Japan and the Japanese as seen by foreigners prior to the beginning of the Russo-Japanese war

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JAPAN AND THE JAPANESE

AS SEEN BY FOREIGNERS

PRIOR TO THE BEGINNING OF THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR.

EDITED

BY

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KEISEISHA,

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To the
Lovers and Haters of Japan
this book is dedicated
by the Editor.
INTRODUCTION.

Some two years ago being engaged in writing for the Master's degree a series of essays on The Political Ideas of Modern Japan—published in book form by the University of Iowa, and later republished in Japan—I had to read a considerable number of books and review-articles by foreign writers on various topics connected with Japanese life. It then occurred to me that a compilation of the views of some of the representative foreign writers on Japan would be of great interest as well as of great benefit to the reading public, especially to younger readers, at home. While at the University of Wisconsin, where I continued my academic life after having left the University of Iowa, its better equipped library tempted me frequently to undertake the difficult task of editing the views of foreign observers of Japan. I found, however, that it would be too ambitious a task to assume amid the host of daily duties required of a university student.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, a period of idleness since the spring of 1903 has been imposed upon me, because of an oft-recurring illness. A year of enforced leisure which has been spent on the Pacific Coast, mostly at Seattle, has afforded me a unique opportunity to execute my long-
cherished plan. Although libraries to which I had access were not of sufficient scope yet the materials I had gathered from all available sources were thought sufficient to form a book of considerable size. The collection is, of course, far from being exhaustive, but is, I hope, none the less interesting. In any event, I have taken care to make it represent most of the prominent writers on Japan, so far as it lies within my power.

Being intended as reading for students of English, this book has given no space to Continental writers who have written in languages other than English. However, a few authoritative English translations of some German writings have been selected. In view, also, of the fact that this book was primarily conceived to furnish the younger element of our nation with wholesome reading, I have deliberately avoided quoting criticisms and observations on such matters as might offend a keen sense of propriety.

In editing this book, my attitude towards different writers has been that of an impartial reader; making no discrimination between views favorable or unfavorable to Japan, between correct or incorrect representation. As can be understood from its title, this work has been so planned as to voice fairly all conflicting and contradictory opinions which have come under my notice. Approval or disapproval on my part of such opinions has had nothing to do with the present undertaking. Even malignant and sinister criticisms of us would have been included had they been found in my reading. If in this book friendly opinions overbalance adverse
criticisms, it is not because I was reluctant to give due regard to the latter. The fact is that I have endeavored without much success to find as many discouraging as encouraging views. Eulogists are abundant, but denunciators rare. The most the alien critic has said against us is that we lack the sense of modesty and sobriety; that our merchants do not possess business-like qualities, being petty, shilly-shallying and untrustworthy; that the inhabitants of Nippon have no interest in metaphysical problems. But even for such charges as these most of them find apologists of one sort or another. Think of Lafcadio Hearn, Sir Edwin Arnold, Mrs. Hugh Fraser, Arthur Dicsy, Edward S. Morse, and you will easily realize what panegyrics and eulogies foreign friends have lavished upon us. This list will be lengthened to a much greater degree if you enumerate authors who are less enthusiastic or less prominent. While such laudatory terms contain a certain amount of truth, we should be slow to approve them without discrimination. To be sure, there is not less superficiality in the excessive praise lavished upon us than in the harshest criticism. I must be more than disappointed if the Japanese reader of this book is not reflective enough to consider whether there is reality behind the commendation uttered by the foreign admires of Japan, but carelessly allows himself to be flattered into the belief that his country has attained a state of civilisation far superior to that of Western nations, thus falling into that most deplorable sort of arrogance—national egotism or chauvinism, and prejudice. When we read glowing words of praise, we must not rejoice but
meditate. If we come across acrimonious utterance flung in our faces, we should calmly reflect instead of frowning or ignoring them. There can never be a great future for a nation which is reluctant to recognize its faults and shortcomings. Conforming to the dictum of the great moral Teacher, we should hesitate to behold the mote in others’ eyes, and always be ready to consider the beam in our own.

Were I to write a book on America or any other foreign country I would rather be blamed as an indulgent observer than be called a harsh critic. Such would be the safest course for one who writes about a nation whose moral conceptions and ideals, and manners and customs, are as widely different from his own as heaven is from earth. Is it not greatly due to a similar precaution that foreign writers have been ever generous towards us? Moreover, to a more critical and thoughtful reader it ought to be clear enough that even in agreeable compliments of foreign writers on Japan there lurks some thought which is not after all pleasing to us. Many an Edwin Arnold has become enamoured of the Land of the Rising Sun, or rather of some one in it, and, as Stafford Ransome aptly says, endeavoured to Japonify himself at short notice and without being able to speak a word of Japanese. Are we really complimented when such an author as this tells the world that Japan is peopled with dear giggling dolls, living in dear little miniature houses made of card board, and eating fairy food out of miniature dishes? Has any writer attributed to us that solid and endurable nature, that sturdy and strenuous quality, which forms the back-
bone of a strong nation? Are artistic proclivities, gracefulness, neatness, fine manners, engaging courtesy—are these per se elements that make a great nation? Have we any reason to rejoice when a man like M. Pierre Loti seems to take Japan as a bright and fascinating freak of geography and ethnology? To be brief, Japan is or at least has been, in the eyes of most of her admirers, like an innocent sweet damsel to be petted and played with, and not like a strong man commanding the respect of all who come in contact with him.

He who has been delighted with the charming compliments expressed by the writers represented in this book is more than likely to feel that he was gravely deceived by those authors when he goes abroad and becomes acquainted with the disagreeable, almost hostile, attitude of ordinary people towards him and his country. The moment he lands at a foreign port especially at such places on the Pacific coast of America as Seattle and San Francisco, he will be welcomed by the vilest sort of epithets. The wild "kid" will call him "John Chinaman," the street loafer will whisper in his ears such indecent names as will make him blush with mingled feelings of anger and shame, and the press will print in big staring letters such slipshod vulgarisms as "Jap," "little brown man," and the like. He will find all these and hundreds of other disagreeable things in countries where he expected to meet the most flattering and delightful compliments. To a reader such as he I must explain that those foreigners who have studied and endeavoured to understand Japan form a mere fraction as compared
with the great mass among which prevails dense ignorance regarding things Japanese. The favorable sentiment expressed in most of the articles contained in this book is that of the learned class of foreigners, but not that prevalent among common people.

The present war with Russia will no doubt greatly assist in introducing Japan to a vastly wider circle of foreign acquaintances and in doing away with many of the misunderstandings that have been preventing the Westerners from establishing a closer friendship with the greatest of all the Oriental races. The China-Japan war has already proved of some service in a similar direction. The pending conflict immensely vaster in its significance and magnitude will work out a result infinitely greater. The Japanese of New Japan are anxious almost to a man, if I mistake not, to see their country cease to be regarded as a land inhabited by dear little doll-like people, as the land of miniature landscape gardens, of quaint tea-houses, and of weird temples. Who is to blame, even after our victories over the Great Northern Power, for that popular misconception that we are only pretty weaklings, and how shall we force the foreigner to believe that "the steam-whistle, the newspaper, the voting-tablet, the postal-box at every street-corner and even in remote villages, the clerk in shop and bank and public office hastily summoned from our side to answer the ring of the telephone bell, the railway replacing the palanquin, the iron-clad replacing the war-junk,—that these and a thousand other startling changes testify that Japan is transported ten thousand miles away from her former moorings?"