

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ORIENT?

WE have now passed in rather detailed review the emotional, æsthetic, intellectual, moral, and religious characteristics of the Japanese race. We have, furthermore, given considerable attention to the problem of personality. We have tried to understand the relation of each characteristic to the Japanese feudal system and social order.

The reader will perhaps feel some dissatisfaction with the results of this study. "Are there, then," he may say, "no distinctive Japanese psychical characteristics by which this Eastern race is radically differentiated from those of the Occident?" "Are there no peculiar features of an Oriental, mental and moral, which infallibly and always distinguish him from an Occidental?" The reply to this question given in the preceding chapters of this work is negative. For the sake, however, of the reader who may not yet be thoroughly satisfied, it may be well to examine this problem a little further, analyzing some of the current characterizations of the Orient.

That Oriental and Occidental peoples are each possessed of certain unique psychic characteristics, sharply and completely differentiating them from each other, is the opinion of scientific sociologists as well as of more popular writers. An Occidental entering the Orient is well-nigh overwhelmed with amusement and surprise at the antipodal characteristics of the two civilizations. Every visible expression of Oriental civilization, every mode of thought, art, architecture; conceptions of God, man, and nature; pronunciation and structure of the language—all seem utterly different from their corresponding elements in the West. Furthermore, as he visits one Oriental

country after another, although he discovers differences between Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, and Hindus, yet he is impressed with a strange, a baffling similarity.

The tourist naturally concludes that the unity characterizing the Orient is fundamental; that Oriental civilization is due to Oriental race brain, and Occidental civilization is due to Occidental race brain.

This impression and this conclusion of the tourist are not, however, limited to him. The "old resident" in the East becomes increasingly convinced with every added year that an Oriental is a different kind of human being from a Westerner. As he becomes accustomed to the externals of the Oriental civilization, he forgets its comical aspects, he even comes to appreciate many of its conveniences. But in proportion as he becomes familiar with its languages, its modes of thought and feeling, its business methods, its politics, its literature, its amusements, does he increasingly realize the gulf set between an Oriental and an Occidental. The inner life of the spirit of an Oriental would be utterly inane, spiritless to the average Occidental. The "old resident" accordingly knows from long experience what the tourist only guesses from a hasty glance, that the characteristic differences distinguishing the peoples of the East and the West are racial and ineradicable. An Oriental is an Oriental, and that is the ultimate, only thoroughgoing explanation of his nature.

The conception of the tourist and the "old resident" crops up in nearly every article and book touching on Far Eastern peoples. Whatever the point of remark or criticism, if it strikes the writer as different from the custom of Occidentals, it is laid to the account of Orientalism.

This conception, however, of distinguishing Oriental characteristics, is not confined to popular writers and unscientific persons. Even professed and eminent sociologists advocate it. Prof. Le Bon, in his sophisticated volume on the "Psychology of Peoples," advocates it strenuously. A few quotations from this interesting work may not be out of place.

"The object of this work is to describe the psycho-

logical characteristics which constitute the soul of races, and to show how the history of a people and its civilization is determined by these characteristics."* "The point that has remained most clearly fixed in mind, after long journeys through the most varied countries, is that each people possesses a mental constitution as unaltering as its anatomical characteristics, a constitution which is the source of its sentiments, thoughts, institutions, beliefs, and arts." †

"The life of a people, its institutions, beliefs, and arts, are but the visible expression of its invisible soul. For a people to transform its institutions, beliefs, and arts it must first transform its soul." ‡

"Each race possesses a constitution as unvarying as its anatomical constitution. There seems to be no doubt that the former corresponds to a certain special structure of the brain." §

"A negro or a Japanese may easily take a university degree or become a lawyer; the sort of varnish he thus acquires is, however, quite superficial and has no influence on his mental constitution. What no education can give him, because they are created by heredity alone, are the forms of thought, the logic, and above all the character of the Western man." ||

"Cross-breeding constitutes the only infallible means at our disposal of transforming in a fundamental manner the character of a people, heredity being the only force powerful enough to contend with heredity. Cross-breeding allows of the creation of a new race, possessing new physical and psychological characteristics." ¶

Such, then, being the opinion of travelers, residents, and professional sociologists, it is not to be lightly rejected. Nor has it been lightly rejected by the writer. For years he agreed with this view, but repeated study of the problem has convinced him of the fallacy of both the conception and the argument, and has brought him to the position maintained in this work.

The characteristics differentiating Occidental and

* P. xvii.
§ P. 6.

† P. xviii.
|| P. 37.

‡ P. 19.
¶ P. 83.

Oriental peoples and civilizations are undoubtedly great. But they are differences of social evolution and rest on social, not on biological heredity. Anatomical differences are natal, racial, and necessary. Not so with social characteristics and differences. These are acquired by each individual chiefly after birth, and depend on social environment which determines the education from infancy upward. Furthermore, an entire nation or race, if subjected to the right social environment, may profoundly transform its institutions, beliefs, and arts, which in turn transform what Prof. Le Bon and kindred writers call the invisible "race soul." Racial activity produces race character, for "Function produces organism." I cannot agree with these writers in the view that the race soul is a given fixed entity. Social psychogenesis is a present and a progressive process. Japan is a capital illustration of it. In the development of races and civilizations involution is as continuous a process as evolution. Evolution is, indeed, only one-half of the process. Without involution, evolution is incomprehensible. And involution is the more interesting half, as it is the more significant. In modern discussion much that passes by the name of evolution is, in reality, a discussion of involution.

The attentive reader will have discovered that the real point of the discussion of Japanese characteristics given in the preceding chapters has been on the point of involution. How have these characteristics arisen? has been our ever-recurring question. The answer has invariably tried to show their relation to the social order. In this way we have traversed a large number of leading characteristics of the Japanese. We have seen how they arose, and also how they are now being transformed by the new Occidentalized social order. We have seen that not one of the characteristics examined is inherent, that is, due to brain structure, to biological heredity. We have concluded, therefore, that the psychical characteristics which differentiate races are all but wholly social.

It is incumbent on advocates of the biological view to point out in detail the distinguishing inherent traits of the Orient. Let them also catalogue the essential psychic

characteristics of Occidentals. Such an attempt is seldom made. And when it is made it is singularly unconvincing. Although Prof. Le Bon states that the mental constitution of races is as distinctive and unaltering as their anatomical characteristics, he fails to tell us what they are. This is a vital omission. If the differences are as distinct as he asserts, it would seem to be an easy matter to describe them. Whatever the clothing adopted, it is an easy matter for one to distinguish a European from an Asiatic, an Englishman from an Italian, a Japanese from a Korean, a Chinaman from a Hindu. The anatomical characteristics of races are clear and easily described. If the psychic characteristics are equally distinct, why do not they who assert this distinctness describe and catalogue these differences?

Occasionally a popular writer makes something of an attempt in this direction, but with astonishingly slight results. A recent writer in the London *Daily Mail* has illustrated afresh the futility of all attempts to catalogue the distinguishing characteristics of the Oriental. He names the inferior position assigned to women, the licentiousness of men, licensed prostitution, lack of the play instinct among Oriental boys, scorn of Occidental civilization, and the rude treatment of foreigners. Many of his statements of facts are sadly at fault. But supposing them to be true, are they the differentiating characteristics of the Orient? Consider for a moment what was the position of woman in ancient times in the Occident, and what was the moral character of Occidental men? Is not prostitution licensed to-day in the leading cities of Europe? And is there not an unblushing prostitution in the larger cities of England and America which would put to shame the licensed prostitution of Japan? Are Orientals and their civilization universally esteemed and considerately treated in the Occident? Surely none of these are uniquely Oriental characteristics, distinguishing them from Occidental peoples as clearly as the anatomical characteristics of oblique eyes and yellow skin.

Mr. Percival Lowell has made a careful philosophical effort to discover the essential psychic nature of the Orient. He describes it, as we have seen, as "Imperson-

ality." The failure of his effort we have sufficiently considered.

There remain a few other characterizations of the Orient that we may well examine briefly.

It has been stated that the characteristic psychic trait distinguishing the East from the West is that the former is intuitive, while the latter is logical. In olden times Oriental instruction relied on the intuitions of the student. No reliance was placed on the logical process. Religion, so far as it was not ceremony and magic, was intuitional. "Satori," "Enlightenment," was the keyword. Each man attains enlightenment by himself—through a flash of intuition. Moral instruction likewise was intuitional. Dogmatic statements were made whose truth the learner was to discover for himself; no effort was made to explain them. Teaching aimed to go direct to the point, not stopping to explain the way thither.

That this was and is a characteristic of the Orient cannot be disputed. The facts are abundant and clear. But the question is whether this is a racial psychic characteristic, such that it inevitably controls the entire thinking of an Oriental, whatever his education, and also whether the Occident is conspicuously deficient in this psychic characteristic. Thus stated, the question almost answers itself.

Orientals educated in Western methods of thought acquire logical methods of reasoning and teaching. The old educational methods of Japan are now obsolete. On the other hand, intuitionalism is not unknown in the West. Mystics in religion are all conspicuously intuitional. So too are Christian scientists, faith-healers, and spiritualists. Great preachers and poets are intuitionalists rather than logicians.

Furthermore, if we look to ancient times, we shall see that even Occidentals were dominated by intuitionalism. All primitive knowledge was dominated by intuitions, and was as absurd as many still prevalent Oriental conceptions of nature. The bane of ancient science and philosophy was its reliance on a priori considerations; that is, on intuition. Inductive, carefully logical methods of thought, of science, of philosophy, and even of religion, are rela-

tively modern developments of the Occidental mind. We have learned to doubt intuitions unverified by investigation and experimental evidence. The wide adoption of the inductive method is a recent characteristic of the West.

Modern progress has consisted in no slight degree in the development of logical powers, and particularly in the power of doubting and examining intuitions. To say that the East is conspicuously intuitional and the West is conspicuously logical is fairly true, but this misses the real difference. The West is intuitional plus logical. It uses the intuitional method in every department of life, but it does not stop with it. An intuition is not accepted as truth until it has been subjected by the reason to the most thorough criticism possible. The West distrusts the unverified and unguided intuitive judgment. On the other hand, the East is not inherently deficient in logical power. When brought into contact with Occidental life, and especially when educated in Occidental methods of thought, the Oriental is not conspicuously deficient in logical ability.

This line of thought leads to the conclusion that the psychic characteristics distinguishing the East from the West, profound though they are, are sociological rather than biological. They are the characteristics of the civilization rather than of essential race nature.

A fact remarked by many thoughtful Occidentals is the astonishing difficulty—indeed the impossibility—of becoming genuinely and intimately acquainted with the Japanese. Said a professor of Harvard University to the writer some years ago: "Do you in Japan find it difficult to become truly acquainted with the Japanese? We see many students here, but we are unable to gain more than a superficial acquaintance. They seem to be incrustated in a shell that we are unable to pierce." The editor of the *Japan Mail*, speaking of the difficulty of securing "genuinely intimate intercourse with the Japanese people," says: "The language also is needed. Yet even when the language is added, something still remains to be achieved, and what that something is we have never been able to discover, though we have been considering the subject for

thirty-three years. No foreigner has ever yet succeeded in being admitted into the inner circle of Japanese intercourse."

Is this a fact? If not, why is it so widespread a belief? If it is a fact, what is the interpretation? Like most generalizations it expresses both a truth and an error. As the statement of a general experience, I believe it to be true. As an assertion of universal application I believe it to be false. As a truth, how is it to be explained? Is it due to difference of race soul, and thus to racial antipathy, as some maintain? If so, it must be a universal fact. This, however, is an error, as we shall see. The explanation is not so hard to find as at first appears.

The difficulty under consideration is due to two classes of facts. The first is that the people have long been taught that Occidentals desire to seize and possess their land. Although the more enlightened have long since abandoned this fear and suspicion, the people still suspect the stranger; they do not propose to admit foreigners to any leading position in the political life of the land. They do not implicitly trust the foreigners, even when taken into their employ. That foreigners should not be admitted to the inner circle of Japanese political life, therefore, is not strange. Nor is it unique to Japan. It is not done in any land except the United States. Secondly, the diverse methods of social intercourse characterizing the East and the West make a deep chasm between individuals of these civilizations on coming into social relations. The Oriental bows low, utters conventional "aisatsu" salutations, listens respectfully, withholds his own opinion, agrees with his vis-à-vis, weighs every word uttered with a view to inferring the real meaning, for the genius of the language requires him to assume that the real meaning is not on the surface, and chooses his own language with the same circumspection. The Occidental extends his hand for a hearty shake—if he wishes to be friendly—looks his visitor straight in the eye, speaks directly from his heart, without suspicion or fear of being misunderstood, expresses his own opinions unreservedly. The Occidental, accustomed to this direct and open manner, spontaneously doubts the man who lacks it. It is impossible

for the Occidental to feel genuinely acquainted with an Oriental who does not respond in Occidental style of frank open intercourse. Furthermore, it is not Japanese custom to open one's heart, to make friends with everyone who comes along. The hail-fellow-well-met characteristic of the Occident is a feature of its individualism, that could not come into being in a feudal civilization in which every respectable man carried two swords with which to take instant vengeance on whoever should malign or doubt him. Universal secretiveness and conventionality, polite forms and veiled expressions, were the necessary shields of a military feudalism. Both the social order and the language were fitted to develop to a high degree the power of attention to minutest details of manner and speech and of inferring important matters from slight indications. The whole social order served to develop the intuitional method in human relations. Reliance was placed more on what was not said than on what was clearly expressed. A doubting state of mind was the necessary psychological prerequisite for such an inferential system. And doubt was directly taught. "Hito wo mireba dorobo to omoye," "when you see a man, count him a robber," may be an exaggeration, but this ancient proverb throws much light on the Japanese chronic state of mind. Mutual suspicion—and especially suspicion of strangers—was the rule in Old Japan. Among themselves the Japanese make relatively few intimate friends. They remark on Occidental skill in making friends.

That the foreigner is not admitted to the inner social life of the Japanese is likewise not difficult of explanation, if we bear in mind the nature of that social life. Is it possible for one who keeps concubines, who takes pleasure in geisha, and who visits houses of prostitution, to converse freely and confidentially with those who condemn these practices? Can he who stands for a high-grade morality, who criticises in unsparing measure the current morality of Japanese society, expect to be admitted to its inner social circles? Impossible. However friendly the relations of Japanese and foreigners may be in business and in the diplomatic corps, the moral chasm separating the social life of the Occident from that of the Orient ef-

fectually prevents a foreigner from being admitted to its inner social life.

It might be thought that immoral Occidentals would be so admitted. Not so. The Japanese distinguish between Occidentals. They know well that immoral Occidentals are not worthy of trust. Although for a season they may hobnob together, the intimacy is shallow and short-lived; it rests on lust and not on profound sympathies of head and heart.

And this suggests the secret of genuine acquaintance. Men become profoundly acquainted in proportion as they hold in common serious views of life, and labor together for the achievement of great moral ends. Now a gulf separates the ordinary Japanese, even though educated, from the serious-minded Occidental. Their views of life are well-nigh antipodal. If their social intercourse is due only to the accident of business or of social functions, what true intimacy can possibly arise? The acquaintance can only be superficial. Nothing binds the two together beyond the temporary and accidental. Let them, however, become possessed of a common and a serious view of life; let them strive for the attainment of some great moral reform, which they feel of vital importance to the welfare of the nation and the age, and immediately a bond of connection and intercourse will be established which will ripen into real intimacy.

I dispute the correctness of the generalization above quoted, however, not only on theoretical considerations, but also as a matter of experience. Among Christians, the conditions are fulfilled for intimate relations between Occidentals and Orientals which result, as a matter of fact, in genuine and intimate friendship. The relations existing between many missionaries and the native Christians and pastors refute the assertion of the editor of the *Japan Mail* that, "no foreigner has ever yet succeeded in being admitted into the inner circle of Japanese intercourse." This assertion is doubtless true in regard to the relation of foreigners to non-Christian society. The reason, for the fact, however, is not because one is Occidental and the other Oriental in psychic nature, but solely because of diverse moral views, aims, and conduct.

It is not the contention of these pages, however, that intimate friendships between Occidental and Oriental Christians are as easily formed as between members of two Occidental nations. Although common views of life, and common moral aims and conduct may provide the requisite foundations for such intimate friendships, the diverse methods of thought and of social intercourse may still serve to hinder their formation. It is probably a fact that missionaries experience greater difficulty in making genuine intimate friendships with Japanese Christians than with any other race on the face of the globe. The reasons for this fact are manifold. The Japanese racial ambition manifests itself not only in the sphere of political life; it does not take kindly to foreign control in any line. The churches manifest this characteristic. It is a cause of suspicion of the foreign missionary and separation from him; it has broken up many a friendship. Intimacy between missionaries and leading native pastors and evangelists was more common in the earlier days of Christian work than more recently, because the Japanese church organization has recently developed a self-consciousness and an ambition for organic independence which have led to mutual criticisms.

Furthermore, Japanese Christians are still Japanese. Their methods of social intercourse are Oriental; they bow profoundly, they repeat formal salutations, they refrain from free expression of personal opinion and preference. The crust of polite etiquette remains. The foreigner must learn to appreciate it before he can penetrate to the kindly, sincere, earnest heart. This the foreigner does not easily do, much to the detriment of his work.

And on the other hand, before the Oriental can penetrate to the kindly, sincere, and earnest heart of the Occidental, he must abandon the inferential method; he must not judge the foreigner by what is left unsaid nor by slight turns of that which is said, but by the whole thought as fully expressed. In other words, as the Occidental must learn and must trust to Oriental methods of social intercourse, so the Oriental must learn and must trust to the corresponding Occidental methods. The difficulty is great in either case, though of an opposite nature.

Which has the greater difficulty is a question I do not attempt to solve.

Another generalization as to the essential difference marking Oriental and Occidental psychic natures is that the former is meditative and appreciative, and the latter is active. This too is a characterization of no little truth. The easy-going, time-forgetting, dreaming characteristics of the Orient are in marked contrast to the rush, bustle, and hurry of the Occident. One of the first and most forcible impressions made on the Oriental visiting the West is the tremendous energy displayed even in the ordinary everyday business. In the home there is haste; on the streets men, women, and children are "always on the run." It must seem to be literally so, when the walk of the Occidental is compared with the slow, crawling rate at which the Oriental moves. Horse cars, electric cars, steam cars, run at high speed through crowded streets. Conversation is short and hurried. Visits are curtailed—hardly more than glimpses. Everyone is so nervously busy as to have no time for calm, undisturbed thought. So does the Orient criticise and characterize the Occident.

In the Orient, on the contrary, time is nothing. Walking is slow, business is deliberate, visiting is a fine art of bows and conventional phrases preliminary to the real purpose of the call; amusements even are long-drawn-out, theatrical performances requiring an entire day. In the home there is no hurry, on the street there is no rush. To the Occidental, the Oriental seems so absorbed in a dream life that the actual life is to him but a dream.

If the characterization we are considering is meant to signify that the Orient possesses a power of appreciation not possessed by the West, then it seems to me an error. The Occident is not deficient in appreciation. A better statement of the difference suggested by the above characterization is that Western civilization is an expression of Will, whereas Eastern civilization is an expression of subordination to the superior—to Fate. This feature of Oriental character is due to the fact that the Orient is still as a whole communal in its social order, whereas the Occident is individualistic. In the West each man makes

his own fortune; his position in society rests on his own individual energy. He is free to exert it at will. Society praises him in proportion as he manifests energy, grit, independence, and persistence. The social order selects such men and advances them in political, in business, in social, and in academic life. The energetic, active characteristics of the West are due, then, to the high development of individualism. The entire Occidental civilization is an expression of free will.

The communal nature of the Orient has not systematically given room for individual progress. The independent, driving man has been condemned socially. Submission, absolute and perpetual, to parents, to lord, to ancestors, to Fate, has been the ruling idea of each man's life. Controlled by such ideas, the easy-going, time-ignoring, dreaming, contemplative life—if you so choose to call it—of the Orient is a necessary consequence.

But has this characteristic become congenital, or is it still only social? Is dreamy appreciation now an inborn racial characteristic of Oriental mind, while active driving energy is the corresponding essential trait of Occidental mind? Or may these characteristics change with the social order? I have no hesitancy whatever in advocating the latter position. The way in which Young Japan, clad in European clothing, using watches and running on "railroad time," has dropped the slow-going style of Old Japan and has acquired habits of rapid walking, direct clear-cut conversation, and punctuality in business and travel (comparatively speaking) proves conclusively the correctness of my contention. New Japan is entering into the hurry and bustle of Occidental life, because, in contact with the West, she has adopted in a large measure, though not yet completely, the individualism of the West.

As time goes on, Japanese civilization will increasingly manifest the phenomena of will, and will proportionally become assimilated to the civilization of the West. But the ultimate cause of this transformation in civilization will be the increasing introduction of individualism into the social order. And this is possible only because the so-called racial characteristics are sociological, and not

biological. The transformation of "race soul" therefore does not depend on the intermarriage of diverse races, but only on the adoption of new ideas and practices through social intercourse.

We conclude, then, that the only thoroughgoing interpretation of the differences characterizing Eastern and Western psychic nature is a social one, and that social differences can be adequately expressed only by contrasting the fundamental ideas ruling their respective social orders, namely, communalism for the East and individualism for the West.

The unity that pervades the Orient, if it is not due to the inheritance of a common psychic nature, to what is it due? Surely to the possession of a common civilization and social order. It would be hard to prove that Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Siamese, Burmese, Hindus (and how many distinct races does the ethnologist find in India), Persians, and Turks are all descendants from a common ancestry and are possessed therefore by physical heredity of a common racial psychic nature. Yet such is the requirement of the theory we are opposing. That the races inhabiting the Asiatic continent have had from ancient times mutual social intercourse, whereby the civilization, mental, moral, and spiritual, of the most developed has passed to the other nations, so that China has dominated Eastern Asia, and India has profoundly influenced all the races inhabiting Asia, is an indisputable fact. The psychic unity of the Orient is a civilizational, a social unity, as is also the psychic unity of the Occident. The reason why the Occident is so distinct from the Orient in social, in psychic, and in civilizational characteristics is because these two great branches of the human race have undergone isolated evolution. Isolated biological evolution has produced the diverse races. These are now fixed physical types, which can be modified only by intermarriage. But although isolated social evolution has produced diverse social and psychic characteristics these are not fixed and unalterable. To transform psychic and social characteristics, intimate social intercourse, under special conditions, is needful alone.

If the characteristics differentiating the Eastern from

the Western peoples are only social, it might be supposed that the results of association would be mutual, the East influencing the West as much as the West influences the East, both at last finding a common level. Such a result, however, is impossible, from the laws regulating psychic and social intercourse. The less developed psychic nature can have no appreciable effect on the more highly developed, just as undeveloped art cannot influence highly developed art, nor crude science and philosophy highly developed science and philosophy. The law governing the relations of diverse civilizations when brought into contact is not like the law of hydrostatics, whereby two bodies of water of different levels, brought into free communication, finally find a common level, determined by the difference in level and their respective masses. In social intercourse the higher civilization is unaffected by the lower, in any important way, while the lower is mightily modified, and in sufficient time is lifted to the grade of the higher in all important respects. This is a law of great significance. The Orient is becoming Occidentalized to a degree and at a rate little realized by travelers and not fully appreciated by the Orientals themselves. They know that mighty changes have taken place, and are now taking place, but they do not fully recognize their nature, and the multitudes do not know the source of these changes. In so far as the East has surpassed the West in any important direction will the East influence the West.

In saying, then, as we did in our first chapter, that the Japanese have already formed an Occidento-Oriental civilization, we meant that Japan has introduced not only the external and mechanical elements of Western civilization into her new social order, but also its inner and determinative principle—individualism. In saying that, as the Ethiopian cannot change his skin nor the leopard his spots, so Japan will never become thoroughly Occidentalized, we did not intend to say that she was so Oriental in her physiological nature, in her "race soul," that she could make no fundamental social transformation; but merely that she has a social heredity that will always and inevitably modify every Occidental custom and conception

that may be brought to this land. Although in time Japan may completely individualize her social order, it will never be identical with that of the West. It will always bear the marks of her Oriental social heredity in innumerable details. The Occidental traveler will always be impressed with the Orientalisms of her civilization. Although the Oriental familiar with the details of the pre-Meiji social order will be impressed with what seems to him the complete Occidentalization of her new civilization and social order, although to-day communalism and individualism are the distinguishing characteristics respectively of the East and the West, they are not necessary characteristics due to inherent race nature. The Orient is sure to become increasingly individualistic. The future evolution of the great races of the earth is to be increasingly convergent in all the essentials of individual and racial prosperity, but in countless non-essential details the customs of the past will remain, to give each race and nation distinctive psychic and social characteristics.