TO SPEED THE PARTING GUEST

Dear Friends:

The Japanese are a very hospitable people and they are polite to a fault. Occasionally, however, a critical situation will arise with which Western families are also well acquainted. We all remember the story of the man who came to dinner and stayed on indefinitely. Japanese houses are small and provide very little privacy. Each member of the family lives largely within himself and learns to think quietly while sitting on his own corner of the tatami mat. While Western facilities are far more commodious, we are accustomed to a more elaborate household. Every room is indispensable to our varied interests.

In the Western household, there is a strong tendency to make elaborate preparations for the entertainment of visitors even though they may only stay for tea. The general housecleaning is mandatory. No speck of dust must be allowed to embarrass the lady of the establishment. The younger generation has less disciplined habits. The doors of the children's rooms remain closed or locked when strangers are about.

The Japanese, as usual, do things differently. They prefer to clean house immediately after the departure of guests. Considering the sparceness of Japanese furnishings, the excellent behavior of children, and government supervision, tidiness is almost universal. The annual "big clean" is enforced by appropriate legislation and the little cleans are semi-public with bedding hanging out of the windows or spread along fences.

A curious publication called "We Japanese" issued by the Fujiya Hotel, Ltd., Miyanoshita, Hakone, Japan has gained distinction for its description of folk ways and other local curiosities of behavior. Among its distinctions are the regular meetings of the Mustache Club. The above mentioned volume also has some practical recommendations in the matter of guests who outstay their welcomes.

There was once upon a time an elderly Japanese gentleman with a fastidious nature who must have been allergic to dust or those causing it. Whenever a
caller departed, the entire house, from the tiled roof to the substructure of the floor, had to be washed, cleaned, or dusted. There was no way of telling when a visitor would depart, but the maidservants were required to stay awake far into the night if the evening was especially convivial.

Servants are always ingenious creatures with a natural instinct for labor-saving devices. According to ancient customs which have descended from an unknown antiquity, there are suggestions for speeding the departures of lingering guests. One of the Japanese methods would probably interest weary Americans except for one difficulty. In Japan it is an inflexible rule that, when entering a house, guests must leave their shoes outside. The clog-like sandals were therefore available to servants. One happy thought based on natural magic (with a touch of sorcery) was to make the shoes as uncomfortable as possible to encourage the departure of their owners. They were quietly taken indoors and warmed at the kitchen stove. In the course of warming they would become so red hot that they would send a telepathic message that the wearer must depart as quickly as possible or his clogs would be burned to death.

If this procedure failed, there was a more complicated stratagem. Outside the door leading into the house, a broom might be standing with its sweeping end up. Around the head of the broom a cloth was gracefully draped to act as a scarf or towel. The caller's heated footwear was placed close to the handle of the broom. There was one minor complication, however. If the visitor came out suddenly, he was likely to be offended for he was probably familiar with the contrivance and may have used it himself on a number of occasions. It was therefore necessary that one of the servants keep an eye on the visitor and quickly remove the broom before it was noticed.

Of course, the best of schemes do not succeed on all occasions. In Chinese medicine the practice of moxacadtery was common. An incense stick was lighted and the burning end applied to various points on the human body similar to those now recognized by acupuncturists. If the visitor failed to respond, it was possible to burn moxa on the bottoms of his clogs or shoes if he was in Western dress. There were certain disadvantages to this practice however, for Japanese footwear was usually made of light colored wood and unpainted. The moxa burns would be almost certain to show, but by that time of night, desperate measures were justified. Those acquainted with this technique insisted that there was some kind of psychic sympathy between a person's feet and his shoes. The smoldering moxa caused painful itching and a strong burning sensation and the tardy guest nearly always took the hint.

A friend of mine in Japan decided to experiment with the esoteric means to get rid of a boresome caller. The technique was entirely successful, but abruptly terminated the friendship. Most Japanese believe in astrology and important events are carefully calculated. Social events are held on auspicious days to ensure the success of the occasion. Sometimes it is possible to set up an enjoyable evening for a friend who is leaving the country the next day. Local gossip can result in many types of strategy to protect the privacy of family life. There is one situation however for which there may be no convenient remedy. A gentleman and his wife may be invited to a small and intimate gathering. He is likely to arrive late as time is for the most part illusionary, but when the guests arrive they bring with them their parents, a number of close friends, children and grandchildren, and the inlaws. Moxa provides no solution under such conditions, but courtesy rises to cover every conceivable complication.
The philosophy of natural magic which solves social problems has also been extended to a variety of health problems. Sickness is an unwelcome guest which should be invited to depart as soon as possible. Nearly all ancient peoples use charms and spells to free the body from minor infirmities. The Japanese specialize in charms against skin ailments. If a rash breaks out on the body, a straw doll made for the occasion is rubbed vigorously against the affected parts. It is assumed that the doll will absorb the ailment and all that remains to be done is to drown or burn the doll. A somewhat more spectacular remedy is also mentioned in the Fujiya Hotel publication. From this we learn that sufferers from eczema or serious eruptions on the skin benefit from a procedure that is not likely to become popular in the West. The victim puts on a broad brimmed black hat and, wearing it, walks out in the water of a lake, a pond, or a running stream until his hat floats. The ailment is supposed to depart with the hat.

In Shintoism, invisible beings are supposed to be attentive to problems involving health. They are also available in almost any emergency and prayers addressed to them are speedily answered. Communications with Kami, or spirits, need not be verbal as they can read minds and are aware of the most intimate thoughts of the living. In the ultimate emergency when all else is failing and the situation is completely out of control one can request that the invisible inhabitants that are always nearby will hasten the guest who is reluctant to leave. The thought may be caused to arise in the mind of the individual who has worn out his welcome and he will depart with appropriate dignity without further delay.

Always most sincerely,

[Signature]
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AND
Continued by R. H. ESQUIRE.

FOREWORD
By
MANLY P. HALL

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