

Difficulties.

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A thousand books have been written about Japan; but among these, — setting aside artistic publications and works of a purely special character, — the really precious volumes will be found I number scarcely a dozen. This fact is due to the immense difficulty of perceiving and comprehending what underlies the surface of Japanese life. No work fully interpreting that life, — no work picturing Japan within and without, historically and socially, psychologically and

ethically, — can be written for at least another fifty years. So vast and intricate the subject 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 any good history upon a modern plan is but one of many discouraging wants. 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 coöperative conditions in the development of industry; the history of ethics and aesthetics, — all these and many other matters remain obscure.

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 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. Hitherto 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 com-
 -prehension of social condi-
 -tion requires more than a
 superficial acquaintance with
 religious conditions. Even
 the industrial history of a
 people cannot be understood
 without some knowledge of

those religious traditions and customs
 which regulate industrial 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 know-
 -ledge of the beliefs with which it
 reflects, were mere waste of
 time. By art I do not mean
 only painting and sculpture,
 but every kind of decoration,
 and most kinds of pictorial
 representation, — the image on
 a boy's kite or a girl's
 battle-dove, not less than the
 design upon a lacquered
 cabinet or enamelled vase, —

— the figures upon a workman's
 towel not less than the pattern
 of the girdle 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 Ni-O 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 under-
 stand Japanese beliefs, but
 able also to sympathize with
 them to at least the same
 extent that our great humanists

can sympathize with the religions 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 slightest knowledge of the
 ancient and modern religions of
 the Occident. I do not refer
 to distinctly religious creators, -
 to 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
 either of Christian beliefs or
 of the beliefs which preceded
 them. The real mastery of any
 European tongue is impossible

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without a knowledge of European religion. The language of even the unlettered is full of religious meaning: the proverbs and household-phrases of the poor, the songs of the street, the speech of the worship, — all are infused with significations unimaginable by any one ignorant of the faith of the people. Nobody knows his better than a man who has passed many years in studying & teaching English in Japan, & pupils whose faith is utterly unlike our own, and whose ethics have been shaped by a totally different social experience.