A Christian Samurai *

MANY SEARCHERS after knowledge and seekers after God lived in Japan before the yard-arms of Perry's black ships mirrored themselves on the waters of Yedo Bay. Not all, however, were destined to save their heads or live to gratify their aspirations; for death, exile and imprisonment were the rewards in store for most inquiring minds. Even when escape was made on foreign ships to more enlightened lands, it was rarely that friends and help were found. One of the fortunate—or Providentially guided—was a young samurai of the family of Niijima, whose father served Itakura, a daimio who held a fief under the Sho-gun in the province of Kodzuké. Born in Tokyo on Feb. 12, 1843, this son of the writing-master of the baron spent his childhood mostly inside the square enclosure or caravansary (yashiki) of the clan. He was reared as a samurai in all the feudal traditions, both noble and brutal, of old Japan. Educated in Japanese and Chinese and later in Dutch, then the vehicle of foreign culture, he longed to see the lands beyond sea. Escaping from Hakodaté and reaching America, he was welcomed and sent to school by one of the noblest of Boston's 'solid men.' During his voyage, the Yankee captain, unable to pronounce easily the name of Shimóta or Niijima, called him 'Joe.' Entering school at Andover and becoming a Christian of the Christ-like sort, he took the name of his 'American father,' and thereafter wrote his name Joseph Hardy Neesima. He loved and served that really great man Alphaeus Hardy with all the strength and loyalty of one trained in the ethics of feudalism. He was a Confucianist of the best sort. His becoming a Christian made him no less a gentleman of the old school of Japan, but rather more so. He retained all that was excellent in

* Life and Letters of Joseph Hardy Neesima. By Arthur Sherburne Hardy. $2. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

the character of a samurai, but gradually cast away the savagery and brutality inherent in the pagan ideal of Yamato Damashii (the spirit of unconquerable Japan). Neeshima, when again on his native soil, as an educator, reformer and patriot, was as different from the Soshi of Tokyo (the ultra-patriotic young Japanese who act as the fleas of the new body politic of constitutional Japan) as Alphaeus Hardy was from the barbarians of America who fight duels or shoot Negroes.

Exceptionally fortunate in his biographer, Neeshima is allowed—or rather made—to tell his own story. With that perfection of art which conceals art the son of Neeshima's benefactor, the author of 'But Yet a Woman' and 'The Wind of Destiny,' writes a story of truth and fact that will prove to many more fascinating than any of his romances. In the broken but though intelligible English of his early diaries and letters, and in the manly, direct and polished diction of his later writings, one finds a tolerably complete autobiography. As beautiful as the samurai's own story is the modesty of the biographer. Neeshima was a mighty spiritual force in the making of the Japan of our day. He had a good deal to do with the destruction and abolition of much that artists, lotus-eaters and unmarried young men from Christendom would like to see preserved in Japan, but he was essentially a builder rather than a destroyer. He lived to see Christianity well rooted in his beloved land, and as the head of a great Christian University to mould the careers of many of the young men with whom is the moral future of the nation that has turned its back on Chinese ideals. With its handsomely printed pages and neat binding, its strong but unflattering picture of the homely but high-souled Japanese, and one also of his 'American father,' the volume is attractive without as well as within. It is a distinct loss that it has no index.