The Soul of Nippon.
By George T. Murray.

JAPANESE NOTES.

T has been said that “nothing succeeds like success.” Let me complete the sentence by adding: “but success never succeeds.” All things earthly end, in the long run, in bitter failure. To be or not to be—satisfied at the right moment, that is the question.

Even now the Bear is beating a snarling retreat to his own icebergs, and yet the Sons of Nippon are gnashing their teeth in bitter disappointment, because cela va sans dire; oh! really, because they are not satisfied with the terms of peace. The battlefields of Liaoyang and Manchuria, sodden with the blood of heroes, lie dumb under the rains, the storms and the burning sun. The cries of agony from those now mouldering there have long since reached the portals of heaven, and due accounts of cause and effect have been entered on the celestial tomes for future reference. The recording angel has wept his tears and submitted the details to the Great Architect for judgment. And yet nobody is satisfied. The Russians want to give less; the Japanese desire more, and every tomodachi of Japan, real or pretended, cries out: “What charming magnanimity!” What modesty after absolute victory! Saying under their breaths “She has got quite enough; more would make her too powerful.”

The Russians, in sullen despair, fomenting under their internal troubles, yet, with a faint hope in Linievitch, reluctantly sign away Corea and Manchuria, and retire from their anticipated ownership of Peking, with clenched teeth, muttering au revoir! A fatal blow to all their aspirations has been struck by the little men; the Pacific now lies open to Japan and——?

So far the Islanders have succeeded, but what about the aftermath? Does their triumph extend over those desolate homes, where the walls are wet with the tears of widows and orphans? Or do their banzais stop short at the gates of the crematories? Success? Oh, ye mortals of small understandings, who hear but the reverberating echoes of the victorious cannon! Roses will bloom again; fruits of all kinds follow each other with the seasons, but those lost ones are—like last year’s bird’s nests—withered!
I knew a young student in Kyoto who had twice applied to the military authorities for permission to enlist for the war, but, owing to some bodily infirmity, he was considered unfit to fight in the ranks of his friends, and his application was rejected. One morning he was found on the ancestral burial grounds, dead; he had committed *harakiri*. Under his body was found a tiny slip of paper with but one word written thereon: “Ima” (now.) He had joined the Others—the slain Others.

This is the Soul of Nippon!

*KAMIKURA DAIBUTSU (AMIDA).*

When you cross “the little water” which separates these islands from China, you shape within the sentiments of your being a new life: the visions of beauty, art, a noble race, and a new world. All things in Japan speak direct to the heart; the fitness of things is here brought to perfection. People obey the natural impulses: the naked body is seen, *but not looked at*, and behind the paper-windows you can observe the silhouettes of their simple lives exposed to the whole world.

Yet—*noli me tangere!*—let not the rude globe-trotter, in search of things picturesque, presume on their charming innocence, lest on his much-travelled shoulders they unload an avalanche of contempt, which would send him back, staggering, to his “home-land.”
A party of ladies and gentlemen, residents, and well acquainted with the language and customs of Japan, got belated in a mountain excursion on a rainy evening. They told their rickshamen to take them to the nearest inn, which these poor fellows, after many protestations of the lateness of the hour and the inclemency of the weather, at last agreed to do. After circumnavigating half-a-dozen mountains, wet, and in a very uncertain temper, they at last came to a house, which looked respectable enough for anybody. The smiling master led the party to his best guest-room, where his wife and daughters did all they could to make them comfortable. Yet, somehow, nothing seemed to please; the rice was cold, the fretons were damp and the mosquito-curtains smelt musty. In the morning, breakfast was served, their vehicles mustered at the front door, and nothing now remained but to settle their little bill. The foremost lady of the party, a dame of great local repute and the wife of a man rolling in a wealth of yen, with the usual admixture of condescension and hauteur, enquired "Ikura?" (How much?) Then the man of the house spoke in English, and what he said was this: "Ladies and gentlemen, you have done me a great honour by staying overnight in my poor house. Unfortunately, my sons are in Tokio, where they are serving in the Mikado's household. I, my wife, and my daughters, have failed in our endeavours to make you comfortable; accept, therefore, our united excuses. My name is Count M———, and I do not know how to keep an inn, nor do I keep one. The pleasure of entertaining such a distinguished company of foreigners quite compensates us for any expenses incurred, and as a memento of my wretched hospitality (here he concluded in Japanese, which these people understood thoroughly well) deign to accept these irises, which my daughters have just pluckd for you in the garden. Gonen, kudasai, sayonara!"

Confusion! Cards exchanged! Exit party!

These episodes happen—often, and will occur again and again until the foreign element begins to fathom the depths of the "Soul of Nippon."

When the Japanese soldiers—a very small number indeed—who are at the present time held prisoners in Russia, return, they will be taken before a military court and asked two questions:—

1.—Under what circumstances did they surrender?
2.—Why did they not commit harakiri?

If, question No. 1 is not answered to the satisfaction of the court, they will be permitted, as a special act of grace and under extenuating circumstances, to do away with themselves there and than.

That is the bushido!
The man from Japan, be he noble or simple, prefers a thousand deaths to dishonour. To be taken prisoner! To return to his home discarded! To encumber the earth while his comrades are rotting over yonder! Quick, the happy dispatch.

During my travels in the "Land of the Tatami" I visited Kamakura, once the ancient capital of the great Shogun Yoritomo, and now an open acreage of ricefields, one monument only of all its former grandeur now remaining: the majestic, pensive, sublime image of Amida, the golden-eyed Daibutsu. The interior of this god forms a temple, and steps lead up to his very head. Candles are ever burning and incense is offered to him by pilgrims from near and far. On these inner walls have been scrawled by foreigners scurrilous and often obscene sentences relating to themselves, their entourage, and their desire to become immortal. When now the man and woman from abroad enters this shrine, the priest presents him and her with a slip, printed in Japanese and English, which reads something like this: "Stranger, whosoever thou art, and from whatsoever place thou comest, remember that thou standest on ground hallowed through centuries of veneration, by the worship of holy pilgrims, and the prayers of venerable priests of Buddha. Respect this temple as thou wouldst venerate thine own holy churches. Depart in peace."

This is the Soul of Buddha!

The theatres, on the night of a first performance, charge half-price only. This is as it should be. The actors allow a rebate for their want of completeness on this night, the slow movements of their stage scenery, and the mistakes in their dialogues. At the end of the play, the proprietor and the entire troupe of actors kneel before the audience, praying the house "augustly to pardon the shortcomings of their play," and promising a better performance on the morrow. If anyone going to a Japanese theatre is foolish enough to hand his tickets over to a bogus collector, he is compelled by law to pay again, so let him beware and stick to his tickets. Your hotel or tea-house does all the business in this matter: they purchase the tickets (which you never even see); procure your chair; your comforts in the eating and drinking line; choose your company; introduce you to the actors, and surround you with a thousand other charms, which are charged in your bill when you "honourably depart."

Maxim: Never do yourself what you can get others to do for you.

Up north I came across some funny notices over the doors, such as:

**Millionaire and Dressmaker,**

**Ladies' Outfitter,**

**Fried Souls.**
A Japanese friend, courting a *geisha*, said to her in English:

She loves me, loves me not?
I'll test it on the spot,
Where burn her blushes?

The lady, answering in Japanese (translated)—

*We are the *geisha* of Japan,*
*Reared on the *gomen nazai* plan*
*Augustly condescend to admire*
*Our resplendent attire,*
*And look at us in anger—if you can!*

A Customs' broker pays (not deposits) Yen 5,000 to the Customs for the privilege of transacting business for others; he must also be a man of the highest respectability.

The game of poker has become quite the rage in Tokio, where can be found some very clever dealers, who "play the game" with a "kitty," and who stake the indenture papers of several *geisha* on one hand. And where as in Boston the winner says: "*Habeas corpus,*" and in Liverpool they grant the loser a compassionate "Better luck next time, old chap," so in Tokio the winner with a shrug gives to the *geisha* her liberty, and says: "August pardon deign" to the loser.
In passport days a Japanese gentleman met a foreign tourist in an out-of-the-way place, where the foreigner had experienced considerable trouble on account of some irregularity in his document. The tourist was fuming at the delay and broke forth in lamentations over his fate. In fact he wished himself home again. Whereat the Japanese came to his assistance, and when they parted, he quoted Shakespeare to his American friend, thus:—

"There are many things in heaven and earth, Horatio, which were never dreamt of in your law of extraterritoriality!"

On a summer's night, when the air was swarming with fireflies and the cicadas were making lively music in the camphor-trees, we met an old, blind man, who was being led along by two small boys, his sons, aged six and seven years, respectively. The old man sat himself down under a tree, and began playing sad melodies on his harp, the Japanese *biwa*. The two tired boys fell asleep at his feet. My Japanese friends made enquiries and were informed that this was an old man from Takeo, whose wife had run away from him six months before, and had taken her daughter with her, to lead a life of shame, leaving the old, blind man and his boys to the mercy of the world. The tears were welling up in his blind eyes as he told his story, and his fingers mechanically made sad refrains on his harp. Our house was ransacked, and everything in the shape of rice, fish, meat, and tea was handed to the servants, with orders to see the wandering minstrel and his sons well fed, and to give them a night's lodging.

But my friends did not rest there. The next morning they went to the Kencho, and ascertained that the old man had spoken nothing but the truth. They then had him sent back to Takeo, found for him there a home, and put his boys to school. The woman was traced and her daughter taken from her, and she herself was placed in a penitentiary, with hard labour for life. These are a few instances of the commercial spirit of Nippon.

And this episode reminds me of the sad, soft tones of the flutes at night, on the streets, in country lanes, in forest glades, and on the mountain paths. It is a melodious and plaintive tune, always the same, and it is heard only when night has enveloped these places in her shadows. It is the flute of the blind Amma San, the massage man and woman. From old men, hoary with age, to young girls in their teens, there they wander, the blind people of Japan.

By law, strictly enforced, they *must* be blind, either from birth or through some fatality during their lives. Thus they gain an honourable living, and God pity the man who would in any way molest them; his punishment would be swift and sure. With perfect knowledge, gained by years of study in schools specially provided for them, they knead, twist and
new-string every nerve, sinew and tendril in the human body; in two hours' time they will create a new being; masterly is their manipulation of the tired traveller, the exhausted debauche, and the nervous hypochondriac; of the woman suffering from neuralgia, sick headache, or the weaknesses of a languid mind and body. Without a trace of false modesty they will take charge of your body from the head to the soles of your feet, and when their task is completed, they leave behind them a lingering sense of entire comfort, of placid well-feeling, which makes you very soon call them back again. Some of these girls are pretty and attractive, and their helplessness gives them an additional charm. One, I had, was a perfect beauty, with the face of a Madonna by Raphael. I asked her if she could see, and she answered "chitto" (a little)—and I rejected her!

Their usual charges are forty sen per hour, in rural districts much less. Where is the foreign lady residing in Japan, who can honestly say that she has not used the Amma San over and over again, and that she has not derived great benefit from her tender, soft and skilful hands?

Would it not be a good example for us to follow—to teach our blind the science of massage and shampooing, and thus enable them to earn a decent living, instead of putting them on the street-corners, with a dog behind and a placard in front, begging for charity?

And now, before closing, I will tell you about:

MY BESO AT KATAFUJI!

A besso—a Japanese villa! what dreams of comfort, ease, pleasure and charming seclusion does that word create in my memory of memories! My beso, alas! now no more. Time flies when the heart is filled with joy. I tried to stay its swift course, but with a mocking smile over its shoulder it said to me: "Poor mortal, thy time has expired." And I went into banishment, further than ever—to the very portals of Hades went I.

But when sadness enfolds me, I think myself back to my beso at Katafuchi. In memory there is no time.

Come, friend, seat thyself under this shady tree, and together we will away to dreamland.

In the early morning, when the dew lies thick on grass and flowers, the little servants open the wooden shutters, and the wrens and the thrushes send their greetings from the laurels on the lawn. They awaken us from our sweet slumbers on the soft silken cushions, as if singing. Arise, come out to us and worship the morning.

A cup of thy Japanese tea, O Hanna San, dozo, and my yukata, ("morning robe"). We will watch the sun rising over yonder glorious
mountain, where nature still lies slumbering under the break of day, and the night-clouds are slowly retreating over the horizon. There is that little fellow of a wren again, looking at me with his head on one side, and winking his eye. Forsooth, he is laughing at us, the rascal! his bird-soul is in sympathy with us; he knows that joy is fleeting and life but a one-night's dream.

Within the grounds of my besso there is a splendid park, where avenues of stately maples, magnolias, cherry, and camphor-trees rear their lofty heads. Behind a hedge of bamboos lies the orchard, with plums, pears, peaches, biwa, oranges, pumeloes and "apricocks," in its midst a large space where the finest, sweetest strawberries tempt one to linger. And under the shade of the maples there is the pond of ever-running water where the fountain splashes, and myriads of carp, red and black, and tiny goldfish with double tails, lift their heads for the daily dainties from our hands. Here we sit on rustic benches and watch them cruising around the beds of blue irises growing in fine clusters on the borders of the waters, where the dragon-flies rest their shiny wings, and the bees seek their nectar. Across a tiny bridge we come to the bamboo-grove, with its shady walks and stones, chair-shaped, for rest. These slender trees grow from a small shoot into lofty eminence in two short months, when they unfold their feathery leaves and sway with a cooling swish under summer breezes. Here I left behind me a tablet, on which was written in Japanese and English the words of Semi Maro:—

The stranger here from distant lands,
The friend his home-bound friend may greet,
For on this hill the barrier stands,
The gate where all must part and meet.*

It stands on a grassy mound, and will be taken care of when this hand has grown cold.

Here we sat on evenings and saw the moon rise over the mountains, and the lights appear in the harbour. Fireflies flit by like shining stars and the scents of the flowers of night envelop us. From here we saw, in the month of July, during the Bon Festival of three days, when the spirits of the dead visit their earthly homes, the mountains and the river and the harbour ablaze with thousands of lights, placed there to guide the spirits to their former abodes; groves one mass of illumination; and rockets and fire-stars sent towards the heavens to welcome back the ghostly visitors. On the third night myriads of straw-boats, with lights in their holds, are set afloat to carry back to the beyond these ancestral spirits. Alas! last year their

* Chamberlain's translation.
number was legion; the war had hardly left one home in Japan that did not count at least one grave on these mountains.

The gardens of my besso are built in two terraces, cut from the mountain's side, and upheld by immense stones and boulders, overgrown with lovely ferns and mosses. During a storm the rushing waters are led through cunningly devised canals and aqueducts to the roaring river below, and from the flood the rice fields and gardens around, by a perfect system of irrigation, which leaves the higher strata of the mountain in perfect immunity from inundation.

The great river, with rocks of ages and artificial cascades, becomes at such times a mighty torrent, deep blue, and throws its spray far over the rocks. Here can be seen the men and boys of Japan in countless numbers ascending the cascades, plunging down into the wild whirl of water like tritons, climbing the branches of overhanging trees, and diving to its innermost depths. A fine sight to see and unmistakable proof of the fine manhood of this race.

In my garden there are flowers, manifold, of sweet scent and charming variety. The peony (botan) is the queen of them all. Fain would I leave them on their stately branches, but my vase requires one—the most perfect specimen there is, just unfolded. So O Hanna cuts it, with many fair excuses to it, murmured in soft words. In the vase of Satsuma it lives for one long day, and sheds its faint fragrance over the room; then it dies and makes room for its successor. The people here have a way of singeing the stems of the peonies with burning charcoal, which process will keep the flowers fresh for a week. Roses we have here, everywhere, in splendid beds, and climbing
the old walls, red, white and the lovely yellow tea-rose, grafted. The wild rose and the moss-rose, beautiful beyond all description; and rosebuds for the hair of all the belles in the village.

Jasmine and the flowers of the magnolia, cherry and plum-blossoms, lilies of a hundred varieties, irises, blue, white and red, in the waters; sunflowers, orange-blossoms and convolvulus. And, oh! sweet morning-glory, I behold thy tender leaves opening to the morning sun, laden with dew that sparkles like snowflakes, on the walls of my besso! Friend, they are still blooming—there, and I see them not!

My bees flocked around me when I left, as if to bid me good-bye. In this land they do not sting, and willingly allow their human friends a share of their honey, which is taken from them in strict moderation.

The Divine Master is my witness that here can be found peace and happiness; that the world of sorrow finds no entrance to these enchanted grounds, where time is not, nor beginning, nor end.

In front of my villa is the large lawn, smooth as velvet, emerald-green. On it, at certain distances apart, are placed three stone temple-lanterns on high pedestals. Just before sunset a small lamp, containing clear oil, is
placed in each of these lanterns, and lit behind a paper-screen. These lights throw a faint shimmer across the lawn and over the stunted pines and red and green maples, suggestive of that mystic lore which dominates the hearts of these people. From the ordinary outsider's point of view it is charming to behold, and gives one the idea of perfect repose. We are swinging here in hammocks, under the majestic group of camphor-trees, smoking our cigars, looking at the stars, watching the fireflies, and whispering sweet nothings to the darling creatures swinging at our side. Then a hot bath and O Yasumi nazai. So end our days, in peace; and our mornings begin in happiness. What could mortals desire more? Alas, there is sorrow plentiful everywhere—in the next street, perhaps!

Immediately in front of the garden entrance stands a cut stone, three feet high, with its top hollowed into a basin; at the bottom of this stone there is another, also hollow, and containing five small loose stones: this is for washing the hands. To the left is another stone, also hollow at the top, but shorter; this is for washing the face. To the right, cut into the mountain, is a large hollow, oval-shaped; this is for taking the bath. Every morning, at sunrise, the little maids fill these hollows to the brim with clear water from mountain-spring, and remove the refuse water from the loose stones. These are relics of the classic cha no yu (tea ceremony,) and are to be found in front of every Japanese besso.

As for the house itself, why must I lacerate my heart-strings by describing its delights? The snowy tatami, the silken cushions, the recesses with their incense-burners, flower-vases and kakemono. The soft lights and mellow shadows behind the paper-windows, and gilded sliding screens. The soft breezes through room and hall, the perfect cleanliness and wholesome freshness, the balmy air, flower-scented and incense-laden. The unpainted wood in posters, pillars, beams and ceiling; the arrangements of the bath, the toilet and the lavatory. The tiny ancestral shrine behind the orange-trees, where the four Inari San, (honourable foxes) in marble, keep guard day and night over the fortunes of the family—all these and many others I enjoyed with rapture; all these I see now, and I feel their charms lingering over my spirit. Farewell, friend, I can dream no longer, but with the words of the famous Osaka geisha, murmuring softly to her dying lover, I say:—

Omae shindara tera ewa yaranu,
Yaete Konishite sakē de nomu.
Dearest, shouldst thou now die, the grave shall never hold thee:
Mixed with wine will I drink thy ashes!