

CHAPTER V

AMATEUR JOURNALISM

The newspapers in their beginning era were run primarily by amateurs who hoped to make themselves known by means of it and though the dominant note in those papers was political they contained much of human interest.

The fact that the members of the Chugai Shimbun were extremely rejoiced at the increase of its circulation to 1,500 is very interesting, when compared with the circulations of leading Tokyo and Osaka papers at the present day. It may be mentioned here that the circulation of the Osaka Mainichi is more than one million and that of its sister paper, the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi, is 700,000. The rapid progress Japan has made in the past sixty years is a wonder, indeed, and it was measured at every period by the increase in circulation of leading newspapers, which was a landmark of Japan's advancement.

The Japanese public in 1868 had to be taught even how to subscribe to a paper. The Moshioyusa, a newspaper edited by Gen-ichiro Fukuchi, the famous writer, which came out two months later than the Chugai Shimbun, had the following to say in its first issue in April, 1868.

"There was a paper edited by Hikojo but after his departure for his second home, America, the paper ceased to be published. Later there appeared a paper of Buckworth Bailey, named the Bankoku Shimbunshi, but this also disappeared after its 10th number came out.

"In Hawaii, where the natives did not know even the alphabet five or six years ago, is now a newspaper

with a circulation of 7,000. China has her own language papers at Hongkong and Shanghai, each with 24,000 monthly subscribers. By a monthly subscription is meant the delivery of a paper regularly by the publisher for a certain amount of money deposited as subscription."

As already seen from these statements, regular newspapers, influential in society, were late in coming in this country compared with those in China or even in Hawaii. The papers run by Hikojo or by Bailey were forerunners in Japan but were not so popular. Hikojo's paper had only 100 copies sold every month and it suffered from financial difficulties. So it was discontinued in June, 1868. Bailey's paper ceased in the same month. By the way, an error is noticed in the statement of the Moshioyusa that Bailey's paper ceased to appear after its 10th number came out. The fact is that the paper issued more than ten, and the publication of its 11th number was reported by the Moshioyusa itself later.

The papers in 1868, the fathers of present-day newspapers, had much more of the human interest element than the papers of to-day, and they were looked for especially by those who sought gossip. The patrons of these papers belonged to the well-to-do class and had educated themselves before the appearance of newspapers, by the habit of reading collections of essays of the Tokugawa era. These collections were quite interesting. They had essays on various subjects, both instructive and interesting. This

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style of literature was, and is, called *zuihitsu* or random thoughts. The people in the Tokugawa era had a weakness for this literature. The papers in 1868 resembled *zuihitsu* in some respects, while the *zuihitsu* in the Tokugawa period contained newspaper element largely.

Among many *zuihitsu* published in the Tokugawa period, the *Shum-paro Hikki* by Koban Shiba, the first Japanese painter who studied western style art, can be called a sort of journalistic production. The book contained many clippings from ancient books on 'Do you know that —?' kind of things but at the same time gave information of the current news with certain comments. The writer pointed out the frequency of local fires and warned the public to be careful of the handling of fire at home. He wrote about the exploration in Karafuto by Rinzo Mamiya, who went there in November, in the beginning of the 19th century, and returned to Yedo in January of the next year. The explorer visited the writer on June 2 the same year, the story said. Shiba's essay contained notes on sundry other topics, such as the publication of a book on ancient Indian astronomy; a typical miser, a fortune-teller named Sekiryushi or Red Dragon, who lived in Mishimacho, Shiba; Mt. Shirane in winter; the streets in Yedo, which had increased from 808 to 1808; or the advisability of the opening of trade relations with Russia.

Just like Shiba's *zuihitsu* essays, the newspapers in 1868 contained many stories for social gossip. The readers who used to read the *zuihitsu* of the Tokugawa period now turned to newspapers.

Another characteristic of the newspapers of those days was that

they were still of the habit of thinking the people to be far below the Government. They used very respectful language in mentioning the Government. They referred to the Government as *Kami-gami*, which means high quarters, and the people as *Shimo-jimo* or lower depth. However, the tide of democracy in Europe and America was flowing into Japan by every channel and newspapers became naturally an open sea-route by which western ideas were brought to these shores.

In accordance with the development of communications, western civilization was coming into this country, in spite of all efforts by the reactionary element then prevailing. It goes without saying that every bit of news of the European countries reported by papers helped awaken the Japanese people, and stimulated them to found a New Japan on a thoroughly new basis. The Japanese who first visited Europe in those days were amazed at the civilization of a quality different from the stoic and quiet Oriental culture. There they saw the democratic basis of society which was quite strange and even enticing to them. The letters sent to papers at home by these Japanese abroad naturally formed most important news stories. The readers at home had no choice but to grow more democratic day by day.

Here is an example of a letter contribution to the *Chugai Shimbun* printed in its columns on April 6, 1868.

"The Paris exposition ended on October 8.

"The exposition was visited by rulers of European countries. The Emperor of Austria and his two brothers were among them. In

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their honour & grand military review was held in Paris. Fifty thousand troops participated in it.

"Of these soldiers 10,000 were cavalrymen. About a hundred cannon were used. It was quite a spectacle.

"The French Emperor Napoleon III is democratic. He drives his own carriage and talks with his subjects freely. He is always accompanied by only three or four attendants. In his Palace he is waited upon by only a few Court ladies!

"Paris is surrounded by deep moats and terraces with outposts here and there. In an emergency, cannon will be placed on these terraces and soldiers be sent out from the outposts. As the city is thus safeguarded, the citizens never left the town on any occasion of attacks from outside in the past. The people are extremely loyal not only to their emperor but also to their own country.

"Many sentinel posts are found in town. They keep communications with each other by means of telegraph. Railway lines run through the country like a net. Soldiers can be sent in a minute even to the remotest part of the land. Provisions, too, are carried by train. So the despatch of soldiers to a far country is not difficult.

"I am astonished at the fact there are many horses in Paris. Excepting cavalry horses, there are more than 30,000 in the city.

"The Austrian Emperor has donated 100,000 francs in aid of the paupers. Similar gifts have been made by the Emperors of Turkey, Russia and Prussia.

"Paris is a city, a little larger than Kyoto. There is nowhere in Europe such a big city as Yedo.

Paris is the finest capital in the world. But there are many paupers. Very few people marry before 30. This is the natural result of the high cost of living. The average women support themselves by working in manual labour at their own home. But they generally wear nice clothes.

"Women in Paris are pretty. Their faces are fair and white. Their skins are smooth. Their speech is very beautiful.

"European rulers often visit theatres. Recently the Emperor of Austria visited a theatre in Paris but as if he were a commoner. The traffic was not stopped. The people just took off their hats to him.

"The retinue of European kings and emperors who are now in Paris consists of only six or seven officials.

"Prices in Paris are very high. It seems that they are three times as high as those in Yedo. But machinery and guns are cheaper than in Japan."

Japanese papers reported that many Japanese went to Paris in connection with the Paris Exposition and some of those who exhibited goods at the exhibition were granted medals.

In its issue of May 2, 1868, the *Moshigusa* printed a report of the exhibition saying that "among the exhibits of various countries, the Italian jewels are attracting visitors. They are of variegated colours and of beautiful cuts. The watches and clocks exhibited by Switzerland are all wonderful. The English machines are very fine."

Commenting on the Japanese popularity at the exhibition, the

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journal said: "Japan has now become one of the seven big Powers of the world. This is acknowledged by the judges of the exhibition."

These reports and comments show the rise of new nationalistic group sentiments in Japan. The Japanese visitors to the Paris Ex-

position returned home with newer ideas and the conviction that if they strove hard Japan would be one of the biggest in the world. However, the new ideas brought back home by these Japanese were met with by the reactionary elements and naturally strife occurred between them.