

# WILL JAPAN CRACK UP?

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AS WE progress into the second year of the Pacific War—the eighteenth year of Showa, “Era of Enlightened Peace,” by the Japanese calendar—one question among others is asked with increasing frequency: what are the chances, if any, of Japan’s cracking up? We can form a rough estimate of her material resources, what she possessed at the start, what she has gained so far by her conquests. But to answer the question with a chance of success we must try to understand what is actually the background, the mental and moral make-up, of the Japanese people.

As applied to Germany the question evokes wide differences of opinion, yet here the background should be more comprehensible. Many of us know, more or less intimately, Germans of various classes, callings, and political ideas; we are familiar with their history, literature, and reactions to international events. Japan, in spite of all that has been written about her in the past half-century, remains almost a *terra incognita* to the world at large. Since the Japanese victory over Russia thirty-eight years ago—before which they were known vaguely as a small nation of funny customs and artistic ideas—few people have suffered—and benefited—so much from both over- and under-estimation as have the Japanese. We have taken them largely at their own valuation. A legend has grown up. Ex-

celling all others in courage, patriotism, industry, self-sacrifice, loyalty, and scorn of death, they are, we have lately discovered, at the same time cunning, treacherous, brutal, bloodthirsty, cruel, longanimous, and inflexibly persistent.

After nearly forty years’ residence among them I am inclined to say that in all these respects they are, in the mass and by nature, remarkably like the rest of the world.

In the mass. But we must remember that for at least a thousand years these islanders have consisted of two well-defined classes, differing from each other in customs, ideals, and outlook on life far more than the people of any Western country since medieval times—with the exception perhaps of Imperial Russia.

## II

NINETY-SIX per cent of them, the *heimin* or common people, had practically no rights or privileges whatsoever. Such loyalty as they knew was to their village, their trade-guild, or their local boss. The *daimyo*, or castle-lord of their province, and his henchmen, the samurai, they regarded much as the Anglo-Saxon did his Norman masters—good things to keep out of the way of, or to be endured much like flood, earthquakes, and typhoons. The Emperor, shut up in his palaces at Kyoto, and the Shogun, who



kept him practically prisoner and usurped his powers and dignities, were little more than names, the country of Japan hardly even a geographical expression. To the peasant deep in mud on his patch of rice land, to the artisan at his bench, the idea of sacrificing life for such abstractions, except under dire compulsion, would never even occur. He might in rare instances do it for his own little community—and be worshipped as a local god thereafter. His religion was the Buddhism imported from China, with which a number of indigenous Shinto deities and superstitions had become intermingled. To imagine that emperor worship is an age-old thing with the whole Japanese people, bred into their bones as Christianity has been in Europe, is absurd, whatever their present rulers may assert.

Neither are most of the Japanese remarkable, individually, for courage. Some of the coastal folk formerly were pirates, fierce and bloodthirsty enough; they harried the lands lying across their seas, and were feared as far as Singapore; but the inland men were peaceful and averse to quarrels. Through the long centuries, with their property, their women, and their lives subject to the least whim of the overlord and his retainers, they had learned the virtues of endurance and submission. Except for the attempted invasion by Kublai Khan around 1265 Japan remained practically free from foreign attack, and the *heimin* took part as little as possible in the continual warring of their superiors.

That mentality still persists. The average citizen in everyday life acts with a prudence not far from cowardice. A common saying has it, if a burglar should break into your home you must not cry "*Dorobo*"—thief!—but "*Kwaji*"—fire! Then, not otherwise, the neighbors will come to your assistance, to prevent the flames, most dreaded enemy in Japan, from spreading to their own houses. When as sometimes happens a man runs amok in a busy street, slashing with a knife at anyone—particularly any woman—he meets it is very rarely that the passers-by try to restrain him; they prefer to hurry off and inform the police—who will come in, not too quickly, at the death.

A tough customer will terrorize a whole neighborhood. "Better not annoy him," is the consensus of opinion, "or he will beat up our wives and children!" Hence, partly, the power wielded by the Black Dragon and similar societies, the lower strata of which consist largely of thugs and gangsters.

That every Japanese will gladly lay down his life for his ruler is another popular myth. I recently heard a woman member of a certain legislature assert that every Japanese wife is obsessed by two ideas: to produce as many boy babies as possible and to send them to fight for their God-Emperor. The facts that birth-control clinics in Tokyo, until banned by the authorities, were swamped with applications for advice, and that most young men going up for the conscription examinations wear a secret *namori* or charm to secure them exemption from service, indicate the absurdity of such a statement.

But the samurai class, from which the modern army indirectly derives, presented an exact antithesis to all this. The soul of the warrior was his blade, loyalty (to his feudal lord, not to the Emperor) was the paramount virtue; to sacrifice his life and the lives of his wife and children if necessary to that lord was his highest ambition; loss of reputation was the only evil. Money was an unclean thing; the very ability to calculate was a trick fit only for hucksters. A perpetual state of warfare, latent or active, being the sole honorable conception of the "gentle" life, any stratagem or deceit not for mere personal ends was both permissible and praiseworthy.

When the great feudal lords of Satsuma and Chushu brought about the "Restoration" of 1868 they transformed their grudging loyalty toward the Shogun, whom they had always regarded somewhat as *primus inter pares*, into whole-hearted fealty to the Emperor—and kept the real power in their own hands. It is easy to obey a god whose wishes you interpret to suit yourself. The first imperial bodyguard was composed entirely of their men, samurai of the Kōchi, Kagoshima, and Yamaguchi clans. When conscription was instituted in 1873 and the *heimin* were granted the inestimable privi-



lege of bearing arms, just like their superiors, they were dazzled at the honor. It was a sort of initiation into a high, glorious, and hitherto very exclusive club. Gratitude demanded that they should be worthy of it. Their officers have taken care to keep them as far as possible in that state of mind ever since. During the recruits' term of service at least as much time is spent in this moral and spiritual propaganda as in teaching the practical side of soldiering.

The Japanese youth, as I know from nearly forty years' teaching of him, is extremely malleable. His fellow-villagers or wardsmen accompany the young recruit to the railway station with drums and banners, but he enters the barracks, in most cases, with secret fear and dislike. Three months of this daily and hourly propaganda, however, change him into a zealot, a fanatic, really eager to die for his Emperor, his country, and the honor of his regiment. American and Australian soldiers who have met him in the southern swamps and jungles bear witness to that. Facing the enemy, he becomes the fighting spirit incarnate; all else fades from his mind; he holds on like a weasel to the death. But if he should happen to be taken prisoner he is apt to reveal (as his captors have told us) that he too is human. The bent bow relaxes. Freed from the ever-present atmosphere of tense, ferocious, selfless determination which he has breathed since joining the army, he drifts back—though there are of course exceptions—to his former careless self, and perhaps has no great wish to escape or be rescued.

If the conscript is lucky enough to return to civilian life his implanted martial fervor soon dies, though his commanders try to keep it alive by frequent military reunions and short periods of service. As he grows older his former officers' words dim in his ears. He recalls mostly the seamy side of the soldier's life. I have talked with many such—farmer, fisherman, or shop-hand—and found their views much alike. Summoned back to active service in China or elsewhere, the elderly reservist leaves his business and his family morosely, with leaden steps.

A common error among foreign observ-

ers is the assumption that because practically all in the nation must pass through the army, the people of Japan and her fighting forces are heart and soul the same, indivisible. Her authorities of course foster that idea. It is none the less an error.

When the modern builders of Japan took over control in 1868 they tried to fashion a completely organic state around the idea of the God-Emperor as its spiritual center, and for that purpose took out and refurbished the doctrine of Shinto—for ten centuries a vague cult among the common people, a meaningless form of ritual in the imperial family and its entourage—and established it as the state religion in place of Buddhism, which was shorn of much of its land, belongings, and privileges. In this way they intended to perpetuate their military oligarchy. But at the same time two Western influences, international commerce and liberal education, were beginning to undermine them. Japan's history since the turn of the century has been a race or struggle between these opposing forces.

### III

THE foreign correspondent or diplomat who, after a few months or years in Tokyo spent mainly in meeting a small number of officials and gathering a large number of statistics (plain or colored, mostly the latter), returns and writes a book or series of articles on his discoveries, has as a rule little chance of estimating the real ideas and feelings of the people at large. But on the other hand those people are not so mysterious and secretive as is popularly supposed. Live intimately among them for half a century or so and you will find them surprisingly understandable and human.

For many years, up to the day I left Japan in '41, I had been teaching English several hours weekly at the Military Academy, the Staff College, the First High School, the Third Middle School, and the Peers' College, besides two or three evenings at a large private school where the students were mostly store clerks, factory hands, and a few retired merchants: a pretty full week's work, providing a



clique, till in prudence I hurried away; the little knot of peasants in a remote Boshu fishing hamlet discussing with me the recent blitz bombing of London. "Englishman," they said sympathetically, "far better that you stay always here in Japan, where no enemy can ever come by air or water to attack us!"

#### IV

IN THE light of these memories the picture so often drawn by commentators of a nation of fanatics knit together in a selfless spirit of almost insane devotion, loyalty, and sacrifice and welded through the long ages into a homogeneous mass seems so far from reality as to be almost comic.

That the great majority *are* very loyal to their ruler is beyond question—although he has always to be heavily guarded whenever he appears in public, and attempts on his life have been made; but how far that ruler holds with the present adventure of his war lords is very doubtful. Throughout 1937 he struggled, so far as he could within the trammels of Court procedure and the Constitution, to restrict the increasing power of the extremist generals Terauchi, Araki, and Hayashi. In March (I think it was) he nominated the moderate and liberal-minded General Ugaki to the premiership, amid the plaudits of the press and population; but the military junta blandly refused to let him form a Cabinet. By a significant clause in the Constitution the Ministers for the Army and Navy respectively must be officers on the active list, and no officer would dare to accept the post without permission from his General Staff—which really puts all ultimate power over the Diet in the hands of the fighting services.

In the general election held that April the Social Mass party more than doubled their numbers, gaining thirty-six seats—and in July came the "North China Incident": the Army, in fear of this upsurge of democracy, plunged the nation into war. A few months later Ugaki was pushed out of the Cabinet Advisory Council.

For more than fifteen years I had been going twice a week, at odd intervals between my numerous classes, to give con-

versation lessons to some of the officers of the General Staff in the big, copper-domed edifice in Miyakezaka. One Thursday in June of that year 1937 my little class met me there with gloomy and regretful looks. They told me that for some time it had been uncertain whether or not our lessons should be discontinued. Now it was decided. This was to be our last meeting. They were very sorry. I thought then, and have often done so since, that this was a straw showing the direction of a strong and sinister wind.

It is rather ironical, as well as perhaps unfortunate, that some of our cartoonists should have bracketed the Emperor Hirohito with Hitler and Mussolini as prime enemies of the world. So far as I recall, they have never hoisted the King of Italy to the same bad eminence, though the argument might have been at least as cogent. It was possibly the most painful moment of the Emperor's life when he signed the declaration of war with Great Britain. His brothers, Chichibu and Mikasa, each of whom I taught for more than three years, are very democratically inclined, great admirers of Western free institutions and particularly of the British royal house. It is the cartoonist's misfortune that there is no one man to shoulder the responsibility, though Tojo may serve to fill the gap. The fact is that the military clique are in such mortal fear lest one of their number should gain undue power and seize dictatorship—Japan's whole history has been an endless repetition of this—that as soon as a general or admiral begins to loom too prominently in the public eye he is relegated by the others into the background. The handsome Terauchi, so much to the fore six years ago, is a case in point. Besides, the Navy leaders are ever prompt to keep their Army brothers in check.

Successes in the Pacific gained by Japan at the outset filled the nation with pride, and the daring adventure was popular for a time; but gradually this died down when the months brought no more tangible gains. The long, fruitless campaigns in China have made the people very skeptical of advertised victories. The vehemence with which Tojo shouts that Japan has now crashed the ranks of the "have"



nations and is about to reap boundless wealth fails to impress them. Doolittle's raid on Tokyo was, morally, a shattering blow. Moreover, few people are so sensitive as the Japanese to public and world opinion, and the knowledge that they are detested everywhere by land and sea except (possibly) by their allies, themselves now fighting with their backs to the wall, must have a deadening effect on the nation's morale. In Japan the pendulum swings swift and far. If a few sharp, sudden, heavy blows are delivered on their homeland, with airplanes dropping showers of incendiaries and "block-busters" on their wood-built towns and the few cities housing their heavy industries, the people's confidence in their "invincible" army and navy, their trust in the leaders who brought them to this, may melt away. Those leaders have assured them innumerable times that, though many of their sons must die abroad in the cause of the fatherland, the fatherland itself is immune from foreign attack, can never be subject to invasion. Their own past history, they say, proves this.

Press home to them the idea that their towns, their snug villages, their sacred

temples and shrines and homes and graveyards may any day be relentlessly blasted from above, that their boasted fleets and regiments are powerless to save them, that their wonderful air fleet is pitifully inferior to the invader's, and the façade of national unity may collapse. Political leaders, snubbed so long by the militarists, will gather courage and ask questions in the Diet. The Court, I am convinced, will show where its sympathy lies. Then the liberal statesmen who have bided their time for the past five or six years will come forward with constructive proposals, and the nation, given a glimpse of peace, will eagerly follow in their wake.

In principle we may stick to our recently enunciated doctrine of unconditional surrender; but we must on our side be prepared with peace conditions which will offer our enemies, once their arms are laid down, a fair and equitable chance, if they substantiate goodwill by deeds, of a safe and decent existence within the comity of nations. If not, mere despair will drive them to continue the struggle indefinitely, to the advantage of nobody—or, at any rate, of neither America nor the British Commonwealth.

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SINCE we published our brief correction of the mistaken reference to Count Ferdinand Czernin in the article "The Stew in the Melting Pot," in our January issue, we have investigated the matter further and are now glad to state definitely that Count Ferdinand Czernin should not have been included in the list of those persons whose activities the article regarded as harmful to the war effort. We have been able to ascertain that Count Czernin and Austrian Action, Inc., of which he is Chairman, neither are nor have been royalist or pro-Hapsburg, but have consistently followed a pro-democratic line, devoting all their efforts to collaboration between foreign-language groups and working in every possible way to help the war effort.

Our sincere apologies to Count Ferdinand Czernin and to Austrian Action, therefore, for the error. — *The Editors*

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