

# The Japanese As They Really Are.

A Close Range Study of the Gentle Nipponese  
by a Portland Traveler  
They Have Many Problems More Vital Than  
Exclusion From California.



Hachiman Temple  
at Kamakura, One of the  
Oldest in Japan.

BY WALTER McBRIDE.

JAPAN is the land of enchantment. Almost everybody at some time dreams of going there. To gain its charm is akin to confessing the absence of an esthetic faculty. Few travelers who have seen its wonders would think of disputing the claim that it is one of the most beautiful regions in the world.

That person who can behold the majestic peak of Fujiyama at sunset with a golden mist behind it, or roam through the mighty forest at Nikko without being thrilled, or look into the eternally calm face of the great Buddha at Kamakura without being made profoundly aware of his own mortality, ought never to leave home. To all such travel is a wasted effort. It would be difficult to find an area of similar extent possessing so many natural attractions as this little island empire. From Hokkaido in the north to the Bay of Nagasaki in the south there is revealed a succession of scenes as exquisite as any one has ever pictured in imagination.

While there is a very marked agreement among travelers and foreigners residing in Japan as to the natural charms of the country, there is by no means the same unanimity of opinion regarding the virtues of its inhabitants. Either the tendency would seem to be to give these people credit for little that is admirable. Tourists from America who are in Japan for a few days or a few weeks, bringing in most cases a well-defined prejudice with them, after an encounter or two with surly or avuncular ricksha men are apt to proceed on their travels with a stronger feeling of dislike. Others with no more discrimination see in these amiable, courteous people merely smiling dolls. Still others err by presuming to see no faults of any kind.

I had come into contact with Japanese in various ways long before I went to Japan. Years ago in the boarding houses of San Francisco there were Japanese waiters and elevator boys. They were generally either stolid, impatient, lazy, deceitful, much more interested in acquiring knowledge than in performing their duties. Later in the best sugar fields of the Spreckels Company in Monterey County, I had an opportunity to observe those conditions which have since seemed to demand restrictive legislation.

As an assistant secretary to the Honorary Commercial Commission from Japan, which visited the United States in 1909, I got my first real insight into the Japanese character. The commission was made up of representative business men from the chief cities of the country, and many of these gentlemen were of very high character and intelligence. During the three months I traveled with them I formed friendships that have endured and that have constituted a large element in my enjoyment of my year's stay in Japan.

While I found much to admire in many of these high-class men, I think my opinion of the Japanese generally was not greatly changed until I went to live in Yokohama. Remembering the old days in California, I expected to find the people of Japan proud, insolent, grasping and enamored of the material ideal. I found them on the contrary the most gentle, patient and amiable people I have ever met. From the highest to the lowest I received nothing but graciousness and courtesy. Their dignified and friendly attitude, not only toward each other, but toward foreigners as well, was a revelation to me. Excepting ricksha men, who seem at least in the treaty ports—constitutively excitable, I do not recall ever seeing a disturbance between foreigners and Japanese. Subjected to the exactions and impudence of tourists or foreign residents, they never seem to lose for a moment that self-control which is quite a marvelous trait. While their slowness was often both disappointing and annoying, I was fortunate in having no difficulties with shopkeepers, and contrary to the impres-

sion which seems to prevail, I found their methods entirely ethical. One was never importuned to buy. He was invariably invited to inspect the wares of whatever sort they might be, and the size of one's purchase never seemed to determine one's treatment. That perfect politeness which characterizes the people of all classes, is especially marked in the keepers of shops.

My memories of my long sojourn at the Cherry Mount Hotel in Yokohama are a pleasure to recall for many reasons. Our proprietor was a Japanese man for whom one could have only the highest respect. His establishment, compared with those in America, was a rather poor affair, but despite its barn-like apartments and lawdy furnishings, Akon San's genial personality and his tireless efforts to make us comfortable made it seem almost homelike. Our room boys were all that one could desire. They needed only to learn one's tastes and habits in order to anticipate one's wishes, and so thoughtful and careful were they that the best of feeling always prevailed.

Their efficiency, fidelity and self-effacement were always quite beyond my comprehension. Our under-clerk at the office, a young Japanese of 22, was one of the most engaging young men that I came to know. Despite his multifarious duties, which ranged from caring for the mail, running errands and making blueprints, to serving tea, he was absolutely dependable. Whatever was expected of him he did smilingly and with dispatch. I shall never forget his manner and his picturesque appearance in his flowing silken kimono.

One is safer in Yokohama on the darkest night than he would be in New York. Such a thing as an attack on a foreigner is very rare. I cannot say whether this is because of the inherent virtue of the Japanese or because of the vigilance of the police. For a time after my arrival I always used rickshas at night. The narrow, dimly lighted streets presented to my mind an ideal setting for robbery or violence. Both my Japanese and foreign friends laughed at my timidity, and I came to have no feeling of uncertainty as regards attack of any kind.

In Tokio, Kobe, Kyoto and Nagasaki I went about day and night without the least fear. I must say, however, that Japan has her full share of criminals and the accounts of revolting murders and crimes constantly appear in the press. Our rooms at the Cherry Mount were always unlocked and in the summer time the windows were wide open. No one seemed to think it necessary to guard his belongings.

When you come to the Japanese children you are getting very close to the heart of these mysterious people. The love of parents for children is their most beautiful trait and one that is quite easy to understand. Children are called a name that means "treasure-flowers" and it seems quite to express the tender relation that exists between parents and their offspring. Anyone who can withstand the charm of even an average Japanese child is indeed deficient in feeling. I found them the most fascinating children in the world. Without anything like the intellect or personality of an American child, their good nature and gentle manners give them an attraction that it is impossible to analyze.

I found the Japanese an unusually attractive people in many ways—polite, deferential, amiable, considerate, obliging. I do not, however, believe that they care much for the foreigner. That trait of aloofness which has influenced their entire history, cannot be surmounted. Tourists are welcomed, of course, since entire communities thrive on their expenditures.

Japan is not a rich country, in fact it is a very poor one. The most amazing thing about the Japanese people is their ability to make so much out of a meagre opportunity. With every square inch of available land taken with burdensome taxes, and with pov-

erty widespread, it is not to be wondered at that the presence of the prosperous, patronizing foreigner is resented.

That Japanese should manifest any friendliness toward foreigners is evidence of their consummate tact. In Yokohama the relations between Japanese and foreigners are the best on earth. The disposition of most of them toward all nationalities outside their own is one of either superiority or indifference. The social code in Yokohama is rigid and the atmosphere dull and formal. Their caste ideas are pronounced and I regret to say that many Americans adopt the same supercilious attitude. To see anything worthy in the Japanese is a breach of decorum, is in fact to be hopelessly ordinary. One sometimes wonders that the Japanese endure them at all.

At the time of the land legislation in California there was a good deal of bitter feeling among the Japanese, but no such display of it as the American press has tended to convey. In order to understand their point of view one must take into consideration the fact that the Japanese are naturally a proud and sensitive race. Their splendid victories over the Chinese and the Russians, their advancement in government, education, commerce, and science they feel justifies them in claiming absolute equality with Caucasian nations.

Any disparagement they will not tolerate. The action of the State of California in the land measures meeting discrimination particularly in view of the restriction against further immigration from Japan. They had resigned themselves to the loss of that privilege. The land act they regarded as an insult, as an implication that they were inferior and undesirable. Their case has been weakened a good deal by the fact that the very rights for which they contended in California have never been willing to concede to aliens at home. Indeed every effort is made to curtail the activities of the foreigner in Japan. No opportunity is afforded him to compete with Japanese, and it is predicted that in the course of time the foreign merchants will be forced out of Japan. At

any rate the foreign settlements will never be enlarged.

While the California Legislature was considering the land measures meetings of commercial and political bodies were constantly being held in Tokio to protest against the treatment of Japanese there. The yellow journals were loud in their demand that the enactment of the bills be considered a sufficient cause for the issuance of an ultimatum. Even some of the conservative papers were outspoken in their opinions as to the probable outcome. Our Army and Navy were constantly being compared with those of Japan and the results of hostilities were ingeniously forecasted.

Among thoughtful Japanese, however, one could find no such hysteria. America to a steadily growing number of Japanese means El Dorado or Utopia, a land of golden opportunity, of immeasurable resources, a region where life is singularly fortunate. The intimate character of the relations with Japan since the opening of the empire to the world, the enormous volume of her commerce with Japan in 1913 one-third of Japan's foreign trade was with the United States gives her in the eyes of these sober-minded, very practical men an importance beyond that of any other nation. Despite the humiliating treatment of Japanese in California, the belief in the good intention of the American people at large is becoming widespread. Our high ideals as a nation, our generosity, love of fair play and freedom from intrigue are all but acknowledged. I could never get any of these men to favor hostilities as a means of settling differences. They usually disposed of that feature of the issue by saying that such a course would mean Japan's ruin.

I am not prepared to say, however,

that if Japan should ever find us at a disadvantage that she would not use it to our harm. A nation whose tradition is founded on the strongest arm and the sharpest sword could hardly be expected to do otherwise. The California question is not, when all is said, as grave as many suppose. That time will solve it to the satisfaction of both nations the more optimistic are confident.

Just now Japan is facing problems that are far more vital than the somewhat abstract one in California could ever be. Japan's affairs on the Asiatic continent are apt to demand all the sagacity of her statesmen for some time to come. The government of China is anything but favorable to Japan's ambitions in the Orient. When I was in Shanghai in September there was very strong feeling against the Japanese. They had not convinced the people of the new republic that they were not concerned in the revolution in the south. Also the extensive military activity of Russia in Mongolia should be disquieting, even to a nation less alert than Japan. By the military party this was considered a situation necessitating an increase in the army by two divisions, a question that when it came to be voted on in the Parliament only a year ago, precipitated the downfall of two cabinets and such a popular demonstration as Tokio had never seen before.

Perhaps the most significant prob-

lem which Japan has to deal with is that within her own borders. Socialistic ideas have been spreading slowly and the growing discontent of the people with the ever-increasing burden of taxation has brought about a state of affairs which will test the powers of those at the head of the government. I have never been much concerned over the suspected sinister designs of Japan toward ourselves and have had even less apprehension in that regard since my stay in Yokohama. Therefore, I did not interest myself in investigation of the military strength of Japan. Nevertheless, one would have to be in that country only a short time to realize that it has a large and efficient standing army and a reserve force that would be considered formidable by the most military of nations.

Soldiers and sailors are constantly passing through Yokohama, and on various trips that I made to places in the interior I saw many of them and had an opportunity to judge, casually, the character of Japan's soldiery.

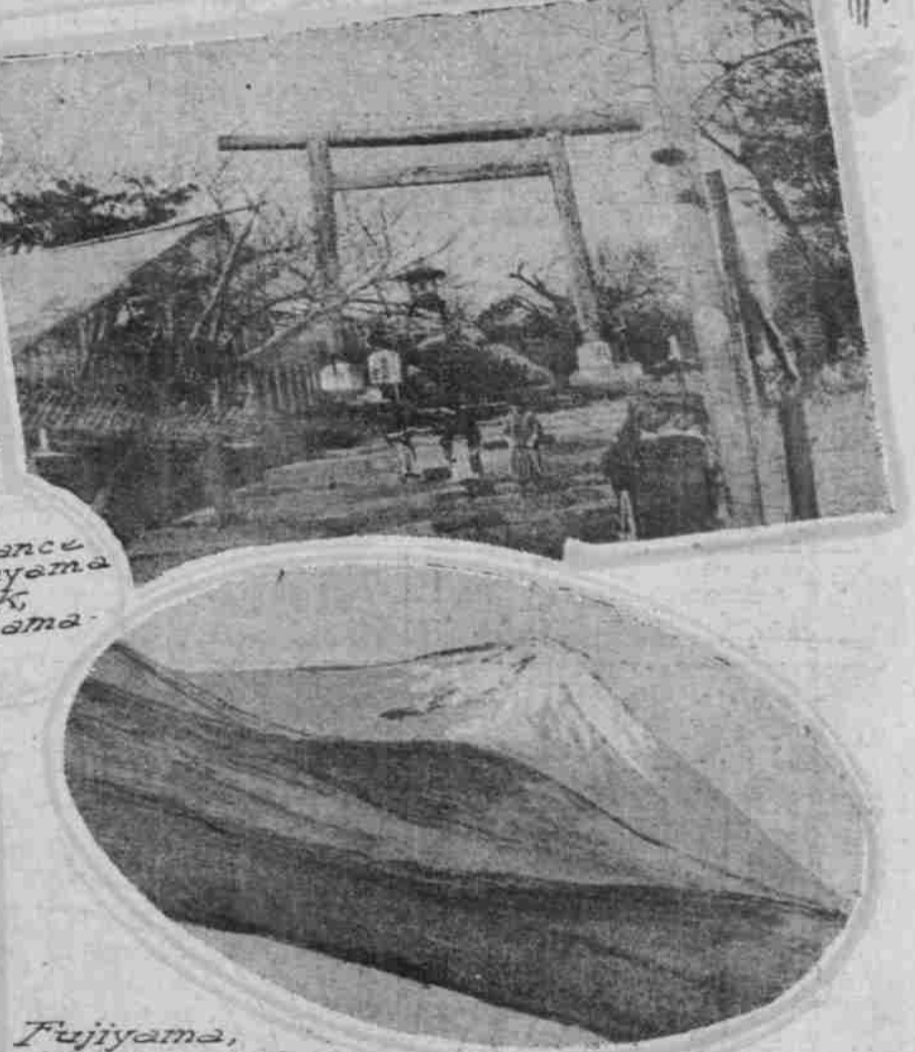
They are a sturdy, sober, dignified lot of men; splendid physical specimens. Drunkenness or rowdiness are not qualities one will find in them. They give the impression of being thoroughly disciplined. They are far from being assertive or bold, almost childlike in their ingenuousness.



Entrance to Nodoyama Park, Yokohama.



Scene in Kudan Park, Tokio.



Fujiyama, the "Sacred Mountain."