



K. Tsukamoto. **A Question of Clothes.**

FROM: THE JAPAN MAGAZINE, vol. 8, no. 5 (September, 1917), pp. 273-274.

A QUESTION OF CLOTHES

By K. TSUKAMOTO

THERE are increasing numbers of Japanese who advocate a change of dress for the nation, thinking the native costume to be the most primitive now obtaining among civilized nations. On the other hand there are increasing numbers of foreigners who admire the native dress of Japan and are pleased to wear it sometimes; whether for comfort or curiosity is not known. There is no doubt that the native kimono is artistic and elegant in form and colour, especially the woman's dress, and certainly looks better on a Japanese lady than European dress, though as much cannot be said, perhaps, for the male attire of Japan. Most men of education or position now in Japan wear foreign dress; but they usually change into native costume on returning from their shops and offices.

The Japanese have had numbers of opportunities for hanging their costume during the centuries that have passed, but they have not very radically done so as yet; and, therefore, there must be some relation between the native kimono the Japanese temperament and spirit that renders them more or less inseparable. Perhaps, indeed, it is a matter of climate rather than of spirit or temperament. It is an atmospheric rather than a psychological influence. The kimono is as simple a garment as the human mind could well contrive, and be a garment at all; and therein it well agrees with the Japanese disposition, which is content with elegant simplicity. For active service the native dress of Japan is not so well adapted; but for rest and quietude and thought it is admirable and very comfortable.

The loose folds of the Japanese kimono wrapped about the body make it possible to keep the body warm in cold weather, and at the same time, using lighter material, render it easy to loosen and cool the body in summer. It is certainly more easily ventilated and washed than foreign clothing, and therefore much more sanitary. The light-weight kimono used by the Japanese for negligé attire in the hot weather is known as the yukata, or yuagari, which means bathrobe. The light cleanliness of this garment for summer wear is incomparable; and even foreigners sometimes like to don them on hot evenings to go to the bath or to take a stroll on the street. About spas and watering places generally they are all the go, and to see hundreds of people, young

and old, so cheerfully habited in sweltering weather, is a scene one never can forget.

Those who knew the late Lafcadio Hearn during his residence in Japan will remember how fond he was of Japanese dress, always wearing it when possible. He thought the dress of a Japanese gentleman infinitely superior to the modern frock coat and starched shirt. When he was appointed professor at the Imperial University the one request he asked was that he should never be required to appear in a frock coat, or a morning coat. In his family he always wore the yukata, and the members of his household did likewise.

In this connection his wife, who survives him, tells a story to the effect that one summer day she went with her husband to a dry goods shop to buy some material for making yukata. The clerk showed them many pieces of material with great patience, as is the usual custom. Hearn liked all and set all aside, until his wife was astonished at the number of pieces her husband desired to purchase. She protested that it was not wise to buy so many; but he insisted, saying the price was only 1 yen and a half, or 2 yen, and he liked to see a variety of patterns worn in the house, the sight always delighting his eye. The shopman was surprised to see the foreigner buy as many as thirty pieces. Hearn specially preferred yukata bearing such designs on the pattern as waves or cobwebs. When a yukata was brought to him he always exclaimed and welcomed it with delight.

The yukata is unlined and very simply made. It may be made of cotton, or serge or common thin flannel. Most yukata are made of cotton, the patterns being very artistic and bright. The most popular colour is blue pattern on a white ground. The average cost of a yukata is from 2 to 6 yen; but more 2 yen ones are bought than any others. These garments are worn without distinction by rich and poor alike. It is the one touch that reduces all to the same level in Japan. The month of May sees the yukata material begin to be on show in the shops. The yukata cannot be worn on ceremonial occasions, as its appearance means undress attire and a day off. The chief reason against its use for ceremonial occasions is, of course, because the rank of the wearer cannot be distinguished. The designs on yukata cloth are now of great variety, representing every beautiful thing in nature. Some indulge in having their materials made to order with patterns of their own choosing, but the people do not fancy this notion, as they regard it contrary to the national simplicity and elegance for which the yukata naturally stands.

Tokyo is about the best place in Japan to see becoming patterns in yukata, though at such watering places as Ikao and Kamakura one often sees a magnificent variety of beautiful yukata. In the summer evening when the people go to the public bath they wear yukata, and one sees numbers of them strolling along every street. The Japanese woman with her beautiful black hair looks specially charming in her yukata. The Japanese gentleman loves to recline in his yukata in the cool of the evening on his veranda or in his garden or stroll about his domain; while the poor man rests in front of his cottage, feeling clean and cool in his yukata after his bath and the work and toil of day are over. The cool of the summer evening is when the old man feels like a youth again and the old woman like a girl; while boyhood feels quite above the common earth: and all alike in their cheery yukata. It is then that talk is at its best; everyone is in the best of humour and good spirits. In short the yukata is the most light and cheerfully characteristic garment of the Far East; and all who know it desire that it may long remain so in use.