THE JAPANESE BEARD

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IN Japan the subject of human hair has received a good deal of attention; and even the very hairs of the Japanese head have been numbered, but the no less interesting theme of beards has up to the present been neglected. Certain scientists, especially Germans, have written on the subject from an ethnological point of view, but no one has treated the subject from the point of view of history or fashion.

As the Japanese of to-day do not appear to be particularly predisposed to beards, it might be supposed a racial defect; but as beards existed before barbers, it may be taken for granted that the Japanese were originally a well-bearded people. Though in no sense so hirsute as their northern compatriots, the Ainu, the Japanese have unusually good heads of hair; and while, from an occidental point of view, they show a remarkable scantiness of beard, history does not justify the suspicion that as a race they despised it. Being naturally more devoid of facial hair than Europeans the latter have supposed the Japanese to be racially related to the Malays, who show a similar
peculiarity. The Japanese of to-day is astonished at the length attained by the Ainu beard, and think one of a foot and a half in length an abnormal appendage; but according to the *Kojiki*, the most ancient of Japanese writings, Susan-no-o-no-Mikoto, the father of Nippon, had a beard no less than eight feet in length, so long in fact that it had to be folded up when he was seated. Annotators of the *Kojiki* have tried to explain this away by contending that the expression, “eight feet,” is simply a way of describing a long beard; but even this imperial appendage to the ancestral visage is not so abnormal compared with the beard of the German painter, John Mayo, whose beard when he stood, trailed on the ground, and had to be trucked into his belt when he walked.

Among the Ainu of Japan, as among the Jews of old, the beard is regarded as a sacred production of nature, to be vigorously cultivated and never treated with disrespect. The Jews did not regard a beardless man as properly in the image of his Maker; and the Ainu even to this day regard a man without a beard as unfit to assume the responsibilities of a family. One with a fine beard becomes popular with the tribe and commands no little influence and respect, being allowed the free choice of a wife when the time for marriage comes; while the beardless unfortunate is not allowed to select his life-partner; and those who undertake it for him have no easy task, since all the marriageable females want a man with a beard; that is, a man. So sacred and essential is the beard regarded among the Ainu that in
case of combat, should the beard of an opponent be touched, the offender is punished with confiscation of property. The natives of the Loo Choo islands also show a remarkable development of beard, and take much care in the cultivation and preservation of it. While for facial crop the Japanese cannot successfully compete with these aboriginal tribes, one does from time to time see patriarchs with abnormally long beards, though usually much thinner than is the case with European growths of similar extent.

Though the Kojiki reports the male ancestor of Japan as having been in respect of beards a veritable Frederick Barbarossa, there seem to have been few subsequent potentates who were capable of following the original example, or even showing a disposition thereto. We never read of beards being sufficiently appreciated to command a tax, as they did in Russia under Peter the Great, and in England under Elizabeth, when a two weeks' growth could command a tax of three shillings and six pence. Nor is there any record of a Japanese setting such store by his beard as to offer it in security for debt, as did the Portuguese Juan de Castro, to the men of Goa, saying: "All the gold in the world would not equal this natural ornament of my valor." His Majesty the late Emperor of Japan wore a beard; but there appears no special disposition among the people of the country to follow the imperial fashion in this respect. In old Japan, however, the wearing of beards was undoubtedly more popular than to-day. At the age of 25 the
young samurai was commanded to cultivate a beard, and was not permitted to associate with his fellows of the order till he had succeeded. He was then granted the rank of Keritono and fully qualified to be a bushi. Why the beard should have been regarded as one of the essential features of a samurai, does not appear. What was the lot of those aspirants who failed in the effort to grow the requisite facial appendage, remains likewise unrevealed to posterity. It is recorded of an ancient king of Greece that he complained how he had been sent a beardless youth as an envoy; and so stung was he by this slight that he refused to begin negotiations, when the young ambassador replied: "Had my master known that your Majesty set such value on a beard, he would have sent you a goat."

The value placed upon the possession of this ornament to the chin in old Japan may be readily inferred from the fact that one of the most dreaded forms of punishment was known as kamuyarai; to have the beard removed. It is even reported that Prince Susa-no-o-no-Mikoto was so obstinate at one time among the other gods that he was visited with this condign punishment. And the popularity of beards continued in Japan till the advent of Buddhism with its tonsured and shaven priests, and then a new custom set in. For a long time the ordinary lay folk held out against any change. Coming to the Nara period, when Buddhism was at its height, we find that the common people had begun to shave off the beard but not the mustache. It was really a
concession to Chinese style rather than to religion, and was called the fashion of Tenjin, being affected much in the manner of the Kaiser mustache of to-day. During the effeminate days of the Heian era, like the Romans in the days of their decline, the Japanese began to prefer shaven faces, as may be seen from some of the books and pictures of the time. In the more virile Kamakura period the samurai again cultivated the beard, and it became a mark of manhood and chivalry, as in Europe. The fashion was affected even by the commercial classes of the day. The beard of this time was cut in the shape of a sickle. During the era of Tensho it is recorded of one Katai Rokurobei, a follower of Soun Hojo, Lord of Odawara, that a friend of his, Yuwase Kazaemon, called him a "beardless fellow," and he was so enraged at the insult that they fought a duel in which both were slain. In those distant days it was the polite custom to place hair-tweezers in front of a guest at the hibachi, so that he might attend to his beard during the conversation, in the same manner as to-day he might smoke a cigarette. Though the fashion of shaving prevailed in the days of Oda Nobunaga and Hideyoshi Toyotomi, many of the samurai still adhered to the old and manly custom of a beard. The famous warrior, Kato Kiyomasa, is always represented as wearing a thick beard. With the ascendancy of the Tokugawa shoguns more effeminate fashions began to come in, and those cultivating beards were dubbed Yezo people. Throughout the towns and villages, however, many continued to cultivate beards, and
so much value was set upon them in some places, that young men not only took extreme care in dressing their beards, but those who could not produce a beard, often coloured their faces so as not to have an effeminate appearance in the presence of their more fortunate comrades. The authorities soon began to look upon this latter habit as an evil, and forbade it under heavy penalty. This had the effect of discouraging beards to a great extent; and the model of a handsome man came to be one with fat cheeks and no beard.

With the opening of the Meiji era and the accomplishment of the Restoration perfect freedom prevailed in matters of this kind, and now we have all kinds of beards cultivated by all kinds of people. It is said that at present there are no less than ten styles of beard among the Japanese. The Japanese have never encouraged superstition as to the wearing of a mustache, as the Europeans did in the Middle ages, but they have nevertheless set more value on its possession than on the beard. The style of mustache known as the \textit{Imperiale} was regarded as controlling one’s destiny, and those possessing them were esteemed fortunate. In this connection it is told of Sugawara Michizane, who is now deified as \textit{Tenjin Sama}, that he was banished to Tsukushi through a slander of Fujiwara Tokihira, and there came to a miserable end, just because he had no \textit{Imperiale} adornment to his upper lip. Japanese fortune-tellers take into account the colour of the beard in adjudging destiny. A beard of common, dull black is not
adjudging destiny. A beard of common, dull black is not
lucky in their estimation, while one of purple hue is a good
omen. A face incapable of beard is adjudged unfortunate, a
fact corroborated by science. Japanese criminologists
have ascertained that one and a half per cent of the male
population is beardless naturally, and that of these, thirteen
and one half per cent are criminals. It is said that out of
1,537 convicts in a certain prison, 192 are naturally
beardless. Long before such facts were ascertained by
science the Japanese proverb echoed the intuitive
conviction: "The gods preserve us from a beardless man;
and again: "Little beard, little colour: there is nothing
worse under heaven." Another proverb is: "The beardless
man and the bearded woman, salute from afar." In the
same manner the ancients associated wisdom with the
beard, as when Persius said of Socrates: "Magister
Barbatus!"

The marked distinction between the beards of Japanese
and Europeans has long been a question of interest to
ethnologists. The Japanese beard is thin and straight, while
the European beard is thick and crinkled. The transverse
section of a hair taken from a European beard reveals an
outline shaped like a hook; while that from a Japanese
beard is almost perfectly circular. This is a remarkable
difference, apart altogether from colour and density.