

CHAPTER XII

HIRAGANA SHIMBUN

The readers in the early years of the Meiji era were generally inferior to those of the present day in their knowledge, so that a certain paper issued a glossary of newspaper terms. This phenomenon tells the *raison d'être* of the Hiragana Shimbun, founded in 1873 by Hiso-nu Mayejima, who was proprietor of the Yubin Hochi. The paper was written with Japanese letters only. This scheme was quite unique and would be so even if it was started to-day. Mayejima's plan was very far-reaching, and he attempted to revolutionize the Japanese way of writing, and go forward with Japanese original letters, Kana, instead of Chinese characters.

The first number of the Hiragana Shimbun was issued on February 15, 1873. It contained the following editor's note.

この しんぶんし を すりいだし に
は ともとも ふたつ の をもむき あ
り ひとつ には まいにち の をふれ
を はじめ くにうち は まうす ま
でも なく せかいぢう の にちにち
うつり かわる ありさま まで かき
つどり あまねく をんな こども にも
みせ くに の ひらけ すゝむ を
たすくる ため ふたつ には わが く
には ことばまなび の くに なれび
かづ をほく して まなび かたき
から の もじ は なく とも ひらが
な 五十じ さへ あれば よろづ の
ことに すこしも さしつかへ なき こ
と こ あまねく ひとびと に しらせ

この のち をほひ に わが くに
ことば の がくもん を をこす ため
に すりいだし しんぶん なれび……

"Kono shimbun wo suri idasu ni wa somosomo futatsu no omomuki ari. Hitotsu niwa mainichi no ofure o hajime kuniuchi wa moo-su made mo naku sekaiju no nichinichi utsuri kawaru arisaua made kaku tsuzuri amaneku onna kodomo ni mo mise, kuni no hirake susumu o tasukuru tame, futatsu ni wa waga kuni wa kotoba manabi no kuni nare ba, kazu oo-ku shite, manabi kataki kara no moji wa naku te mo hiragana goju-ji saye are ba yorozu no koto ni zukoshi mo sashitsukaye naki koto o amaneku hitobito ni shirase kono nochi oo-ni waga kunikotoba no gakumon o okosu tame ni suri idasu shimbun nare ba....."

Translation:—

"We have two reasons for the issue of this paper. One is to report the Government bulletins and daily changes in Japan and other countries of the world, and to tell the news even to women and children, so that it will help the development of this country. The other is to show to the people that anything can be written with the Japanese alphabet of fifty characters, without the help of Chinese ideographs, which are too many and too difficult to be learned, and that as Japan is really the country of letters, the study of letters should be encouraged,"

The Hiragana Shimbun was shortlived but its influence on the

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public was great. The appearance of the Yomiuri Shimbun with Japanese letters beside the Chinese characters for pronunciation guides was the outcome of the movement started by the Hiragana Shimbun. The Yomiuri issued its first number on November 2, 1874. The paper was the first one which came out with kana (Japanese characters) attached to all Chinese ideographs so that the less-educated people could read them. The circulation increased enormously, and many other papers soon followed the example. The style still exists.

The movement started by the Hiragana Shimbun caused a similar movement for the adoption of Roman letters. The Anglo-Japanese Review, edited by M. Y. Muramatsu, says in its number issued on January 30, 1886, that the general meeting of the Romaji-kai took place in the Engineering College on January 23 and was attended by a large crowd who filled the spacious hall of the college. There were present, the English weekly reports, Count Inouye, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. T. R. Plunkett, the British Minister, Count Zaluski, the Austrian Min-

ister, Mr. Van der Palder, Minister for Holland and the Governor of Tokyo, and Mr. Kazuo Hatoyama, who was assistant chief secretary of the Foreign Office, and addresses were delivered by Mr. Ryokichi Yatabe and Mr. Aikitsu Tanakadate. We know from this that the Roman letter movement is so old and Dr. Tanakadate, who is now actively engaged in the movement, is the only one of the pioneers of Romaji still living. There are even now pros and cons in regard to the matter, but most young publicists are agreed in asserting that Chinese characters must be replaced by Japanese kana letters or Roman letters, because the use of Chinese characters may greatly hinder Japan's progress. They say that the learning of difficult Chinese characters is the hardest burden imaginable upon the tender minds of children and if other syllabic letters are used instead, typewriters or linotypes may come into use. It can safely be predicted that papers printed with Roman letters or Japanese kana will appear in the future. In that case, the efforts made by our predecessors in the early periods of the Meiji era must be remembered.