

tunny fish purchased for 1/ brought, in various dishes, fully 4/6. As times grew harder trade grew slack; the number of soldier visitors increased, and it was impossible to refuse the poor fellows something to eat when they pathetically gazed in silence at the tempting cutlet-ash and fresh corn. Then the rent was advanced and the veterans, after borrowing money at 180 per cent interest, finally gave up and moved to a cheaper home—of three mats with a back yard just two feet wide. One by one they pawned their clogs, sandals, and socks, their umbrellas, braziers, little low tables, rice kettles, and miserable bedding—everything that could be pawned.

Tokyo Shylocks.

The Government rate of interest in the pawnshops is supposed to be about 1 1/2 per cent a month, but by devious devices the Tokyo Shylocks secure from



CHILDREN AT WORK IN A POTTERY.

amusement they read newspapers which when twelve hours old were sold to the very poor for one-third of the original prices.

One day, while roaming sorrowfully in the desolate wilderness of low, flat houses, Taki met his old colonel, who received him kindly and gave him one yen. With this the veteran purchased a stock of salt mackerel, dried cuttle, salmon trout, and codfish on skewers, and started out as an itinerant merchant in the country. He found the farmers and villagers so poor that they could not afford to pay Tokyo prices for his delicacies, and he was compelled to sell at a loss. He trudged along manfully, however, hoping that luck would change. He washed his coarse blue kimono in the wayside streams. He was still a self-respecting Japanese.

On the road and in the hamlets of Chichibu and Oniya he met homeless veterans and beggars of all sorts. It seemed to him that Japan had become the saddest country on earth. Then he sold the last of his stock and found that he had but 5d left. He determined to return to Tokyo. There was a stroke of good luck on the way. Ten miles from the city a farmer hired him to draw a load of vegetables to the market. The clumsy cart carried fully seven hundred pounds, but Taki tugged it to its destination and received 4d for his labour. That was a large sum, as 4d in the market had a buying power of thirteen cucumbers or twenty egg-plants. It meant a temporary supply of food.

Back in Tokyo, Taki gave a swindling employment agency his last yen and secured employment in a rice shop which sold the leavings of large restaurants and public institutions. His wages were 23d a day and all the spoiled rice he could eat. It was a repulsive business. The dilapidated shop boasted a little yard, and in this were stretched old mats upon

which the rice was dried. Inside, bottles, casks, broken boxes, tubs, and kettles were filled with refuse rice. Everything was very dirty, and yet to the neighbourhood it was a mainstay for food cheap enough to be within reach. Twice a day Taki and the other assistants made a round of the restaurants and public institutions, such as the hospitals and the Military College, and bought the rice and the bits of food that had been left over. They also picked bits of fish and decayed fruit from the garbage receptacles. A tub of rice weighing 125 pounds could be bought in this way for 2/1. It was retailed to the poor at the shop for 3d a pound. The rice, the fragments of bread and fish, the spoiled fruit, the stale pickles and the like were carefully sorted.

A Japanese is dirty only when he cannot help himself, and Taki shuddered at the stench of this garbage gathered like precious metal and weighed out to the last ounce by the stewards of the restaurants and the officials of the public buildings. Poverty made him and his fellows live in dirt and eat dirt; it was not to be escaped. He learned to speak the slang of the second-hand food dealers. Rice scorched in the kettle was termed "tiger's skin," while rice washed out in cleaning was known as "stop"; fragments of bread they called "stove" in jocular allusion to the warmth they did not give the stomach; and bits of vegetables were sold as "stumps." Taki soon became a connoisseur in the various forms of edible swill.

Of course, there were doleful days occasionally, when the patrons of the cafes and the students in the colleges and the hospital patients cleaned up their plates and there was little refuse to gather. On such days the throng at the shop which awaited the return of the laden carts made a lugubrious assemblage. When there was not enough to go round, the repulsive mess was divided up so as to enable each patron to buy a fractional meal.

Taki worked here for several months, but at the time the combination to control the second-hand food-supply was being perfected, and when it finally took over the various collecting carts and routes the veteran found that he was not wanted, owing to new economies in gathering the garbage in central stations.

Taki began once more a weary round of labour-seeking. He even joined the homeless coolies who made their headquarters on Reiganjima, an island in Tokyo formed by the River Sumida. Here the poorest class of coolies resort, hearing a pad on their shoulders and wearing a single coarse garment. Not having employment by the day, they seek piece-work and odd jobs. They haunt the lumber yards and the vegetable markets. They pull heavy carts

great distances for 3d. After a day of killing toil scattered over half the sections of the city, they regard a total earning of 5d as a great harvest. Then they begin to think of the sake shops and a hilarious evening. A dish of cooked food can be had for a farthing, and this, washed down with sake sold in little square wooden cups, makes them forget the toils of the day. In winter they drink "white horse," a very cheap sake, and in summer when their thirst is great they satisfy it with shochu, a fiery liquor made from the dregs of the sake breweries.

After a time Taki left the wharves and markets and found employment with a lender of quilts who lived in Shin Ami Cho, a street in the Shiba quarter. It was getting on in the winter, and his duties consisted of keeping count of the quilts rented to the poor and collecting payment. For this he received 33d a day and his food. In this one street there were seven quilt lenders who supplied the 350 houses. The poor cannot afford to own quilts, but when the cold becomes intense they rent coverings



A JAPANESE AT WORK.

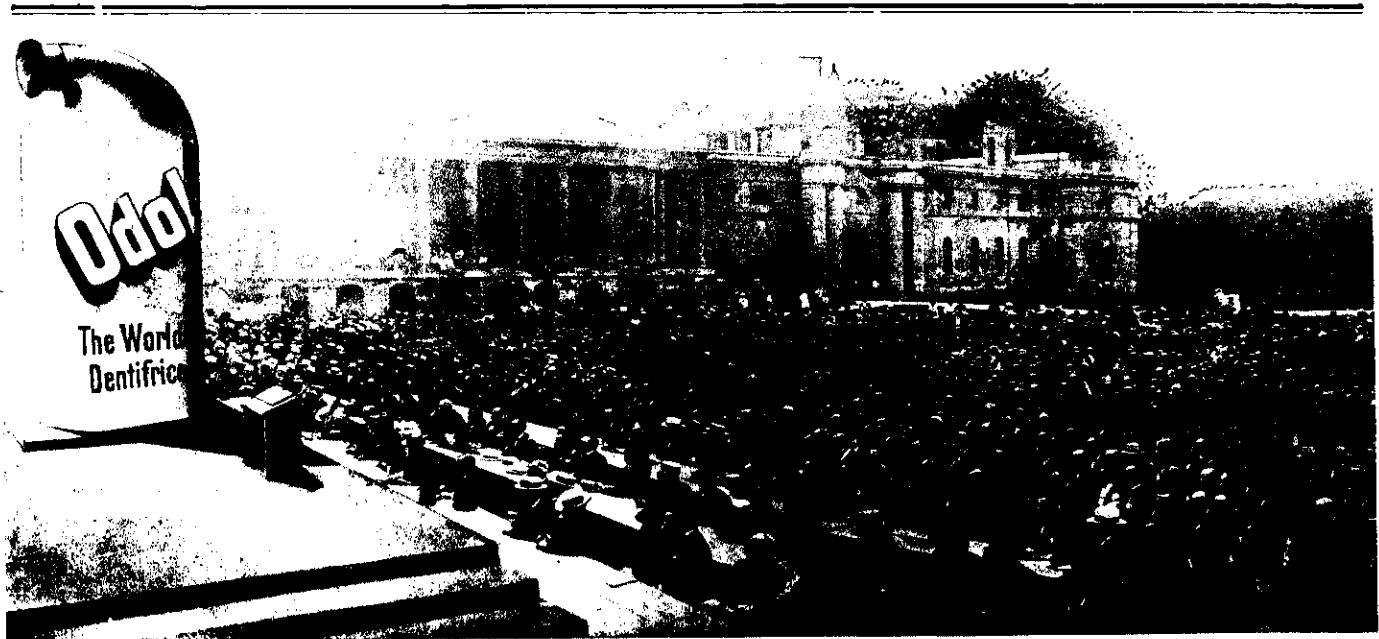
5 to 8 per cent per month. Then, whenever an article was taken out, an additional charge of 1 1/2 per cent was made. In the matter of pipes, the pawnbrokers, after advancing, would rent them out to their owners for a few mills a day so that the unfortunate might still have his smoke of a thumbful of the horrible stuff supplied by the Government monopoly. The three veterans huddled together on their ragged old mats and lived on the entrails of fish, horses and cattle, which, prepared in itinerant kitchens by kebab restaurateurs, were sold nicely browned on long wooden skewers. One skewer cost 3d, and in common with many of their neighbours, they chewed the very wood to extract the last atom of nourishment. For



THE PRICE OF VICTORY.

A poverty-stricken peasant praying for food.

made of rags sewn together, which can be had as low as a farthing a night. In the nipping winter air, an entire family will huddle under a single flimsy quilt. The rent must be paid before midnight. If not paid, the collector takes the quilt and leaves the unfortunates shivering. Taki, though he had charged machine guns, was a veritable coward when it came to depriving the poor of their quilts. Many times he went away leaving a penniless mother with her children in possession of a quilt they could not pay



A POPULAR TRIUMPH: Adherents of Odol.

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