

BOOK REVIEW

A Handful of Sand. Translated from the works of Takuboku Ishikawa by Shio Sakanishi, Ph.D., with a foreword by Hiroshi Saito, Japanese Ambassador to the United States. Marshall Jones Company. Boston, 1934. Limited Edition. Pp. xvi+77. Price \$2.00.

Though little known to western readers, Takuboku Ishikawa has influenced the development of Japanese literature by bringing back to the short, classical Japanese poem simplicity and freedom in both content and language. His poetry is autobiographical, full of longing for the things he lacked and appreciation for the precious, fleeting moment. He catches these moments and makes of them something intense and significant by his genius of expression, his dramatic quality, and his feeling for melody and rhythm. Yet to realize their full pathos and poignancy one should know something of his tragic life.

He received what education his father, a rural Zen priest, could afford. His poetic gifts were quickly recognized both at school and among the new poets of Japan. Marriage, however, brought upon him the responsibility for the support of his wife and child as well as of his parents and sister—a situation which he was unable to meet. They were desperately poor; their lives full of tragedy. The sister died; the father disappeared one snowy night.

His earliest poetry, written in the traditional short form under the influence of the idealistic romantic school, lacks individuality. But later, upon the advice of Tekkan Yosano, he tried the longer freer lyrics which were immediately successful, collected, and published under the title of *Longings*. His naturalistic tendencies soon ended, however, as years of hardships and contact with the injustices of life made of him a socialist. He was again writing in the short classical form. *A Handful of Sand*, written during these difficult years, created a sensation in the literary world because of the unconventionality of the subject matter and the simplicity of language.

At home there was discord between his wife and mother. Takuboku was in the hospital with chronic peritonitis. They were all ill, leaving no one but the aged mother to care for them. She collapsed, and they discovered that she had been suffering from tuberculosis for years. Sick as he was Takuboku cared for her until her death, and survived her by only one month. A week before his death, penniless and ill, he sold his third volume of poetry named *My Sad Toys* from the last sentence of one of his essays "Poems are my sad toys."

In complete harmony with the content of this little book of poems, is its physical appearance with cover of Japanese design, hand-set type, and laid, deckle paper.

In conclusion we quote a few of the poems chosen at random.

O, the sadness of lifeless sand!
Trickling
It falls through my fingers
When I take it in my hand.

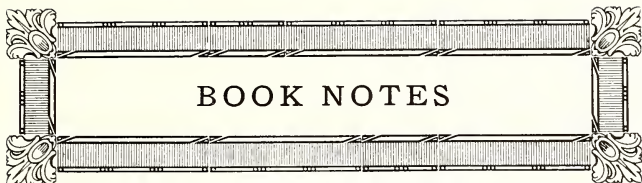
As a son of the hills
Thinks of the hills,
When in sorrow
I always think of you.

At nightfall,
A vague sorrow comes by stealth
And climbs up on my bed.

Balls of sand
That absorbed tears to the full!
How heavy indeed are tears!

Like to a kite
Cut off the string,
Lightly the soul of my youth
Has taken flight.

Never am I weary of watching
A wreath of smoke
That like a dragon,
Jumps out into an empty sky
Only to disappear.



BOOK NOTES

A Letter of Emerson. With analysis and notes by Willard Reed. Gift edition. Boston. The Beacon Press. 1934. Pp. 33. Price \$1.00.

Reality and man's apprehension of reality form the theme of this hitherto unpublished letter of Emerson to Solomon Corner of Baltimore in 1842 in response to an appeal for advice in his religious perplexity. A facsimile of Emerson's letter is added, and the two letters of Solomon Corner with a foreword, notes, and analysis by his grandson, Willard Reed.

Turkestan Reunion. By Eleanor Holgate Lattimore. The John Day Company. New York, 1934. Pp. xii + 308. Price, \$2.75.

Turkestan is perhaps the most remote of all countries, most difficult to reach, and least changed by modern civilization. Here Mrs. Lattimore joined her husband to travel along the trade routes where for centuries silk and tea were carried from China to the West, and where life is still very much as it was in the days of the great Khans. The Lattimores traveled simply and subsisted as much as possible on the products of the land in order that they might learn about the ways and habits of life of the inhabitants.

In these letters, which chronicle the journey, Mrs. Lattimore describes vividly the life of the sledge drivers on the Siberian plains in the midst of winter, a Siberian village with log or mud houses on either side of wide snowy streets and green-domed church, the snow-covered villages where nothing was visible but the openings in snowdrifts and the little chimneys sticking out the top. She tells of Chuguchak, primitive, merry, and exuberant with the first signs of spring, with its frontier-mixture of races, Kazaks with rakish, white fur bonnets on ponies, Mongols in sheepskins with purple sashes on camels. Chantos and Tungkans in high red and black boots on jingling little sledges; of the Chinese capital city Urumchi; of Turfan which is completely Turki with arched gateways, carved balconies, gayly colored shops, and domes and mosques; and of Kashgar, larger and gayer, more splendid than the other towns.

They traveled by pony, cart, and camel both north and south of the T'ieu Shan or Heavenly Mountains, through black, spruce forests under glittering snow peaks, through desert and oases. They met migrating caravans, brilliant with reds and yellows, in search of fresh grass for their own welfare depends upon the welfare of their flocks; they lived as guests in the white-domed yurts of the Kazaks, eating their black bread and mutton, and drinking their kumiss.

And finally they crossed into India over the Karakoram Route, the most difficult trade route in the world, through five passes each over 16,000 feet high. This is a thrilling and exciting route. The way is lined with skeletons of dead animals and abandoned loads. They followed deep red gorges, winding river beds, steep valleys under pink snows and violet glaciers. They crawled up icy places where even the yaks needed help with their loads. From the top of the Khardong pass they looked back over a mass of rock and ice between walls of jagged mountains through which they came, and forward steeply down and far away onto green pastures, the spires of Leh, the silver thread which was the Indus River, and the snowy Himalayas.

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