

Shops and Shoppers in the Mikado's Empire



VENDORS OF VEGETABLES AND THEIR STOCK.



FLOWERS FOR SALE.

(Copyright, 1902, by Douglas Sladen.)

TO START a Japanese shop is the simplest thing in the world. You take the front off your house and arrange your worldly possessions on the floor. Japanese floors are raised off the street, though nothing is raised off them. The transient customer sits on the edge of the floor sidesaddle. A real shopper, who means to do the thing properly, like a peasant buying jewelry in Italy, climbs upon the floor, which is also the counter, and squats on his heels.

Real Japanese shops don't have doors or windows or counters. Shop windows in New York don't leave much wall in a twelve-foot frontage; but even an American shop window does not take the whole front of the house.

The Japanese don't have many regular shops. There are very few streets of shops even in Tokyo, which is as large as Berlin. Foreigners never buy anything but curios and knick-knacks at Japanese shops; if they are fools they deal with shops kept by Europeans; if they want good bargains they deal with Chinamen. There are many Chinese shops in treaty ports. The Chinaman is cheaper and more reliable than the Japanese. European shopkeepers do not set up in Japan for philanthropic reasons. Japanese shopkeepers are the lowest class of the population except the outcasts. Servants and laborers take precedence of them in society, and precedence is the hobby of the Japanese.

You have a different bow and a different salutation for a man who is below you or your equal, and several for the people above you; you have even a different language for each, and Japanese writing wriggles like the carvings on their temples. Just as debutantes have to learn how to bow and kick away their trains before they are presented at courts, Japanese infants learn their alphabet of salaams. It is the only alphabet they have; to the Japanese all the world is a court.

This makes it a serious matter going to a Japanese shop, unless you are going to buy silk handkerchiefs, the only thing foreigners buy often enough to spoil the manners of the shopkeeper. You get out of your ricksha and the ricksha boy lies about you. All the attendants in the shop salaam (tilt) you wish they would get up and let you catch their eye and explain what you want. When they do get up, instead of having a shop-walker and four counter-jumpers asking you to repeat your order, you are offered five cups of tea—Japanese tea without milk or sugar—but you can have salted cherry blossoms if you want, when it is a good shop. This is the Japanese way of asking you to take a drink.

Good Japanese shops contain nothing except the proprietor. When you have got as far as explaining what you want he gives orders to attendants, who hiss as if they were brushing a horse and trying to keep the hairs out of their mouths, while they rub their knees and bob their heads.

Off they go at a run—good servants always run—and bring back goods tied up in faded green silk handkerchiefs, or green cotton cloths. The goods are kept in the godown, but the customer is never taken there lest he should choose right away and have done with it, instead of being etiquette-ly worked up for half a day with enough tea for a bath.

A Japanese godown has no windows, and only one door, and looks like a black or white plaster coffin with a heavy gabled roof and a crest which fills the whole gable. Its thick walls are made of compressed plaster, covered with lacquer, and the Japanese believe it to be fire and burglar proof. It looks like meerschaum or ebony. All Japanese houses of any importance have godowns.

The Japanese keep all their things put away, and have them out (except

their wives) one at a time to admire—they even apply the godown principle to their wives. This method of shopping is slow, and as I was not buying Quaritchy books or choice curios I tired of it. The right way would be to have an etiquette servant, like a parson editor, to start an hour before you and get through the gymnastics before you arrived.

You could choose one who held plenty of tea, because if you don't drink tea you are charged more as a worthless person or a barbarian with no knowledge of business.

It is better, however, to sit on your heels and drink cups of Japanese tea than to stand about bars drinking whiskies. Once upon a time I published a book in Japan. I was only 30 then, and had my life before me. I called in on my way to the exhibition to ask when I might expect some proofs which had been due a month. I had to go upstairs and take tea on the floor, and eat an orange, and some bean-flower sweets before I could ask the question, lest I should hurt the publisher's feelings. It took half an hour, but the time was not wasted, because he sent his foreman to the exhibition with me to get a free lesson in English. If you have a good ricksha boy, he goes in with you to tell you how to behave.

I made up my mind only to deal with pawnshops, unless I was buying camphor wood boxes or paper umbrellas. When you buy direct from the manufacturer things are simplified a bit, as his whole stock may be under twenty shillings' value.

Perhaps the Japanese don't really have pawnshops, but the places which look like them are the only shops where it is any fun buying things; and the things you buy are worth so much more when you get to England, because they were made in the days when the Japanese did not go in for shops, but all lived in big families, which sometimes ran into thousands, in the establishment of a noble whose income was reckoned in rice.

This sounds as bad as having your name writ in water, but it isn't really, for the daimio's income would have run into the millions if it hadn't been reckoned in rice. The daimio paid salaries, also in rice, to every kind of workman to take the proper leisure over making things. One wonders how much time a Japanese would take under those favorable circumstances; the only thing he hurries over is fetching.

In the humble second-hand shops which abound round Shiba at Tokyo, and behind the Theater street at Yokohama, one buys for coppers little gems of articles of domestic use which are the most lovable things in Japan. They were made in the old Daimio days when a thing had to be perfect of its kind, and though clipped and worn and discolored, their elegance of form and ingenuity of design make them masterpieces of art.

I do not only refer to the buttons which they do not use for buttoning (netsukes), the four-trayed medicine chests which would go inside of a cigar case (inro), and the pipe tubes and tobacco purses, which are all the Japanese has in the way of jewelry, but the folding and telescoping candlesticks of bronze and iron, the finger bells and gongs priests take out for walks, chopsticks and amulet cases, solemn tea caddies, dressing cases for carrying in your sleeve, looking-glasses made of bronze and ivory card cases for holding lip paint.

The Japanese do sell some things too large to go in a woman's muff. For mere songs one can pick up wonderfully elegant and decorated finger stoves, smokers' stoves, kitchen ranges made of wood which you could put in your portmanteau, antique screens a foot and a half high which are only meant to look at, Daimios' trunks of black lacquer which open and shut like fis-



THE JAP AND THE SOROBAN.

cuit tins, and are slung on bamboos, tea baskets, without any sides, made of old red lacquer with fine metal fittings; quaint tea-cups with metal or wooden or even cocoonant shell saucers, square iron kettles as decorated as temples, rich old lacquer writing cases used, not for containing the writing materials, but the letter when it is written; temple banners, images of Buddha and countless other objects of great age, high beauty and imperishable solidity, sacrificed for coppers at the first chip, for the old Japanese workmanship was so good that the lacquer lost its value with a scratch. Another favorite line, second-hand, are pieces of silk which have been priests' or actors' or geishas' dresses; ladies and gentlemen do not use gay materials.

The Japanese second-hand shop, like other shops, has no doors or windows, or counters, but differs in needing to display all its goods to catch the passing ricksha. For this the vendor uses receding shelves, such as we use in our greenhouses; you see some tit-bit and call out "Stop a little" to your ricksha.

Then, if you are new to it and have an hour to spare, you say, "Ikura?" (How much?) He names a fancy price. You reply "amari takai" (far too high.) He comes down a little. You name a price for which you have no hope of getting it. He raises you, as if you were playing poker. You refuse to be raised and then split the difference. All the time you are paying your ricksha boy 7½ pence (worth only 3½ pence in debased dollars) an hour. Of course if you understand the soroban—the abacus of moving beads on which he does his counting, you have him at your mercy.

He always calculates what a thing cost him on his soroban and if you watch that you know where his bedrock comes in; he thinks that a foreigner is too big a fool to understand it. I was too big a fool, but Mr. Landor, the Tibetan traveler, understood it. I had a better plan, not to ask the price. I computed the sum at which an article would be a gift, took it

up and made my offer. If the proprietor written on and, when he has finished, tears said no, contemptuously, I put it down it off. His letters are a yard long; that's why his envelopes are such a funny shape.

I returned by the same route as I went out on these shopping expeditions and on the drive back was saluted the whole way by little boys running from their masters to say "yoroshi!" (good), which is the Japanese way of saying yes. They have no proper word for "yes" and "no;" it is not polite to be too definite and the Oriental never knows when he may regret a promise. If the proprietor showed a willingness to do business by only raising me a little, I made one fresh offer, supposing I really wanted the thing.

Before I had been living in Tokyo a month all the shops in my favorite haunts knew me for a man of my word and also knew, with Oriental intuition, if I really wanted a thing or would only take it as a bargain. In this way purchases were made like lightning. If my price paid them they jumped at it; if it didn't, they told me their lowest price and shook their heads sadly when I would not be raised. This shopping from a ricksha was fresh air and poker combined.

Those were the most exhilarating days I ever spent. I adorned my sitting rooms at Tokyo while I was living there with my trophies, and when I left Japan sent them all to England, in five cases large enough for me to stand in. They are all in my Japanese room.

Whether you are a lady or a gentleman, if you live long in Japan you have yourself refitted by a Chinese tailor on the model of your own or your most recently arrived friend's garments. But I must not discuss the humors of dealing with Cock Eye & Co., who keep their word and excellent materials; nor those of the camphor wood box and basket chair makers. If a foreigner has only one day in Yokohama and goes to only one shop, it will be to the silk handkerchief shop of one Shobey, who was so impressed by the importance which the English attach to well known brands that he used to label his boxes of handkerchiefs with the name of a well known British firm. He sells excellent handkerchiefs at fairly moderate fixed prices, also silks by the piece; but foreigners in the know do not buy silk by the piece, or in a shop which has a door and counter; they buy it by weight from a Chinaman if they want white or natural colored silk, or from Nozaway if they want the gay light Japanese silk.

Nozaway, who lives in the street of the Japanese Venus, has most of his shop taken up with the staircase of which he is so proud, and uses his floor for his counter; so you take off your boots instead of your hat when you go into his shop.

Next to the silk shops, transient foreigners patronize the Kwankobas, or bazaars, where they sell rubbishy lacquer and sham soap, new pipe cases and geisha girls' hairpins that no geisha would be seen in. These are generally kept in temples, the hugest of all being in the Ueno park at Tokyo. The Japanese holiday maker is always buying knick-knacks for his baby or his best girl.

A few foreigners discover the charm of Japanese paper shops, where you buy envelopes a foot long and two inches wide, with cranes straggling across them, and unfolded notepaper of absurd shapes with a whole landscape painted on it in colors as faint as water-marks. They write to all their friends and think themselves desperately Japanese, instead of "new chums" of the deepest dye. The Japanese writes his letters on a roll of wrapping paper six inches wide and many yards long. He begins on the right-hand top corner of the end, writes on it with a paint brush before it is unrolled, unrolls the part he has

Mental Exertion

Baltimore American: In the halls of the vast institutions of learning they warn us to tread lightly as we pass the seat of the pallid youth who is moodily composing something upon a sheet of pure white paper.

We see his knitted brow; his air of intense thought; his every evidence of great mental struggle.

"Ah," we whisper, "is he preparing some weighty treatise on political economy; or some thesis which shall show the nations of the world the proper system of government?"

"No," whispers the guide in reply. "He is getting up the new class yell."

Short on Advertising

Atlanta Constitution: "Is your new book a success?"

"No," my publisher's too poor to advertise it."

"Can't you get up any excitement to help it along?"

"Tried to, but failed. Had two ribs broken in a railroad wreck the other day and that helped some, but not much."

"Couldn't you manage to fall from a steeple—get the fall broken by the electric wires and come to earth in a sheet of fire? Or, you might fall overboard and be saved by your mother-in-law just as you had risen the third time!"

But after a second or two of profound thought the author replied sadly:

"But, the old lady wouldn't!"

Too Short for Comfort

Chicago News: Goodwin (after the service)—Seems to me the minister preached an awfully short sermon this morning.

Mrs. Goodwin—Well, what if he did? You slept through it from beginning to end.

Goodwin—Yes; that's just the trouble. I don't feel as if I'd had enough sleep.

Pointed Paragraphs

Chicago News: Things that make a woman cry make a man swear.

Natives of Greenland are a cold and distant people.

Beware of the man who owns a soft, persuasive voice.

A spoiled child is to be pitied because of its fool parents.

You can never tell what a woman in love or a balky horse will do next.

All the world's a stage and all the women thereon want speaking parts.

He is a wise son who knoweth when his own father will stand for a touch.

An evening call is productive of pleasure—either when you come or when you go.

That woman doesn't live who can lose at a social card game without getting mad.

When a short young man gets sweet on a tall girl he immediately buys a high silk hat.

Paint looks all right on an old house, but on an old woman—well that's quite another story.

It makes a spinster grit her teeth every time she encounters a widow who has planted three husbands.

If a man knew what his acquaintances really thought of him he would go away somewhere and do the hermit act.

A woman's idea of a dutiful husband is one who will stay at home and look after the baby while she spends the afternoon shopping.