

Orangeness and Charm.

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The majority of the first impressions of Japan recorded by travellers are pleasurable impressions. Indeed there must be something lacking, or something very harsh, in the nature of which Japan can make no emotional appeal. The appeal itself is the clue to a problem; and that problem is the character of a race and of its civilization.

My own first impressions of Japan, — Japan as seen in the white sunshine of a perfect spring day, — had doubtless much in common with the average of ~~first~~ experiences. I remember

Especially the wonder and the delight of the vision. The wonder and the delight have never passed away: they are often revived for me even now, by some chance happening, of the fourteen years of sojourn. But the reason of these feelings was difficult to learn, — or at least to guess; for I cannot yet claim to know much about Japan... Long ago the best and dearest Japanese friend that I ever had, said to me, a little before his death: —

"When you find, in four or five years more, that you cannot understand the Japanese at all, then you will begin to know something

about them." After having realized the truth of my friend's prediction, — after having discovered that I cannot understand the Japanese at all, — I feel better qualified to attempt this essay.

#1 line

As first perceived, the outward strangeness of things in Japan produces (in certain minds, at least) a queer thrill impossible to describe, — a feeling of weirdness which comes to us only with the perception of the totally unfamiliar. You find yourself moving through queer small streets full of odd small people, wearing robes and sandals of extraordinary shapes; and you can scarcely distinguish the sexes at sight. The houses are constructed and furnished in ways

ation & all your experience; and you are  
 astonished & find that you cannot con-  
 -ceive the use or meaning of number-  
 -less things on display in the shops.  
 Food-stuffs of unimaginable derivation;  
 utensils of enigmatical forms; emblems  
 incomprehensible of some mysterious  
 belief; strange masks and toys  
 that commemorate legends of gods  
 or demons; odd figures, too, of the  
 gods themselves, with monstrous ears  
 and smiling faces, — all these you  
 may perceive as you wander about  
 ; though you must also notice  
 telegraph-poles and type-writers,  
 electric lamps and sewing machines.  
 Everywhere on signs and hangings,  
 and on the backs of people passing  
 by, you will observe wonderful  
 Chinese characters; and the wizardry  
 of all these texts makes the dominant  
 tone of the spectacle.

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Further acquaintance with this fantastic world will in no wise diminish the sense of strangeness evoked by the first vision of it. You will soon observe that even the physical actions of the people are unfamiliar, — that their work is done in ways the opposite of Western ways. Tools are of surprising shapes, and are handled after surprising methods: the blacksmith squats at his anvil, wielding a hammer such as no Western smith could use without long practice; the carpenter pushes, instead of pulling, his extraordinary plane and saw. Always the left is the right side, and the right side the wrong; and keys must be turned, to open or close a lock, in what we are accustomed to think the wrong direction. Mr. Percival Lowell has indulgently observed that the Japanese speak

backwards, read backwards, write backwards, -  
 and that this is "only the abc of their  
 contrariety". For the habit of  
 writing backwards there are obvious  
 evolutionary reasons; and the require-  
 -ments of Japanese calligraphy suffi-  
 -ciently explain why the artist pushes  
 his brush or pencil instead of pulling  
 it. But why, instead of pulling  
 the thread through the eye of the  
 needle, should the Japanese maiden  
 slip the eye of the needle over  
 the point of the thread? Perhaps  
 the most remarkable, out of a  
 hundred possible examples, <sup>of antipodal action</sup> is fur-  
 -nished by the Japanese art of  
 fencing. The swordsman, delivering  
 his blow with both hands, does not  
 pull the blade towards him in the  
 moment of striking, but pushes  
 it from him. He uses it indeed,

as other Asiatics do, not on the principle of the wedge, but of the saw; yet there is a pushing motion where we should expect a pulling motion in the drops. . . . These and other forms of unfamiliar action are strange enough & suggest the notion of a humanity, even physically, as little related to us, as might be the population of another planet, — the notion of some anatomical unlikeness. No such unlikeness, however, appears to exist; and all this opposite-ness really implies, not so much the outcome of a human experience entirely independent of any an experience, as the outcome of an experience evolutionally younger than our own.



Yet that experience has been  
 one of no mean order. Its mani-  
 -festations do not merely startle:  
 they also delight. The delicate  
 perfection of workmanship, the  
 logic strength and grace of objects,  
 the power manifest to obtain the  
 best results with the least ma-  
 -terial, the achieving of mechani-  
 -cal ends by the simplest possible  
 means, the comprehension of irre-  
 -gularity as aesthetic value, the  
 shapeliness and perfect taste  
 of every thing, the sense displayed  
 of harmony in tints or colours, -  
 all this must convince you at  
 once that our Occident has much  
 to learn from this remote civi-  
 -lization, not only in matters of  
 art and taste, but in matters  
 likewise of economy and utility.

It is no barbarian fancy that appeals  
 to you in those amazing porcelains,  
 those astonishing embroideries, those  
 wonders of lacquer and ivory and  
 bronze, which educate imagination  
 in unfamiliar ways. No: these are  
 the products of a civilization which  
 became, within its own limits, so  
 exquisite that none but an artist is  
 capable of judging its manufactures, —  
 a civilization that can be termed  
 imperfect only by those who would  
 also term imperfect the Greek  
 civilization of three thousand years  
 ago.

#  $\frac{1}{2}$  line

~~Pope~~ But the underlying strange-  
 -ness of this world, — the psycho-  
 -logical strangeness, — is much more  
 -startling than the visible and super-  
 -ficial. You begin to suspect  
 the range of it after having dis-

- covered that no adult Occidental can perfectly master the language. East and West the fundamental part of human nature — the emotional bases of it — are much the same: the mental difference between a Japanese and a European child is mainly potential. But with growth the difference rapidly develops and widens, till it becomes, in adult life, immeasurable. The whole of the Japanese mental super-structure evolves into forms having nothing in common with Western psychological development: the expression of thought becomes regulated, and the expression of emotion inhibited in ways that bewilder and astound. The ideas of this people are not our [ideas; their sentiments are not our sentiments; their ethical life represents for us regions of thought and emotion yet unexplored, or perhaps long forgotten. Any one of their ordinary phrases, translated into

Western speech, makes hopeless nonsense; and the literal rendering into Japanese of the simplest English sentence would scarcely be comprehended by any Japanese who had never studied a European tongue.

Could you learn all the words in a Japanese dictionary, your acquisition would not help you in the least to make yourself understood in speaking, unless you had learned also to think like a Japanese, — that is to say, to think backwards, to think upside-down and inside-out, to think in directions totally foreign to any habit. Experience in the acquisition

of European languages can help you to learn Japanese about as much as it could help you to acquire the language spoken by the inhabitants of Mars.

To be able to use the Japanese tongue as a Japanese uses it, one would need to be born again, and to have one's mind completely

reconstructed, from the foundation upwards. It is possible that a person of European parentage, born in Japan, and accustomed from infancy to use the vernacular, might retain in after-life that instinctive knowledge which could alone enable him to adapt his mental relations to the relations of any Japanese environment.

There is actually an Englishman named Black, born in Japan, whose proficiency in the language is proved by the fact that he is able to earn a fair income as a professional story-teller (hanashika).

But this is an extraordinary case... As for the literary language, I need only observe that to make acquaintance with it requires very much more than

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a knowledge of several thousand Chinese characters. It is safe to say that no Occidental can undertake to render at sight any literary text laid before him — indeed the number of native scholars able to do so is very small; — and although the learning displayed in this direction by various Europeans may justly compel our admiration, the work of none could have been given to the world without Japanese help.

#  $\frac{1}{2}$  line }

~~And~~ But as the outward strangeness of Japan proves to be full of beauty, so the inward strangeness appears to have its charm, — an ethical charm reflected in the common life of the people. The attractive aspects of that life do not indeed imply, to the

ordinary observer, a psychological differ-  
 -ence measurable by scores of  
 centuries: only a scientific mind,  
 like that of Mr. Percival Lowell,  
 immediately perceives the problem pre-  
 -sented. The less gifted stranger,  
 if naturally sympathetic, is merely  
 pleased and puzzled, and tries to  
 explain, by his own experience of  
 happy life on the other side of  
 the world, the social conditions  
 that charm him. Let us suppose  
 that he has the good fortune of  
 being able to live for six months  
 or a year in some old-fashioned  
 town of the interior. From the  
 beginning of his sojourn he can  
 scarcely fail to be impressed by  
 the apparent kindness and joyous-  
 -ness of the existence about him.

In the relations of the people to each other, as well as in all their relations to himself, he will find a constant amenity, a tact, a good-nature such as he will elsewhere have met with only in the friendships of exclusive circles. Everybody greets everybody with happy looks and pleasant words; faces are always smiling; the commonest incidents of everyday life are transfigured by a courtesy at once so artless and so faultless that it appears to spring directly from the heart, without any teaching. Under all circumstances a certain outward cheerfulness never fails: no matter what troubles may come, — storm or fire, flood or earthquake, — the laughter of greeting voices, the bright smile and graceful bow, the kindly inquiry and the wish to please, continue



& make existence beautiful. Religion  
 brings no gloom into the sunshine:  
 before the Buddhas and the gods  
 folk smile as they pray; the  
 temple-courts are playgrounds for  
 the children; and within the  
 enclosure of the great public shrines  
 — which are places of festivity  
 rather than of solemnity — dancing-  
 platforms are erected. Family  
 existence would seem to be everywhere  
 characterized by gentleness: there  
 is no visible quarrelling, no loud  
 harshness, no tears and reproaches.  
 Cruelty, even to animals, appears  
 to be unknown: one sees farmers  
 coming to town, budgeting patiently  
 beside their horses or oxen, aiding  
 their dumb companions to bear  
 the burden, and using no whips  
 or goads. Drivers or pullers of

cards will turn out of their way, under the most provoking circumstances, rather than overcome a lazy dog or a stupid chicken... For no inconsiderable time one may live in the midst of appearances like these, and perceive nothing, to spoil the pleasure of the experience.

Little

Of course the conditions of which I speak are now passing away; but they are still to be found in the remainder districts. I have lived in districts where no case of theft had occurred for hundreds of years, — where the newly-built prisons of Meiji remained empty and useless, — where the people left their doors un-

-fastened by night as well as by day. These facts are familiar to every Japanese. In such a district, you might recognize that the kindness shown to you, as a stranger, is the consequence of official command; but how explain the goodness of the people to each other? When you discover no harshness, no rudeness, no dishonesty, no breaking of laws, and learn that this social condition has been the same for centuries, you are tempted to believe that you have entered into the domain of a morally superior humanity. All this soft urbanity, impeccable honesty, ingenious kindness of speech and act, you might naturally interpret as conduct directed by perfect goodness of heart. And the

simplicity that delights you is no simplicity of barbarism. Here everyone has been taught; everyone knows how to write and speak beautifully, how to compare poetry, how to behave politely; — there is everywhere cleanliness and good taste; interiors are bright and pure; the daily use of the hot bath is universal. How refuse to be charmed by a civilization in which every relation appears to be governed by administration, every action directed by duty, and every object shaped by art? You cannot help being delighted by such conditions, or feeling indignant at hearing

them denounced as "heathen". And according to the degree of altruism within yourself, these good folk will be able, without any apparent effort, to make you happy. The mere sensation of the milieu is a placid happiness: it is like the sensation of a dream in which people greet us exactly as we like to be greeted, and say to us all that we like to hear, and do for us all that we wish to have done, — people moving soundlessly through spaces of perfect repose, all bathed in vapoury light. Yes — for no little time these fairy-folk can give you all the soft bliss of sleep. But

sooner or later, if you dwell long  
 with them, your condemnation  
 will prove I have much in  
 common with the happiness of  
 dreams. You will never forget  
 the dream — never; but it will  
 live at last, like those vapours  
 of spring which lend preter-  
 -natural loveliness to a Jap-  
 -anese landscape in the fore-  
 -noon of radiant days. Really  
 you are happy because you have  
 entered bodily into Fairyland, —  
 into a world that is not, and  
 never could be your own. You  
 have been transported out of  
 your own century — over spaces  
 enormous of perished time — into  
 an era forgotten, into a vanished

age, — back to something ancient  
 as Egypt or Nineveh. That  
 is the secret of the strangeness  
 and beauty of things, — the  
 secret of the thrill they give, —  
 the secret of the elfish charm  
 of the people and their  
 ways. Fortunate mortal! The  
 tide of Time has turned for  
 you! But remember that  
 here all is enchantment, —  
 that you have fallen under  
 the spell of the dead, — that  
 the lights and the colours and  
 the voices must fade away  
 at last into emptiness and  
 silence.

# *lin*

Wood

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Some of us, at least, have often wished that it were possible to live for a season in the beautiful vanished world of Greek culture. Inspired by our first acquaintance with the charm of Greek art and thought, this wish comes to us even before we are capable of imagining the true conditions of the antique civilization. If the wish could be realized, we should certainly find it impossible to accommodate ourselves to those conditions, — not so much because of the difficulty of learning the environment, as because of the much greater difficulty



of feeling just as people used to feel  
 some thirty centuries ago. In spite  
 of all that has been done for Greek  
 studies since the Renaissance, we  
 are still unable to understand many  
 aspects of the old Greek life: no  
 modern mind can really feel, for  
 example, those sentiments and  
 emotions to which the great tragedy  
 of Oedipus made appeal. Never-  
 -theless we are much in advance  
 of our forefathers of the eighteenth  
 century, as regards the knowledge  
 of Greek civilization. In the  
 time of the French revolution, it  
 was thought possible to re-establish  
 in France the conditions of a  
 Greek republic, and to educate  
 children according to the system

of Sparta. Today we are well aware that no mind developed by modern civilization could find happiness under any of those socialistic despotisms which existed in all the cities of the ancient world before the Roman conquest. We could no more mingle with the old Greek life, if it were resurrected for us, — no more become a part of it, — than we could change our mental identities. But how much would we not give for the delight of beholding it, — for the joy of attending one festival in Corinth, or of witnessing the Panhellenic games? . . .

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And yet, to witness the revival  
of some perished Greek civilization  
,— to walk about the very Crotona  
of Pythagoras, — to wander through  
the Syracuse of Theocritus, —  
were not any more of a privilege  
than is the opportunity actually  
afforded us to study Japanese  
life.

Indeed, from the evolu-  
-tional point of view, it were  
less of a privilege, — since Japan  
offers us the living spectacle  
of conditions older, and psycho-  
-logically much farther away  
from us, than those of any  
Greek period with which art  
and literature have made us  
closely acquainted.

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The reader scarcely needs to be reminded that a civilization less evolved than our own, and intellectually remote from us, is not on that account to be regarded as necessarily inferior in all respects. Hellenic civilization at its best represented an early stage of sociological evolution; yet the arts which it developed still furnish our supreme and unapproachable ideals of beauty. So, too, this much more archaic civilization of Old Japan attained an average of æsthetic and moral culture well worthy of our wonder and praise. Only a shallow mind — a very shallow

mind — will pronounce the best of  
 that culture inferior. But Jap-  
 -anese civilization is peculiar &  
 a degree for which there is perhaps  
 no Western parallel, since it  
 offers us the spectacle of many  
 successive layers of alien culture  
 superimposed above the simple  
 indigenous culture, and forming  
 a very bewildering complexity.  
 Most of this alien culture is Chinese,  
 and bears but an indirect rela-  
 -tion to the real subject of these  
 studies. The peculiar and  
 surprising fact is that, in spite  
 of all superimposition, the  
 original character of the people  
 and of their society should have

been so little changed. The wonder  
 of Japan is not to be sought in  
 the countless borrowings with  
 which she has clothed herself, —  
 much as a princess of the older  
 time would don twelve ceremonial  
 robes, of diverse colours and  
 qualities, folded one upon the  
 other so as to show their many-  
 -lined edges at throat and  
 sleeves and skirt; — no, the  
 real wonder is the wearer. For  
 the interest of the costume is  
 much less in its beauty of  
 form and tint than in its  
 significance as idea, — as repre-  
 -senting something of the mind  
 that devised or adopted it.

And the supreme interest of the old Japanese civilization lies in what it expresses of the race-character, — that character which yet remains essentially unchanged by all the changes of Meiji.

Word

— "Suggests" were perhaps a better word than "expresses", — for this race-character is rather to be divined than recognized. Our comprehension of it might be helped by some definite knowledge of origins; but such knowledge we do not yet possess. Eth.

-nologists are agreed that the Japanese race has been formed by a mingling of peoples, and that the dominant element is Mongolian;

but the dominant element is represented in two very different types, — one slender and almost feminine of aspect; the other, squat and powerful. Chinese and Korean elements are known to exist in the populations of certain districts; and there appears to have been a large infusion of Aino blood. Whether there be any Malay or Polynesian element also has not been decided. Thus much only can be safely affirmed, — that the race, like all good races, is a mixed one; and that the peoples who originally united to form it have been so blended together as to develop, under long social discipline, a tolerably uniform type of character. This character, though immediately recognizable in some of its aspects, remains (to Western observation at least) mysterious, enigmatic, inscrutable.



Nevertheless, to understand  
it better has become a matter of  
importance. Japan has entered  
into the world's competitive struggle;  
and the worth of any people in  
that struggle depends upon character  
quite as much as upon force. We  
can learn something about Japanese  
character if we are able to ascer-  
-tain the nature of the conditions which  
shaped it, — the great general facts  
of the moral experience of the  
race. And these facts we  
should find expressed or suggested  
in the history of the national  
beliefs, and in the history of  
those social institutions derived  
from and developed by religion.

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