buried with them when they died and the young men do not now make them.

Marriage was as a rule determined by the young people themselves though the elders did at times make arrangements for their children, and the matrimonial bond was easily broken by mutual consent or by one or the other walking off.

Polygamy was customary and the writer of these lines has come across one or two traditions in the north where the husbands (*plural*) of a woman have been mentioned as though polyandry was practiced in days gone by. Endogamy was the rule and exogamy the exception till within quite recent times. This did not contribute to either the mental vigour or diuturnity of the race. Many of the women are sterile and quite a large number of the children die early. To make up for the loss Japanese babies are adopted and registered as Ainu.

The family tie on the female side was stronger than that

on the male side, the brother of the mother being considered as the head of the family. The sister had more privileges, in her own family, than the brother's wife.

The village chieftainship was hereditary and the assembly of the elders had legislative and judicial authority. In all big matters the recognized chief of the district took the leading part. In many instances the differences between the villages or districts used to be settled by argument rather than by blows. The people would assemble at given places and each side put forth its best speakers who would argue and plead together perhaps for whole days. The meetings were quite open and it was settled by the vote of all present as to which side had won.

In forming a village a family would sometimes go off into the interior and there the father would set up his hut. Perhaps by the side of a lake or river. He would then claim the lake as his own property and perhaps a valley with its stream. He would claim fishing rights near his dwelling. His children would, as they grew up, get married and build their homes along by the side of their father and as they increased the families would make a social community where, in so far as fishing and hunting and getting fuel was concerned, they had things in common. Ill-feeling was at times engendered by others not of the family coming and fishing in the lake or stream or hunting in the valley.

When the population of a village became so great that the surrounding district and the river could not sustain the people, as was the case with Piratori some years ago, the middle was taken out, a chief chosen, and the people migrated further up into the mountains. Thus we now have Upper and Lower Piratori.

The only domestic animals the Hokkaido Ainu had were dogs, and in some places, near the Japanese villages, a cat or two. The dogs were used for hunting deer, bears, hares, and other animals. But in Saghalien dogs were used in drawing sleighs as well as in hunting. The men also trained them to swim out into the bays near the shores, surround the shoals

of salmon, and drive them in towards their masters.

In olden days the men did nothing but hunt and fish, each family or village for itself. Indiscriminate fishing is now forbidden as some of the salmon rivers have had hatcheries set up by Government along their banks, and the salmon are preserved.

The men employ themselves by working for the Japanese as fishermen, horse tenders, and in farming. They also farm for themselves on a small scale. They also breed horses in some localities. And there are a few who fish on a large scale and employ Japanese to help them.

The bond of religion is strong among them. The old folk were sun, fire, and ancestor worshippers. As polytheists they paid divine worship to rocks, fishes, and trees among other objects. The rulers of nature were regarded as anthropomorphic and it is said that they sometimes appeared to men on special occasions and for specific purposes in the forms of men, animals, birds, and fishes.

Sorcery and witchcraft were much practiced among them. And the shamans, male and female, had great power in their midst. Serpent and demon worship was indulged in.

Animism lay at the root of their religious belief. Real future metempsychosis is not believed in and the immortality of the soul is not a gift or acquisition but natural and inherent. No life can really be destroyed, but by departing out of the body the spirit or life is supposed to reappear in another like body, though a spirit may on occasion assume the body of another temporarily for some particular purpose.

The Ainu hut is not merely to be looked upon as a dwelling for the family but also as a temple for the gods of whom the house-holder is the priest. The two family gods dwell in them. They are somewhat like the old lares and penates of the Latins, excepting that they are not regarded as having any connection with animals and reptiles. They are the father and mother of the race. The great original father is in some places represented by a fetich made out of a durable stick, with a cinder tied on it to represent the heart,

and this is well hidden by clusters of willow shavings bound over it. Incisions are also made to represent the eyes and mouth—it is a real home-made idol, and is looked upon as a living divinity. It is set in the north-eastern corner of the hut immediately behind the family heirlooms and treasures. This place is peculiarly sacred and one must treat it with due reverence. The name of this fetich is *Chisei koro Ekashi* which means "Ancestral House-holder."

The name of his wife is *Fuji* or *Huchi kamui*, i.e., "Divine Grandmother." The name occurs in Mount Fuji. This goddess has her throne in the very centre of the fire upon the hearth. Fire is considered under two aspects by the Hokkaido Ainu. One is called *abe* which is fire when used in its general daily offices, and the other is *Huchi*, *Fuji*, or as in Saghalien, *Unji*, a name which is applied to fire only when looked upon as a goddess and worshipped. The fire upon the hearth must always be treated with the utmost respect. *Huchi* is also the general name for "grandmother." The special duty of this goddess is to watch over all that goes on in the hut and will appear as a witness at the great day of judgement. She is frequently saluted and offerings of food and drink are set before her. These two are said to have a daughter named *Shu-ko-yan-mat* which means "She who descends to the pots." She is supposed to superintend the cooking and look after the fire, pots, and pans.

Just outside the east end of every hut will be seen clusters of peeled wooden wands having the shavings left attached to them. Among these will generally be found the skulls of bears and other animals set up on high for worship and as talismans. These fetiches are in some instances regarded as gods, in some as offerings to the gods, and in others as mediators between gods, men, and demons. Like the hearth inside the hut so the fetich place outside is held to be very sacred. They should not be approached by strangers heedlessly.

The great religious bear festival takes place in the autumn and throughout the winter months. There are usually some bear cubs to be seen, among other places at Shiraoi, being

brought up in cages ready for the festival. The feast is called *Iyomande*, and this means "sending away." At the time of the festival the young bear is bated, shot at with blunt arrows, throttled, its heart pierced and the warm blood caught in a vessel and drunk warm by the principals. Portions of the flesh also are eaten raw especially by the hunters and old men. Much is well cooked and partaken of by all present. A favoured few are allowed to carry some of the meat home with them. In slaying the bear it is not for a moment supposed that the animal is killed but only that the life or soul is sent off into the mountains where it will assume another body and come again as a cub to supply viands and sport at another festival. It is a very degrading and cruel spectacle and one is very glad to know that the Hokkaido Government is now discouraging the practice of it.