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Why the Japanese Fight as they do.

By W. Richmond Smith.

Mr. President, Gentlemen, Members of the Canadian Club,—I can assure you that it affords me great pleasure to be here to-day to give you a short talk upon the Japanese conception of military duty and service. I do not know any organization in the world before which I would have greater pleasure in speaking than the Canadian Club of Toronto.

The world knows to-day how the Japanese fight. In so far as the newspaper accounts of what has taken place in Manchuria during the last two years have given the facts, those facts read more like romance than like the record of what has actually taken place during the war between Russia and Japan. The Japanese accomplished so much more than reasonable authorities on military matters would have admitted was possible before the war commenced, that the world has become convinced that back of their organization and strength as a military power there is some very strong reason for what they have done, an incentive which does not exist in any other army in the world. When I was asked to speak before your organization it occurred to me that this was the most interesting phase of the subject on which I could speak. I will try, therefore, to lift at least a corner of the veil upon the question, "Why the Japanese fight as they do." It is a difficult problem to explain, but, as I have said, I will do my best to lift the veil as far as I can.

As far back in the mythology of old Japan as the records go, the Japanese have always had a fighting element in the nation, though they were not, in the days of old Japan, essentially a fighting nation at all. That conception is distinctly a mistake. There was a fighting class, called the Samurai who were the retainers of the feudal lords of Japan. They were only a small percentage of the population. The great masses of the people were engaged in pacific pursuits, and never fought at all because the duty of fighting devolved upon the army of Samurai. This class of hereditary warriors was, in the best sense of the word, an exclusive corporation of fighting men. The rest of the people in the country devoted themselves to agriculture, fishing, and the various arts and manufactures for which Japan to-day is famed throughout the world.

Naturally in an aggregation of fighting men such as these Samurai were, the standard which existed among them was exceedingly high. It is said that death rather than defeat or surrender was the religion of the

class. It came to be known throughout Japan and the world that the soul of a Samurai was with his sword, for they fought with swords and were clad in armor in the former days.

Japan became known to the Western world when Commodore Perry went with a few warships into Yokohama harbor and demanded that the country which had been closed for centuries to the world should be opened for trade with the United States. This demand came at the psychological moment and was successful. For centuries the power of ruling in the country had been usurped by the most powerful of the feudal lords. These rulers never attempted, at any time, to usurp the functions of the Emperor, though they ruled absolutely in his name. They always acted nominally, at least, under his authority. Centuries of rule by these Shoguns resulted in an effeminacy which robbed them of the primitive power which gave them the right to rule. When Perry made his demands the last of the ruling house of Shogun, who was an extremely weak personality, was in power. Perry's demands hastened, not only the downfall of the Shoguns' rule, but the end of the feudal system which had held the country in its grip for centuries. The war of the restoration in 1868 restored the Emperor of Japan to absolute power, and the Shoguns voluntarily relinquished the right and power to rule. From the date of the restoration of the present Emperor of Japan to absolute power, dates the beginning of the present military and governmental systems of Japan.

I would like to tell you a short story in connection with Perry's expedition which will show you what has been done in Japan well within the span of one man's life. It was told by one of the elder statesmen at a dinner party at Tokio, the Marquis Yamagata. Hearing of the foreign ships which discharged thunder from their sides being in Yokohama harbor, he went to the shore, put his sword between his teeth, and swam out to Perry's flagship, and with his sword tried to pierce the iron hull. That man to-day is revered as the father of the Japanese navy, and he is the head of the administration of the fleet which defeated the ships of Russia in far Eastern waters during the recent war. (Prolonged applause.)

With regard to the army, the story is even more interesting. When Perry's demands that the country be opened to the world were made they were granted because the country was not able to refuse the demand. The feudal system had in the meantime disappeared. The Samurai had no leadership and therefore most of them no longer had any profession. The need of a national army, larger and more powerful than the Samurai had ever been, came with great force to the whole nation. They saw in the "open door" which Perry's demand necessitated danger to the country they loved so well. The man who was responsible for the idea out of which came the present national army of Japan, was a Samurai, General Saigo. He had fought well in the War of the restoration on the

side of the Emperor, had quelled rebellion in the north, and in fact had succeeded largely through his own efforts in restoring the Emperor to power. He became a member of the Privy Council, and it was he who evolved the idea of a conscript army large enough to meet the requirements of national aspirations and development. Young men, the best the land produced, were sent abroad to study the armies throughout the world, and to report thereon with the idea of creating an army system. Five years later the new conscript army was tested in a manner which brought out the effect of the system in its initiative stage. The great Saigo, the man who had created the national army, was the man who led the Samurai forces against it. The trouble arose over a dispute in the Emperor's Council over an insult offered by the Emperor of Corea to the ships of the Emperor of Japan. Saigo favored a punitive expedition, the others a diplomatic settlement. Saigo resigned his position in the Emperor's Council and went back to his Province of Satsuma, where most of the Samurai, who regarded the conscript army as an insult to themselves, gathered about him as well as other malcontents, and this military force rose in rebellion, not against the Emperor, but against his advisers. At first scores of defeats were inflicted on the conscript army. They were beaten because they felt they must be defeated, so high in the estimation of the common people stood these Samurai warriors, that no dozen of them would face a single Samurai, and it is told of the Samurai forces in this rebellion that they often faced the conscript army twenty to one and put them to flight. Finally the Emperor and his advisers chose a good way to prevent the esprit de corps of the new army being destroyed. They sent to the front the Emperor's bodyguard, composed of picked forces of the Samurai, who had sworn fidelity to the Emperor, and whose duty it was to guard his person with their own lives if need be. The police force of the country, composed of a lower class of Samurai, was also sent to the front. With this infusion defeat was turned into success and the rebellion was turned into victory for the conscript army. That was the inception of the Japanese military system as it exists to-day. (Applause.)

It is a remarkable story because these men of the conscript army had not only never fought before, but their forefathers for generations had been taught not to oppose the trained Samurai; that it was impossible as well as a sacrilege to attempt to do so. Thus the national army of Japan won its spurs against a class of privileged warriors whom they had been taught for all time not to oppose. (Applause.) That was thirty years ago. To-day we have a Japanese army in Manchuria of 500,000 men, composed of an agricultural and sea-faring population all of which have absorbed and taken to themselves the high standard which formerly appertained to a class of hereditary warriors who fought the fights of old Japan. This national army has grafted onto itself the standard which formerly existed among the Samurai, professional soldiers by heredity and training. (Applause.)

There is, however, another and a stronger reason for the way in which the Japanese fight. The position and personality of the Emperor of Japan is the keystone not only of the Japanese conception of military duty and service, but of everything Japanese. Japan has learned much and copied much from the West. One thing which she has not abandoned and never will, is the attitude of her people towards, and the confidence and reverence in which they hold not only the person, but the position, of their Emperor. He is to-day a unique monarch. Not only is he an absolute temporal ruler, but he is the embodiment of his people's conception of God. I choose that language carefully. They do not worship their Emperor as God; no Japanese worships. They pay reverence to the Emperor as the embodiment of their idea of God. I can best explain that, perhaps, by trying to give you an idea of what took place when Buddhism and Confucianism came into Japan from China and India. They were adapted to the dominant idea of the nation that in the Emperor who ruled over their land, they had the highest type possible in humanity of their idea of God.

In the mythology of Japan the first Emperor consolidated the people into one body. He lived a long life, and it was one of absolute self-abnegation for his people. For that he was regarded as the nearest thing in the nation to perfection. He was the embodiment of God because perfection with the Japanese is God. Since the first Emperor there have been many others, some of whom did not fill the position with dignity. The present Council of Elder Statesmen is the result of a process by which the Emperors who came after the first were enabled to fill the public eye as far as personality was concerned. If an Emperor fell short in mental or moral capacity then the ablest men in the land gathered about him and constituted his council. He used their brains. His position, whatever his personality was, was that of the wisest man in the Empire. The Emperor of Japan cannot take part in the ruling of his country personally. He lives a virtual prisoner in Tokio, a prisoner to his duty of absolute self-abnegation in the cause of his people. That will give you some idea why the people regard him as the embodiment of their idea of God. In Buddhism there is no personal God. There are many Buddhas; they are only the embodiment of attributes of God, and when a Buddhist lives so as to acquire perfection in any one particular in the opinion of his fellow man, he is canonized as a Buddha and his example is held up to men.

Shintoism, the other popular religion of Japan, is more a code of ethics than a religion. It first teaches that the Emperor, because of his personality and position, is the highest type of human perfection; that he, therefore, is entitled to reverence, not to worship, and his example is the highest example which his people ought to follow. Therefore he is the central figure of that religion. It also teaches an intense and devoted love of country. The Japanese in their art have nothing to correspond with our "eternal feminine." They find perfection in nature.

Their art will give a study in leaves or flowers that will appeal to the Japanese infinitely more than a study of the beautiful in woman. They look for perfection in something that nature does. The same thing applies to the Shinto religion, which is indigenous to Japan and which comes from no other country. In the things that God gives to the soil of Japan are to be found the most beautiful things in this universe. Shintoism has become best known in the Western world because of its so called "ancestor worship." That is a misnomer. If a man lives, according to Shintoism, so that he does deeds that are the result of self-abnegation, when he dies a monument is erected to his memory, and the people who knew him and among whom he did those deeds, go to the shrine, not to worship, but to catch from the atmosphere which surrounds the shrine, the spirit of the departed soul, an inspiration to do what he did. I saw thousands of conscripts going to the shrine of the Forty Ronans, men who died hundreds of years ago, to catch the inspiration to die as those men did. This is the so-called "ancestor worship," and this is all it means.

You will see in this religion there is an enormous incentive to the soldiers of Japan to die for their country. In the armies you have the Samurai, the man who would kill himself rather than surrender, the man to whom defeat spells death, absolutely. The conscript, under the influences of the religion outlined, with the records of the Samurai to spur him on, with the hope that some day hundreds will come to his shrine to worship, has a mighty incentive. That incentive stands back of the fighting of the Japanese soldier and sailor during the present war and it not only applies to the individual soldier, but in a very strong way it has a potent influence upon the mother of the soldier. The first duty of a Japanese mother of a male infant is to teach that child so to live that he may be able to live a life which will make him willing to die, while her female child she teaches to perform the same duty when she becomes the mother of a male child. The regret of a Japanese mother is not that conscription included her children, but that she had no more children to give. The Japanese mother, though she loves her offspring as much as any other mother, gives them voluntarily to the country. I have seen hundreds of train loads of soldiers leaving Japan. I have seen thousands of mothers, sisters and sweethearts at the stations seeing the soldiers depart, but I never saw one of those women falter or shed a tear, though there was anguish in their eyes it would almost break one's heart to see. I have seen those women carried out of the stations by dozens after the trains had left, when human nature refused to stand the strain any longer, but so long as they stood face to face it was the duty of the mothers to send their children, sisters their brothers, to die without showing their emotions by a tear.

When I arrived in Japan I was extremely anxious to get behind this tremendous incentive which I knew existed. At the Nobles' Club in Tokio one day I met the head of one of the oldest families in Japan. He

l two sons in the army, and the news had arrived that day that one of sons had been seriously wounded in the battle at the Yalu River. I d to him, "I hope that your son will recover, and that both your sons l live to come home." To my amazement he became very angry. He d to me, "My son has brought disgrace upon his name by being unded and he is returning to this country before his duty is done. He l be nursed back to health at my house, but he will never show his face public until he goes back to the field and finishes the work I sent him do." (Applause.)

In the fighting before Port Arthur a thousand illustrations of the rit I have been trying to explain were evidenced in a manner that uld draw pity from a heart of stone. Many times I saw an army of n composed of conscripts and animated by the spirit I have just tried explain hurl themselves against one of the strongest fortress positions the world, only to be thrown back by as stubborn an enemy as ever ght behind walls. I wish to say here that the Russian private soldier, en well led and fighting behind defensive works, is an ideal soldier. ud applause.) He fights as long as his officer is with him—(renewed plause.) The story of Port Arthur would have been a different story if e inherent qualities of the Russian private soldier had been used to the nost by the officers who commanded. If General Kondrachenko, who s the real hero of Port Arthur up to the 13th of November, when he s killed, had lived and had been given complete command, the story the siege would have been different. The 28,000 able-bodied Russian diers who surrendered would have fought to the bitter end, and though e Japanese would have won in the end, it would have been at a cost possible to estimate.

An incident happened during the fighting at 203 Metre Hill which ll give you some conception of the spirit animating the opposing rces. This 203 Metre Hill was an essential point of the Russian es west of the city. Upon it depended the entire outer line of the fence. It had been transformed into a very strong field work. The hill is high with double peaks. It was belted with trenches in order to elter garrison reserves when being moved into the front lines upon e hill. The Russians had tunnelled between the peaks to the trenches the face of the hill so that reinforcements could be sent from rear to nt without being exposed to the Japanese fire. The last peak of the l was taken on the ninth day of the continuous fightng for possession. ie last two men who stood on the Russian side were the com-ander of the position and his aide, a naval officer. These 'o met the final rush of the Japanese with their swords. ie Japanese have a wonderful admiration for courage, and I do not ink that a Japanese soldier would fire at a man armed only with sword. (Applause.) The Japanese soldiers attacked the two Russians ith their bayonets, but so well did the Russian officers fight that for

half an hour the unequal combat went on. Finally the aide was killed, but the commander of the position continued the fight alone—(applause)—until a Japanese officer got under his guard and disarmed him. He had killed a dozen men, his sword was dripping with blood, which had soaked his sleeve and stained his tunic. He was wounded in several places, but only very slightly. He was taken to the Japanese army headquarters, and that night I saw him at dinner with General Nogi, his chief of staff and other officers of the Japanese army. (Renewed and prolonged applause.) He was sent to Japan in a special transport wearing the sword and uniform that he had worn on the day of the great fight. When I went back to Japan afterwards I learned that the people of Japan would travel hundreds of miles to see this officer, the one brave Russian they knew. (Laughter and applause.)

I do not want you to think that all the Japanese are brave. They are just as human as you are. (Laughter.) Their performance has been what it was because their standard is so high. It is easier, a million times, for a soldier to die having lived up to that standard than to live and fall below that standard. The standard may be too high, but it takes an army to break it. The Japanese standard is the highest in the world. I do not think there is any higher standard among civilized nations, but there are cases where Japanese soldiers have failed to live up to the standard of their army. The 8th Regiment of Osaka Reserves on one occasion during the siege refused to leave their trenches when ordered to take a position in the face of a heavy fire. The major in command was killed endeavoring to get his men to leave the shelter of their trenches. As soon as the fight was over this regiment was sent behind the lines and was put through a terrible course of punishment. They were made to do duty as servants to non-combatant officers, they were hewers of wood and drawers of water; they had to engage in long sham fights; they were taken in sections every morning to a shrine erected to the memory of the officers who had been killed because of their failure to obey orders under fire, where they listened to Shinto priests descant for hours upon the enormity of their conduct. This went on for three months until the soldiers, goaded to desperation, petitioned to be sent to the front and to be put in the first rank of the fighting line. They were, and there are none of them left alive to-day.

Behind this story is the evidence of a weakness which makes it absolutely positive that the Japanese in the recent war fought their last great fight. A large percentage of the conscript soldiers of the 8th Osaka Regiment were from the districts of Japan famous for their development of the fine arts and commercial life. During the Chino-Japanese war the soldiers conscripted from this district gained an unenviable reputation for lack of courage. It was found during the progress of the war that the young men of the district eligible for conscription were in the habit of prostituting one of the oldest and most historical shrines in Japan. This shrine

is called Motorogni and is situated far up among the mountains between the city of Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, and the city of Otsu, the centre of the silk industry. Japanese mythology states that this shrine was erected by the Empress Jingo, the Joan d'Arc of Japan, on the eve of a punitive expedition to Corea, during which she led her army in person. Before this shrine she is supposed to have prayed for a safe return from the expedition, not on her own account, but in order to give birth to her son, the future Emperor. It was found during the war between Japan and China that young men from the Osaka district eligible for conscription were in the habit of going to Motorogni and petitioning the spirit supposed to be enshrined there for immunity from conscription. During the recent war with Russia I know this ancient shrine was again used for the same purpose. In this prostitution of the ancient shrine of Motorogni is to be found the visible evidence of the lack of that desire to die for the Emperor which still exists in other parts of the Empire. It is evident that the cultivation of the fine arts, and the prosecution of commercial pursuits has robbed the people of the Osaka military district of their primitive military district. If this influence is indicative of what the development of the arts and commerce, with the consequent access of wealth, will do for the Japanese people, it is obvious that the access of wealth which is bound to come to the nation now that the war with Russia is over, will rob the soldiers of the Mikado of that primitive strength and wonderful incentive which made them during the war the most wonderful soldiers in the world. They now possess this primitive strength largely because the people generally in Japan are compelled to live a life of unremitting toil in order to keep body and soul together. A Japanese lives on from half a cent to a cent a day. They grow the finest rice in the world but cannot afford to eat it; they sell their own and buy a cheap Chinese rice for themselves. They have to struggle from the time they are born to keep body and soul together. That is one reason why the Japanese are such good soldiers. To live with them is a burden in a large measure, and to die is a relief.

Another interesting thing in regard to the recent fighting is that among the Japanese generals who commanded armies in Manchuria there was not one who spoke English. The general in command of troops was always a man who had the spirit of old Japan. The head and front of every Japanese army was always a native-born Japanese who had never seen any foreign country, and one of those men was General Nogi, to whom Port Arthur surrendered. He was a splendid specimen of the old class of Japanese. I want to read you a few lines of an invocation which he addressed to the spirits of those who had died and been killed during the siege of Port Arthur. After the place had been taken and the Japanese were in full possession he served a great dinner to all the officers of his army. After the dinner they drank the health of the Emperor. The next day there was a fête to the spirits of the de-

parted. The situation for the fête, which was preceded by a parade of the army, was remarkably well chosen. On the high land whence could be seen every spot where Japanese had fallen during the siege, were drawn up 125,000 soldiers with fixed bayonets. The scene was one that it is almost impossible to describe. The morning opened with a heavy mist, but as the General began to read this invocation the mantle of mist slowly lifted, disclosing first a few lines of bayonets, then an army, magnificent and silent. It was a never to be forgotten sight. Then General Nogi read his invocation with all the simple dignity and nobility so characteristic of great men—and he is a great man, though as a general he made mistakes which no general should have made. This is what he read: "I, Nogi Maresky, Commander-in-Chief of the Third Imperial Army, celebrate a fête in honor of those brave officers and men who fell during the siege, with saké and many offerings.

"From the date of our army's landing in the Kwantung Peninsula, over two hundred and ten days since, you have gone forward with such bravery and fought battles with such gallantry that you have met death from fire and sword. Others of you have died from sickness and disease. I wish to tell you that your noble sacrifice has not been in vain. The troops of the enemy inside the stronghold of Port Arthur have been utterly defeated and the fortress has at last surrendered. This glorious victory is due in a large measure to your indomitable courage and bravery.

"I, Maresky, with many of you, took a solemn oath to achieve victory or accomplish death. Surviving the struggle, I have received the warmest thanks from our Supreme Commander the Emperor. It is not meet that I should monopolize all this glory. With you, the spirits of those who fought and died to win the great result, I desire to share the glory. My heart is oppressed with sadness when I think of all you who have paid the price of our victory, and whose spirits are now in the Great Hereafter.

"I have chosen the place for this fête so that it commands a view of the hills, the valleys, the streams, and the forts which were the scenes of your glorious deaths, and which have been stained with your life blood. First of all I have cleared the ground. Then I have erected this altar upon which I make my offerings and invoke your spirits, hoping that you will come, partake of our offerings, and share the glory of our victory over the enemy." (Loud and long continued applause.)