

Mrs. Agnes de Saint-Phalle Mathews

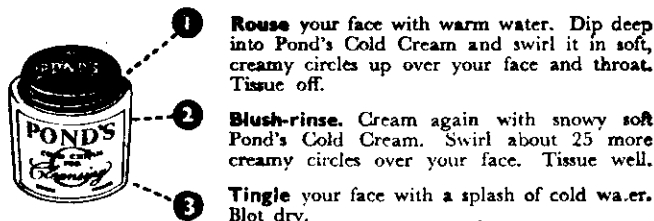
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TOKYO REVISITED

IN the windows and doorways of little slate-roofed houses and shops and inns on either side of the railway track, the red and white flags stirred in the warm air of early autumn. From the blinding mid-day light of Kure, until we ran into darkness like a tunnel beyond Okayama, we saw them all the way: and when we looked out into the cooler air of morning, the first things we noticed were the sun flags, fluttering in the salty breeze off Tokyo Bay.

Several thousand miles away a 72-year-old Japanese bent his morning-coated form over a yellow table and inscribed his name with a golden pen. Japan was at peace.

I FIRST saw Japan in 1946. After some years in India it seemed a paradise even then. But Hiroshima was still slate and ashes; the rubble lining the road between Yokohama and Tokyo had scarcely been raked through. It was a time of caution and uncer-

tainty. The Occupation watched the Japanese; the Japanese watched the Occupation: both waited for the next move.

I remember the faces of the people in those days. There were few smiles. Food was critically scarce, clothing was patched and faded, trade and industry were in chaos. Above all, there was the unspeakable humiliation of the first total defeat in their country's history. To a Japanese success is everything. Losing the war was failure of unparalleled degree. It was a failure of the nation and of every individual in the nation. It was no smiling matter.

The Japan I left a year later was already changing. Taxes had risen; once-wealthy families were secretly selling their treasures. Petty thieves and unwashed orphans slept side by side in the dim underground passages of railway stations, while a new community of black-marketeers grew sleek and prosperous, and certain members of the Occupation accumulated wealth quite out of proportion to their salaries. The value of the yen plummeted from 60 to over 1000 to the pound sterling.

But for many Japanese there was new hope. From the bewildering flow of memoranda and directives and recommendations published by a well-meaning if sometimes ingenuous Occupation, workable systems were emerging. Undreamed-of reforms were being brought about, and were becoming recognised as sensible and helpful. The Occupation, confident that it had the measure of the Japanese, eased back in its comfortable chair and beamed benignly upon its well-mannered children.

Sunrise

Things were moving again; jerkily at times, and with many a false start, but at least there was movement: and somewhere ahead, momentarily glimpsed, it seemed there glowed the first faint light of a rising sun.

When I returned to Tokyo recently I found the sun well up, and the great city and its people bathed in its warmth. The memories of the old dark days

seemed to melt away as the new bustle of the third city of the world hit me with a roar.

Tokyo Central Station, a burned-out shell before, was more crowded than ever. Its vast, resounding entrance halls were fully repaired, their walls decorated with the kind of travel posters only the Japanese and certain Continental peoples seem capable of producing. The throng, no longer pushed sullenly forward in a desperate struggle for six square inches of standing room in a dirty coach with broken windows. There were smiles, and the jostling seemed good-natured. I watched bespectacled men in natty suitings and panama hats, office girls in well-cut gabardines and a liberality of lipstick, fat-faced, sailor-suited schoolgirls and noisy, uniformed high school boys, all pushing and heaving and perspiring together in determined but friendly competition.

The suburban electric trains which leave Tokyo every half minute are no longer crowded to the doors. Even at peak hours there is far more room to move in than a Wellington tramcar

can offer. Just recently the practice of reserving a coach for Allied forces and their guests was stopped. These coaches were never more than half-filled, and it irked the Japanese (and many members of the forces) to see soldiers and their girl companions lounging in each other's arms while elsewhere in the train aged people were strap-hanging. I learned later that this, and other instances of segregation, had been practically the only causes of what slight ill-will existed between the Occupied and the Occupation.

No More Rickshaws

When I stepped out of the station I was besieged by gesticulating taxi agents. Where once had been a few grimy rickshaws I saw a line of cars, several deep, ranging from the strange little vehicles the Japanese make themselves to shiny Fords and Chevrolets. Behind the cab rank, across the great square, the girders of what will soon be a concrete building housing some two thousand shops and offices reared into the sky.

I was bowed into one of the cabs. It was a Japanese vehicle of unnamed make. Its external appearance was vaguely familiar, a combination copy, it seemed, of several makes long popular in the Western world. Its interior was rough, but adequate. The driver had taken the precaution of removing the handles from the inside of the back doors; no offence intended, but just to make sure one paid one's fare before leaving.

We dodged through the traffic, the driver shutting off his engine and coasting at every chance. Either the Japanese have a genius for dexterous driving, or a benign spirit watches over them all; for although I have never ridden in a Japanese-driven vehicle without anticipating a collision every minute of the way, I have never seen one happen.

Big American cars were about in large numbers. Many of them were chauffeur-driven, but in at least half of the

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