

REVIEWS

Living Japan

By Donald Keene

London, William Heinmann Ltd., 1959, 50s

Among the numerous books on Japan that have appeared in recent years for the general reader none has been more attractively presented than *Living Japan: the Land, the People and their Changing World*, by Dr. Donald Keene, associate professor of Japanese at Columbia University, New York City. Rarely has a finer combination of good literature, excellent content, and superb photography appeared.

In spite of his relatively short residence in this country, Dr. Keene has succeeded in a remarkable manner in weaving together all the important phases of everyday life of "living Japan" and in making the inner as well as the outer life of the people real to those whose acquaintance with the country is limited. Although the author's professional field is Japanese literature, he is clearly a keen observer of people and customs. Even in the difficult field of reli-

gion he does remarkably well.

To expect complete technical accuracy in such a volume, however, would be asking too much. It is not that kind of a book. The readers will be primarily interested in general impressions and an understanding of the overall situation. This they will get. For the scholar or the person interested in more than this, the section on the religions must be read with great care. There are a number of minor errors, and some mistaken impressions will be created but this should be no surprise in view of the many errors that creep into the writings of even professional scholars in this field. For these errors the author of course must be responsible; but one cannot help but wonder if the specialists on whom the author must have relied for checking his manuscript were as careful as they should have been. Here are a few statements concerning which this reviewer has doubts:

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(1) "Buddhist priests are clothed in black." (p. 82) Did he never see the gorgeous robes worn by the priests when performing temple ceremonies?

(2) "The Shinto priesthood has become an hereditary profession. It is almost unthinkable that a young man born outside the profession would wish to become a priest because of piety." (p. 92) The validity of any generalizations as to the motives for becoming a shrine priest is open to question; but the fact is that there are many young priests that were not born in priestly families.

(3) "The expenses for erecting the new shrines (at Ise) were met by popular subscription instead of by state grant." (p. 90) This is only partly true. Actually, the timbers for the last rebuilding of the shrines had already been cut and placed in the lumber yards at state expense before hostilities ended in 1945. This greatly reduced the amount of money that had to be raised from the public in order to rebuild the shrines.

(4) It is hardly fair to many modern religious movements to make such a sweeping statement as: "Innumerable small, less reputable Shinto sects have sprung up during the past half-century, especially since 1945." Moreover, there is no reference to new sects of Buddhist origin. (p. 95)

(5) Concerning Buddhism, the author says that Pure Land Buddhism has won "the allegiance of the vast majority of Japanese" p. 97 The total number of such believers is reported to be approximately 20 million out of a total of about 45 million.

(6) There are a number of other things that might be mentioned, but let us close with the statement that "most of the Japanese enthusiasm for the Imperial Family is concentrated in the person of of the Crown Prince." It can't be disproved but it seems very doubtful that this is correct?

In spite of these and other technical errors, the books is an excellent introduction to "Living Japan." (W.P.W.)