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THE STRENGTH OF JAPANESE OFFICIALDOM, PARTICULARLY IN EDUCATION

By an American many years resident in Japan

Japan is one of the Allies and not the least among the number; she is doing more than simply fulfilling the obligations of her treaty with Britain. She is acting, and apparently with sincerity and heartiness, the part of a true ally. So far as appears, the government and the governing classes are taking the part of their allies with more than the conviction that it is the winning side; they also feel that it is the *right* side—the side of righteousness and honor. The fact that Japan's acts and attitude are what they are makes us pause anew to investigate Japan's position as to government. She takes the side of the democratic governments as against Germany, the exponent of autocracy and a militaristic bureaucracy; to which party should we expect to see her lean, arguing from her form of government and her governmental tendency?

When one compares Japan and Germany, and Japan and her three principal allies in this war, one cannot fail to be impressed with the very many more points of resemblance between Japan and Germany. In the first place the government and the people are not the same—which, of course, is tantamount to saying that Japan and Germany are neither of them true democracies. The common people have as yet little concern with the government. They are still too close to the more fundamental realities of obtaining a living in the face of many obstacles and much competition to take much interest in anything else. Their precedents, their education and attainments, their very religion, make no provision for anything but accepting the state of affairs as they find it. Of course some of the people, notably the new but rapidly growing class of factory operatives, which is so easily organized, are beginning to connect their own unsat-

isfactory condition with the government in a vague sort of way. But in general what is said above holds good: the people and the government are absolutely different bodies, and there is little interest taken in the matters of government by the rank and file.

Secondly, the feeling of the people with regard to the imperial institution, while absolutely different in origin, and in the way in which it is fostered, is nevertheless in its effects very similar. In the one case it is of very recent growth and is fostered by the imperial institution itself; in the other the history runs into millennia, and though there is, as described afterwards, a definite propaganda for fostering it, yet it is concurred in, and even intellectually assented to, by the whole nation with remarkable unanimity. But while the history and method may be different, the results are very similar in the two countries. In both the emperor is the seat of authority and neither is a constitutional government in our sense of the term. Whereas in Germany in very recent times the imperial institution has usurped the function once held by the people, in Japan from time immemorial the ruler has been the sole source of power, and the granting of the Constitution by the emperor of Japan was a piece of quasi-divine clemency—granted, the theory is, out of his love for his people entirely, and not because of any inherent right of theirs to have a constitution. So in neither country is there constitutionalism based on the divine rights of man as the Allies know constitutionalism.

On the other hand there is very little to be found in Japan of the definitely militaristic spirit—though it is difficult to see why it might not be legitimately expected from a country which the western nations refused to treat as an equal until they were compelled to do so by her military defeat of China. It certainly might be argued by the Japanese that the ways of war rather than the ways of peace have been the successful ones in their own experience, and that therefore the way to obtain their object was by force. In the face of this severe lesson by her western neighbors Japan's scarcity of real militarists is surprising. But if her militaristic spirit is far less developed than that of Germany, so

also is that offsetting factor, a socialistically inclined proletariat. This however is rapidly developing. Japan will not consent forever to cling to the leading-strings of her governing classes.

Lastly in this brief summary of a few of the outstanding similarities between Japan and Germany is the fact that there exists in the hands of officialdom in Japan today the selfsame weapon which has proved so powerful in the hands of Germany's bureaucracy—the system of education. The whole nation is not only educatable, but is already educated, according to the ideas of the ruling caste. The educational system in Japan is absolutely in the hands of the officials; given any line under the sun along which they wish to educate the people, there is no reason why it can not be done. Up to the present the chief use to which this power has been put is the fostering of the patriotic cult, the peculiar official Shinto with the Emperor and the imperial institution as the immediate object of reverence. There are in this, of course, grave possibilities of danger to good understanding with other peoples; but so far these elements do not seem to have come to the surface in any international relations. How very praiseworthy this is on the part of official Japan can be appreciated when one considers what its exact counterpart in Germany has done for the world.

There are undoubtedly many other points which might be mentioned in this connection, but I will confine myself to the above. I wish to say again that right through the list there is a difference in degree; it is, for instance, far easier to break into the official class in Japan than in Germany. But the fact seems to be that Japan, feeling instinctively the similarity between the two nations (whether temperamental or accidental we will not now discuss), when she was selecting models for herself along all lines after her reconstruction, deliberately chose Germany as her pattern in many things, especially in the matter of education. It is especially this item of education considered in the light of what has already been said as to Japan's officialism, of which I wish to speak a little more at length.

The educational system is official, first and last, from top

to bottom. From the Department of Education whose minister is head of the system, down through all the grades, 4 years university; 3 years college; 5 years secondary school; 6 years primary school; and 3 years kindergarten (where it exists) through it all it is official, almost inconceivably different from the spirit of education which we know in America. It is frequently remarked that the German system is calculated to reduce all students to one type. Certainly nothing could be more conducive to that end—highly desirable from the official point of view—than the educational system of Japan. It has been stated to be the ideal, albeit known to be unattainable, of the Department of Education officials to be able at any given hour of any day to say by looking at a schedule what any pupil in the empire in any given grade is doing. That is, of course, impossible; but they are able to inform you that if a certain pupil has reached a certain grade in any school he has therefore studied certain subjects as far as a given page in the textbook. The whole scheme is formulated by the Department and absolute adhesion to it is compulsory. No provision whatever is made for the “optionals” and “electives” which our colleges so elaborately furnish.

Private schools also have been very distinctly frowned upon; and although there are some indications that hereafter such absolute rigidity will not be exacted, yet it is still very difficult for the private schools to obtain “government recognition.” This last term means (1) that so long as a student remains in the school he is exempt from military conscription; and (2) that a graduate is permitted to compete with graduates of regular government institutions in the examinations of higher government schools. This last makes it hardly necessary to remark that a graduate of a mission school without “government recognition,” for instance, is not permitted to attend government colleges and universities; which is tremendously penalizing the private school students and handicapping the schools themselves.

Every prefecture has its department of education, whose head is one of the governor’s staff and is, like the other members of the staff, designated by the central government.

By the way, the shifting about of these heads of prefectural departments by the national Department of Home Affairs is one of the features of official life. After my years of residence in this little prefectural town there is not one of these officials who has not been changed; and in some cases there have been three and even four incumbents. When this can be done without tremendous detriment to the work it shows the absolute uniformity of the government in all the prefectures.

The principals of the schools are appointed officially; the primary and secondary school heads by the prefectural officials, and those above that by the national Department. These principals of the prefectural schools are really government officials. They rank as such and are so considered in social and official functions. These schools are: Middle School, feeding the colleges and afterward the universities, with a course of 5 years; the corresponding Higher Girls School, with 4 years; Normal with 4 years for both sexes; Agricultural with 3 years; Commercial with 4 years; all of these take pupils after an examination upon finishing at least the required 6 years of primary work. For the Normal it requires 7 or 8 years of primary work. For the less ambitious there is a higher primary course of 2 years.

It should be noted that there is very severe competition in the entrance examinations for the higher schools. In some of these there are several contestants for every place. A young friend of mine recently was one of a successful class of 50 out of 200 examinees. And we hear of 2000 young men competing in the entrance examinations when only 100 can be admitted. And it must be borne in mind that these men are all eligible and would be admitted without examination if there were places for them. But as there are so comparatively few schools the entrance is necessarily by competitive examination. One reason for the fierceness of the competition is that the successful graduate of the college and university has his position in life, financially and socially, assured to him. There is a great difference between graduates of government and private schools in the line of prestige and social standing, and in the probability of get-

ting a good situation. And this is true of the girls perhaps equally with the young men.

Recently I attended a series of graduations of the secondary schools: Middle School, Higher Girls School, Normal School, Agricultural School; the difference between the spirit—the feeling—of these graduations and those of secondary schools at home is so great that in spite of many years of such attendance the shock is always acute. They are so absolutely official.

Let me describe one of them; being official, describing one is describing the whole series for this year and for every year.

First, however, let me say that Japanese officials are not officious or impolite. They are gentlemen; kind, courteous, and thoughtful for the stranger in their midst. We who live in the prefectural towns are almost always on friendly, sometimes even on intimate terms with the officials from the governor down through the school principals. I have some very pleasant acquaintances and even some real friends among the official class. We hear of the bane of officialdom in Germany, especially its effect upon the officials in their rudeness and haughtiness to all below them in rank. I am very happy to say that while there is necessarily an official bearing among Japanese officials I have never seen anything even approaching the hauteur so common among Germans of this class. And especially is this true of the military officers; generally there is to be seen little swagger and no brutality among them. In view of these considerations it is easy to understand that there is little of the offensive about this class in Japan.

The graduation ceremonies—that is the right word—are conducted as follows: at the end of the school hall there are large panelled doors before the alcove in which are the imperial portraits. These doors are kept shut except on such occasions as New Year's Day and the Emperor's Birthday when they are opened for the school ceremony of bowing before the pictures. In front of the doors is the platform, highest in the middle and lower at the sides. First, the school takes its place in the main body of the room in the

middle, the graduating class in front; then the "fathers and elder brothers," some few of whom come to the graduation, take their seats around the edge of the room (in the case of a girls' school it is the "parents and elder brothers and sisters;" practically no women attend the graduation at boys' schools); then the "invited guests;" and lastly the "chief official," usually the governor, but in his absence, or in the case of an unimportant school, the prefectural education secretary or even some other official. The "invited guests" and officials sit on the right wing of the platform and the teachers on the left. At the command of the gymnastic and military training teacher, an ex-army officer of inferior rank, or it may be at the chords struck on the piano, all bow profoundly. Then the principal stands before the "invited guests," thanks them, especially the governor, for gracing the occasion with their presence ("in spite of great pressure of business you have come out this morning at great trouble to yourself," etc.), and declares the proceedings open. The national anthem is then sung, the guests usually not singing, with heads lowered in reverence. Next comes the reading of the Imperial Rescript on Education. This, promulgated October 30, 1887, which is a message from the Emperor himself urging his people to be diligent, obedient, and faithful in the discharge of all their obligations, has been in a special box on the table in front of the closed doors behind the platform. The principal goes from his seat at the left side of the platform to a place about twenty feet from the doors, bows before them, and then goes up, and (though not *de rigueur*, usually with gloved hands) with great care takes out the rolled Rescript, unrolls the silken cover, and lifts it to his forehead in reverence; this is the signal for all to bow, and bowed heads and lowered eyes are the rule during the reading. Then the roll is reverently replaced and the box closed and tied with its silken cord.

Next comes the distribution of diplomas: the principal takes his stand behind the desk and the head teacher brings the diplomas in a great lacquer tray and places them before him. Then a teacher, usually the former army officer, in his uniform, reads the names of the graduates who rise,

saying "present" as they do so. The one chosen for it, usually the best scholar in the class, goes out in front, bows while the rest simultaneously bow, advances to within three steps of the desk, bows again, receives the bunch of diplomas, raises it to his head and bows, retires the three steps, bows, turns about and goes to his seat. Sometimes the school has several courses in which case each course has the same order of procedure; and the same order is followed in the distribution of prizes which follows—prizes for general excellence, for excelling in some one branch, and for attendance. I have seen prizes awarded students who have not been absent for ten or twelve years; but I strongly suspect that this means *officially* absent, which means "without excuse."

After this the principal says a few words of congratulation and of exhortation to the graduates. Then the governor is handed by his attendant, an official in the education department, a beautifully written and classically worded letter of congratulation which he receives, reads from the desk, and afterwards deposits on the same to go later into the school archives. Then the lists are thrown open to the "invited guests" of whom one to three have been beforehand requested by the principal to say something, always congratulatory, sometimes also hortatory in tone, to the graduates.

The next item on the program is the reading by a member of the graduating class of a beautifully written and worded document expressing gratitude to all for their presence on the occasion, their thanks to the teachers, and their regret at leaving the school. A representative of the under classes reads a letter similar in style, expressive of their sorrow at losing their big brothers. These two documents go into the school archives, as do also the congratulatory addresses from the "invited guests" when these are read instead of being a speech without notes. After this a representative of the "fathers and elder brothers" addresses a speech of gratitude to the teachers for what they have done for the graduating class. Then if there is music on the curriculum of the school, as in the Normal and Girls Schools, the graduates sing a song expressing their feelings; and this is re-

sponded to by the under classes who sing the sentiments of Bobby Burns, and sometimes to the selfsame tune, indeed. After this the principal declares the proceedings over, thanks the guests again, and leads out the governor; the guests, and fathers and elder brothers follow in order.

Upon arriving and before leaving the three grades of guests are shown into three separate rooms where they are served tea and cake. Also after the proceedings there is usually an exhibit of penmanship, drawing and painting, and in the case of girls, of sewing, that is very attractive.

Little comment on this graduation program is needed to show how absolutely official it is in tone. I do not know any better way to show how the whole educational system of Japan runs in that direction than describing this one point of that system.