Difficultés.
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Bibliographical Note.
A thousand books have been written about Japan; but among these,—setting aside all publications and works of a purely special character,—the really precious volumes will be found a number scarce, a dozen. This fact is due to the immense difficulty of perceiving and comprehending what underlies the surface of Japanese life. No work fully understanding that life,—no work picturing Japan within and without, historically and socially, psychologically and
critically, can be written for at least another fifty years. Its vast and intricate nature is such that the united labour of a generation of scholars could not exhaust it, and so difficult that the number of scholars willing to devote their time to it must always be small. Even among the Japanese themselves, no scientific knowledge of their own history is yet possible, because the means of obtaining that knowledge have not yet been prepared, though mountains of material have been collected.

The want of a good history upon a modern plan is but one of many discouraging want.
Data for the study of sociology,
are still inaccessible to the Western investigator. The early state of the family and the clan; the history of the differentiation of classes; the history of the differentiation of political from religious law; the history of restrictions, and of their influence upon custom; the history of regulative and cooperative conditions in the development of industry; the history of ethics and aesthetics, all these and many other matters remain obscure.

This essay of mine can serve in one direction only as a contribution to the Western knowledge of Japan. But
this direction is not one of the least important. If there is the subject of Japanese religion has been written of chiefly by the sworn enemies of that religion: by others it has been almost entirely ignored. Yet while it continues to be ignored and misrepresented, no real knowledge of Japan is possible. Any true comprehension of social conditions requires more than a superficial acquaintance with religious conditions. Even the industrial history of a people cannot be understood without some knowledge of
have religious traditions and customs which regulate domestic life during the earlier stages of its development. Or take the subject of art. Art in Japan is so intimately associated with religion that any attempt to study it without extensive knowledge of the beliefs with which it is connected, were mere waste of time. By art I do not mean painting or sculpture, but every kind of decoration, and most kinds of pictorial representation, the image on a boy's kite or a girl's battledore, no less than the design upon a lacquered casket or enamelled vase.
- the figures upon a workman's towel not less than the pattern of the poodle of a princess, - the shape of the paper-dog or the wooden rattle bought for a baby, not less than the forms of those colossal Nio who guard the gateways of Buddhist temples... And surely, there can never be any just estimate made of Japanese literature until a study of that literature shall have been made by some scholar, not only able to understand Japanese beliefs, but able also to sympathize with them to at least the same extent that our great humanists.
can sympathize with the religion of Euripides, of Pindar, and of Theocritus. Let us ask ourselves, how much of English or French or German or Italian literature could be fully understood without the stipulated knowledge of the ancient and modern religions of the Occident. I do not refer to distinctly religious creators, poets like Milton or Dante, but only to the fact that even one of Shakespeare's plays must remain incomprehensible to a person knowing nothing of either of Christian beliefs or of the beliefs which preceded them. The real master of any European tongue is impossible
without a knowledge of European religion. The language of even the most learned is full of religious meaning: the proverbs and household phrases of the poor, the songs of the street, the speech of the workshop—all are infused with significations unimaginable to any one ignorant of the faith of the people. Nobody knows his better than a man who has passed many years in living to teach English in Japan, to pupils whose faith is utterly unlike our own, and whose ethics have been shaped by a totally different social experience.