

MIRROR, SWORD, AND JEWEL

By HERMANN BOHNER

On December 8 Japan entered the greatest struggle of her national history. What gave her the courage to take on the two most powerful empires in the Pacific?

In the heat of the present political and military conflicts most people's opinions of other nations are dictated by political opportunism and depend on whether that nation is in the same camp or the opposite one. To be sure, it is necessary to consider realities and facts, but once in a while we should also turn to the imponderables, to the invisible essence of a nation, her spirit and ideas, on which she must rely in times of decision. So we have asked a man who stands outside of the political controversies of the day to write on what he would consider the essence of Japan. Dr. Hermann Böhner, a leading German Orientalist, is not the first, of course, to write on that subject as such. Many books and articles have been published on the soul of Japan, on "bushido" etc., but Dr. Böhner treats the subject from an entirely new and original angle by making the three mystic insignia of Japan the central point of his essay.—K. M.

1.

If we were to pick, by rule and compass, with strictest observance of all mathematical, logical, and geographical standards, the theoretical nucleus of the Japanese Empire, this "country strewn about like grains of millet," we would hit upon the very province from which it has been built up during the last two thousand years: Yamato. Every traveler to Japan knows Yamato: for he knows Nara, the old capital with its herds of tame deer, its great Buddha Vairochana, its wonderful shrines and temples. And Yamato is the region around Nara.

2.

Like the Englishman, the Japanese is an islander. The sea gives strength and unity hardly imaginable to continental nations. Unity is the natural disposition of Japan's land and people. Nevertheless, strong as this disposition for unity may be, the converse disposition toward particularism and disunity is equally strong. The "doctors" of nations, the physicists and geographers, have in their cold-blooded, impartial "medical" examination established this peculiar constitution of Japan. They

call it the "beehive" structure of Japan. As in a beehive, cell adjoins cell, each strictly partitioned from the other; in front there is always the sea, on the other three sides mountains form a boundary. In early times there was no greater crime in Japan than to pierce through the wall separating one cell from the other.

In the end, however, this disunity had to be overcome. Among the innumerable cells there had to be one whose situation and nature was such that gradually, in a process lasting a thousand years, all other cells could be united around it. This central cell is Yamato with the coastal strip of Osaka.

3.

Today the Japanese Empire extends from Alaska-like regions to the equator. In the North the domestic animal is the reindeer, in the South palm trees grow. The central province had to be somewhere in the middle. In olden times the South and the Southwest were far ahead in culture. Japanese history flowed from here. The North and the Northeast were wild colonial territory; the northern island of Hokkaido still has something of that

character. The central cell had to be the agent between North and South, East and West. It had to be strong on land: the great wheat and rice plain of Yamato provided this strength. It had to be strong on the sea: Yamato has access to it at the strategic spot where Ocean and Inland Sea meet.

The choice of this place, this cradle of Japanese history, is more than amazing. And when one reads that the first ruler, called "God and Hero" (*Jin-mu* 神武), came from farthest Kyushu, landed just here and picked this very spot to found the empire, it seems the purest "chance"—as does everything factual in history. Yet it is so logical, so mathematically exact, so perfect! The golden hawk, the divine bird, descended upon the bow of the hero and guided him. Verily it is not for nothing that the story is told thus.

4.

To the impartial observer the further development of Japan appears to correspond to this first choice. Other nations, one might say, grow in their history like oaks or beeches, or other trees that appear tangled and irregular in growth. The unfolding of Japan has something of the extraordinary, ornamental regularity of the growth of a fir tree. Regular on all sides, rising step by step, adding epoch to epoch—the historian is almost afraid to record such regularity as a fact; for it seems like a construction.

Like a child grows this Yamato-Japan. At first the "residences" change with every ruler, as if the child were learning to walk. Gradually they become larger and larger. There is the Fujiwara capital; stately though it is, it disappears. Then come the Asuka capitals, the earlier and the later; amazing remains—world-famous temples and statues—still tell of Asuka. But this "residence" perishes too. Finally the residence has become so big in grounds and buildings that it can no longer be easily moved: Nara is founded in 710 and lasts for nearly a hundred years, until inner tension

(between "state" and "church") and foreign policy require the capital to be moved slightly further north. Heian-Kyoto arises, the crowning pinnacle of Yamato, and remains the capital for a thousand years.

5.

Standing on the terrace of the beautiful Nara Hotel, we see before us the town of Nara. About a tenth of the old capital still remains; all the rest is now fields again. From north to south extends the great wheat plain of Yamato, this cradle of Japanese history. Here on our side are bordering hills and mountains stretching from north to south, and beyond the plain are similar mountains. There Mount Shigi towers with its temples, the site of one of the most decisive battles fought in the history of Japan, the battle that decided the adoption of the culture of the Asiatic mainland, Buddhism and Confucianism. The Yamato river flows there through a valley to the coastal strip of Osaka and into the open sea; there, too, the imperial road leads to the sea. Over there also tower Mount Katsuragi and Mount Kongo, the Ossa and Olympus of Yamato; and far away in the south, stretching from east to west, the barrier of the high Kii mountains, with their ancient memories and now for the greater part declared a national park, forms the border. In the south-eastern corner a road leads over a pass through a mass of mountains to the innermost part of this cradle of Japanese history, to Ise. As secluded as Ise is, walled in by mountains on three sides, it is wide open on the fourth side: the ocean lies before it, the abyss of the world in ancient times out of which rises the divine sun, greeting this land first among all others. From Ise, by sea, the East and the North stood open; no route was more direct to Kamakura and Edo-Tokyo than by Ise.

6.

A peculiar problem since ancient times is the *Ise-ya* (伊勢屋), the man-

of Ise. First of all he is a man of the sea, comparable to the Viking, or the man of the "hanse." In the whole empire there is no place so distant that the *Ise-ya* is not found there; he defies every weather, every storm. Moreover he is, like the "Hanseate," a merchant, a trader, an industrialist. Ise has since time immemorial stood for spinning and weaving; the sun goddess herself is not only the giver of food, the goddess of wheat and rice, but also the first spinner. Today the *Ise-ya* is represented by seafaring, widely experienced industrialists, familiar with all conditions of the empire, the pioneers in large-scale capitalism, creators of huge department stores (e.g. Matsuzakaya, "business [man, house] from Matsuzaka"), and the founders of textile and other trusts. He is the man who knows what the times demand. Modern organization, technology, and great cities are opened up through him. Both for the dictatorial-imperial unification of the empire under the Tokugawa Shoguns (1603—1868) and for the Meiji restoration, it was the *Ise-ya* who had the first and most thorough understanding. But when one asks about spiritual things, about the real representative of true modern Japanese thoughts, beliefs, and desires, it is also an *Ise-ya*, Motoori Norinaga (1730—1801), born in the town of Matsuzaka in the district of Ise (hence also a *Matsuzaka-ya*), who is named before all others. "We must take hold of ourselves, of that which is essentially Japanese in us," is Noringaga's incessant cry, "the true Japanese mind (*Yamato-gokoro* 大和心), and with that we shall master all problems, conquer all difficulties." Thus this man carries on the oldest traditions of Ise, anticipating the future, grasping the dawn of a new period, and exerting a decisive influence upon his time. No one in modern times can compete with him in importance in this spiritual world of Japan.

Ise itself is like the man of Ise: open as it is to the world, with its open mind for all that is modern, Ise still remains the innermost and most silent place of Yamato, indeed, of the

whole empire. It is the most retired place of abode, the sacred ground filled with prayer and adoration, the sanctuary of the three holy insignia of the empire—Mirror, Sword, and Jewel. And just as the *Ise-ya* goes forth to the most distant points of the empire, people still stream, as they have for centuries, from all places, be they ever so far away, to the center, to Ise. High and low, old and young, soldiers and civilians, people from all classes and professions come here to pray, to adore, to feel the throb of the very heart of Japan and to take home again some of this feeling. No ruler ascends the throne without sending messengers to Ise and going there himself in a solemn procession. No member of cabinet takes office, no high officer assumes his post without making a pilgrimage to Ise and calling upon the deity in prayer. On December 30, 1941, for instance, Premier Tojo visited Ise to report on the outbreak of the Greater East Asia War and to offer prayers for an ultimate victory. Even the simplest man goes, at least once in his life, to Ise. In times when there was an inner agitation in the nation, in periods of crisis, these pilgrimages developed into real mass-movements (see Böhner, "Mass-Nukemairi," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. IV, 2; Tokyo 1941), as if the people, in an unconscious dark urge, wanted to lay the national problems before the deity, just as Army, Navy, and Government seem consciously to put all decisions before the all-highest.

7.

Yamato and Ise—they are inseparable. The blossoming of Yamato, to be sure, became ever mightier, greater, more explicit. "If you wish to see the art of the great Wei dynasty, of the Sui period," connoisseurs of Chinese culture say to us, "go to Yamato, that treasure house of such art; it will take you weeks to see it all." "If you want to see T'ang culture," they say "in all spheres of life, but above all in statues and paintings, go to Yamato with its countless temples. There T'ang is preserved in its essence." Yamato possesses

an almost inexhaustible wealth of examples of the rising levels of culture.

What a world of statues, pictures, of visible manifestations! Greece, the richest treasure house of art in the whole world, has its Oriental parallel here in Yamato.

Yet did not the Greeks, those sculptors and creators of form, know a time long before all statues? It was their most sacred time, their pristine age. In Ise this distant, sacred time continues to exist. Ise is tranquil, simple, like the state of childhood; it does not yet express itself in huge buildings, towering pagodas, vast monastery grounds, or universities. The sacred grove is the dwelling-place of the deity; here one remembers that all divine worship originally took place in the open. The shrine that has now been set up is simplicity itself, a log building such as the head of a clan might have possessed in primeval times. Nor does Ise express itself yet in statues and images. *Shin-tai* (神體), "*corpus dei*," was the name given to that in which the deity was embodied. For comparison we may take the crown: all kingship rests in the crown; however we may wish to explain it—logically or alogically, naturally or supernaturally—the crown is kingship. Or again: in other times man saw all supremacy and power in gold. The amassing of gold meant power. But what is gold? It might be called a human *shin-tai*. *Shin-tai* is Ise's form of expression, and the three great *shin-tai* are Mirror, Sword, and Jewel.

Yamato, on the other hand, and the rest of Japan expressed themselves in ever greater, more numerous, and more developed forms of sculpture, painting, and architecture. That which took place in the realm of statues and images was also effected in all other spheres of life, as, for example, in the constantly improved and developed forms and terms of law, in the increasingly elaborate rituals, teachings, dogmas, and forms of thought. All that is represented in the Occident by the

tremendous development of medieval systems of law and government, by Scholasticism and mysticism and their growth, finds its Oriental parallel in Japan. Thousands of statues, covered with gold, were crowded into a temple; there could never be enough statues to embody the presence of the deity.

There came a time when everything had been, as it were, developed, articulated, unfolded to the utmost, when it had become rigid and lifeless. Whether it was movements of the church, groups within the state, forms of justice, thought, ceremonies, human relations—in all these spheres Neo-Confucianism developed a kind of enlightenment which, in its rational systematization, was no less rigid than the later development of the Western period of enlightenment. Buddhism had developed all kinds of trends, from that of the most extreme schematization to that which obstinately held to the one rule and tradition of having no rule or tradition.

Moreover the Occident was approaching. Slowly, through the centuries, since the beginning of modern history, it crept over the globe. Western navigation, piracy, and trade, as well as its spiritual world, science, and faith, stretched out their arms. What blossoming was exhibited by the Occident in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries; what tremendous force, almost irresistible to human power! It is well known how in the Meiji period (from 1868 onwards) the Japanese burned and destroyed their most precious treasures, pictures and statues of inestimable value, in order to devote themselves entirely to the new Western influence. It is even told of enthusiastic patriots that in all seriousness they wanted to do away with their own Japanese language in favor of a leading Occidental tongue.

The reader may perhaps think of the severe Japanese persecution of Christians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Latest research has disclosed a most curious fact, namely that even Christianity was openly

received in Japan. But as the Pope's line of demarcation had left room for doubts, the religious orders were in dispute as to which should have Japan as a mission territory. One might say that it was the Christians themselves who threw each other out of the country. The missionaries themselves had not yet progressed to worship and freedom in spirit and in truth.

8.

How were the Japanese to resist this flood of outwardly infinitely superior forces, of inwardly bewitching and fascinating power? The Japanese answer is remarkable enough: "Poetry gives us the strength; we must turn to the songs of our people. There lies invincibility." It is the tongue of Ise which speaks here. Language is the *Shin-tai* of nation and empire; in poetry it is at its most direct, its most pure. Kamo Mabuchi (1697-1769), the teacher of Norinaga, was the first to speak thus. The "noble straight soul" (*takaku naoki kokoro* 高 < 直 & 心) of the ancients, he says, is the true and original shape of the human spirit and it alone is decisive; it is true that present-day man has lost more and more of the old upright spirit, but in the poetry of the ancients the means can be found to regain it.

Those who, like Mabuchi, live in the joy of Japanese poetry feel more and more conscious of the Japanese ego. The feeling of superiority towards the whole world grows increasingly. These creators of the Japanese movement (as we shall call them) have to an ever increasing degree a feeling of superiority toward everything else, not only the belief, therefore, to be able to endure in the face of approaching difficulties, but the positive conviction of historical superiority. It is, in short, simply the feeling common to all life, which they, containing within themselves the essence of the Japanese nation and spirit, display. And it is the language of Ise, the tranquillity of Ise, that we perceive here.

9.

In speaking of Yamato-Ise, the

central cell of Japan's beehive structure, let us not forget one thing: the living creature within, the man, the clan, the nation. To put it simply, in every cell there was a clan (*uji* 氏), a main *uji* with many sub- and sub-sub-*ujis*. Japanese history is a history of *ujis*. And the central *uji* of Yamato-Ise gradually, in a process covering thousands of years, attached all other *ujis* to itself. These *ujis* are living creatures, not mechanisms. The individualistic-liberalistic Occidental presentation of Japanese history believes itself to be serving the truth by pointing out that many of Japan's traditions are irrational and fantastic. Historians would do well to observe the manner in which the divine estimation of King Saul and King David is conceived in the Bible. Even the fact of Jesus' genealogy in the Gospels is probably not fully understood today; the explanation is generally too rational, too systematic. Every cell in Japan is saturated with such a genealogy, and the central genealogy, in tremendous growth, attaches all others to itself.

10.

The Orient speaks, simply and deeply, of the Three Powers (*san tsai* 三才): heaven, earth, and man. Man is the union of heaven and earth. In every family there is heaven and earth: to his family, the father is "heaven," to other families, as the representative of his own family, he is usually "earth." As in the family, so in the *uji*, so in the nation. King, priest, and prophet—that is a triple function, as the Bible shows. The central *uji* and its leader is "heaven" or "god" to the other *ujis*; toward other countries it is the sum of the empire; toward God it represents nation and man. The reader who wishes to study this in more detail should read the medieval Japanese work on state philosophy written at the time of Dante, the *Jinnoshotoki* (Böhner, *Jinnoshotoki*, Vol. I, introduction and text; Vol. II, commentary; Tokyo 1939).

11.

Ise-Yamato, how closely they belong together! We are still shown the

original Ise (Moto-Ise), near the residence of the first ruler. The tenth ruler could no longer endure having the *corpus dei* always with him, so he had an image of the *shin-tai*, the Mirror, cast there in Kasanuhi. To the original image, however, he assigned a special sanctuary. This, one can say, was the beginning of Ise. The house of God and the house of the ruler are called by the same name in Japanese—*Mi-ya* (宮); act of God and founding of government are both *matsuri-goto* (まつりごと). Hitherto they had been one. Then came the split in this holy of holies, and Ise the sanctuary became henceforth more sacred than ever.

12.

The most sacred functions were entrusted to a priestess; in any case a priestess held sway in Ise during ancient and medieval times. She had to be of the noblest of all families, from the imperial house itself; she was a living sacrifice (*ikenie* 牲) of the central clan to the deity. The idea of the living sacrifice is one of the strongest and most penetrating in Japan. Devoted entirely to the deity, far from all earthly contamination, the sole calling of this priestess was to listen for the voice of god. To the modern Westerner this may seem a somewhat incomprehensible and impossible undertaking, although now the most modern religious movements again set this as a task for their members. And what, we may ask, in the final analysis is the meaning and content of our art, our science, even of our politics? Far from her people and separated from her family like Iphigenia, this priestess could, if her longing for house and home became too overwhelming, relinquish her office. Love of man had to be conquered, or she must give up her calling. The priestess had to have grown up among princes and rulers, equal to them in rank and position, able to think about matters of state, to understand great changes and events, to have the affairs of the people at heart. Medieval Japanese chronicles tell of the strange change which took

place, even physically, in the priestess when she had renounced everything and devoted herself entirely to the Great Divinity. Great age was also accorded to such a priestess. And it is a fact that in moments of crisis the divine instructions of this priestess have decisively influenced Japanese history, empire, and state.

High and low, prince and people, all ranks, all professions and guilds, all experience, all complaint and request converged here in Ise and came before the priestess. She had to have understanding for all and bear all in her heart; she laid everything before the deity, and she, speaking for the deity, gave answer and advice.

13.

The god of Ise was the sun—today we would probably say that the visible sun which we see with our eyes is the most visible manifestation of the deity. And the emblem of the sun is the first insignia of the empire—the *Mirror*. It is not a mirror in the mechanistic sense; it is, as it were, the sun itself. The sun brings light; not until the sun comes can we see. It is the same with the mirror. "The mirror adds nothing; it has no heart, no meaning of its own; in reflecting all that is, it reveals to the last detail what is right or wrong, what is good or evil."

So says the *Jinnoshotoki*, the great and to this day fundamental work, in referring to the first emblem. The reader will be reminded of the magic qualities of the mirror among all peoples. He may also think of the physician and his examination: no place for moralizing there, the important thing is not to hide or suppress anything and to make quite clear how matters stand. The Japanese have an excellent word for it—*ma-koto* (真言). *Koto* means thing, fact; *ma* is only an intensification, a kind of superlative. Thus *ma-koto*, the very thing, the absolute trueness, truth. The mirror is *ma-koto*.

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Those who go to Ise and stand before the sun, the deity, the Mirror, must become *ma-koto*. Since our whole existence is illuminated by light, all mist and darkness must give way. In Ise they must free themselves of their little ego—"the mirror has no heart of its own"—they must free themselves for the Great Whole, for the Light; they must become free to see themselves in truth. This is as true for the individual as for the whole nation. Those who see themselves in truth are saved from pride and wrong actions; at the same time, however, they become strong in themselves (just as Mabuchi and Norinaga grew strong and joyous in the Japanese spirit). They even see others as they are and as they are not. Hence—although this may sound curious at first, it is full of profound wisdom—the mirror is the true symbol of efficiency, of victory, and rule. "With the brightness (power of light) of the mirror, reflect what is under heaven (and conquer and rule)!" According to Japanese tradition, this is what the deity said to the first earthly ruler taking possession of the world. This saying permeates Japan just as the great words of God in *Genesis* resound through the Occident.

14.

The second emblem is the *Sword*. It is scarcely necessary to enlarge upon this. The essence of the sword is steadfastness, spirit, precision, and determination. Here life, there death. Before the mirror, the all-penetrating light of the sun, the existence of all, of friend and foe, of this or that nation, lies exposed. The *ma-koto* becomes apparent. Before the sword the same thing happens, only in a different way—the *ma-koto* impels to action. "Raise the sword of God and smite to earth those who do not give honor!" Thus the ancient command of the deity to the first ruler.

The sword is adit and exit. In the West one only thinks of the adit; in Japan one is particularly conscious of the exit. The Western knight

carries the sword: his course is one honor after another. It is the path of glory, of outward might, or rule, which is mostly seen in the Occident. But the Japanese mind, even that of the schoolboy, is saturated with the other meaning: knight, officer, means sacrifice, living sacrifice (*ikenie*) that is always and everywhere absolutely prepared for obedience, devotion, and the dedication of one's life.

15.

The *Tama* (玉) is the third of the three "divine" imperial emblems. It is the name given to the sphere, the most universal of all physical-spatial forms, as well as to the soul and the *Jewel* (precious, semi-precious stone, or crystal). In ancient thought these three are one. Can our thinking ever free itself from space? Do we not conceive the point, or what we call the center or middle as universally round, as a sphere (*tama*)? And this essential and active Something, as intangible and yet real as the point or center, that we call *ego* or soul—is it not really *tama*? Is not its symbol really *tama*? And what, then, the soul of the *uji*, the people even, the nation's personality? Does it not appear to us as *tama*?

We are reminded of the manifold use of the jewel or crystal in the magic of all peoples. In Japan itself we know many forms and conceptions of *tama*. When we come to Ise, pearls are offered us everywhere. Not very far from Ise girl-divers bring pearls up out of the depths of the sea. Is the pearl *tama*? What an impression it must have made on early man when he opened the shell brought up out of the sea and saw the full, softly shining roundness of the pearl with its tender magic! What lustrous light! It is born of the sun; not a hard, sharp light, but as from the slumber of the night, the shimmering palaces of the sea into which the sun sinks in the evening and from which it rises in the morning—a gentle, reflected gleam.

"The mirror is the body of the sun (is body, is sun); the jewel is the soul

of the moon (is soul, is moon)," says the *Jinnoshotoki*. In Japan there are countless legends about the palace in the sea. A mythical being, usually called a dragon, lives in this castle as king and ruler, and of incomparable beauty is *Tama*, his daughter, his *hi-me*, "maid of the sun." Whoever sees her in the palace of the sea, forgets all time; hours, years, even centuries flow past, heart and soul are enchanted by an irresistible spell. All life has the luster of the pearl. Happy the people and state who are imbued with it!

16.

The priestess, too, holding sway in Ise—what is she and her life? She is the mirror, the sword, but her real nature is *tama*. And this is how the nature and the power of *tama* is described by Japanese: it is tender, of an irresistible gentleness; it is "round," penetrating everywhere, offending nowhere, and shining; overpowering everything else by the magic of its inner and outer nature, "miraculously ruling everything under heaven." It is not only man, hard as steel and sword-like, who builds and determines the state. There is something else, hardly recognized as a power, difficult to express in words and statutes. It is especially to be met with in woman—the noble, the seemly, the gentle, the beautiful, that which unites above and below, harmony. *Wa* (和, in Chinese, *ho*) is the character for it. And it is by this very character—the highest symbol—that Yamato, or Japan, calls itself. "*Wa* is the only thing that is needed, that is important above all else," says the incomparable Crown Prince Shotoku (聖徳) in beginning the seventeen

articles of the first Japanese Constitution.

17.

A Buddhist symbol appearing very often in Japan is the *Nyoi-Tama* (如意玉), the "jewel of heart's desire." In our innermost souls there is a longing, like a seed, a slowly growing fruit. The mother bearing a child is most deeply aware of it; but even the little girl who carries and caresses her doll has this *tama*. Goethe, the most candid of all observers of nature and men, has said: "Inclination is already talent," and he precedes his autobiography with the words: "What one desires in youth, one has in abundance in old age." This is what *tama* expresses, and it applies to individuals as well as nations.

18.

But are not men as well as nations often mistaken in their innermost desires? The clearness of the mirror is needed: know yourself! Sword-like decision must follow, a casting-off of all but true desire; heroic determination and longing demand sacrifices. Then only can the power of *tama* be effective. For, according to an oft-repeated saying of the East, "the Invisible Ones know our hearts" (*Jinnoshotoki*); they usually know our desires better and more clearly than we do ourselves; and the sublimeness of their giving is as great as heaven is high over the earth. Here again we hear Ise speaking, and Yamato. The Buddhist symbols have finally shown man and nation the way toward the comprehension of their innermost desires—for this is the essence of life—and in them to progress to ever higher perfection.