

CURRENT OPINION

February, 1922

JAPAN'S REBELLION AGAINST OUR CLOTHES

THERE is in Japan a growing revolt against European clothing. It is supposed by some to reveal a subtle hostility to the west, a display of reactionary patriotism, but too much importance may be attached to this interpretation. The irreconcilable Japanese, it is true, as long ago as 1890 determined to revive the styles of their ancestors, and high silk hats and long frock coats were put away by the extremists of the patriotic party, and in their place the flowing robe and the bare head were adopted in exclusive circles. But that movement, as an effort to revive the traditional Japan of the shoguns, long since passed away. The Japanese who now wear their native dress, explains a writer in the *Komumin*, do so because it is so convenient and so much more comfortable than the modes of the west. When the Japanese have to come into contact with the western world they still wear western dress out of politeness.

The Japanese, explains M. Bolard Talbère in the *Paris Illustration*, have endured agonies in their efforts to get into our hats, our trowsers, our corsets. In the days of the beloved Mutsuhito, when the adoption of western ideas was to some extent obligatory, the men and women of the highest Japanese society did the best they could with our styles. They went in for our food as well. The emperor himself contracted disease of the kidneys in his efforts to digest the sort of food that is served to the aristocracy of England. He put his legs in trowsers. He wore boots. In order to impress the popular mind, pictures of himself and of his beautiful consort were circulated among the masses in order that the Japanese generally might be encouraged to follow these styles. In no long time the sons of the samurai were seen in high silk hats and four-in-hand ties. The rest of the costume might be native Japanese, because the clansmen generally were too poor to

Japan's Rebellion

equip themselves with the whole sartorial outfit. The women suffered most. Their incapacity to endure the corset longer than an hour at a time led to some tragedies in the imperial palace. Young and healthy women had to be cut out of their corsets. Men swooned after agonies to their feet in western boots.

Then there was the question of taste. Here, suspects the Japanese paper, and the French one agrees, the oriental mind proved itself the esthetic superior of the occidental. The Japanese were making a laughing-stock of themselves. They seemed manikins in an extravaganza as, in tight-fitting boots, they tried to walk upon the matting



**JAPANESE GENTLEMEN LOOKING LIKE
PRUSSIAN PLUTOCRATS**

The fidelity with which the samurai under German auspices in the middle of the last century adopted European trowsers, European hats, coats and sticks, made them more tailored than the fashion plates in aspect and grimmer than the gorilla when they grinned to dissemble the anguish they experienced in too tight boots, too tight hats and too tight ties.

of the ordinary native reception room. Sitting down in a chair with London skirts flowing about her limbs compromised the dignity of a great lady. Her friends in the royal circle were not a whit more brilliant in their efforts to negotiate the same difficulty. To make matters worse, the Japanese did not use

Japan's Rebellion

furniture then. There might be a solitary chair in the center of the room, and the unfortunate ladies would strive to make use of it in turn after the Lon-



**PERFECT JAPANESE LADIES IMPERFECTLY
EUROPEANIZED**

One of them, escorted by him whose subdued aspect suggests that he is her Europeanized friend, falls in an obvious effort to ignore the presence of that other dear Europeanized charmer whose telescope of forty horse-power is European enough to distract the attention of the Europeanized man thus placed between two fires.

don manner, only to collapse upon the floor oftentimes as the chair went backwards.

Members of the Japanese nobility did not know how to keep hats on their heads. These articles would fall on the floor and they could not be picked up by the loser because he did not dare to stoop in trowsers and boots lest he lose his equilibrium. Restoration of the hat to the head of the owner only led to a repetition of the catastrophe. A great statesman of the period wondered why high hats in particular were not provided with some mechanism that would keep them on. Another member of the court circle spent the best part of four hours, with the assistance of an incredibly large number of valets, in getting into a dress suit, a frilled shirt, a collar, a necktie and patent-leather shoes. He had never before in

Japan's Rebellion

his life worn western clothing. Having been fully dressed he thought the ordeal was over. When he learned that he must don an overcoat he collapsed and went to live permanently in the country districts. Ladies of exalted rank were found dead with dresses of the late nineteenth century on their figures, the expression of the countenance making manifest to the horrified beholders the nature of the suffering that had been endured. A lady connected with the court confessed that wearing feminine styles of the Victorian period was like being buried alive. Physicians were often kept in readiness to render what would now be styled "first aid."

All of which harrowing details, it would seem, furnish adequate reasons for the sartorial revolt referred to without assuming that the Japanese are starting a general crusade of hate against the Occident.