

Funny Signs of the Times in Japan.

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STREET signs are often of much interest to the tourist. In Japan he will find some that are probably unique. Yet in spite of their oddity they are truly signs of the times.

There is some history in telling how they came to be, for they are of the period when Japan was stepping from her old clothes into her new. Feudalism with its daimiyos and military retainers was disappearing, and so were caste distinctions. The Government had just established a system of schools on a German-American plan, with much English and much military drill, and had set all the youth of the nation to school together to gain Western knowledge. Children of the four classes of society—warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants, and even of the outcast Eta—met on a common footing for the first time.

Hasami San, the son of Kami San, the barber, was the equal of the son of the Samurai, and the barber was happy in the fact. Kami San knew nothing whatever of foreign ways. He was of the old *régime*, but he had perfect faith in his Government, and if the Government favoured foreign ways, surely they were good. And this English language, too, which all the schools were teaching, so that no matter where one went he would hear of the great Peter Parley and his history, of Lord Macaulay, Clive, and Warren Hastings, and of George Washington and the cherry tree: was not Hasami studying about these things every day in classes, side by side with gentlefolk? Surely he must put up an English sign to show the world that his abode was the home of learning as well as other houses, even those of great pretensions. His son should have the job—Hasami San, who played with the children of fighting men and of the owners of many rice-fields, who knew the characters for writing Eigo, as he called the foreign tongue, and who even at this moment was in military uniform, drilling to become a soldier in the army of the great Mikado. The barber's nose was high.

Kami San talked of these things to his friend Hige San while Hige was receiving a ha'penny's worth of treatment. He had gone entirely over Hige San's face with his thin, narrow blade, even to the eyelids, and

now had hold of his friend's nose and was reaming the hair from his nostrils with a tiny, gouge-shaped razor, that few but a native barber would dare to use.

"The times are changing," he said as he rolled Hige's head a little to the right, twirling his gouge, "and when Hasami has leisure from his studies in the coming rest days of the school he shall show by the new knowledge that I have the pride to make changes, too, keeping by the times closely in my business."

Here he lifted Hige San a little, saying: "Augustly condescend honourable head to elevate," and began to shave the ears. He did so deftly and thoroughly both inside and out. When this was over, and he had taken a run round the neck, he struck a tuning-fork and put the handle, which had a nob on its end, first into one ear and then into the other. The tuning-fork gives the customer the impression that he can hear himself purr, and so makes him happy.

Hige San arose, shining and beaming, paid his two sen, said that Kami San was augustly gloriously expertissimo, and declared that an English sign over the sliding doors that made the front wall of the shop would be an honour to the neighbourhood, a sign in truth befitting the new era which Tenshi Sama, the Son of Heaven, had deigned to honour with the name of Meiji—the epoch of enlightenment.

"Oh, it will be of course a most unworthy and disgraceful object, as is everything in my miserable shop," replied Kami San. "But the new language from the wonderful people of the West, that it is that I wish to place on high."

The "rest days" Kami had referred to came soon, and Hasami San had the leisure of his first vacation. He had learned the alphabet—aye, bee, shee, dee, ee, efoo, jee, etc.—and could tell a "dee" from an "oh" almost every time. Besides, he knew many words and short sentences from his first reader. He could not pronounce "el," it is true; the nearest he could come to it was "eroo," as is the case with the general run of Japanese to-day; such words as "literal" are beyond them, but he could draw characters skilfully, English letters being simple compared with the Chinese intricacies that youngsters learn to write so deftly with a brush.



From a]

A JAPANESE HAIRDRESSER'S SHOP.

[Photograph.

So when his father explained the sign idea to him he set to work diligently, and by the time the holidays were over he had produced an ornament over his father's Chinese lettered sign that filled the old man's heart with joy. It was in three lines, which he printed and shaded beautifully. It read:—

BARBER
TO SHAVE BEARD OR TO ORESS
HAIRS WAY.

Kami San was the proudest man in town when he gazed up at the completed work. He gave a dinner to celebrate the event, and had all his friends in for the day. Sake flowed. There were raw fish, boiled fish, broiled fish, and cuttle fish in profusion, and even the hardy little fishes that submit to slicing up alive. In the evening he had lanterns all over the front of his shop, with special illumination for the sign. Geisha strummed their samisens and danced and sang, and the guests had so good a time that many of them forgot all about going home until Kami San awoke them in the morning.

The fame of the

sign spread. Soon it was the envy of every one of Kami San's brothers in the "hair's way," and of the trade folk generally. Those of them who had sons that had learned the "aye, bee, shee," commanded them to do as Hasami had done, and those who had no sons sought to engage Hasami's services. Kami San would not hear of his boy's neglecting his studies of the wonderful Eigo, however, nor the military drills. He was busy, too, he said, for customers flocked to him so that he had to hire two more assistants, and he needed Hasami himself whenever the youngster had any spare time.

As he said to Hige San one day as he was going carefully over the tip of his friend's nose, and giving a curve deftly to his eyebrows, he knew when the honourable good thing came his way; he was a respecter of signs, and would not do anything to make a good one common. Except that his son had explained to him by means of a dictionary



From a]

A LEATHER MERCHANT'S SHOP.

[Photograph.



From a]

AN ENTOMOLOGIST'S.

[Photograph.

what his sign signified he did not know its meaning, but its influence as it shone down upon the passing throng was agreeable to his ideas, and he proposed not to meddle with it.

Kami San's lack of assistance did not hinder matters much, however. The sign craze was on, and it lasted for longer than the rabbit craze. But, then, the Government put a stop to that, whereas it has never interfered with signs. English lettering appeared in Yokohama, Tokio, Nagasaki, Hakodate, Kobe, Kyoto, and hundreds of other places, even at the tea-houses along the great highways where the jinriksha men stopped for a sip of tea and a whiff from their tiny pipes.

"The Tas are restful and for sharpen the minds," read one of these signs. And another :—

"The Genuine-I-y bier buy the health for drink." And a third :—

"Of smokes our tobaco is preasure to our Tongue and give the Healthiness to Hers and Hes! Also All People by It."

These little
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notices in unexpected places relieved the monotony of a journey on a dull day. Some of them have disappeared now that the railway has come, and the old Kaidos with their inns do little of their former business. But those in the towns remain, except where they were too frank, like the language of the "damyoureyesan," as the treaty-

port natives call bluejackets. The camera has caught them, and should Kami San and Hasami San be taken up in a chariot of fire their work would live. An Eta now become heimin, a member of the great class that includes all but officials and nobles, expanded under the radiant announcement over the entrance of his leather shop :—

TO TRADE HAIR-SKIN SORT SHOP.

An entomologist of some repute in Yokohama, who supplied collectors of insects and also silk raisers with their "seeds," orna-



From a]

UMBRELLAS, CANES, AND PARASOLS.

[Photograph.



From a]

A BUTCHER'S SHOP.

[Photograph.

mented the front of his place of business with his name and the words :—

BUTTERFLY AND WORM
MERCHANTS.

He may have been leading a double life.

The man who safeguards against sun and rain declared the fact publicly as follows :—

A SHOP

THE KIND OF PARASOL OR
UMBRELLA AND STICK,

and either of "parasol" or of "umbrella and stick" he had great variety.

Japan looked askance at butchers in the early days of the new order. Beef and pork were tabooed pretty well all over the country. Even now it is not easy to get animal food in the small villages of the interior, where some Buddhist priests still declare war against flesh and wine. But medical advice, following a cholera scare, has had much influ-

ence, so that one may see this sign to-day exposed boldly to view :—

COWMEAT AND
PIGMEAT.

In a country where there has been much raw fish, especially salmon, and not particularly good drainage until William Kinninmond Burton took to teaching it sanitation, troublesome ailments would occur. To one of these Mr. Swiftriver had turned his attention with success. His sign read as

one straight line : "Tape-worm Swiftriver Shop."

Mr. Pinecape, who dealt in coals, took the public into his confidence and confessed the secret of his success. Beneath his name and address are these two lines :—

HONEST, INDUSTORIOUS MAKE THE CONT-
INUAL PROSPERITY.

Mr. Seedsmall, who dealt in so-called temperance drinks which the Japanese call



From a]

A COAL-DEALER'S SIGN.

[Photograph.



From a]

A DEALER IN TEMPERANCE DRINKS.

[Photograph.

“gun water,” because of the “pop,” got hold of a dictionary in which someone had translated the names of his beverages into Japanese phonetic equivalents. These Japanese syllables do not conform with extreme nicety to English sounds, principally because none of them ends in a consonant, but always in a vowel, and none of them has the sound of “l” in it. This is the English part of Seedsmall’s sign :—

RAMUNE SOUDA SASUPRE ZINZINBIYA
JINJIYAE-L,

which one sees at a glance to mean lemon, soda, sarsaparilla, gingerbeer, and gingerale.

The brilliancy of official uniforms attracted the attention of a certain tailor, and he sought to make business amongst the men of the army, the navy, and the Government. His sign read :—

GOLD TAIL SHOP.
Coat-skirt decoration apparently was his specialty.

Another sign,

about told everyone that in the tobacco business Mr. Pinemountain of the Ginza was supreme.

And so one might go on indefinitely quoting signs, labels on bottles and cigarette packages, the covers of books, and what not, all of them strange and some of them incomprehensible, yet all of them signs of the effort of Old Japan to become New Japan, an effort that has been triumphant.



From a]

A “GOLD TAIL SHOP.”

[Photograph.