

# The Commoner.

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### COMMONER DAY—SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Complying with a suggestion made by General James B. Weaver of Iowa, Saturday, February 24, has been designated as "Commoner Day."

On that day any one may obtain one year's subscription to The Commoner for 60 cents.

Commoner readers everywhere are asked to devote at least a portion of the day to an effort to increase The Commoner's circulation and thus widen its sphere of influence.

Further reference to this plan is made on page 5 of this issue.

The congressional campaign is coming on, and those who believe that The Commoner is doing a good work will find ample reason for participating in this effort to give The Commoner an increased circulation in every congressional district.

If every reader of The Commoner would secure at least one new subscriber on "Commoner Day" The Commoner's list would be increased to 300,000. Five new subscribers by each present-day subscriber would mean a circulation of 900,000. Six new subscribers for every present-day subscriber would mean more than one million.

Every Commoner reader in sympathy with the work The Commoner is striving to do is requested to tell his neighbor of the program for "Commoner Day." The active co-operation of those in sympathy with the principles for which The Commoner stands is invited.

If we may depend upon your assistance on "Commoner Day" send us a brief note to that effect.

### WHY?

The Kansas City Journal, a republican newspaper, says: "It is generally conceded that the government wants railway rate legislation and the leading railway men stand pledged to help President Roosevelt to secure the passage of any just and equitable measure." Then how does it happen that the recognized representatives of railroad interests in the senate and in the house are doing all in their power to embarrass Mr. Roosevelt in his efforts to meet this popular demand?

## Japan—Her History and Progress

MR. BRYAN'S FOURTH LETTER

As for the islands themselves they are largely of volcanic origin, and a number of smoking peaks still give evidence of the mighty convulsions which piled up these masses of masonry. Asosan mountain, on the island of Kyushu, has the largest crater in the world.

Japan is the home of the earthquake. The Japanese Year Book of 1905 is authority for the statement that Japan was visited by 17,750 earthquakes during the thirteen years ending 1887—an average of more than thirteen hundred a year, or three and a half each day. It is needless to say that a large majority of these were so trivial as to be unnoticed, except to those in charge of the delicate instrument which registers them.

If the average is as great at this time, there have been more than seventy-five since we landed, but we have not been aware of them. The severe shocks have come at periods averaging two and a half years and the really disastrous ones have been something like fifty years apart. The country about Tokio is most subject to earthquakes, the number recorded there averaging ninety-six a year during the last twenty-six years. The last severe one was in 1894. According to an ancient legend Japan rests upon the back of a large fish and the earthquakes are caused by the moving of the fish. There is a Seismological society in Japan which has published a sixteen volume work giving all that is scientifically known of the cause and recurrence of these disturbances.

Of the origin of the Japanese themselves nothing certain is known. The best authorities say that they came from the continent in an early Mongol invasion, while others believe that they came from the islands which stretch to the south. One writer announces the theory that they are the lost Israelites. It is quite certain that when the first Japanese landed on the islands they found an earlier race in possession. Some seventeen thousand of these, called Sinos, now occupy the northern extremity of the empire—an indication that the migration was from the southwest. The Sinos have remained distinct; where they have inter-married with the Japanese, the half breeds have died out in the second or third generation. They are a hairy race and in physical characteristics quite different from the Japanese. Their religion is a sort of nature worship and it is their custom to say a simple grace before eating.

The remoteness of the settlement of Japan is shown by the fact that the reigning family, which claims descent from the gods, has held undisputed sway for twenty-five hundred years, although the record of the first thousand years is so dependent upon verbal tradition that the official history can not be verified. As concubinage has been practiced from time immemorial, the heir, the oldest son, has not always been born of the empress.

Soon after the beginning of the Christian era the influence of China and Korea began to be felt in Japan, the written characters of the language being quite like the Chinese. Koreans and Japanese do not agree as to the influence which the former have had upon the latter. A very intelligent Korean informs me that his is the mother country and that Japan was settled from Korea, but the Japanese do not take kindly to this theory.

The feudal system, of which I shall speak more at length in another article, was early established in Japan, and society was divided into well defined classes. First came the members of the royal family and those admitted to the circle of favor; next, the Shogun (of whom more will be heard under the subject of government) and his relatives.

Next in rank were the daimios, or lords, of varying degrees of importance. Each daimio had a large number of retainers, who were called samurai, and below these were a still larger number of peasants who tilled the soil and did the manual labor. Some of the early pictures show

the gorgeous dress of the daimios and portray the elaborate ceremony employed on state occasions.

The samurai were the warriors and had no other occupation than to defend their lords in the struggles between the clans. They corresponded to the knights in Europe during the days of chivalry, except that there were no romantic adventures over women—woman holding until recently a very subordinate place as compared with "her lord and master."

The samurai were given an annual allowance for their subsistence and felt that toil was far beneath their dignity. They wore lacquered armor and costly helmets and carried two swords—a long one for the enemy and a short one for themselves.

It was with this short sword that the famous hara-kiri was committed. This ancient form of suicide by disembowelment was considered an highly honorable death and has been practiced until within a generation. General Saigo, one of the great men of Japan and one of its popular heroes, was the last man of prominence to terminate his life in this way. He was one of the leaders in the movement to restore to the emperor the authority which the shoguns had usurped and was for awhile close to the throne. In 1874, however, he organized an army for the invasion of Korea, and coming into conflict with the forces of the empire, which were called out to prevent the invasion, he was defeated. In his humiliation he committed hara-kiri. A few years ago the title of Marquis was conferred upon him by a posthumous decree and is now enjoyed by his eldest son. One of his sons is the present mayor of Kyoto and another a colonel in the Imperial Guard. A bronze monument of heroic size, the gift of admiring friends, has recently been placed in the principal park in Tokyo.

Only a few years ago a young Japanese committed suicide in this way in order to emphasize his protest against the encroachments of the Russians, but a strong sentiment is developing against hara-kiri and it will soon take its place among other obsolete customs.

The samurai represented the intellectual as well as the military strength of the nation. The daimios have furnished few of the men of prominence in modern Japan, nearly all of the leaders in government, education, literature and the professions having come from the samurai class. Now, however, that all social distinctions have been removed and the schools opened to the children of all, the old lines between the classes can not much longer be traced.

The merchant class has always been looked down upon in Japan. In the social scale they were not only lower than the samurai, but lower than the tillers of the soil. It was probably because of the contempt in which they were held that so low a standard of integrity existed among them—at least this is the explanation usually given. Even now Japanese, as well as foreigners, complain that the merchants impose upon their customers, but here also a change is taking place and a new order of things being inaugurated. There are in every city merchants of honor and responsibility who are redeeming trade from the stigma which it so long bore. Still, unless the stranger knows with whom he is dealing, it is well to have a Japanese advisor, for we found by experience that the price named to foreigners was sometimes considerably above the regular price.

For centuries Japan lived an isolated life and developed herself according to her own ideas. Of her native religion, Shintoism, of the introduction of Buddhism and of the first Christian missionaries I shall speak in a later article. She repelled an attack of the Mongols which might have been disastrous to her but for the fact that a timely storm destroyed the invading fleet, much as the Spanish Armada was destroyed. She has from time to time attempted the inva-