

attributable to the inherent philosophical ability of the race. So far as Japan is either behind or in advance of other races, in this respect, it is due to her social order and social inheritance, and particularly to the nature, methods, and aims of the educational system, but not to her intrinsic psychic inheritance.

## XXI

## IMAGINATION

**I**N no respect, perhaps, have the Japanese been more sweepingly criticised by foreigners than in regard to their powers of imagination and idealism. Unqualified generalizations not only assert the entire lack of these powers, but they consider this lack to be the distinguishing inherent mental characteristic of the race. The Japanese are called "prosaic," "matter-of-fact," "practical," "unimaginative."

Mr. Walter Dening, describing Japanese mental characteristics, says:

"Neither their past history nor their prevailing tastes show any tendency to idealism. They are lovers of the practical and the real; neither the fancies of Goethe nor the reveries of Hegel are to their liking. Our poetry and our philosophy and the mind that appreciates them are alike the results of a network of subtle influences to which the Japanese are comparative strangers. It is maintained by some, and we think justly, that the lack of idealism in the Japanese mind renders the life of even the most cultivated a mechanical, humdrum affair when compared with that of Westerners. The Japanese cannot understand why our controversialists should wax so fervent over psychological, ethical, religious, and philosophical questions, failing to perceive that this fervency is the result of the intense interest taken in such subjects. The charms that the cultured Western mind finds in the world of fancy and romance, in questions themselves, irrespective of their practical bearings, is for the most part unintelligible to the Japanese."\*

\* "Things Japanese," p. 233.

Mr. Percival Lowell expends an entire chapter in his "Soul of the Far East," in showing how important imagination is as a factor in art, religion, science, and civilization generally, and how strikingly deficient Japanese are in this faculty. "The Far Orientals," he argues, "ought to be a particularly unimaginative set of people. Such is precisely what they are. Their lack of imagination is a well-recognized fact."\*

Mr. Aston, characterizing Japanese literature, says:

"A feature which strikingly distinguishes the Japanese poetic muse from that of Western nations is a certain lack of imaginative power. The Japanese are slow to endow inanimate objects with life. Shelley's 'Cloud,' for example, contains enough matter of this kind for many volumes of Japanese verse. Such lines as:

'From my wings are shaken  
The dews that waken  
The sweet buds every one,  
When rocked to rest  
On their mother's breast  
As she dances about the sun,'

would appear to them ridiculously overcharged with metaphor, if not absolutely unintelligible."\*

On the other hand, some writers have called attention to the contrary element of Japanese mental nature. Prof. Ladd, for instance, maintains that the characteristic mental trait of the Japanese is their sentimentality. He has shown how their lives are permeated with and regulated by sentiment. Ancestral worship, patriotism, Imperial apotheosis, friendship, are fashioned by idealizing sentiment. In our chapters on the emotional elements of Japanese character we have considered how widespread and powerful these ideals and sentiments have been and still are.

Writers who compare the Chinese with the Japanese remark the practical business nature of the former and the impractical, visionary nature of the latter.

For a proper estimate of our problem we should

\* P. 213.

† P. 30.

clearly distinguish between the various forms of imagination. It reveals itself not merely in art and literature, in fantastic conception, in personification and metaphor, but in every important department of human life. It is the tap-root of progress, as Mr. Lowell well points out. It pictures an ideal life in advance of the actual, which ideal becomes the object of effort. The forms of imagination may, therefore, be classified according to the sphere of life in which it appears. In addition to the poetic fancy and the idealism of art and literature generally, we must distinguish the work of imagination in the æsthetic, in the moral, in the religious, in the scientific, and in the political life. The manifestation of the imaginative faculty in art and in literature is only one part of the æsthetic imagination.

In studying Japanese æsthetic characteristics, we noted how unbalanced was the development of their æsthetic sense. This proposition of unbalanced development applies with equal force to the imaginative faculty as a whole. Conspicuously lacking in certain directions, it is as conspicuously prominent in others. Rules of etiquette are the products of the æsthetic imagination, and in what land has etiquette been more developed than in feudal Japan? Japanese imagination has been particularly active in the political world. The passionate loyalty of retainers to their lord, of samurai to their daimyo, of all to their "kuni," or clan, in ancient times, and now, of the people to their Emperor, are the results of a vivid political idealizing imagination. Imperial apotheosis is a combination of the political and religious imagination. And in what land has the apotheosizing imagination been more active than in Japan? Ambition and self-conceit are likewise dependent on an active imaginative faculty.

There can be no doubt the writers quoted above have drawn attention to some salient features of Japanese art. In the literature of the past, the people have not manifested that high literary imagination that we discover in the best literature of many other nations.

This fact, however, will not justify the sweeping generalizations based upon it. Judging from the pre-Elizabethan literature, who would have expected the brilliancy of the Elizabethan period? Similarly in regard to the Victorian period of English literature. Because the Japanese have failed in the past to produce literature equal to the best of Western lands, we are not justified in asserting that she never will and that she is inherently deficient in literary imagination. In regard to certain forms of light fancy, all admit that Japanese poems are unsurpassed by those of other lands. Japanese amative poetry is noted for its delicate fancies and plays on words exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, of translation, or even of expression, to one unacquainted with the language.

The deficiencies of Japanese literature, therefore, are not such as to warrant the conclusion that they both mark and make a fundamental difference in the race mind. For such differences as exist are capable of a sociological explanation.

The prosaic matter-of-factness of the Japanese mind has been so widely emphasized that we need not dwell upon it here. There is, however, serious danger of over-emphasis, a danger into which all writers fall who make it the ground for sweeping condemnatory criticism. They are right in ascribing to the average Japanese a large amount of unimaginative matter-of-factness, but they are equally wrong in unqualified dogmatic generalizations. They base their inductions on insufficient facts, a habit to which foreigners are peculiarly liable, through ignorance of the language and also of the inner thoughts and life of the people.

The prosaic nature of the Japanese has not impressed me so much as the visionary tendency of the people, and their idealism. The Japanese themselves count this idealism a national characteristic. They say that they are theorizers, and numberless experiences confirm this view.

They project great undertakings; they scheme; they discuss contingencies; they make enormous plans; all with an air of seriousness and yet with a nonchalance which shows a semi-conscious sense of the unreality of

their proposals. In regard to Korea and China and Formosa, they have hatched political and business schemes innumerable. The kaleidoscopic character of Japanese politics is in part due to the rapid succession of visionary schemes. One idea reigns for a season, only to be displaced by another, causing constant readjustment of political parties. Frequent attacks on government foreign policy depend for their force on lordly ideas as to the part Japan should play in international relations. Writing about the recent discussions in the public press over the question of introducing foreign capital into Japan, one contributor to the *Far East* remarks that "It has been treated more from a theoretical than from a practical standpoint. . . This seems to me to arise from a peculiar trait of Japanese mind which is prone to dwell solely on the theoretical side until the march of events compels a sudden leap toward the practical." This visionary faculty of the Japanese is especially conspicuous in the daily press. Editorials on foreign affairs and on the relations of Japan to the world are full of it.

I venture to jot down a few illustrations of impractical idealism out of my personal knowledge. An evangelist in the employ of the Kumamoto station exemplified this visionary trait in a marked degree. Nervous in the extreme, he was constantly having new ideas. For some reason his attention was turned to the subject of opium and the evils China was suffering from the drug, forced on her by England. Forthwith he came to me for books on the subject; he wished to become fully informed, and then he proposed to go to China and preach on the subject. For a few weeks he was full of his enterprise. It seemed to him that if he were only allowed the opportunity he could convince the Chinese of their error, and the English of their crime. One of his plans was to go to England and expostulate with them on their un-Christian dealings with China. A few weeks later his attention was turned to the wrongs inflicted on the poor on account of their ignorance about law and their inability to get legal assistance. This idea held him longer than the previous.

He desired to study law and become a public pleader in order to defend the poor against unjust men of wealth. In his theological ideas he was likewise extreme and changeable; swinging from positive and most emphatic belief to extreme doubt, and later back again. In his periods of triumphant faith it seemed to him that he could teach the world; and his expositions of truth were extremely interesting. He proposed to formulate a new theology that would dissolve forever the difficulties of the old theology. In his doubts, too, he was no less interesting and assertive. His hold on practical matters was exceedingly slender. His salary, though considerably larger than that of most of the evangelists, was never sufficient. He would spend lavishly at the beginning of the month so long as he had the money, and then would pinch himself or else fall into debt.

Mr. —, the head of the Kumamoto Boys' School during the period of its fierce struggles and final collapse, whom I have already referred to as the Hero-Principal,\* is another example of this impractical high-strung visionariness. No sooner had he reached Kumamoto, than there opened before our enchanted eyes the vision of this little insignificant school blooming out into a great university. True, there had been some of this bombast before his arrival; but it took on new and gorgeous form under his master hand. The airs that he put on, displaying his (fraudulent) Ph. D., and talking about his schemes, are simply amusing to contemplate from this distance. His studies in the philosophy of religion had so clarified his mind that he was going to reform both Christianity and Buddhism. His sermons of florid eloquence and vociferous power, never less than an hour in length, were as marked in ambitious thoughts as in pulpit mannerisms. He threw a spell over all who came in contact with him. He overawed them by his vehemence and tremendous earnestness and insistence on perfect obedience to his masterful will. In one of his climactic sermons, after charging missionaries with teaching dangerous errors, he said

\* Cf. chapter vii.

that while some were urging that the need of the times was to "hie back to Luther," and others were saying that we must "hie back to Christ" (these English words being brought into his Japanese sermon), they were both wrong; we must "hie back to God"; and he prophesied a reformation in religion, beginning there in Kumamoto, in that school, which would be far and away more important in the history of the world than was the Lutheran Reformation.

The recent history of Christianity in Japan supplies many striking instances of visionary plans and visionary enthusiasts. The confident expectation entertained during the eighties of Christianizing the nation before the close of the century was such a vision. Another, arising a few years later, was the importance of returning all foreign missionaries to their native lands and of intrusting the entire evangelistic work to native Christians, and committing to them the administration of the immense sums thus set free. For it was assumed by these brilliant utopians that the amount of money expended in supporting missionaries would be available for aggressive work should the missionaries be withdrawn, and that the Christians in foreign lands would continue to pour in their contributions for the evangelization of Japan.

Still another instance of utopian idealism is the vision that Japan will give birth to that perfect religion, meeting the demands of both heart and head, for which the world waits. In January, 1900, Prof. T. Inouye, of the Imperial University, after showing quite at length, and to his own satisfaction, the inadequacy of all existing religions to meet the ethical and religious situation in Japan, maintained this ambitious view.

Some Japanese Christians are declaring the need of Japonicized Christianity. "Did not the Greeks transform Christianity before they accepted it? And did not the Romans, and finally the Germans, do the same? Before Japan will or can accept the religion of Christ, it must be Japonicized." So they argue; "and who so fit to do it as we?" lies in the background of their thought.