

A VISIT TO JAPAN IN 1937

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MY first hint of Japan's plans to fulfil her "manifest destiny", by becoming a World Power, was brought home very forcibly when I was a student of medicine at Edinburgh University during the early nineties of last century. When Japan, as a first step in her ambitions, decided to Europeanize her industries and education, the Government invited a number of academic teachers from Great Britain to act as instructors at the Imperial University. After a certain time the Japanese decided that they could do their own instructing; the result was that these British professors found themselves out of a job. As many of them were past middle age, it was obvious that they would have difficulty in securing academic posts in Great Britain. A very able professor, Dr. Knott, returned jobless to his Alma Mater at Edinburgh during my student days, and the university authorities, very generously I thought, instituted a special lectureship for him in physics. Similar expulsion treatment was meted out by the Japanese to the large body of skilled technicians they had engaged to assist them in the development of their heavy industries, such as shipbuilding, etc. A glaring example was the jettisoning of John Milne, the eminent seismologist. He gave very faithful service to the Japanese Government as a geologist and mining engineer for twenty years, during which time he made a survey of the whole country, and established one thousand seismic observation stations.

Armed with the knowledge she had so acquired, Japan was soon enabled to embark on her plans of conquest, and began with an unprovoked attack on her peaceful neighbour China. She soon acquired by force valuable territory such as Korea and the Island of Formosa, both of which were of supreme strategic importance to her in the defence of her island Empire. Japan's aggression in Manchuria in 1931 is too fresh in our minds to require any jogging of the memory. Our troubles in the Far East now are due in great measure to the fact that no effective quarantine was instituted against Japan the aggressor in 1931. During the years that followed, all that the Allied Nations did was to make occasional mild protests, meanwhile continuing to supply her with essential war materials.

My wife and I visited Japan in April, 1937, as part of a cruise round the world in that noble ship the *Empress of Britain*,

now alas no more. This was only three months before Japan's second brutal attack on China, the so-called "incident" which is farther than ever from being "liquidated" after over five years of devastating warfare. As we were approaching Japan, our morning paper, which was printed on board ship, warned us that we would be in the "fortified zone" by noon that day. We were informed that no cameras were to be allowed on deck while we were passing through that area. We were further warned that we would be closely watched from the shore through powerful field glasses during that time. Any infringement of this regulation would entail detention of the ship for an indefinite period. This certainly proved an eye-opener; it convinced us that we were approaching a country firmly in the clutches of rampant militarism.

When the ship reached Kobé, one of the great seaports of the country, I was informed that the Japanese authorities wished to interview me. When I entered the room, I found four officials seated at a table, trying to look very important. I also ascertained that the only other medical man on the passenger list had also been summoned. We were asked if we intended to practise medicine in Japan, or if we were merely transients. A moment's enquiry at the purser's office would have convinced these gentlemen that we possessed through tickets to our destination on that ship. I therefore concluded that the underlying idea of this unnecessary inquisition was to demonstrate the importance of these officials, with the added impression, that it was for the purpose of satisfying their personal vanity. It was thus evident that there was another race in the world, besides the German, which wished to be classed as *Herrenvolk*.

One of our party, an American lady, had an unpleasant taste of Japanese militarism at Kobé. She was in a rickshaw, and saw a small detachment of troops under an N.C.O. approaching. She asked the rickshaw man to stop while she took a snapshot of the soldiers. The N.C.O. noticed this. He halted his troops, stalked over to the lady, seized her camera and extracted the whole film. Comment on this senseless act is needless!

A somewhat similar episode took place at Yokohama. A large German liner came in alongside us, and there was some excitement when it was found that no one was permitted to leave the ship. The reason given was that one of the passengers had been observed taking a snapshot of a Japanese destroyer, while they were approaching Yokohama. The authorities took

possession until they had found out who had taken the photograph, and confiscated the film. The amusing thing was that picture post-cards of Japanese destroyers could be purchased by anyone in the city. There was another humorous side to the episode, for the ship so insulted belonged to a future partner in the Tripartite Pact!

In contrast to these childish displays of provocative officialdom and sabre rattling, we found the Japanese populace, without exception, most friendly and polite. All those whom we met were very genial and hospitable, and indeed were anxious to show their friendship in every way possible. The garden party given to us by Mr. Aso at Beppu was an experience as delightful as it was unique. We were, it is to be confessed, not very favourably impressed by the taste of the tea, largely owing to the fact that no milk or sugar was provided. However, our host very generously gave us the run of his house, and showed us many intimate features of family life. The bedrooms were all on the ground floor, as the house possessed only one storey. The bedding was all rolled up on one side of each room, and looked like large quilts. Bedsteads were non-existent, and we were much impressed by their Spartan method of sleeping on the floor. The latter was covered with matting woven from some form of dried grass. The partitions between the rooms consisted simply of sliding frameworks of wood, covered with paper decorated with characteristic Japanese designs. The furniture was rather scanty, and did not reach very high above the level of the floor, obviously to conform to the Japanese custom of squatting. Chairs in fact appeared to be unnecessary. Baths with constant hot water had been got simply by sinking a pipe in the ground, showing the close proximity of the volcanic heat in this area.

The dwellings of the people in all the towns and cities we visited had to be adapted to a country that was so subject to earthquakes. That is to say, they were built of wood, and were only one storey in height. In the cities these houses were closely packed together, so as to save surface area, and if a tree had happened to come in the way, it was still permitted to continue to grow, projecting through the roof of the house. I feel confident that incendiary bombs dropped on Japanese cities would level them to the ground, and give the national morale a rude jolt. The Japanese are passionately fond of trees, and protect them in every way possible. Several which we saw in the grounds of the Imperial Palace at Kyoto were most elaborately bandaged,

evidently to protect them from the rigours of winter. They certainly presented an extraordinary appearance.

During our visit to Japan the aeroplane which they euphemistically named *Divine Wind* reached Britain on its supposedly goodwill flight. More probably it was sent to demonstrate the prowess of the Japanese Air Force. The result was celebrated by a national holiday, and we were enabled to study the reactions of the population generally. What impressed us most was the parade of school children, which we witnessed at Nara, the ancient capital of Japan. The boys and girls paraded separately in column of fours, and this seemed to extend for miles. At any rate we never saw the end of the column. It was amazing to think that a comparatively small town could muster so many children. This certainly gave one an insight into the national problem of overpopulation. It is undoubtedly a very cogent reason for Japan's entry into the war, in order to secure more living space. Every child in the parade carried a replica of the national flag in paper, and there was much fluttering of these. Some of the children presented us with their flags, without any protest on the part of their teachers. The adult population was also on holiday that day, and what a good humoured, well dressed and well mannered crowd they were. They evinced no curiosity towards us, and there was no unnecessary amount of staring. They accepted our presence as a matter of course, and did not interfere with us in any way. I saw only two men suffering from the effects of overindulgence in saké, the alcoholic drink that is prepared from rice. One of these was in jovial mood. He gave me an engaging smile, and uttered a word which sounded like "Ohio." I gathered that he may have thought I came from the State of Ohio, so I also smiled in a friendly way, and said "Ohio." On investigation afterwards, I was informed that this was the daily salutation. It was interesting to note that one of the most popular items in the dietary of these holiday makers was hard boiled eggs, basketfuls of which could be seen everywhere. At Beppu I saw them being cooked in a natural hot spring, in which they were suspended in net bags composed of coarse fibres. I was informed that they were cooked in five minutes, which gave one a shrewd idea of the temperature of the water. These holiday makers did not indulge in "hot dogs," which are a national institution at American amusement centres, and there was no sign of the fish and chips which used to be everywhere in evidence in Britain on bank holidays.

The Japanese do not as a rule marry for love. Courting with a view to marriage is therefore unknown in Japan. Everything is arranged by a "go-between", approved by both families, and the two chief performers may hardly glance at each other, or they may be introduced, and exchange a few commonplace words. There were two marriage parties at our hotel in Kyoto, and the only episodes we witnessed were, when the brides were led from the scene of celebrations several times in order to change into more and more beautiful kimonos. This procedure, we were informed, is an essential part of the ceremony, and goes to show that human vanity is pretty much the same all over the world. The bride's faces were heavily powdered, and the solemnity of their countenances made the occasion look more like a funeral than a marriage. We certainly saw no evidence of "the radiant bride" in these two instances.

Our experience at the entrance to Nijo castle at Kyoto convinced us, more than ever, that there was a deliberate conspiracy on the part of Japanese officialdom to adopt a pin-prick policy towards their British and American visitors. I may mention that by far the greater proportion of our party came from the U. S. A. We were escorted to the castle entrance early one cold spring morning, to find the massive gates closed, although official arrangements had been made for our admission. After repeated knockings, the gates were at length opened, and our guides conducted a lengthy argument with the gate-keeper. We were kept waiting for at least half an hour in a biting cold wind, while this debate lasted. At last Cerberus relented, after he had made up his mind that his dignity had been satisfied. In our guidebook we had read a rather flamboyant account of the lacquer work in this building. Parts of the wooden walls had been swung outwards, to give us an opportunity to inspect this, but a temporary fence which had been thrown around, prevented a close inspection.

Even more stringent restrictions were imposed upon us within the grounds of the royal palace at Kyoto, for here again we were kept well back from the building by a fence. In addition, we were informed that no photography of this building was to be permitted, and its enforcement was carried out by officials who kept popping up suddenly from behind bushes. The climax was reached at the shrine in Tokyo dedicated to Meiji, who was emperor when Japan defeated Tsarist Russia in 1904-05. I was about to photograph it, when I heard a loud shout behind me. A man gesticulating wildly signalled to me not

to do so. Here we witnessed the populace drop their coins into a large chest covered by an iron grating, and then offer up a prayer to the dead emperor. In other words, they were worshipping him as a god—the direct descendant of the Sun-goddess, as they think. The same emperor is immortalized by a magnificent building in Tokyo. The interior walls are arranged in panels portraying the career of the Emperor Meiji from childhood to his cremation. We were ordered to put on overshoes in the vestibule, as we were told that we were entering a sacred building.

It is a well known fact that the first duty of the pupils each day at school is to make their salaams to a portrait of the present emperor. This worship of the emperor as a living deity indicates that patriotism in Japan goes far beyond our conception of what that means. With the Japanese it amounts to a rabid fanaticism. They would rather die than "lose face", as they call it. A people imbued with this idea is a difficult people to defeat, a stern fact we and our Allies are having to face. The plain truth is, that the Japanese have become swollen-headed, because they have won all the wars they have so far been engaged in. The only thing to bring them to their senses is to impose a crushing defeat on them.