

Know your enemy



A KORERO Report

This is Part I of an article on the Japanese character and some of the influences that determine it. Part II will appear in the next issue.

"KNOW YOUR ENEMY" is sound advice. The successful application of it to the Japanese is difficult enough to be of absorbing interest. We are presented with a people whose character appears to be a mass of contradictions. In this war they have shown qualities which arouse both horror and admiration. They are fanatically brave, careless of their own and any other lives, and filled with the will to conquer. We are given daily evidence of contrasting elements in their character so unnatural as to be almost past belief.

We already knew, for example, the Japanese sense of beauty, their love of natural scenery, of flowers, birds, and butterflies, of running streams and waterfalls. Yet the Japanese have contributed almost nothing to the thought and spiritual progress of the world. This may well be so, for the same gentle Nature lovers will in a moment become savage barbarians, taking to any outrage and cruelty with both gusto and enthusiasm, completely convinced of their divine mission to lead and rule the world. The Japanese truly regard sincerity as one of the cardinal virtues, and yet by word and deed have proved capable of the most incredible chicanery. But it is certain that they are not hypocrites. The mood of the moment is utterly genuine. In the face of these contradictions, there is the temptation to dismiss the Japanese as incomprehensible to the western world. This is not enough. Upon the soundness of our understanding of them will depend the treatment in store for the Japanese not only at the hands of the Allied Governments, but also by

those men and women who may be called upon to assist in Japanese reconstruction.

To further this understanding of the Japanese character we must go back into history to discover the conditions which shaped it. The relevant facts we should find suggested in the racial origin of the people, in the history of their national beliefs, and of those social institutions derived from and developed by religion.

The people of Japan are of mixed racial origin, but it is impossible to determine with accuracy the time and source of the different early migrations. The original inhabitants of Japan, the Ainu, came from North and East Asia, and were probably living when Japan formed a part of the Asiatic continent. Their remains are found in all three islands of present Japan. Then from South-east Asia and the Pacific Islands came a more virile Malayan migration. The invaders seem to have divided into two columns, one of which came straight to Kyushu, the southern island of Japan, while the other settled on the Korean peninsula. Those who settled in the Japanese islands had no difficulty subduing the rather timid Ainu, and made slaves of those who did not escape northwards. The newcomers, therefore, acquired a character of strong aristocratic tendency, with all the arrogance of the conqueror. The Korean settlers, however, found themselves among a culture far superior to their own—that of China. Though sufficiently aggressive to establish themselves in security, the settlers were profoundly influenced by Chinese