

CHAPTER IX

THE NISSHIN SHINJISHI

The Nisshin Shinjishi, started in 1872 by J. R. Black, was one of the first Japanese papers printed from wooden type and edited with a conception of what a newspaper should be. Mr. Black was the editor of the Japan Herald and the Japan Gazette and had long desired to publish a vernacular newspaper. He now realised his plan with the assistance of F. da Roza, who was the proprietor of the Commercial News and a Japanese writer. The Nisshin Shinjishi (The Reliable News) was thus issued and obtained popular support. The paper was a neat production and the news was accurate, so it was useful to readers. It printed the daily quotations of commodities, the railway time table, and the Government bulletins. Later the paper became the official organ of the Sa In (左院), one of the three branches of the Government. It ceased to exist in 1875 on account of the promulgation of a new press law of a more rigorous nature, forbidding foreigners from being proprietors or editors.

The new press law was severely censured by the public, but it remained and many editors were sent to prison for their attacks upon the Government.

Regarding this absurd law, Mr. Black wrote in his work, "Young Japan", as follows:

"At length, towards the end of 1874, newspapers having been established in many of the provinces as well as in Tokyo and Osaka, all fears were set aside and outspoken comments on all subjects that oc-

cupied public attention, became the order of the day. The Government did not at first take any notice of them; but finding that some of the writers were exercising their newly acquired facilities of spreading their opinions, in abuse of Government measures, and even of individuals, it was determined to bring the writers under some kind of control. One right that the new Government had accorded to the people was that of petition. The memorials were sent in to the Genro-in, and there decided upon. Many petitions were thus sent in, boldly assailing the doings of the Government; one even going the length of demanding the disgrace and decapitation of the Prime Minister. By some means the text of this memorial got into the hands of one of the new Editors, who published it in his paper. This caused a climax, and the Press Law was promulgated, bringing newspapers and periodical publications under such rigid censorship, that, although in spite of everything, newspapers have quintupled in number since the law was passed, hardly any Editor has escaped punishment at one time or another by imprisonment for a longer or shorter period; or by fines of a greater or less amount. The very persecution,—for really, in some instances, it has amounted to this,—to which it has been subjected, has seemed to strengthen the growth and importance of the Press; and it has found employment for thousands of samurai of all ranks. It is remarkable that the compositors of all the Japanese newspapers in Tokyo, and I fancy elsewhere, are samurai, and their

steady industry, regularity, and good general behaviour, are their most marked features. It must be remembered that I speak from experience. On the Nisshin Shinjishi, for four years, I had over sixty of them employed; and the pleasure with which I always entered the office, was quite unlike anything a man knows among ordinary workmen.

"There was not one who hadn't the manners of a gentleman. There was not one who did not make me a polite bow as I entered and left. There was often plenty of merriment, which I didn't interfere with, so long as their work was well done; and there was never any quarrelling. The editor was of an old hatamoto family under the Shogunate, and had been Vice-Governor of Hakodate. He had one failing—viz., an unconquerable objection to modifying his style of writing—from the most scholarly style to which he and all of his standing had of old been accustomed,—and bringing it down to the comprehension of the multitude. Everyone said how beautiful was his language, but I had many convincing proofs that it often took some of its professed admirers a long time to understand it. It had the effect, however, of placing the paper very high in the estimation of the highest and most cultivated classes.

"All the subordinates—and an English journalist would be surprised to know how many he required,—were men of equally good family. The manager of the paper was formerly treasurer of one of the most powerful southern clans, and the clerks under him were well-born men of a northern clan. The chief reporter was paid a high salary, and employed his own men. They were all his old kerai, under

the old regime; and even the office messenger was a samurai. The only men who were not so were the machine and press men and their staff.

"Taking this then as an example, and making allowance for the greater economy with which the natives are able to work, it may easily be seen how very important a field of labour the Press opened for the old two sworded men—the real brains of the country. But the same irrepressible boldness that they have always possessed in action, displayed itself in their utterances. They will write; and regardless of all consequences they refuse to avoid criticism of the Government and officials. It has never once been found that when one writer, or editor has been incarcerated, there was no man of ability to step at once into his place, and run the same risks. It is true they are more prudent than formerly, and present what they have to say in guarded language, but with all their care the censor is constantly down upon them, and it may truly be said that since the Press Law has been promulgated 'uneasy lies the head of him who wields an editorial pen.'

His account of the Nisshin Shinjishi, his own paper, in "Young Japan" is very interesting and is worth reprinting here.

"I have in previous chapters mentioned the Shimbun Zasshi, as having been published weekly in the vernacular under the auspices of Kido. Other weekly, and two daily papers had started since the first named made its appearance. Of the daily, one, the Mainichi Shimbun, was published in Yokohama, principally as an advertising medium; the other, the Nichi-Nichi Shimbun, was published in Tokyo.

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The meaning of their titles is the same—the Daily News. Neither dared to write leading articles nor to comment seriously on the occurrences of the day; and their columns were always defaced with such filthy paragraphs as to render them worse than contemptible in the eyes of foreigners; though they appeared to be enjoyed by the Japanese, who, for the most part, had no conception what a newspaper was, or what were its uses.

"It is not disputed that the author of this book was the means of educating them up to this point. This shall be explained in as few words as possible, and should be omitted altogether, but for the fact that the press now is as potent as it is universal in every part of the empire. It has hosts of clever, independent writers; and, notwithstanding somewhat repressive press-laws, and the exercise of a remarkably active censorship, all subjects are discussed with an intelligence that cannot be gainsaid. The story of the period would be incomplete if it altogether ignored the rise of the Native Press.

"I had always had a strong desire to establish a vernacular newspaper; for among the samurai I chanced to meet from the time of my first arrival, I discovered such an amount of child-like ignorance of things connected with the outer world, coupled with such an earnest desire for information and instruction, that I thought there could be no better means found than the columns of a newspaper to give them what they required. All of them seemed to be well educated in their own way; and I have rarely met a Japanese of any class who was not well up in the history of his own country; or at any rate in that of its greatest heroes.

"About 1869 or '70, Mr. C. J.

Pfouder called on me with a proposal. He had so far mastered the language, as to be able, with the aid of his Japanese tutor or friend, to conduct a newspaper, if I would undertake to bring it out in the office in which the Japan Gazette was printed. I agreed, and obtained the necessary katakana type from the Presbyterian Mission Press, Shanghai. It then transpired that this would be of little use: as the educated Japanese only used the Chinese characters with here and there a few kana characters interspersed. A list of these characters he was to have brought me; but him, I heard no more from him upon the subject, and the affair fell through.

"In January 1872, I visited Tokyo, and was met by Mr. F. da Roza, who, after a few commonplace greetings, said in so many words:—'Why don't you start a Japanese newspaper?' I replied. 'There is nothing I desire so much. I have had it in my mind for years, and have long ago made estimates for such an enterprise. But there are many difficulties.' 'What are they?' he enquired. 'They are legion. My own imperfect acquaintance with the colloquial, and total ignorance of the written language. The necessity of getting a sufficient quantity of Chinese type (which was already being cast in Tokyo, but neither he nor I was aware of), more than probable refusal of the Government to give me permission, without which not a sheet could be issued.' Besides these I mentioned a long string of smaller matters that had to be overcome in the starting of a newspaper. 'He replied by meeting every one of my objections.

"'I'm not very busy just now,' he said, 'and I will undertake, if you give me your authority, to have

all the characters cut in type form in boxwood: introduce you to a learned Japanese scholar, formerly Vice-Governor of Hakodate, who, I'm sure, will act as Japanese Editor; engage a trustworthy Japanese gentleman as manager; introduce you to the Mombu-kiyo—the Secretary of State of the Education Department, and guarantee you the necessary license. In short I'll assist you in every way I can."

The efforts made by J. R. Black in starting his paper in the Japanese language can hardly be imagined. His own account of his efforts is minute and gives us a vivid description of the condition of Japan in those days.

"I gave Mr. Da' Roza carte blanche to act for me in making all preparations," says he in his work, 'Young Japan', "and he accomplished promptly and effectually all he promised. He failed in nothing that he undertook to do; and I am glad to acknowledge that it was the services he rendered me, gratuitously and without thought of reward, that enabled me to launch the Nisshin Shinjishi—(The Reliable Daily News). Ultimately, I offered him, in return for his permanent services, a certain share in the paper, which he accepted. Of late years attacks have been made upon the character of Mr. Da Roza. It is in these circumstances, that I take the only opportunity I ever had, or probably ever shall have, of asserting positively and unequivocally, that during the time he was actively engaged on the Nisshin Shinjishi, all his energies were for the good of Japan, and many improvements that followed the publication of articles in the paper, may be justly attributed to him; for though the articles were always

written by himself, they were frequently suggested by him.

"The fact that Japanese find it difficult to read anything written in their own characters, must appear curious to distant readers. It would seem most natural for them to write their own language in their own alphabet—or rather syllabary, (for every character represents a syllable); but it is not so. The Chinese characters are hieroglyphs, each conveying a distinct picture or idea, so that once mastered, they are read as quickly as our ordinary books. The Japanese syllabary of course only conveys words, and they have often so many meanings for one word that they have to read a long way before they can make out which meaning is intended. Thus all men of any education invariably use the Chinese. I was at first told that I should only require between two and three hundred Chinese characters. I found I could not make a beginning with less than twelve hundred; and these gradually augmented, until they numbered over twelve thousand separate and distinct characters, and still were daily increasing. At first I had several men employed constantly at the office, cutting in wood the characters as required; for every paper or article that came in was sure to have some one or two characters not hitherto obtained, and so they were supplied as they were wanted. The blank block, type size, were all kept in quantities, and as particular characters were demanded, the engravers set to work and cut them. After using this wooden type for some months, I discovered that there was a regular metal type foundry in the city, and so was able to replace my rough wood with good metal type; and a peculiarity that will

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bring a smile to the lips of foreign type-founders, was, that when any new character was required, we could send and get one, two, or any number at any time, and at one cent each.

"At the risk of being egotistical—which I will endeavour to avoid as much as possible—a little more shall be added about the establishment of the paper. The work was full of interest for many reasons. The contents were precisely like those of an ordinary European paper—a few advertisements; leading articles; news items; foreign intelligence; shipping lists and current prices. For years it had been the complaint of editors of newspapers in Yokohama that theirs was thankless labour—so rarely did any results show themselves; and when they did, the public did not acknowledge whence the ideas issued that led to them. With the Japanese paper, from the outset, it was quite different. For instance, in the first, or in one of the very early numbers, I had occasion to mention some activity on the part of the police, and I took care to commend it. Hardly had the paper been issued, when some police officers called at the office to thank me. I told them there was no occasion to thank me; that it was the duty of a newspaper to report police cases as well as others; and that perhaps sometimes they would find themselves censured. But, I explained to them, that if so, it was rather with the view of encouraging them to do their duty judiciously, than with the object of discouraging them by finding fault for finding fault's sake. They thanked me, and said they quite understood, and they would explain what I had said to their brother officers.

"On the occasion of my going,

with Mr. Da Roza as my interpreter, to the Mombu-sho, Education Department, in the matter of my license, as we returned, on a large vacant space at the foot of Surugadai and close to Kanda Bashi, we saw a number of small mat booths. 'Now', said Mr. Da Roza, 'here is a thing that you are probably a stranger to. Let us go into one of these places.' We entered. I cannot tell what it was our unhappy lot to see. It was so absolutely disgusting. Suffice it that in a space about eight feet by six, surrounded by matting to a height of about eight or nine feet, open to the sky, was, at one end, a platform raised about three feet from the ground, and sufficiently deep to admit of two girls sitting comfortably on foreign-made chairs. Nothing was charged for entrance. Everyone gave what he pleased. A man stood outside and drew back the hanging piece of matting that served as a door, and a woman within received the visitors. As we entered, a little boy about ten or twelve years of age preceded us, and jumped into the space underneath the platform, and his part of the performance was simply to take the remains of a rabbit, nearly consumed in his previous performances, and to devour a portion of it—raw—like a wild beast. It was unpleasant enough, but that was all. His dog-teeth were extraordinarily long and dog-like, and this may have given his parents the idea of training him accordingly, with a view to exhibition. Of the rest I must be mute. But it led to my being introduced to a number of street exhibitions—indecent and objectionable—though none, in my estimation, was so bad as the first I had seen. I wrote a very strong paragraph on the subject. Within three or four days, every one of them was swept away; and never since has any such ob-

scenity been permitted in any part of Tokio

"I have mentioned these small matters to show how keenly alive the Japanese were to public criticism. But hardly a day passed, without the effects of what had been written in the paper being seen. It was evident that it was read with avidity by officials; but it took some time to find a firm footing for it among the common people. Mr. Da Roza in his efforts to assist me in launching it had organised a staff, embracing among others several young samurai whose duties were constantly to canvass the city for subscribers. Their success was so small that he said he would try himself; and, one day, finding time from his other avocations for the purpose, he asked me to walk with him through one of the principal commercial portions of the city, and visit some of the large establishments. The class of places we visited was similar to the substantial wharfingers of Tooley Street, London,—large oil merchants, wholesale grocers, wine merchant and the like; and the remarks some of them made respecting the new enterprise were amusing in the extreme. Take one as an example.

"We entered the front shop or office. On the ordinary mat covered floor, raised about eighteen inches from the ground, were a number of bantos (clerks) squatting on their heels (in that manner natural to them but all but impossible to foreigners), some writing, some doing nothing but merely waiting for customers. In rear of all, behind a low open-work rail about a foot high, knelt the proprietor; his large circular spectacles over his venerable nose; and with several thick account books before him or by his side, and a little boy kneeling near him, to do his bidding as required. Evidently there was considerable business on

hand, for employees kept passing in and out from the warehouses in the rear, with papers, seeking instructions, or reporting their proceedings.

"All eyes were turned upon us, and all ears opened to hear what we had to say. My companion, possessing remarkable fluency in the Japanese colloquial, was the spokesman. Addressing himself to the proprietor he told him the object of our visit. He heard all with great complacency, and we fancied with marked attention. Alas! we found that he had understood nothing. What was meant by a newspaper he had no idea. At length one of the bantos said, 'Oh yes, Sir! You have seen, this paper. You have it by you somewhere—the Nisshin Shinjishi. Surely, you remember.' 'Ah! so I have,' he said, 'Here it is,' and he produced a copy of it. He then proceeded to pay some compliments on its getting out, and the interesting news it contained from foreign countries; and we thought that one who appreciated it so much would be a certain subscriber; but when he came to the end of his praises he said nothing about taking it regularly. Mr. Da Roza suggested, therefore, that as it had given him so much satisfaction he should place his name on the list of annual subscribers. 'Why?' he asked, 'I've got it—what more do I want?' 'Yes, you have one day's issue; and it comes out every day.' 'So I understand,' he replied, 'but having it already, why should I take it every day?' And all the bantos laughed, thinking it an excellent stroke of wit, no doubt. Mr. Da Roza was about to explain, but the little boy did it for him. 'Master!' the little fellow said, 'You don't quite understand. It is not in the same words every day, but it comes

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out every morning with the news counted by hundreds, and their readers seek them with avidity day of the day before, always something new.' 'What?' asked the master, opening his eyes doubtfully, 'as much as this changed and fresh every morning? I cannot believe it possible!' He said he would not subscribe; but send to his booksellers for it as he wanted it. One could not have supposed that such utter ignorance of the uses of newspaper would have been found among such generally intelligent, substantial people. But it soon passed away. Within a couple of years there were over fifty newspapers in the country, all of them finding readers, although none as yet, save the *Nisshin Shinjishi*, was in the habit of publishing comments on passing events in the shape of articles. Now, the newspapers are counted by hundreds, and their readers seek them with avidity day by day.

"Towards the end of the year the *Nisshin Shinjishi* was made the official organ of the *Sa In*—one of the three branches of the *Daijokuan* (Government); but ultimately the Government altered the Press Law, one of the provisions of the new law being that no foreigner should be editor or owner of a Japanese newspaper. Thereby hangs a grievance, which I do not consider this book is the proper place to ventilate: so on the ultimate fate of the paper I will be silent. The great influence exercised by the newspaper press in Japan at the present day may probably justify my having said so much as to its origin."