

## RECENT LITERARY TENDENCIES

BY KAMEO CHIBA

WITH the World War as the turning point, Japanese thought and literature, like that of European nations, was entirely revolutionized. Up to the outbreak of the war, intellectual and literary endeavor was predominantly Japan-centric. Then Japan was thrust into the world-arena and, whether she liked it or not, because of the pressure of the times, had to assume an international attitude.

This does not mean that previous to the war Japan was not interested and enthusiastic in absorbing the culture of other nations, but the purpose with which she had turned to the outside world had been to draw fresh life-blood for herself. She would build an "unique Japan," so only so much of foreign culture as would contribute to the making of this "unique Japan" would she accept, however significant it might be in the life of other countries. Outside culture was to Japan no more than a means to an end. It was not necessary, she thought, to keep abreast of foreign countries or to fraternize with them in the matter of cultural and social institutions.

Thus, nationalism was the keynote of Japanese thought and literature from the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 up to the outbreak of the World War. Life had been unified and controlled physically and metaphysically by the dictates of patriotism and to establish this doctrine on a firm basis the support of militarism was required. Military preparedness that makes for the strength of the nation was emphasized, and the Government was compelled to spend, and is spending, no small proportion of the nation's wealth to support her army. To perfect military preparedness industrialization was necessary, so Japan encouraged manufacturing by importing scientific knowledge, engineering, and machinery from abroad, and she made serious efforts to promote various enterprises by adopting the western method of banking and business. Foreign trade was developed by installing means of transportation such as railway and steamship services. To become a wealthy and powerful nation became a national slogan and every one looked forward to the day when Japan's strength and influence would be securely established and her position acknowledged, at least, in the Orient.

This national utilitarian consciousness aroused a keen interest in German thought based on the philosophy of Hegel, and this be-

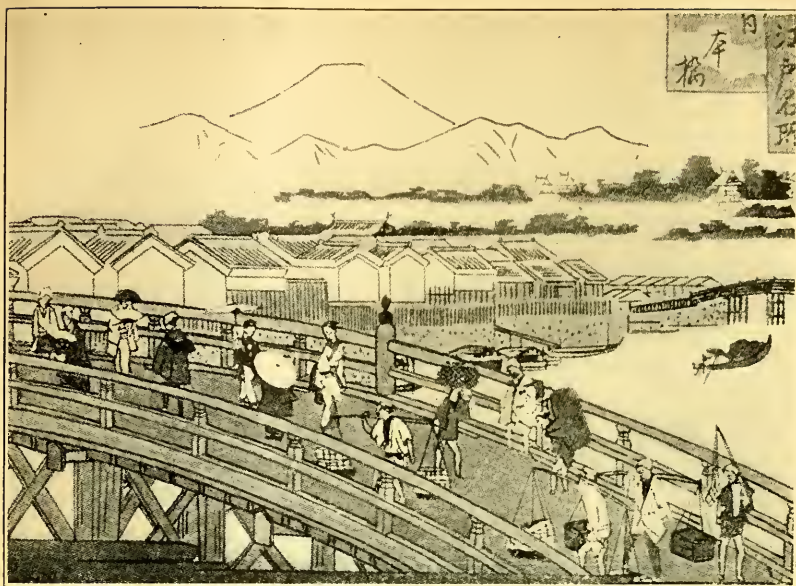
came evident in the literature of the time. A serious controversy was carried on between a literary critic of the utilitarian school and a critic in the school of fine arts regarding the significant effect of literature upon human life.

People were drunk with the thought of their national power to be built on wealth and strength. It was only natural, under the circumstances, that literature, up to the end of the nineteenth century, was flushed with the joy of romanticism. But from the middle of the Meiji era, that is, about the beginning of the twentieth century, literature began to change to realism in the true sense of the word, though it never did forget to combine the spirit of romanticism with its determinism. The reason why Japanese literature of the mid-Meiji era was free from a gloomy atmosphere and singularly characterized with warmth while the realism of Europe was affected by a cold and dismal determinism, was because Japanese realism was the product of a world of romance.

Nationalism demands the subservience of individuality. Extreme unification of thought under the dictates of nationalism is incompatible with individual freedom and originality. The post-war depression after the Sino-Japanese War that prevailed toward the end of the nineteenth century dampened the spirits of the people and checked the feverish nationalism. It was at this moment that the fires of individualism were kindled in the hearts of the people. The philosophy of Nietzsche was heralded as glad tidings because it emphasized the ego and instinct as supreme, and glorified the power of the individual genius over the common masses. Nietzsche regarded existing religions as of minor importance and even delighted in denying and attempting to destroy it, so his philosophy was considered the salvation of a people who had been oppressed by a nationalistic morality based on utilitarianism. An illustration of this is the incident of the well-known poetess, Madam Akiko Yosano. When her brother was called to the colors she had defied the censure by daring to put into her poem the very unpatriotic sentiment, "and yet I pray you will not meet death!"

Such heresy showed the trend of thought, when again the fires of nationalism were fanned by the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. But this time many cross-currents entered, and ideas became considerably diversified and complicated by the new influences.

From this time a people who had been profoundly sentimental began to grow critical and rational. They forsook the articles of



THE NIHON BASHI BRIDGE IN 1800

faith which demanded self-effacement and absolute submission. They became less ego-centric and more world-wide in viewpoint. They discovered themselves to be members of the great society of the world, something entirely distinct from the consciousness of their existence as members of the state.

Industrialism which had been born of militarism permitted the competition of commercial free-lancers. It allowed the swagger of capitalism and encouraged recklessness and indifference to morality. The situation might be compared with that in France at the time of the French Revolution. Captains of industry were beginning to control society. The masses looked on in bewilderment and wondered what would happen. Only a handful of thinkers and artists who were sensitive to things about them sensed the real situation and became obsessed with forebodings of real danger. It was this situation which afforded an opportunity for the rise of socialism and socialistic novels.

Socialistic thought in the broad use of the term such as that prevalent in Europe following the industrial revolution was vaguely understood in Japan in about 1875. About this time a foreign professor at the Doshisha University in Kyoto often used words

like socialism in his lectures. Terms such as "social party," "communist," "socialism," "nihilism" and the like were imported from abroad and used by Japanese scholars after 1880. The words, anarchism and nihilism, were often found in Japanese literature and translations of western books and the existence of an anarchist party in Russia was vaguely known to Japan in those days, but socialism and socialistic literature which won for themselves a certain amount of esteem did not have their birth until as late as 1903. The socialistic novel of the former days was born of a definite idea gained from constantly meditating upon the abuses of capitalism and was hardened by constant struggle with it. The novel of those days, therefore, was confined to a mere exposition of the injustice and corruption that lurked in society and politics, and the novelist, who thought that he had discovered society, merely depicted its sordid aspects and made no attempt to fathom the deep problems of the capitalistic system.

At this time again, there were novels which dealt with home situations, usually the tragedy inherent in class consciousness, the inconsistency of the oriental family system and the slavish submission of woman. They contained some refreshing features such as the conflicts of the new trends of thought, protests against love wrecked, or chastity blighted by tyrannical capitalism, subjects hitherto unknown in Japanese literature. It was about this time that Ibsen's novels exposing the conflict between moral ideas and society, the bankruptcy of the existing family system and the development of individuality were translated into Japanese.

From about 1905 to 1913, the literary world of Japan was strongly influenced by naturalism. This can be seen in the works of Tenguai Kosugi in 1899, who for the first time introduced the naturalism advocated by Zola. Kosugi declared that nature was neither beautiful nor ugly, neither good nor bad, and the mission of a novel was to enable the reader to imagine the phenomena depicted as clearly and effectively as was his contact with the physical world. This was a bold statement in those days. At that time, there was no element in the literature of Japan that might be called unique.

Japanese novelists drew their inspirations mostly from the Russian, German, and French novelists who advocated naturalism. They assiduously followed the method of Turgenev and Tolstoy of Russia, Hauptmann and Sudermann of Germany, and Zola, Maupassant, Flaubert, and Goncourt of France.

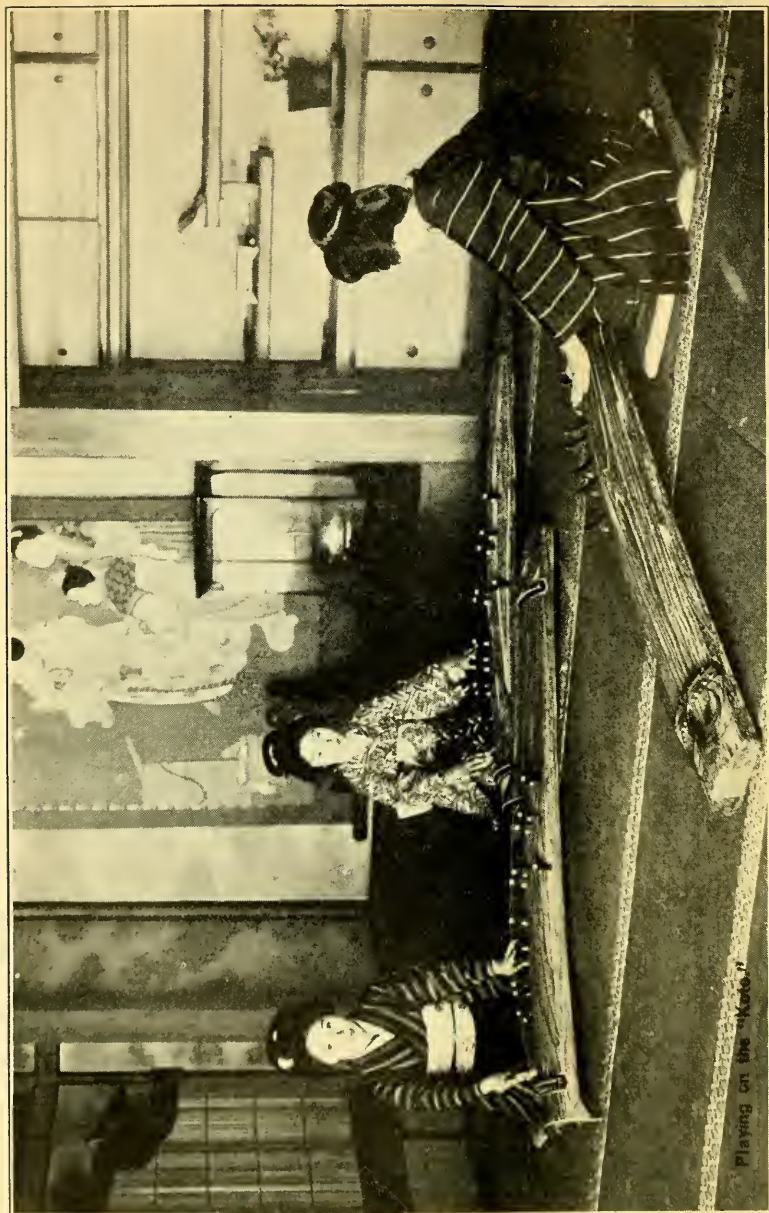


This naturalism flourished for more than ten years but began to wane about 1908, when the field was taken by a group of novelists composed mostly of young men who were seriously interested in Tolstoy and Dostoievsky, who advocated humanism and neo-idealism which they had learned in the new Kantian school of philosophy. There was also another group, whose doctrine was neo-realism who dared to walk into the realm of psycho-analysis, renouncing the extreme objective attitude of naturalism.

Such is the general outline of Japanese literature preceding the present literary endeavor. It constituted a prelude to contemporary literature.

The Japanese people are sensitive and easily susceptible to foreign thoughts. Various systems of philosophy one after the other had been brought into the country intact, but they were usually systems of learning confined to the lecture halls of the government and private universities. The professors seemed to regard any suggestion for making such subjects applicable to daily life an insult to learning. The names of Spencer, Kant, Ladd, Schopenhauer, Fichte, Hegel, Windelband, Rickert, Dilthey, Rousseau, James, Bergson, Eucken and other philosophers that were referred to in lecture rooms and magazines, were a sort of food for exclusive contemplation in study room, and treated apparently as too sacred to be touched by the masses. So the only world where these philosophies left a distinct influence seems to be that of education. In reviewing other currents of thought in Japan, it would not be wide of the mark to mention first the philosophy of Nietzsche, second democracy especially at the conclusion of the World War, and lastly Marxism of the present day. It goes without saying that the philosophies of Eucken, Bergson, Romain Rolland, and Maurice, all had some grip on the minds of the common people but they can hardly be compared with the vast influence of American democracy, as an ism rather than a philosophy. In other words, democracy with absolute liberty and equality as its keynote rendered a great service to the Japanese people, serving as a powerful motto at the time of the World War. It was the thing that Japan did not have and was destined to seek, because the country was burdened with the shackles of feudalism incomparably more than the Western nations.

The shackles of the past still encircled the political, economic, educational, social, and emotional life of the people. It was for this reason that slogans such as "Emancipation" and "Social recon-



Playing on the "Koto."

struction" were subscribed to by the people with sincerity and intensity of enthusiasm.

Of the special movements, such as the demand for universal suffrage and woman suffrage, the control of industry by labor, equal educational opportunities and others, two may be pointed out as of primal importance. One of them is the Women's Movement and the other the labor movement along socialistic lines. The Women's Movement is cultural. It urges women to realize their position and responsibility in society. The labor movement has gone beyond a cultural activity and the proletarian class are now waging war against capitalism for the improvement of their social status. As was the case in other countries, both woman and labor movements are led by a group of the intelligentsia and the important and significant part they have played in the post-war development of the people should be recorded in bold type.

As was already pointed out, professors of the universities, government as well as private, stayed in study rooms and lecture halls and had nothing to do with the masses. But the section of the intelligentsia, who in the post-war period led the reconstruction and emancipation movements were not bookworms. They were a group of so-called outside writers who may be classed under the general name of "Liberal Critics." The development of this group is a significant fact in the world of thought in Japan. The difference between the lecture-hall professor and outside critic is clearly explained in the following remarks made by one of these liberal critics.

Liberal critics in general accuse the study-hall professors of being too abstract and morbidly perplexed, having no positive interest in actual life. They face all social phenomena and criticize them in the light of philosophy, while our attitude is not formal and static but functional and dynamic. On the whole our point of view is different from the genetic point of view, which these lecture-hall philosophers attacked. Despite the accusation made by the lecture-hall philosophers on this point, this point of view was our strength as well as our weakness.

The democracy that came from America swept the country in 1918 and a few enthusiastic professors rushed out of their classrooms into the street to shout for the emancipation of the masses and a reconstruction of society. The Reimei-kai was formed with the purpose of instituting a social reform on the basis of democracy. The organization was a radically progressive element of intel-

ligentsia but it could never find a solution for the difficulties caused by the industrial revolution.

The World War brought an unprecedented flood of gold into the economic world of Japan. Capitalists made the best of the situation by irrational accumulation and consumption of wealth. It was impossible for the proletarian class to ignore their own pitiful condition compared to the luxuries of the other class. The progress of the times would not allow them to remain silent. They began to deplore the inequality of economic opportunity and emphasized the necessity of removing social inconsistency. As a result the labor movement came into being. In literature the Japanese people turned to Upton Sinclair, Barbusse, Carpenter, and Whitman. The "social literature" (literature dealing with social problems) had slowly begun to gain strength by this time.

Socialism, as a matter of fact, was still feeble in 1914 and the laboring class was not yet systematically organized. Ideas were vague and there was a confused conglomeration of various doctrines and principles such as Marxism, syndicalism, anarchism, state socialism, and nihilism. The time was not yet ripe for establishing a proletarian stronghold on the foundation of clear-cut class consciousness. The government authorities were unable to see what kind of a plant would come from all these social movements.

There was a group of a few liberal critics, professors and thinkers, that vaguely realized the rise of the new class necessitated by the spirit of the times. Most of these men advocated liberalism and some of them were of assumed radical tendencies, but none went beyond the scope of culture first, coöperationism or christian socialism. They consistently opposed a revolution by force and endeavored to prevent the growing bitterness of class conflict by harmonizing capital and labor by social legislation and the carrying out of a definite social program in politics.

Here was a veritable hotbed for the seeds of proletarian literature. In Europe empires and kingdoms were transformed one after the other into republics. The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics began to lift its red head. The so-called rice riot, which broke out in one corner of Japan in the summer of 1918 and spread swiftly throughout the country, terrorized the nation. A professor of the Imperial University was deprived of his court rank and dismissed from the institution for an article commenting on the anarchism of Kropotkin. The social thought of 1918-1919 was drifting to anarchy



more than to Marxism. A certain amount of syndicalism, too, was mixed in. The majority of the men who wrote for the *Tane Maku Hito* (Seed Sowers), a magazine which may be regarded as the first hotbed of socialistic literature, and their friends were of anarchistic persuasion. As there was no unifying guiding principle at campaign headquarters and theoretical controversies were inaccurate, anarchists and Bolsheviks combined without any feeling of inconsistency, which is almost a miracle as we reflect upon it now. The fact that a cabinet minister provoked the smile of well-informed persons by confusing anarchism with socialism in his speech at a session of the Diet in response to an interpellation was an interesting incident of the time. Proletarian literature in those days was a crude thing, resulting from the attempt of a few educated laborers to give their own experience of the tyranny of capitalists. After the great earthquake of 1923, the Government adopted strong measures against anarchism and socialism with the result that this proletarian literature was effectively suppressed for a time.

Although the earthquake of 1923 was no more than a natural phenomenon, it had an important bearing upon the social and national consciousness of the people. The disaster gave rise to a reactionary movement of patriotism and Nipponism (Japan first and above all) which was opposed to all radical movements that might be called socialistic. This reactionary movement not only protested against a radical reconstruction of society at the hands of anarchism, socialism, communism, and syndicalism but went so far as to attempt to stamp out completely all these radical principles. It supported the famous old traditions of Japan and looked at everything that was called modern with hatred. It insisted on imperialism and militarism and opposed the peace movement and the reduction of armaments. It was not in favor of women's societies because it regarded such activity as inconsistent with the fundamental character of Japanese women and destructive to her traditional beauty. Practically it opposed everything that came under the name of so-called radical thought because of the belief that it was utterly incompatible with national existence.

It was determined to create a new culture peculiar to Japan which could not be internationalized. The government authorities subscribed to this brand of thought to a certain extent but they did not assume such an extreme attitude as was manifested by the reactionary group themselves. For instance, they supported the

proposal for armament reduction and maintained a favorable attitude toward women's social activities. They were not only friendly toward these movements but made some efforts for their realization. They permitted a certain freedom of thought but they took a definite and decisive stand against social reconstruction according to communistic principles. The attitude of the authorities with a spy system in readiness to suppress any communistic propaganda was such as would make one think they were morbidly nervous over radicalism. They were fully prepared with an efficient police system to cope positively with tenant farmer disputes, factory and labor strikes, radical thought propaganda, and the proletarian election activities. They were equipped, too, with a particular kind of police system for the supervision of radical "thought-movements" in schools. This condition of affairs grew worse and continues to be serious to this day. The trend of thought currents of the present era began the latter part of 1925. In the latter part of the Taisho era (1912-1926), socialism and the various allied organizations were protesting against the existing social system. This protest found voice in what was called "Shizen-hassei"—natural response. Against this, there was another effort by the name of "Mokuteki-ishiki"—purposeful effort. This school of thought maintained that such a controversy without a definite plan and critical attitude as carried on by the former, was utterly meaningless. It took "Shizen-hassei" to task, declaring that the proletarian art must outlive the crude state of its early existence, must become more conscious of its position and be organized and systematized under the ideology based on the stern reality of existing society.

It was necessary for the "Mokuteki-ishiki" to readjust its fighting line. As a result, a general disintegration started in the proletarian camp. Anarchists not only could not live in the same camp with bolshevists but it became necessary also for liberalists and social democrats to readjust their fighting line. Agricultural labor and factory labor began to realize the difference of their positions. A similar disintegration went on in the proletarian literary field each according to the view advocated by literary men. Such was the general condition of proletarian literary endeavor, and it goes without saying that the situation is bound to reflect upon the thought and political activity of the proletarian masses.

To be sure, as in other countries the intelligentsia were the pioneering guides for the rise of the proletarian class. But as time

went on and the proletarian class became confident of their power and conscious of their right of speech, the word "intelligentsia" degenerated into a byword. The intelligentsia is a creature of brain, not action. He is a product of bourgeois culture and has not genuine faith in the proletarian movement and the laboring class. The late Mr. Takero Arishima, humanitarian novelist, in 1921 declared, "the idea that one can contribute anything to the fourth class without being a member of that class is the utmost folly. The fourth class will only be disturbed by such needless efforts.

Mr. Arishima was of the opinion that a separation of the intelligentsia from the labor class is eventually inevitable and was pessimistic over the future of intelligentsia. On the other hand, he was obsessed with a lugubrious foreboding that the intelligentsia of the middle class were doomed under the tyranny of capitalism. Brooding on this subject was one of the causes that led to his suicide.

The intellectual awakening of the labor class about 1922 caused a demand for the exclusion of the intelligentsia with the result that a number of labor agitators, were ousted from their positions of leadership. But this was no more than an incident in the development of the social movement. The activity of the Shin-jin Kai (Society of New Men), a student organization in the Tokyo Imperial University, and the affair that occurred in the Social Science Research Societies of the Kyoto Imperial University and the Doshisha University in 1925 made the educational authorities and the general public feel the urgent need of suppressing "dangerous thoughts."

The government authorities discovered a dangerous students plot when two students of the Kyoto Imperial University were found active in the Social Science Research Society of the Fukuoka Higher School. (A higher school resembles a Junior College in America.) On Dec. 1, 1925, the police raided the homes of twenty students of the Kyoto Imperial University and the Doshisha University and seized propaganda leaflets against universal military training and in the interest of the Farmers' Union, various pamphlets for social agitation, and letters.

The so-called Pan-Japan Social Science Research Society maintained its headquarters in Tokyo extending their activities to the Kwanto (Eastern Japan) and the Kwansai (Western Japan) districts. Whether or not the extreme anarchistic literature, which was seized by the police, might give evidence of radical activities on the

part of the students and something more than mere scientific research, was seriously discussed. A decision was finally made to the effect that the Social Science Research Society was incompatible with the national institution. In the same year, Mr. Ryohei Okada, then Minister of Education, prohibited research on thought problems in all higher schools and ordered the dissolution of all Social Science Research Societies. This strong measure, however, did not accomplish the desired results and the Educational Minister had to call a conference of the principals of all higher schools to discuss the problem of dangerous thoughts among students. The conference drew six resolutions regarding the control of student "dangerous thoughts," of which the two most important are:

1. The principals of higher schools not only must forbid students to form any organization for social research of any sort whatsoever but also should see to it that they refrain from such individual, private study.

2. The principals of higher schools should prohibit students from joining any radical organization, from being involved in any practical radical activity or from undertaking any propaganda of dangerous ideas.

Such measures to control "dangerous thoughts," however, brought no satisfactory effect. Research in social science became wide-spread and many students who were engaged in it were punished.

In 1927 and 1928 the Seiyukai Government appropriated a large sum of money for the establishment of a special police system for the control of "dangerous thought" and for the realization of a plan for guiding students' ideas.

This completely refutes the pessimistic assertion of Mr. Arishima in so far as his view on class conflict was concerned. At any rate, it was the young students in the highest seats of learning who courageously walked into the midst of "dangerous thoughts," and became associated with active workers on the farm and in the factory labor movement. With their youthful enthusiasm, they gained an immense satisfaction by devoting their utmost to agitation and propaganda. They rebelled against any curtailment of civic liberty and gladly became martyrs for the realization of the principles they advocated.

It was almost impossible for anyone to find an adequate plan to cope with this state of affairs in the student world. With "thought



against thought" as a slogan, the successive administrations have attempted to turn the intellectual tide by mobilizing all kinds of cultural and educational institutions. The dignity and prestige of the traditional culture were upheld, the fundamental characters of the Japanese nation were explained, lectures emphasizing the Oriental thoughts and teachings of Confucius and Mencius were given, and religious teachings were encouraged.

Despite all these positive measures, undertaken by the Government and the leaders, the subtle insistence with which Marxism captured the student mind is appalling. Radical ideas in educational institutions are ubiquitous. They may be likened to methane gas in an old swamp, for if suppressed at one point they explode in another. Because the general tendency, particularly among young men of the present time is such, it is all the more difficult to foresee just where the future is leading. These so-called dangerous ideas have struck root too deeply to be regarded as a mere popular and passing fad of the day. It is true that the majority of Japanese, particularly mature people, are not favorably inclined toward socialistic thought, but none the less, it is worth our while to dwell at some length on the intellectual currents of students, because they are the rulers of tomorrow.

Most liberal newspapers and magazines in Japan are of the opinion that the Government's policy of fighting "dangerous ideas" with traditional culture as a weapon is inadequate. At least they are doubtful of any tangible success. Most of them insist that the Government should tacitly allow students to conduct research in social sciences to a certain extent and at the same time carry out some bold social reforms to steal the thunder from their radical agitation.

They declare that it is imperative now for politicians to undertake an epoch-making reorganization of the social and industrial systems upon which economic production, distribution, and consumption depend, because the so-called national peril, "the dangerous thoughts flood," is due to the social unrest among the masses caused by the present economic deadlock between the rich and the poor. These people advocate a new liberalism as a part of their ideal.

There is another school of thought that maintains that "dangerous thoughts" could only be successfully met by the establishing of some new and convincing principles on an equal intellectual basis with Marxism. Some intelligentsia in Japan oppose Marxism but

they are few in number and they have not been successful in their campaign against the latter. The fact that the Department of Education is collecting anti-Marxist literature in other countries in order to furnish the students with such material for research work is but a part of the government policy against "dangerous thoughts."

There are some conservatives who contend that Marxism is not a thought born in the confines of a study, but is bound to lead to action; and therefore, that it is folly to attempt to combat thought with thought. The only adequate method of meeting it is by legal punishment and practical laws.

There have been four kinds of literary endeavor in Japan since 1925. They are literature as a fine art, popular literature, mass literature, and proletarian literature.

Literature as a fine art had its birth about 1888 inspired by the doctrine of creating and relishing "art for art's sake." It saw the rise of realism, romanticism and naturalism up to the end of the Meiji era (1912) and then neo-realism, idealism, neo-symbolism and neo-romanticism set in. The contemporary literary men of this school are devotees of these same ideals and have been writing, each according to his fancy. The results may not be inferior to those of the old days but at best they are no more than limbos of the past, having no vitality or creative promise. One of the reasons for their failure may be that the conception of art for art's sake by which they were inspired, alienated them from the grim reality of life, and they made of literature only a plaything. Despite the fact that people, who are abused by the fickleness of their environment, are constantly seeking the meaning of this vicissitude in the bosom of literature, the novelists of this school have been utterly unconcerned, dreaming their dream of peace in their ivory towers. This coterie of literary men raised walls about them in the midst of society, taking no note of things outside. However excellent in workmanship and however ingenious the plot, there could be no reality, no personal touch and no inspiration in their products as they did not intimately reflect life and society. They never realized that art, too, is born of time and society. It was to be expected that they would be forsaken by the age and society which they themselves forsook.

Popular literature and mass literature are much alike but, at the same time, different. Popular literature has as its content love and home, drawing its materials from society as it is. In this sense



NYO-I-RIN KWANNON IN NUNNĒRY AT CHUGUJI AT HORYUJI  
Suiko 7th century

popular literature has been most widely read throughout the world from time immemorial. From the consideration of quantity, popular literature is said to divide honors with so-called sword literature. Its commercial value can be seen by the fact that the sale of magazines and newspapers is determined by the popularity of the stories they carry. The longer popular novel deals with the new morality, catering to a natural demand of the time.

Mass literature is composed mostly of the sword story and detective story. The so-called sword story seems to have no parallel in the world outside of Japan. It is a kind of historical narrative about feudal knights, barons, and dukes. It intrigues the fighting instinct in man by spectacular plots, breath-taking fights, and by the demonstration of the incomparably developed art of Japanese swordmanship. This kind of literature came into vogue about 1923 and still maintains its popularity. It has been an indispensable source of income for newspapers and magazines and has had successful sales in book form. It may seem queer that stories of the feudal age should have such popular favor in the world of science but this is not without justification. For instance, the development of incidents in the sword novel is very rapid, having a keen appeal to the temper of modern people, to whom speed has become a god. Intense moments of life and death satisfy the unsatiable demand for excitement and thrill. The clear demonstration of moral cause and effect in the dramatization of the story harmonizes with general moral ideals. A character with superhuman strength and art of swordmanship to whom defeat is unknown satisfies superbly the psychological cravings of a hero-worshiper. The sword novel promises the joy of self-forgetting, affording relief and emancipation from the petty problems of daily life. To the modern man, jaded by the stern reality of life under the dictates of rational and scientific processes, it affords delightful excitement, of which he never grows weary.

The detective story is a product of scientific and rational thinking. For this reason, we cannot expect it to be appreciated by everybody, nor can it be so readily understood and liked as a popular love story. But as the detection of a crime is based on intelligence, and science constitutes an important element in the story, it holds the interest of the younger generation. A great many detective stories, written by modern foreign authors, such as Doyle, Free-



man, Oppenheim, and the old masters, such as Edgar Allen Poe and Dumas, have been translated.

Proletarian literature had its birth sometime during the latter part of the Taisho era (1912-1926) and has been making rapid progress. The exposition of capitalistic tyranny, the evils of militarism, the oppressive police system, and the tragedies arising from all forms of oppression are popular themes of the story. Some masterpieces, such as *Prostitute*, and a few others have already been written, but as proletarian literature is still in the plastic period of adolescence, having just entered upon a stage of unified and conscious effort, we have to wait for the advent of some permanent works of art.

Apart from the proletarian novels and romances, the polemical efforts of the proletarian writers have been most notable in recent years and controversies over the social nature of literature, the historic mission of proletarian literature, and other questions will become more acute in this country than in any other with the exception of Russia.

Activities of proletarian artists, however, have not been confined to the field of pure literature and polemics. In fine arts, (painting, drawing and sculpture), in music and also in the cinema, they have been very active. They are not content with their single efforts in these various fields of art, but have tried to unite under the one objective of "class-war." And in December, 1928, the Japanese Federation of the United Proletarian Artists, was recognized. The Federation consists of five unions of artists, which are, in the order of their importance, the Authors' Union, the Theater Union, the Fine Arts Union, the Music Union, and the Cinema Union, each having its own technical programs, but coöperating under the same communistic principle. It is no easy task to find out what kinds of people appreciate and respond to these new arts. Roughly speaking, however, they are men of less than thirty years of age, of the intellectual or of the laboring classes, industrial as well as agricultural. Among the young women of the cities, many are not only sympathetic towards the new proletarian art, but also are positively active in the new movement.

In the foregoing pages, we have dealt with the various types of the literature of modern Japan. They are essentially different from each other, but are all alike in one point. They have all studied western literature and have derived their main ideas from Europe

or America. This seems natural, if we remember that the cultural aspects of Japanese life has been somewhat backward compared to that of western life. When we are told what authors of western literature were or are popular in Japan, we are sure to know the main features of Japanese literature of the time. The authors who were widely read since the last years of Meiji (1912) up to the third year of Taisho (1914), were Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoievsky, Hauptmann, Schnitzler, Wedekind, Romain Rolland, Galsworthy, Shaw, Wells, Boeil, Hamsun, Tagore, Carpenter, Whitman, Ibsen, Strindberg, and others. After the Great War, Russian revolutionary literature suddenly gained an unprecedented popularity, and works of Barbusse, Phillip, O'Neill, Upton Sinclair, and Reed have been widely read. These names indicate most assuredly the literary trend of the last years.

Proletarian literature forms the main current of the literary activities of the present generation of Japan. Excepting Russia, there is no other country in the world in which we can find a similar phenomenon. This is perhaps not so much because of the unusual power and influence of the "left wing" literature, as because of the lack of great figures in the orthodox literary circles. In western countries, where the new proletarian literature has some force, conservative authors still retain high popularity and doubtlessly attract the majority of the reading public. On the contrary, in Japan, authors of the old style went out of date a few years ago as they do not seem to have energy enough to meet the demands of the changing social order. This is the main reason for the extraordinary predominance of proletarianism in the literary word of Japan.

In conclusion, we propose to review some outstanding facts regarding the current publications and to indicate the main tendencies of Japanese thought at the present time.

The "mass" production of the so-called *yen-bon* (one yen books) since the last years of Taisho (1926) is unparalleled not only in Japan's history of publication, but also in the world. The *yen-bon* means a one yen book usually published in series, and, therefore, distinctly different from American dollar books. The first attempt at the mass-sale of *yen-bon* was made, when a publisher planned to compile a series of literary works of the Meiji and Taisho eras. Under this plan, several score of volumes were to be distributed regularly, two copies a month and the price of each volume was to be one yen, which is no doubt incredibly reasonable in view of

the content of the volume and of the cost of production. Apart from this low price, the advertisement for the subscription of this series of books was carried out on such a large scale as would capture the public. Morning after morning, evening after evening, one whole page, sometimes even two pages of newspapers, urban as well as local, were devoted to advertising the publication of this series. The largeness of the advertising scale was only matched by the originality of its propaganda method. At any rate, this attempt proved to be a great success, registering more than three hundred thousand subscribers. There have been many similar attempts by publishers who dreamed of the grand success of the first attempt. At present, there are over one hundred and fifty kinds of *yen-bon* and the prices are sometimes lowered to 50 sen or to 30 sen, and even to 10 sen. Supposing each kind of *yen-bon* sells ten thousand copies, one million and a half copies are estimated to reach monthly the desks of our people. To what extent this flood of *yen-bon* series has satisfied the book-hunger and how much it has enriched the mind, we cannot say definitely. It has, however, established the notion that the price of books should be reasonable, and consequently it has undermined the sale of other books which are not published in the series form, but which appear as single books.

Selected classical literature, translations of a selected list of foreign novels can be easily managed in the form of *yen-bon* series or of *50-sen-bon* series. Also a series of popular lectures could be published in the same form. This form, however, did not suit the publication of new theories and the results of new studies and researches which could only be done in separate book form. Publications of this kind are more important than a *yen-bon* series, but the former often brings to the publisher loss rather than profit, because of its high price and small market. In order to cover these losses, the publisher cannot but resort to the publication of another *yen-bon* series. The necessity and importance of the publication in book form of newer studies and researches and the resulting losses on one hand, and the dependable profit but relative unimportance of the publication of *yen-bon* series on the other, conspire to place the publishers in a sort of dilemma. One thing is quite certain, however, that the future of *yen-bon* publication is still rather promising and that it will surely be the predominant type of publication in the near future. Whether this is a normal condition in the publishing world is difficult to judge. At any rate, we can fairly say, that

the Japanese read much. The statistics for 1927 show that the numbers of different publications in Russia, Germany, and Japan are respectively 36,680, 31,026, and 19,967. While the books in the Russian or German language have a wider circulation outside of their own countries, the Japanese books are read only in Japan.

Numerous kinds of magazines are published in Japan now-a-days. Some popular magazines have a million subscribers. There are three kinds of ladies' magazines which have over 300,000 circulation. And several other magazines are publishing 70,000 copies each. These magazines have a latent power which is strongly influencing the culture of the nation. Amusements and popular knowledge are much dependent on the existence of the magazine.

In 1925 there were 1,012 different kinds of newspapers published daily in Japan. The number of journals which was 3,532 in 1919, increased to 8,445 in 1928. Newspapers participate very little in this increase, because small newspapers are now being absorbed by big ones. As those big papers in Tokyo and Osaka have the advantage of the facilities of communication and are able to spend huge sums of money for advertising, they can easily squeeze out small papers in the provinces. It is quite easy to understand that local papers which are published in the districts nearer to these big cities, are more affected. There are several local papers throughout Japan which are financially independent. Even among the newspapers in a big city, there is a keen competition. The earthquake of 1923 disturbed the condition of fifteen Tokyo newspapers which had been published side by side up to that moment. A few small newspapers which safely escaped the catastrophe and big ones which had plenty of capital on hand though damaged by the earthquake, have been growing bigger. But the rest of them are precipitately going to ruin. The map of the newspaper world is now changing its color. In the future only a few big newspapers will survive the competition. The circulation of these big papers even now exceeds one million.

Once social news was the most important factor of the paper, but now politics and world-affairs are the dominant items.



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