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What the English Thought of the Japs

During the week I have been reading, or rather re-reading, some chapters in Chesterton's Autobiography, published first in 1936 and reprinted six times in less than a year. It is a most interesting book, not only for the Chestertonian style with its humor, paradoxes, asides, and character sketches of the famous men in politics and literature of the period, but also (and this especially for those of us who are old enough to remember) because it recalls so vividly the political controversies, alliances and literary debates which stirred so profoundly the world of English speech only a short generation ago, but which now in the same world seem as dead and distant as the siege of Troy or the founding of Rome.

But I have come across one chapter in this book which poses a question that is as much alive today as it was then: What the English people and their leaders think of the Japanese. In this chapter Chesterton tells that George Wyndham, then an eminent statesman and equally eminent as a man-of-letters, used to invite to his home over the week-end a number of men prominent in public life, but of different schools of literature and politics, so as to get a cross section of English thought on the questions of the day. He thus describes one of these meetings.

JAPAN AS TOPIC

"George Wyndham had all kinds of odd and original notions, and one of his eccentricities was to set a subject for conversation and ask for opinions all round the table, as

if it were an examination or a game. One day he sternly announced Japan! and asked me to start with a few words. I said: 'I distrust Japan because it is imitating us at our worst. If it had imitated the Middle Ages or the French Revolution, I could understand; but it is imitating factories and materialism. It is like looking in a mirror and seeing a monkey.'

"That will do. That is enough," and he passed on to the next who was, I think, Major, now General, Seely; who said he distrusted Japan for certain imperial reasons connected with our colonies and national defense. Then Mr. Winston Churchill said that what amused him was that, as long as Japan was beautiful and polite, people treated it as barbarous; and now that it had become ugly and vulgar it was treated with respect, or words to that effect. Then Charles Masterman in his manner of luxuriant gloom, said that the Japs were Huns who would sweep us off the earth; that they were much stronger and more skillful than we; and were also detestable.

Then one or two others spoke, expressing the same negative view; and then Wyndham, in his whimsical way, wound up the discussion with one of his extraordinary historical theories (of which he had a large selection) and said the Hairy Ainu was the cousin of the European and had been conquered by these horrid Mongols. 'I do think,' he said gravely, 'that we should come to the rescue of the Hairy Ainu.'

NO ANSWER SINCE

"And then somebody said with simple wonder 'Look here, we have been all round the table, and every man-jack of us, for some reason, serious or otherwise, seems to hate the Japanese. Why, are we not only allies of the Japanese, but forbidden to say a word against them in any of the newspapers?' Why is it the fashion or convention to praise the Japs everywhere and at all times?" At that, I think, Mr. Churchill smiled the inscrutable smile of the Statesman; and that veil of vagueness, of which I have spoken, seemed to descend upon everybody round the table and we have never had an answer to that question, then or since.

If Chesterton had lived 'til 1941, he would have an answer, and a resounding one. This globe is not large enough to have two world-wide Empires, in fact or in wish and ambition. Japan's ambition, as Chesterton suggests, was to imitate England to become an island center of an Empire with far-flung dependencies. The Jap would become an Asiatic John Bull. Japan was then an ally of England; and when John looked in the mirror expecting to see his imitator as a flattering friend, for the proverb is that imitation is the highest kind of flattery, he saw a monkey. That is thoroughly Chestertonian. But the point is that two world-wide Empires are impossible, mutually exclusive. Their interests will eventually and inevitably clash; and then alliances are dissolved, then statesmen, newspapers and other organs of public opinion are free to say what they think and had thought from the beginning.

RACE EXPLAINED

The reader, who may not have at hand an Encyclopedia, may reasonably ask who are the Hairy Ainu? They are or were a race who, according to some ethnologists, were the original inhabitants of Japan. In my little Encyclopedia they are described as short in stature, strongly built and in features rather European than Mongolian. They are found in two of the minor islands of the Archipelago and number about 15,000. Wyndham's "whimsical" proposal to rescue them would, accordingly, be matched if Hitler called for a blitzkrieg to rescue the Mohawks from Anglosaxondom.

By the way, a few weeks ago the Jesuit weekly America started a movement, still going on, for the canonization of Cardinal Newman. In the issue for January 10 there is a letter—from Kansas—calling for "the canonization of that tremendous lover of God's holy Church—G. K. Chesterton." Well, I hereby give my voice and vote, although I fear neither will count for much at Rome in the Congregation of Rites. But as the writer of the letter—who, by the way, signs with an Italian name—says: "In our Father's house there are many mansions... and there surely must be one occupied since 1889 by Gilbert Keith Chesterton."

Wins Culture Award



Jacques Maritain, distinguished French Catholic philosopher and lecturer, who will receive the Christian Culture Award, conferred annually by Assumption College, Windsor, Ont., upon the outstanding lay exponent of Christian ideals. (N.C.W.C.)

Catholic Action Men Urged To Exercise Voting Right

SAN ANTONIO—All members of the San Antonio Archdiocesan Catholic Action Council of Men and members of their families eligible to vote have been urged to pay their poll tax in a letter sent to parish presidents.

"Catholics should make use of their right to vote," the letter stated "and should remember that voting is a civic as well as a moral obligation and in many instances a serious duty that should not be neglected. As good and loyal citizens of America every Catholic should be proud to vote for the rights and privileges enjoyed under our Democratic form of Government."

Victorian Brother

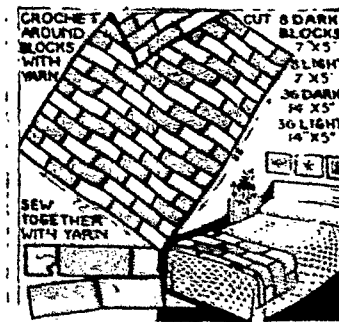
Joliette Que Brother Roch Morin, dean of the Clerics of St. Victor is dead at the age of 88 and the sixty-fifth year of his religious life.

NEW IDEAS

A Novel Gift Idea

FOR HOME-MAKERS

By RUTH WYETH SPEARS



This colorful afghan was made by clever fingers from the best parts of old woolen garments put together with odds and ends of bright yarn. Even trousers and faded jackets yielded strips of the size required.

By holding the goods up to the light it is easy to find the worn parts. These are cut out roughly; washed with mild soap in luke warm water; rinsed with a little soap in warm water; and pressed while damp. The pieces are then cut accurately according to the measurements given here. Single crochet stitch is used around all pieces, and the sketch shows how the pieces are sewn together.

NEXT WEEK—Original Designs with Patterns for Aprons.

NOTE—Today we must be patriotic by using our heads and our hands. Nothing should go to waste. Book 1, of the series which Mrs. Spears has prepared for readers, gives directions for quilts from scraps that may be made quickly on the sewing machine. Book 7, shows how to recondition furniture that might otherwise be discarded. Books are 32 pages each and cost 10c per copy when ordered direct from Mrs. Spears, Drawer 122, CATHOLIC COURIER, 50 Chestnut St., Rochester, N. Y. (Copyright)

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