

SAMURAI TRAILS. By Lucian Swift Kirtland.
300 pages. Doran.

It cannot be insisted too strongly that peace will never be kept between two countries who do not understand each other. Agitators still talk of a war between the United States and Japan. There is no reason for anything so foolish or fatal, except ignorance—ignorance of each other's methods of thinking and living. The value of a man like Lafcadio Hearn is immeasurable; such people pry beneath masks, explain the spiritual causes of customs, and expose the fundamental soil of humanity, which is the only ground on which a peaceful world can be established. Civilization, after all, is nothing but the sympathetic understanding of one's neighbor.

Lucian Swift Kirtland likes Japan because it is human and full of meaning. The curious customs he sees are an intellectual stimulus, a puzzle whose solution concerns the world. He possesses that most valuable accessory of common-sense, a sense of humor—humor which transmutes an irritating incident into a thing to be remembered with pleasure. He has the leisure and means to wander as he wishes, the physical strength and the adaptive personality to go where he wishes, and the taste for choosing places worth knowing. In 1914, he and a companion decided to wander about Japan. Later a Japanese of the samurai caste joined them. The fourth member of the party was a diabolical bicycle of native make, that almost ranks with Stevenson's Modestine. They wisely decided to avoid big cities, tourist haunts, and railroads; and the route they eventually selected was the abandoned trail upon which, before the upheaval of 1868, the samurai came from Yiddo to Nakescendo—Nakescendo, whose beauty was so cherished that its ancient adorers "did not allow their artists to paint it, nor their poets to sing of it to the world," and which consequently is now unknown.

Still more valuable is his easy but concentrated analysis of Japanese conventions and morals. Japan is a land of tradition; the centuries have formalized all life into system, just as their artists have formalized the rhythms of waves or clouds and the patterns of trees or rocks into unreal symbols. All these things must be patiently explained to the Occident. Nitobe's Bushido and Okakura's Book of Tea have done much; nevertheless there are extremely few Americans who could live in a Japanese household for a day without breaking at least half the rules of etiquette. The frightful matter of Japanese nakedness (or should one write "nudity?") has caused as much consternation as was caused three centuries ago in our own land, when the Jesuit priests tried to teach the American Indian what a shameful thing self-exposure was. They succeeded so illy, that many were tempted into the heresy that the Indian could not have inherited the sin of Adam! The Japanese seem equally unim-

pressionable. Kirtland solves the question to his satisfaction in a couple of pages, filled with respect for the belief of others, and a knowledge of the philosophy of clothes.

The Japanese know America pretty well; but we have been far too self-concerned to make a similar effort. Those who read this book will find it amusing; but it is much more—it is a thoughtful and sincere commentary on Japan, excellently told, a bridge between two proud nations.