

# RECOLLECTIONS OF OLD JAPAN

## AN INTERVIEW WITH VISCOUNT SHIBUSAWA

### BY JULIAN STREET.

**A**S the events connected with the translation of Japan from mediævalism to modernity recede into history it naturally happens that the number of those who can distinctly remember the Japan that was becomes smaller and smaller. Men able to recall the restoration are to-day about as rare as those who, in this country, recall the impeachment of Andrew Johnson, which occurred in the same year; and men who played important parts in the restoration are of course rarer still; while as for those old enough to remember Commodore Perry's visit, there is but a handful of them left.

It so happens, however, that in Japan several very remarkable men have survived to a great age. The three most powerful figures in politics are the octogenarian noblemen known as the *genro*, or Elder Statesmen: Field Marshal Prince Yamagata, Marquis Matsukata, and Marquis Okuma. Prince Yamagata as a soldier took an active part in the civil warfare attending the restoration. Both he and Marquis Okuma were born in 1838, seven years before Texas was admitted to our Union as the twenty-eighth State, and Marquis Matsukata was born in 1840.

Of these venerable statesmen Prince Yamagata and Marquis Matsukata figure as great unseen influences; but Marquis Okuma, while perhaps not actually more active than his colleagues of the *genro*, appears frequently in public and has been more of a popular idol. In politics he has long been known as a great fighter and an artful tactician; also he is sympathetically regarded because, many years ago, he was the victim of a bomb outrage in which he lost a leg.

In view of the comparisons often made between Imperial Japan and the Imperial Germany that used to be, it is worth remarking that the three Elder Statesmen are without exception self-made men. None of them was born with a title; all were members of modest samurai families; all rose through ability.

**H**AD not the honorary title "Grand Old Man of Japan" already been conferred on Marquis Okuma, and had I been invited to make a nomination, I should have gone outside the realm of politics and nominated Viscount Eichi Shibusawa, another of the nation's venerable gentlemen.

Viscount Shibusawa has had probably as extraordinary a career as any man alive. In saying this I am taking into account the fact that he distinctly remembers the Japan that existed prior to the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853-4, that he was Minister of the Treasury to the last Shogun, that he later started the first modern bank in Japan, that he became a great financier and a great

philanthropist. In other words, he has seen a transition practically as great as that pictured by Mark Twain in his fantastic story "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court."

The Japan of Viscount Shibusawa's youth and early manhood was divided into some three hundred feudal districts, each ruled by a *daimyo*, or chieftain, having his castles, his court, his concubines, his retainers; among the latter, soldiers in armor, wearing hideous masks calculated to terrify the foe and equipped only with swords, spears, and bows and arrows.

These chiefs had absolute power over the people and lands in their domains. They could make laws, issue paper money, lay taxes, impose labor and punishment on the people, or arbitrarily take from them property or life itself.

It was a land without railways, without steam power, without window glass; a land in which nobles journeyed by the highroads in magnificent processions, surrounded by their soldiers, mounted and afoot, their lacquered palanquins, their coolie bearers; a land in which, when great lords passed, humble citizens fell to their knees and touched their foreheads to the ground; a land of duels, feuds, vendettas, clan wars; a land in which the samurai, or gentry, alone were allowed the privilege of wearing swords, in which a plebeian could be struck down by a samurai for the most trifling reason, and in which one of the privileges most highly prized by samurai was the right of one holding that rank to die by his own hand if condemned to death, instead of by the hand of the public executioner. Involved with this privilege of *hara-kiri*—or, as the Japanese prefer to call it, *seppuku*—was a property right. The property of a man beheaded by the executioner was confiscated, whereas one committing *seppuku* could leave his estate to his family.

Think of a man having started life as a country boy under conditions such as these and now, at eighty-three, being known widely as a financier, a director in companies, and a great organizer and supporter of such modern charities as poorhouses, orphanages, homes for mental defectives, free tuberculosis sanitariums, reform schools, and the like!

The Viscount was so good as to spend the better part of two days in telling me the story of his experiences in connection with the restoration. We talked in a pretty brick bungalow in his garden in Tokyo, our entire conversation being conducted through an interpreter, and being pleasantly punctuated by the appearances of serving-maids bearing cups of pale-green tea.

He was dressed in the silken robes which Japanese gentlemen wear at home for comfort. Short, stocky, en-

ergetic, with a strong neck and a large round head, the face seamed with deep wrinkles, he was one of the most extraordinary-looking men I have ever met. He radiated force, honesty, kindness. Long ago I knew a Sioux chief who had a face like his, even to the color and to the deep wrinkles of humor about the mouth and eyes. Nor in either case did the humorous promise of those wrinkles fail.

When, having likened the Viscount to an Indian chief, I liken him also to a barrel-bodied British squire of the John Bull type I may put some strain upon the reader's credulity; yet there was in him as much of the one as of the other.

**I** WAS a boy of fourteen," he said, "when your Commodore Perry came to Japan. At that time, and for a considerable period afterwards I was 'anti-foreigner'—that is, I was opposed to the abandonment of our old Japanese isolation and to the opening of relations with foreign Powers.

"The majority of thoughtful men felt as I did. Our trouble with the Jesuits, in the latter part of the sixteenth and early part of the seventeenth century, came about through a fear which grew up among us that they were trying to get political control of Japan. This fear resulted in their expulsion from the country, as well as some persecution of themselves and their converts, and it was then that our policy of isolation began. More lately we had seen the Opium War in China, and that had added to our conviction that in attempting to open relations with Far Eastern countries foreign Powers were merely seeking territory, and that they were utterly unscrupulous.

"When I reached the age of twenty-five, I became a retainer of Yoshinobu Tokugawa, a powerful prince and kinsman of Iyemochi Tokugawa, who was then Shogun. Not being of noble family, I did not belong to Prince Yoshinobu's intimate circle, but was a member of what might be termed the middle group at his court.

"He was then acting as intermediary between the Shogun and the Imperial Court at Kyoto—for, though the Shogun then ruled the land, as shoguns had for centuries, there was maintained a fiction that he did so by Imperial consent.

"When Iyemochi died, the powerful *daimyos* nominated my lord, Prince Yoshinobu, to succeed him. I was opposed to his accepting the office, for the country was then in a very unsettled condition, and I felt sure that the next Shogun, whoever he might be, would have serious difficulties to encounter; especially with the important question of foreign relations to the fore, and with such powerful lords as those of Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa, and Hizen becom-

ing increasingly hostile to the Shogunate and increasingly favorable to the Imperial house.

"The fact that Prince Yoshinobu had acted as intermediary between his kinsman, the fourteenth Shogun, and the Imperial Court at Kyoto, made it a delicate matter for him later to accept the Shogunate. Moreover, though he belonged to the Tokugawa family, his branch of the family, the Mito branch, had always insisted upon Imperial supremacy in Japan. However, circumstances compelled him to accept the office. I was greatly disappointed when he did so.

"This occurred two years after I became his retainer. I was now vice-minister of his treasury, with the additional duties of keeping track of all modern innovations and supervising the new-style military drill, with rifles, which we were then taking up.

"Shortly after becoming Shogun, Yoshinobu decided to send his younger brother, Akitaké, to France to be educated, and he appointed me a member of the *entourage* that was to accompany the young man. I was then twenty-seven years old.

"We sailed in January, 1867—a party of twenty-five, among whom were a doctor, an officer who went to study artillery, and various other officers of the Shogun's government, besides Akitaké's seven personal attendants.

"For international purposes the Shogun was now called Tycoon, for the word 'shogun' means 'generalissimo' and carries with it no connotation of rulership; whereas 'tycoon' means 'great prince'—and of course it seemed proper enough for a great prince to treat with foreign Powers. As brother of the Tycoon, Akitaké received in Europe the title 'Highness.'

"Matters looked very ominous for the Shogunate at the time we left Japan, but I felt that the best thing for me to do was to go abroad and learn all I could, with a view to being better able to serve my country when I should return.

"The members of our party wore the Japanese costume, including topknots and two swords. I, however, devised a special elegance for myself. I had heard that the Governor of Saigon, where our ship was to stop, intended to welcome us officially, so I had a dress coat made." The Viscount shook with laughter as he recalled the episode. "It wasn't a dress suit—just the coat. And when we got to Saigon I wore that coat over my Japanese silks, in the daytime!

"Our lack of experience with European ways caused many amusing things to happen. For instance, when we were in the train crossing the Isthmus of Suez—there was no Canal then—one member of the party, unaccustomed to window-glass, threw an orange-peel, expecting it to go out of the window. The peel hit the glass and bounced back, falling into the lap of an official who had come to escort us across the isthmus. We were much embarrassed by that.

"Later, in Paris, another absurd thing

occurred. You must understand that in Japan it is customary for guests leaving a house where they have been entertained to wrap up cakes and such things and take them home. One member of our party, who had never seen ice-cream before, attempted this, wrapping the ice-cream in paper and putting it in the front of his kimono. Needless to say, the ice-cream was no longer ice-cream when he got back to the hotel, and he himself was not very comfortable.

"The Paris Exposition of 1867 was going on when we arrived. When it was over, we traveled through Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, Italy, and England. Originally it was planned that after our official tour we should settle down to study, and I was eager for this time to come. However, it was not long before we received news that the Shogunate had fallen.

"The news was puzzling. I could not gather what was happening in Japan. First I heard that Yoshinobu, as Shogun, had publicly returned full authority to the Emperor, but later came word of the battle of Toba-Fushimi, in which it was said that troops of the Imperial party had defeated troops of

the Shogun. This made it appear that Yoshinobu had played false, first publicly relinquishing the Shogun's power, then changing his mind and fighting to maintain it. These seemingly conflicting acts puzzled me, for I knew that Yoshinobu was a man of the highest honor.

"I had intended to study in France for five years, but there came a messenger from Japan saying that Akitaké had become head of the Mito branch of the Tokugawa family, which made it necessary for us to abandon our plans and return. We sailed from England in December, 1867, reaching Japan in November, 1868, eleven months later.

"I was dumfounded by the change I found. Though I knew that the Shogun Government had fallen, I had not visualized what that would mean. My lord, Yoshinobu, was held prisoner in a house in Suruga. Learning that he was allowed to see his intimate friends and retainers, I journeyed to Suruga, where I had audience with him several times. I found him reticent, and was able to get from him no explanation of the mysterious course he had pursued.

"After having been held prisoner for a year, he was released, but he continued for thirty years to reside in the neighborhood of Suruga, leading a secluded life. Not until thirty-one years after his resignation of the Shogunate did he come to Tokyo. Four years after that the Emperor created him a prince of the new régime. This showed pretty clearly that the Emperor did not mistrust him.

"For twenty years after my return to Japan I was unable to get at the bottom of this matter. Meanwhile the question was constantly discussed. Those hostile to Yoshinobu insisted that he had not acted with sincerity. It was contended that the burdens connected with the opening of foreign relations had led him to lay down the Shogunate, but that later he changed his mind and fought to retain it. On the face of it, that seemed true. Yoshinobu was called a coward and a traitor, and was severely criticised for having retired, personally, from the battle of Toba-Fushimi.

"On the other hand, those who supported Yoshinobu asserted that he had acted logically and wisely; that he had seen that his Government was going to fall, and had been entirely honest in surrendering the Shogunate prior to the battle. They said he had not desired battle, but had set out for Kyoto to see the Emperor with a view to arranging details, especially with regard to the future welfare of his retainers. But when a great lord traveled in those times he traveled with an army; when the men of Choshu and Satsuma learned that Yoshinobu was moving toward Kyoto with his soldiers, they came out and attacked him, believing, or pretending to believe, that he came on a hostile errand.

"At this time the Emperor was but seventeen years of age and the Government was in the hands of Elder Statesmen of the Imperial Party. The Em-



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peror himself probably had no idea on what errand Yoshinobu was approaching Kyoto; but the Elder Statesmen, belonging as they did to clans hostile to the Shogunate, sent out troops.

"Many years passed before the truth of the matter began to become clear. At last, when the old wounds were pretty well healed, I undertook the compilation of a history of Yoshinobu's life and times. Finally, I asked him point-blank about the events connected with his resignation and the subsequent battle. He told me that he had indeed started to Kyoto on a peaceful errand, but that when the forces sent out by the great clansmen of the Imperial Party were met, he could not control his own men. He had neither sought nor desired any such conflict. Therefore, feeling that his highest duty was to the Emperor, he himself withdrew from the battle, taking no part in it, and returned whence he had come, going into retirement. He knew of course that the battle would put him in a false light, and he decided that the wisest and most honorable course for him to pursue was to show by his life in retirement his absolute submission to the Emperor.

"In order fully to appreciate why Yoshinobu was so ready to lay down his power the old Japanese doctrine of loyalty to the throne must be fully grasped. This loyalty amounts to a religion, and permeates the whole life of Japan. That is why the Shoguns, who for so many centuries ruled Japan, never attempted to usurp Imperial rank, but were satisfied, while usurping the power, to preserve the form of governing always as vice-regents.

"It is my personal belief that when Yoshinobu Tokugawa accepted the Shogunate despite the opposition of his trusted retainers, he did so with the full intention of restoring to the Imperial house its rightful power. I used to ask him about this, and, while he never admitted it, he never denied it. That was characteristic of him. He was the most modest and self-effacing of men—the last man who would have claimed for himself the credit for performing a self-

sacrificing and heroic act of patriotism. For him the performance of the act was sufficient."

THROUGHOUT my talk with Viscount Shibusawa I felt in him the passionate loyalty of the retainer to his lord. Where I had wished for reminiscences of a more personal nature, the Viscount, I could see, thought of himself first of all in his relation to the family of Prince Yoshinobu, the last Shogun, whose retainer he was. He was not interested in telling me of his own career, but he was profoundly interested in seeing that I, being a writer, should understand the relationship of Prince Yoshinobu to the Imperial restoration. His attitude made me think of that of an old gentleman, now dead and gone, who had been the adjutant of Robert E. Lee, and who loved Lee and loved to talk about him. When I interviewed him, it was the same. I could induce him to talk but little of his own experiences. It was all Lee.

The loyalty of the retainer to the family of his lord is also to be seen in the relationship between the Viscount and young Prince Keikyu Tokugawa, son of Prince Yoshinobu. After the death of the father the Viscount continued to act as adviser to the son. He became his chief counselor, and when, a few years since, he resigned from the Board of Directors of the First National Bank of Japan—the bank which he founded five years after the restoration—it was young Prince Tokugawa who succeeded to the empty chair.

The Prince, who is a member of the House of Peers, is known in the United States, having last come here during the war as representative of the Japanese Red Cross.

VISCOUNT SHIBUSAWA is also a figure not unfamiliar to Americans, having visited this country several times. I am indebted to him for an anecdote illustrative of the prodigious memory of President Roosevelt.

"Eighteen years ago," he said, "when Mr. Roosevelt was President, I called upon him at the White House. We had

a pleasant talk. He complimented the behavior of the Japanese troops in the Boxer trouble, saying that they were not only brave but orderly and well disciplined. Then he spoke with admiration of the art of Japan.

"I said to him: 'Mr. President, I am only a banker, and I regret to say that in my country banking is not yet so highly developed as is art.'

"Perhaps it will be," he replied, 'by the time we meet again.'

"Thirteen years later, when I called upon him at his home at Oyster Bay, he took up the conversation where we had left off.

"The last time I saw you,' he said, 'I did not ask you about banking in Japan. Now I want you to tell me all about it.'"

As I was leaving the bungalow in the garden late in the afternoon of the second day spent in interviewing the Viscount, the thought came to me that probably I should never again talk with a man who had lived through such transitions. I wanted a souvenir, and I wished it to be something emblematic of the changes witnessed by those shrewd, humorous old eyes.

Therefore, not without some hesitation, I asked if he would be so kind as to put on his two samurai swords and let me take his photograph.

He despatched a servant, who presently returned from the house bearing the swords. The Viscount tucked them through his sash, and I snapped the shutter, hoping fervently that the late afternoon light would prove to have been adequate.

As the reader may see for himself, the picture turned out well. Indeed, it turned out better than I myself had anticipated, for besides the swords and silken robes of Old Japan, there may be seen in it a very modern note.

It was the Viscount's grandson who called attention to that when I showed him the photograph.

"Yes," he said, with a smile, "you have there the swords of Old Japan. But the watchchain—that is an anachronism."

## MAJESTY AND MIRAGES

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE FROM LONDON

BY CHARLES HENRY MELTZER

ENGLAND, or, to be more correct, the United Kingdom, is not the least democratic country in the world. Some think, indeed, that it has far more freedom than the United States. But here democracy seems not to clash with royalty.

King George of course is altogether harmless to those who gladly call themselves his subjects. He earns his salary, too, by honest work—such work as few of those who rank as laboring folk would like to shoulder. And there are

times when, in the good old way, he gives his people a great deal of pleasure by forming part of such right royal shows as I have seen here in the past few days.

There was a tendency some years ago to slight him as a royal figurehead. But, though less fond of self-assertion than his regretted father, Edward, and his still honored grandmother, he has won wide respect, and even love, by his good sense and simple modesty.

One day last week I saw him very

closely as he rode from his palace to present new colors to three of the crack regiments of the Guards. He does not shine much when astride a horse; for he is more at home on deck at sea than in what seems to him the irksome saddle. Yet in his scarlet uniform he looked a King, despite his round back and his awkward air. Behind him rode the young Prince, bright as ever, and, side by side with him, the Duke of Connaught. The Guards, in their red bravery, dazzled one. They took one back