

Literature

"The Industries of Japan"*

JAPAN is, in one sense, a Robinson Crusoe among nations. Living out on a group of islands by themselves, with little communication with the mainland of Asia, and isolated for centuries from the shock of change and fashion, the Japanese pursued their own peculiar path of development. In some respects, they have retrograded, but in respect to art and art industry, their achievements are all the more praiseworthy because original. Their art is yet a thing that is living and growing, and part of the very life of the people. It may be fairly said that the two centuries or more of her Thornrose-like seclusion (in the country named by themselves Cliff-fortress Island and the Princess Country) wrought no harm, but was rather the nurse of her art. Even the Hollanders, who lived in like fraternity of hermit-life on the little island of Deshima fronting the city of Nagasaki, were not aware of the extent of Japan's wondrously varied art industries. The Dutchmen living quite near the porcelain kilns of Arita and Hozin kept Europe informed of the progress of ceramics in the hermit-land, and filled the museums of the Netherlands with things strange and curious. Of the fine art and products of central, northern and western Japan, however, they knew little. When foreigners penetrated the interior after the opening of the treaty ports, they were amazed at the marvellous volume and variety of artistic products. The mastery over unpromising material possessed by the native decorative artists seemed incredible. Yet not until the participation of the Japanese in the exhibitions at Vienna and Philadelphia were the eyes of Occidentals fully opened to the riches of this land of dainty decoration. Then began specialists to ferret out the homes of the artists and the workshops of the artisans. For a long time it seemed impossible that the Japanese could produce such triumphs of skill and taste without large establishments and heavy investments of capital. To those on the spot, however, it soon became evident that as 'the white lotus springs out of the mud,' so the most superb achievements had their origin and environment in humblest sheds and simplest cottages. In these thatched huts from ten to fifty generations of hereditary skill found its last avatar in the taper fingers of workmen who created with love and joy. Knowing nothing of high wages, strikes, or the pleasures and miseries of machine-tenders and minions of 'walking-delegates,' they toiled in sunny content. Into this tempting field of study and exploration, not a few agents, collectors and amateurs have entered, and already we have a considerable literature treating of Japanese art industries. Hitherto, however, these writings have been fragmentary, and of narrow or superficial range.

After years of personal investigation in field, shop and laboratory, winning by hand or tongue the trade secrets of the Japanese, and after persistent travel in the Land of Great Peace for general observation, Prof. Rein returned to

Europe for further study and digestion of his notes and collections. Hence his text is readable as well as informing. He speaks with the ease of one who has his knowledge at his finger's end. His portly volume of over five hundred pages is the twin companion, in general make-up, to the superb volume on 'Nature and People in the Mikado's Empire' which he gave us in German five years, and in English two and a half years, ago. The text is arranged under three divisions: Agriculture, Forestry, and Agricultural Industry; Mining; and Art Industry and Related Occupations. The illustrations form a striking feature of a book in which no expense has been spared to make the mechanical dress worthy of the unique quality of the literary contents. A very high point of reproductive art is reached in some of these lacquer designs and samples of paper. The woodcuts also are excellent. Two full indexes add greatly to the serviceableness of the book. About all that is known of Japan's vegetable, animal and mineral products, and of her various industrial processes is here set forth, not only with fulness and system, but with an enthusiasm in minutest details that is as delightful as it is surprising. It is pleasant for Americans to discover that the labors of our fellow-countrymen who have had a hand in introducing Western civilization into Japan are, as a rule, highly appreciated by the German Professor of Geography at Bonn. Prof. Rein also speaks warmly of Perry, with whose name the flowering of this nation will always be associated. He is, also, as he ought to be, a fair critic of the Dutch, who for two centuries or more served as the link between Japan and the Western world. Shamefully abused as they have been by aliens in race, language and religion, they were not worse than the men of their age. They introduced not only hundreds of plants, but also science and inventions, medicine, surgery and the general culture of Europe. Even when their trade ceased to be profitable, they maintained relations with Japan for the sentiment of historical continuity. Contrary to Commodore Perry's impressions, they advised the Japanese Government to treat favorably with the Americans, even before the Mississippi sailed from America. When, however, Prof. Rein asserts that the Dutch were knowingly and of intent implicated in the massacre of the native Christians at Shimabara in 1637, we are inclined to think he follows tradition more than proved fact.

In general, the author is minutely accurate. He treats with severity the bizarre taste of the Japanese, when it deforms nature and runs riot in grotesque caricature. He pays a just tribute to Dr. Wagner, the German *techniker* who has so wisely and successfully aided the Japanese to adapt their natural genius to the conditions of modern times, nursing their inborn artistic powers, but showing them how to summon chemistry and Western economy to their aid. One of the most charming facts brought out by Prof. Rein is that, despite the fall of feudalism, the decay of Buddhism, the civil war of 1868-70, and the shameful oppression by foreign governments through treaties, Japan, like France after her crushing defeat, found renaissance in the art-capabilities and unquenchable art-enthusiasm of her people. A few slips, like 'Vasco de Gama' for Vasco da Gama, 'Yeddo' for Yedo, a curious and peculiarly German use of *whereas*, the incorrect 'Nipon' for Nippon, and printer's errors like 'Kiota' for Kioto and 'Hokone' for Hakone are noted. The author does not seem to know that Beni-Gara is only the Japanese corruption of Bengal. His vast vistas into the supposed history of Japan and China are hardly from the heights of critical scholarship.

These are minute spots on a magnificent achievement, a shining example of patience, learning and fine literary form. The book stands out as easily first in its special field, as Fuji rises among the lesser mountains of the Japanese islands. Indeed, in one of the manifold senses of the name of the sacred peak, this book of Prof. Rein's *is* Fuji; for it is peerless, and there are 'no two such.'

* The Industries of Japan. By J. J. Rein. \$10. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son.