

TRADITION AND ADVERTISING IN JAPAN

Everything progresses at an incredible rate in Japan to-day. Advertising floods the whole country. American methods and models are taken up and employed. Side by side with this craze for the new which possesses practically the whole business world a most lively respect for tradition is manifest in Japan. To-day as much as ever, all public and private life is governed by the laws of old Japanese manners and usages. In spite of all American and European influences, business people try again and again to draw the old habits and customs into the service of their advertising. We give a few examples. It is an old observance, not only to send congratulatory messages at New Year, but also to ask after the health of one's friends and acquaintances in summer, on particularly warm days. To-day this enquiry usually takes the form of small presents which you buy for your acquaintances at a sweet-shop or pastrycook's. The salesman then adds a printed wood-cut with a polite enquiry as to the health of the recipient or a word of greeting beneath. This little mark of attention, so artistically done, is intended to increase the popularity of the firm and therefore serves an advertising purpose.

It is an old Japanese tradition, never to proffer even the smallest gift of money with the fingers, but always to hand it in an envelope. Actors and the innumerable variety artists in particular provide themselves with envelopes decorated with their portrait or crest for this purpose, since the giving of tips is one of their most important means of achieving popularity with the masses. Not only matches, but fans and small towels are given away as advertisements by nearly all business houses. Even the wrapping material for the purchases is a gift to the customer. It is usually a pretty pince of print, sometimes even a bit of real silk.

Girls and women use letter-paper printed on one side with pretty landscapes which harmonize well with Japanese handwriting. The envelopes are also printed with pictures of girls in charming costumes. The idea is to make a pleasant impression on the recipient.

He who does not advertise in Japan to-day will find himself continually thrust aside. Even the sacred temples, hundreds of thousands of which are scattered over the whole country, are not idle and seek to increase the number of visitors. They give away wood-cuts with pictures of their temple set in the midst of a lovely landscape or reproductions of the art treasures it contains.

It is no exaggeration to say that Japan is in danger of choking herself with advertising matter.

Trans. by E. T. S.



Small towels and fans given as advertisements