

The Strong Men of Japan by Henry George, Jr.
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MARQUIS HIROBUMI ITO, THE FOREMOST STATESMAN OF THE NEW JAPAN

THE STRONG MEN OF JAPAN
BY HENRY GEORGE, Jr.

THE AUTHOR, WHO RECENTLY VISITED JAPAN. DESCRIBES SOME OF THE MEN WHO ARE PLAYING LEADING PARTS IN THE MARVELOUS POLITICAL. MILITARY. COMMERCIAL. AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ISLAND EMPIRE

NOTE—The portraits accompanying this article are from photographs by the following Japanese photographers: Maruki, Tokyo; Ogawa, Tokyo; and Kojiina, Tokyo.

OF the men who lead in public affairs in Japan today, Marquis Ito is indisputably first. Indeed, it is truly said that his personal history is the history of Meiji, as the present reign is called in the Japanese calendar, meaning “the era of enlightenment.” And it seems certain that succeeding generations will pay homage to Ito's versatility, his broad spirit, his progressive genius, his splendid work for the new Japan.

Hirobumi Ito celebrated his sixty-sixth birthday on the 2d of September. He was the only child of a petty Samurai of the Choshu clan. As a boy he went to the family school of Yoshida Torajiro, of whom Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in his “Men and Hooks.” He showed remarkable precocity, but there seemed little likelihood of its bearing much fruit. The times were full of trouble. “The barbarians”—the European and American nations—were anxious to break down the barriers that impeded trade beyond the treaty ports, while the clansmen, and particularly those of Choshu, were bitterly opposed to any such extension of foreign influences.

The spirit of learning was in the young Ito. He was bent on getting knowledge, and especially the new knowledge of the barbarians. He made the acquaintance of the British consul at Yokohama, and through him secretly sailed away for England, with four other young Choshu men. All of the five were less than thirty years old, and each of them was destined to become famous under the new order of things in Japan. Ito himself was only twenty-three at the time.

He was in England perhaps a year when he suddenly received intelligence that the combined British and French fleets, consisting of eighteen vessels, had attacked Shimonoseki, in Choshu, his native province. With one of his fellow students—Inouye, now Count Inouye—Ito at once hurried back, and commenced that career of diplomacy which has made him peerless in Japan. He allayed the feeling between the foreigners and Jus clan prince.

ITO'S LONG PUBLIC CAREER

In 1868, when the feudal government in Japan was overturned, the Shogunate abolished, and the

Mikado restored to his old temporal power, Ito became a counselor of state. As such, he acted as interpreter to the boy emperor when the latter first saw the foreign representatives. For the next two years the brilliant young Choshu man served in various important administrative capacities, and in 1870 he was sent abroad by the government at the head of a commission to study and report on the question of banking. This resulted, two years later, in the adoption of the banking regulations which form the basis of the present Japanese laws.

A still more important mission followed in connection with Japan's first effort to induce the foreign governments to relinquish their extra-territorial jurisdiction in the Mikado's empire. For this purpose Prince Iwakura was appointed chief plenipotentiary, with Ito as one of his four vice-plenipotentiaries. But Ito was the only one of these men who could speak English—a fact which, together with his natural capabilities, made him practically the leader of the commission, at least in the United States and England. The powers, however, were not yet ready to make the desired concession.

In 1881 the emperor issued a proclamation declaring that ten years later he would grant a constitution to the people of Japan, and Ito was sent to America and Europe to study the written and unwritten constitutional law of the leading countries. He reported a form of government which was in its main features adopted.

Ito himself became the first president of the House of Peers, while his secretary, Kentaro Kaneko (since created a baron), was the first secretary of the House of Representatives, the popular legislative body. In 1885, at the age of forty-four, Ito undertook the premiership, but within three years he resigned it to accept the presidency of the newly formed Privy-Council.

His later career is so well known that I need not follow it in detail. He has been premier four times, and was at the head of the government during the war with China, but he had little to do with the recent war with Russia. Indeed, he was in St. Petersburg when diplomatic relations between the two governments came to a crisis, and he was compelled to make a summary exit from Russia in consequence. He was understood to disapprove of a martial policy, and, although several times requested to become peace plenipotentiary, he refused, saying that the responsibility for peace terms should rest upon those who had drawn the sword.

Nevertheless, during and after the war he served as governor-general of Korea. As such he negotiated a treaty under the terms of which the management of all Korea's external relations was turned over to Japan. It was also agreed that the Mikado should send to Seoul a "resident-general," who is what in the Roman days would have been called a proconsul. He "advises" the Korean sovereign and his ministers of state, and that "advice" means law. The Marquis Ito personally undertook this very difficult and irksome office. The world knows how under his firm grasp of the situation the disorganized country which China claimed and Russia coveted has become practically a dependency of Japan.

Many Japanese dislike the marquis. They regard him as "too smooth"; they do not know how or

when to take him. The truth is that he is a combination of Richelieu and Talleyrand. He is never finally defeated. He has extraordinary resourcefulness. Sleeping or awake, he is for Japan. He stands close to the emperor, whose confidence he obtained in the early days of the revolution, and he is the chief of the five Elder Statesmen—those extra-constitutional advisers whom the sovereign consults in all times of crisis.

OKUMA. THE PROGRESSIVE LEADER

A man of quite different type, but of no less ability, and one who is just as active for the welfare of Japan, is Count Shige-nobu Okuma. In fact, in speaking of Ito one naturally thinks of Okuma as in many ways his great rival. Okuma is not of the Elder Statesmen.

He is not what might be called a “ court ” man. He is rather a people’s man. He is the Thomas Jefferson of Japan, in many senses, having founded a university — the Waseda—besides creating a democratic or popular party, called Kaishinto (“the progressive party”).

Okuma was of Samurai birth, and came from the province of Saga, which was not one of the provinces playing a leading part in the revolution that replaced the Mikado at the head of temporal affairs.

Choshu and Satsuma were the two foremost provinces in that great achievement, and as a result they were more favored by the new regime than most of the other parts of Japan. But Count Okuma’s intellectual power and activity could not be overlooked. From an early date he had to be considered as a factor in public affairs, and he filled a variety of high official positions, giving to each the characteristics of his strong personality.

It was while he was minister of foreign affairs, in 1888, that he revived the Japanese effort to obtain a revision of the treaties with the leading foreign powers. Drafts of the proposed agreements were prematurely made public, and a political fanatic, thinking that Japan was not securing fair treatment, hurled a bomb at the minister as he rode out of the Foreign Office. Okuma was badly wounded, and had to have one of his legs amputated; but this did not impede his ascent to the highest political honors.

In 1898, when Count Okuma was premier, a member of his cabinet— Yuaki-o Ozaki, minister of education, now mayor of Tokyo—in the course of a public address incidentally referred to the time when “after a thousand or two thousand years Japan shall become a republic like the United States or France.” Public opinion was not ready for even so remote a republican utterance. and the Okuma cabinet fell.

Count Okuma is as outspoken in the public press, and in interviews with all comers, as Marquis I to is reserved. Yet it is to be noticed that the count, with all his seeming spontaneity, speaks with full knowledge of what he is saying. He is an incessant reader, possesses an extraordinarily retentive memory, and has an amazing assortment of accurate knowledge of the United States, its geography and natural conditions, its social growth and politics. He deplores the American tariff

system, which, he told me when I visited him, does not protect anything in the United States but the trusts. He deprecates Japan's imitation of our tariff policy.

Count Okuma has a large and finely furnished house in the Waseda suburb of Tokyo. In his hothouse are eight hundred varieties of orchids, and his chrysanthemums make a wonderful display in the fall.

MATSU KATA, THE FINANCIER

Count Masayoshi Matsukata will probably be best known to posterity as one of the original Elder Statesmen, and the founder of the Bank of Japan. He was born in Satsuma Province, and came to the front soon after the commencement of the era of Meiji. He became chief of the bureau of revenue in the department of finance, in 1874, when Count Okuma was minister of finance. He served in other minor capacities, and went abroad in 1878 as commissioner to the Paris Exposition. Later he became minister of home affairs, and in 1881, when Count Okuma retired from the finance department, Matsukata succeeded him, and continued to be minister of the Treasury for twelve years, twice being prime minister as well as holder of the financial portfolio. But he had constant friction with the Diet, and resigned the premiership to Marquis Yamagata.

It was Matsukata who piled on the unpopular land-tax prior to the war with Russia. This was not the "single tax," which is a tax on the value of land, irrespective of improvements. The tax which Matsukata increased was a tax on land, rated by a valuation fixed many years ago, and therefore taking no account of the great increment in the cities, while it bore heavily on the rice-growers. No attempt was made to get at a fair assessment, and the small farmers were ground down more deeply with every step of preparation for war with Russia.

YAMAGATA, THE MILITARY ORGANIZER

Marshal Marquis Aritomo Yamagata, another of the Rider Statesmen, was, like Ito, a Choshu man, and won distinction as a soldier when his clan was attacked by the Shogun's army during the revolution of 1868. Later, he became one of the emperor's leading officers. In 1872 he was commissioned a lieutenant-general, and in the following year he became minister of war. He is regarded as the father of the modern military system in Japan.

In 1889 Yamagata held the premiership for a brief period. He seems, however, to have endeavored to conduct political affairs like a military machine. Instead of deferring and conciliating, he issued peremptory orders. When he needed a majority in the Diet, it is common report that if compulsion failed he resorted to mercenary means to bring members to his side. He this true or not, it is certain that his cabinet bore the odium of bitter denunciation for corrupt methods, and Yamagata himself was called the Walpole of the Orient.

During the early nineties he visited Europe and America, where he inquired into the constitution of civil corporations and systems of local government. From these peaceful studies he was

carried back into the field by the breaking out of war with China. Put in command of the First Army, he swept the enemy's feeble forces out of Korea and was advancing triumphantly upon Mukden when he was compelled by illness to give up his leadership to General Nodzu.

OYAMA, THE SILENT SOLDIER

Marshal Marquis Iwao Oyama, still another of the Elder Statesmen, is one of the idols of the Japanese army, and was the chief figure on the Japanese side in the late war with Russia, being commander-in-chief of the Mikado's forces in Manchuria. Like Matsukata, he comes from Satsuma. He fought in the revolution, and was afterward despatched by the government to follow the Prussian army as attaché in the Franco-Prussian War. He had one of the bitterest periods in his life in 1877, when he was called to put down the rebellion in his native Satsuma, and had to fight against his own friends and even relatives. He was promoted to lieutenant-general, and later to the full rank of general, becoming commander-in-chief of the Second Army, which took Port Arthur and Wei-hai-wei in the conflict with China. Subsequently he became marshal and chief of the General Staff, and, very ably aided by General Kodama and other brilliant officers, he carried the Japanese arms to splendid victory against the Russians in the late war.

One of Marshal Oyama's peculiarities is brevity of speech. On one occasion, in Europe, when he was being feted and complimented by the government heads he was impressed with the necessity of making an acknowledgment, though he could speak no tongue save Japanese. He arose, and turning toward the gentleman who was to serve as his interpreter, he uttered one word in the Satsuma dialect; then he sat down. The interpreter thereupon delivered an address of several hundred words. All present were astonished that a single Japanese word could contain so much meaning. When inquiry was made about that word it was found to mean: "Please make a good speech for me."

TOGO, THE NELSON OF JAPAN

Admiral Heihachiro Togo, chief of the Naval Staff, and the hero of the memorable battle of the Japan Sea, is another taciturn man. He is sixty—five years younger than Oyama; and, unlike the latter, he is small of stature. I met him at a dinner at the official residence of the minister of the navy, Admiral Saito. He entered the drawing-room with so little pretense, and stood there so silent, that it was difficult to believe him to be the man whose name had so recently rung over the world. When I asked him if he thought of visiting the United States next year, he smiled and said he did not know. One of the gentlemen present remarked that the admiral was afraid lest his reception might be too hot for him. I was obliged to admit that the American people would certainly give him a very warm welcome.

Togo was the son of an obscure Kagoshima man, and in 1871 was sent by the imperial government, with thirteen other young men, to study in England. He entered a naval school at Portsmouth. His life has been given to his profession; his were the first shot of the war with China and the crowning triumph of the struggle with Russia. It is said of this silent sailor that he

will sit at table for long periods without uttering a word, and then only to express himself in the simplest terms.

OTHER LEADING MEN OF NIPPON

The business world of Japan may be said to be represented by three men, Baron Yci-ichi Shibusawa and Messrs. Takashi Masuda and Soichiro Asano. The former is called the Nestor of Japanese financial and mercantile affairs. He was the son of a well-to-do Saitama-ken farmer. He early showed talent for financial affairs, and became a high official in the department of finance. Leaving the government service, he became president of the First Bank, the earliest of the national banks. To-day, of the leading commercial institutions of Japan it would be easier to name those in which he has no interest than those with which he is actively connected.

Mr. Masuda is fifty-eight, younger than Shibusawa by eight years. He sprang from petty Samurai stock, and early became connected with an importing and exporting house in Yokohama. He developed much aptitude for mercantile matters, and when his firm was absorbed by the great banking and trading Mitsui family, he became the manager of the mercantile end of the combination. He is said to receive the largest salary in Japan, and he has become a rich man. His house in the suburbs contains many rare antiques.

Mr. Asano, by dint of his personal ability and his quickness in seeing opportunities, has come out of nothing to the rank of a money-king of Japan. He is president of the Toyo Steamship Company—one of the great Japanese lines; and is, moreover, successfully building up a rival business in Japan to the Standard Oil Company's.

Dr. Igaku-hakushi Shibusaburo Kita-zato may be mentioned among the representative men of Japan. He stands for the scientific achievement of the Island Empire, being one of the foremost bacteriologists of the world. When I visited him at the government laboratory in Tokyo, of which he has charge, he told me of his recent visit to the United States, where he was an interested observer of our equipment for medical research.

There are other men of distinguished parts and services in Japan who deserve attention in this sketch, but the brevity of space forbids. I can do no more than add a mention of Baron Dairoku Kikuchi, who was sent to England by the government in 1870 and studied at Cambridge, where he won a place among the "wranglers." He came back to Japan to do great work as deputy minister, and later as minister, of education, and also as president of the Imperial University at Tokyo and of the Peers' School. He is a member of the House of Peers.