



## 10 Days in Japan (2)

# THE CHEAPEST ANIMAL IS MAN

*THE second of a series of articles written by the Editor of "The Listener" about his recent visit to Japan.*

I DON'T think there was any member of our party — six Australians and five New Zealanders—who was not disappointed with Japan at first sight. It was beautiful from the air when we were high up, but when we came lower and saw that the houses had no paint and the roof-tiles no colour, that no house had a garden, and that all the streets were drab and grey, the remark of one of the Australians went for us all: "What a bloody swindle. I bet we all thought we were coming to a flower-garden." We certainly should not have thought that in the first week in February, but it is true that everybody has been swindled who has been sold the Japan of the guide-books and music-halls. The pretty-pretty Japan does not exist, even in springtime when the plums and cherries are in blossom, or in autumn when maple leaves are yellow and chrysanthemums every colour under the sun. No country can be a garden of flowers and at the same time a rice-field and vegetable garden. Every Japanese loves flowers and grows them if he can; but he loves food more, and starves unless the earth is kept continually busy feeding him. I shall return to Japanese

food production in a later paragraph; but it is nonsense to perpetuate the flowery-land myth whether the country is Japan or China, and just as foolish, I think, to accept the suggestion of Japanese guide-books that the houses are not painted because the people prefer the natural colour of the wood. The houses are not painted because the people are poor, and I suspect that the tiles are grey-black because the weathered bamboo is grey-black which supports them and holds them together. So there is very little colour in the streets because people who work from daylight to dark in oily or dusty workshops, and as labourers on the roads or transport services, can't be resplendent too; but you do see colour occasionally—a woman or girl in a kimono of such brilliance that you stop and watch her—and you do soon find yourself admiring the drab roofs, which make shacks into houses, and are far more than half the story of Japanese architecture.

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IF Japan itself had not interested me it would have been worth while travelling 8,000 miles for the glimpses I managed to get of the Japanese people. I spent hours watching them in the streets, followed them on country roads, and saw as many as I could at work

### INDUSTRY ON TWO FEET

on their farms. Of the industrial workers I saw little so far as I know, though all Japan was a factory during the war, and thousands of the men and women the visitor now sees crowding into trains and streaming on and off railway plat-

forms were munition workers a few months ago, with perhaps a million schoolchildren and at least one worker from every farm. Similarly, it is not easy for a stranger to judge how many of the thousands one passes on the roads outside the cities are farmers going to town to trade, or townspeople going into the country for food. A considerable proportion of them are cultivators carrying home night-soil for fertiliser, though these are easily recognisable by what the Americans call their honey-pots—barrels on handcars, pulled by a single horse (invariably thin and ill-groomed), a bullock or a bull, or three or four humans both pulling and pushing. Twice only in a range of about 600 miles I saw a man on horseback, but where he was going and what he was doing I was not able to discover. I did notice that the horses were spiritless and the riders ill-at-ease, which suggested a rich man riding for prestige or health. On the other hand, these were the only two horses I saw in Japan which were not being led. The cheapest animal in Japan walks on two legs, and Providence has seen to it that he also lives longest. So only the very rich, whom I neither met nor saw, indulge occasionally in such luxury as a ride in a horse-drawn carriage, and only the very thin trickle of radicals see anything incongruous in using most freely what is most readily available.

But something has happened to the rickshaw. You see it everywhere, but you do not often see a human load in it. I watched at one railway station for half-an-hour and in that period did not

see a single passenger enter a rickshaw or leave one. The load in every case was luggage.

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IT may of course be true, as the guide-books say, that the rickshaw is now only a curiosity in the cities, or was becoming so before the war, but the rickshaw idea, that man-power is cheap transport, is accepted everywhere. The number of people you see carrying burdens in the cities is probably about one in 20, but when you include the women with their babies the impression you get is that it is one

### NO ESCAPE FROM POVERTY

in three or four. There is the fact, too, that a large proportion of people of all ages—the very young as well as the very old—carry wooden frames on their backs if they are not carrying babies, and even in the cities you will see them filing home at night, buried under loads of firewood or carrying what looks like half the contents of a home.

Whatever the population of Japan is to-day—60, 70, or 80 millions—you never escape anywhere from people. So you never escape from poverty and dirt. Half the population by our standards are just destitute. They eat, work, mate, and sleep, but you wonder when and where. Three out of four of them have never used a handkerchief, or regularly changed their clothes, or kept their hands clean, or slept in aired beds. All those things are luxuries which they have never been able to pay for. I think their instinct is towards cleanliness, or they would never have achieved