INTRODUCTION

We have had illuminating books upon Japan. Those of Lafcadio Hearn will always be remembered for the poetry he brought in them to bear upon the poetic aspects of the country and the people. Buddhism had a fascination for him, as it had for Mr. Fielding in his remarkable book on the practice of this religion in Burma.\(^1\) There is also the work of Captain Brinkley, to which we are largely indebted.

These Lectures by a son of the land, delivered at the University of London, are compendious and explicit in a degree that enables us to form a summary of much that has been otherwise partially

\(^1\) The Soul of a People.
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obscure, so that we get nearer to the secret of this singular race than we have had the chance of doing before. He traces the course of Confucianism, Laoism, Shintoism, in the instruction it has given to his countrymen for the practice of virtue, as to which Lao-tze informs us with a piece of 'Chinese metaphysics' that can be had without having recourse to the dictionary: 'Superior virtue is non-virtue. Therefore it has virtue. Inferior virtue never loses sight of virtue. Therefore it has no virtue. Superior virtue is non-assertive and without pretension. Inferior virtue asserts and makes pretensions.'

It is childishly subtle and easy to be understood of a young people in whose minds Buddhism and Shintoism formed a part.

The Japanese have had the advantage of possessing a native Nobility who were true nobles, not invaders and subjugators. They were, in the highest sense, men of honour, to whom, before the time of this
dreadful war, Hara-kiri was an imperative resource, under the smallest suspicion of disgrace. How rigidly they understood and practised Virtue, in the sense above cited, is exemplified in the way they renounced their privileges for the sake of the commonweal when the gates of Japan were thrown open to the West.

Bushido, or the 'way of the Samurai,' has become almost an English word, so greatly has it impressed us with the principle of renunciation on behalf of the Country's welfare. This splendid conception of duty has been displayed again and again at Port Arthur and on the fields of Manchuria, not only by the Samurai, but by a glorious commonalty imbued with the spirit of their chiefs.

All this is shown clearly by Professor Okakura in this valuable book.

It proves to general comprehension that such a people must be unconquerable even if temporarily defeated; and that is not
the present prospect of things. Who could conquer a race of forty millions having the contempt of death when their country's inviolability is at stake! Death, moreover, is despised by them because they do not believe in it. 'The departed, although invisible, are thought to be leading their ethereal life in the same world, in much the same state as that to which they had been accustomed while on earth.' And so, 'when the father of a Japanese family begins a journey of any length, the raised part of his room will be made sacred to his memory during his temporary absence; his family will gather in front of it and think of him, expressing their devotion and love in words and gifts in kind. In the hundreds of thousands of families that have some one or other of their members fighting for the nation in this dreadful war, there will not be even one solitary house where the mother, wife, or sister is not practis-
ing this simple rite of endearment for the beloved and absent member of the family.' Spartans in the fight, Stoics in their grief.

Concerning the foolish talk of the Yellow Peril, a studious perusal of this book will show it to be fatuous. It is at least unlikely in an extreme degree that such a people, reckless of life though they be in front of danger, but Epicurean in their wholesome love of pleasure and pursuit of beauty, will be inflated to insanity by the success of their arms. Those writers who have seen something malignant and inimical behind their gracious politeness, have been mere visitors on the fringe of the land, alarmed by their skill in manufacturing weapons and explosives—for they are inventive as well as imitative, a people not to be trifled with; but this was because their instinct as well as their emissaries warned them of a pressing need for the means of war. Japan and
China have had experience of Western nations, and that is at the conscience of suspicious minds.

It may be foreseen that when the end has come, the Kaiser, always honourably eager for the influence of his people, will draw a glove over the historic 'Mailed Fist' and offer it to them frankly. It will surely be accepted, and that of France, we may hope; Russia as well. England is her ally—to remain so, we trust; America is her friend. She has, in fact, won the admiration of Friend and Foe alike.

GEORGE MEREDITH