

BY ; REV. W. E. GRIFFIS, D.D. '69

*JAPAN: A PARADOX IN EDUCATION.*

A certain condescension with which military critics have been congratulating Japan upon her successful application of our teachings, is changing to an uncomfortable sense that we Occidentals are every day learning hard lessons from Japan. The demonstration of the efficacy of unarmored vessels, the successful operation of contact mines as a means of offence, add new chapters to naval theory, and we may not lightly flatter ourselves that these formidable inventions are merely the obvious application of our teachings. No; this remarkable mastery of the machinery framed by the Western mind denotes not simply that the Japanese have caught up with us and surpassed us in a single generation of conscious imitation; it means rather that in feudal Japan there were qualities of mind stable enough to bear the impact of new facts and accurate enough to master them. The successes of Japan today in scientific warfare are due to that immemorial discipline of hand, heart, and head which has made the Japanese mind.

To those who cherish conventional ideals of education it may be instructive to ask what that education was. And immediately we meet the paradox that the training which is every day producing practical results of the most sensational kind was the most impractical that may be conceived. The heart was trained by rigorous subjection to the most exacting of social codes, the hand by devotion to minute and exquisite workmanship, the head by poetry, romance, and speculative philosophy. Were a British schoolmaster asked to construct a scheme which should totally unfit his students for practical affairs, it would not differ greatly from the Japanese plan. Among the upper classes the earliest training is in calligraphy, and the control of the ideographic script makes every educated Japanese an artist in the handling of the brush. The artisan class gets a similar schooling in

trades which are all conducted with the patience of the ivory carver or the designer in lacquer. Against this perfectly trained hand the West sets a hand numbed and almost superseded, as an instrument of precision, by the machine. For that check upon lawless emotionalism which a fixed social etiquette provides, the West offers individualism—

that is, the caprice of the unschooled man.

But the two disciplines of fine craftsmanship and fine manners are, after all, secondary, else a legion of watchmakers and dancing masters might conquer the world. What has really made the Japanese mind the superb instrument it is daily proving itself to be is the habit of abstract meditation—of separating the operations of the intellect from those of the emotions. For some two thousand years the best minds of Japan have had the habit of hard and consecutive thinking along metaphysical lines. The generalizations which fix the individual's relation to society have been no more carefully pondered than the relations which exist between the individual and the cosmic order. It is common to condemn this Stagyrate attitude. The West to-day lets the sleeping dogs of philosophy lie, and turns to science and engineering. From the China Seas comes the startling message that your best engineer comes from generations of mystics, that, by a strange perversion, the soul of Siddartha is controlling with a precision before unknown the weapons forged by Thornycroft and Krupp.

If there is anything to learn from this paradox, it is the value of mind stuff in all its phases, the folly of off-hand opinions on national superiority, the fallacy that infects the so-called practical education of to-day. It is wholesome and fortifying to recall that all hard-thinking is potentially practical. Larger tolerance comes from the thought that intellect is not necessarily wasted because it does not emerge through the conduits of our particular national or racial activities. Some of the best thinking of the world

was done by the schoolmen. St. Thomas Aquinas, perhaps, might have marshalled armies with the precision displayed in the "Summa"; it would have been no more surprising than the patient planning and actual execution of the present naval campaign by the offspring of the Samurai, with their code of honor more tortuous than any theology. No hasty generalization as to the inferiority of yellow races can obscure the fact that, measured only by skill in handling the latest machinery of civilization, the Japanese appear as the superior, the Russians as the inferior, race.

Broadly considered, the significance of great tacticians bred on calligraphy and metaphysics seems to be that the intellect finds its account in a great variety of educations, and prevails even over the worst. And, more particularly, the ease with which scientists, engineers, naval and military experts have been produced in Japan proves that often the most abstract training is the best preparation for practical efficiency. The cherry-stone carvers have been preparing to hold the lever and the trigger; the pundits have found the plotting of a campaign upon Port Arthur already accomplished in

their ancestors' charting of the cosmos and the soul of man. The Japanese have not been taught to despise anything as too small or too great. No illusion of racial superiority has fostered a faith that they can blunder luckily through all emergencies. No superstitious respect for machinery has betrayed them into scorning the finest of all instruments—the mind itself. Their success is a warning to them not too readily to give up the educational standard under which they are conquering, and a reminder to us not to substitute workshops and sham practicalities for the old liberal training that makes the mind hardy enough to answer all challenges, and steady enough to meet the most exigent practical demand.