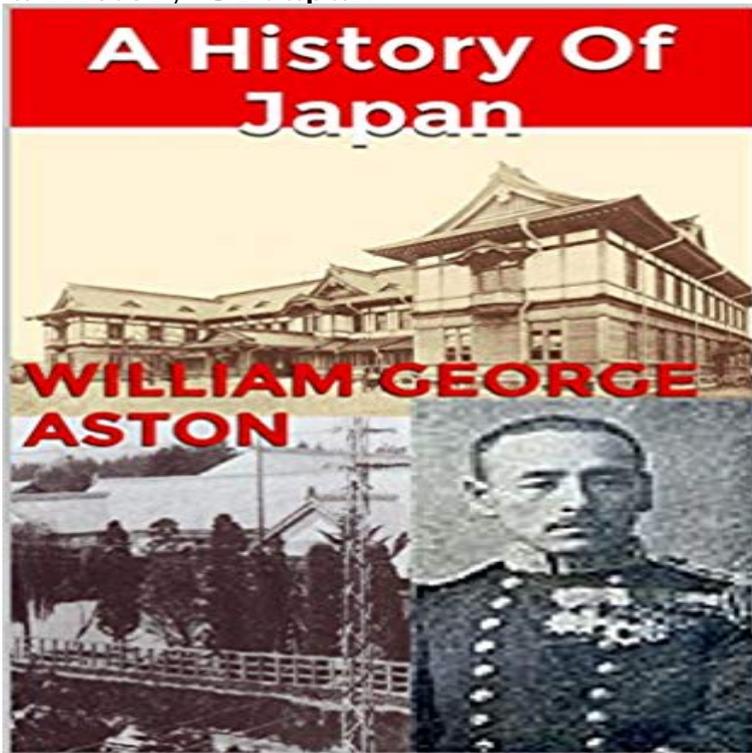


## a History Of Japan



Extract of preface : THE Japanese have a voluminous literature, extending over twelve centuries, which to this day has been very imperfectly explored by European students. Forty years ago no Englishman had read a page of a Japanese book, and although some Continental scholars had a useful acquaintance with the language, their contributions to our knowledge are unimportant. Much has been done in the interval, by writers of grammars and dictionaries, to facilitate the acquirement of this most difficult language, and translations by Sir E. Satow, Messrs. Mitford, Chamberlain, Dickins, and others, have given us interesting glimpses of certain phases of the literature. But the wider field has hitherto remained untouched. Beyond a few brief detached notices, there is no body of critical opinion on Japanese books in any European language, and although the Japanese themselves have done more in this direction, their labours are for various reasons in a great measure unserviceable. The historian of their literature is therefore thrown mainly upon his own resources, and must do his best, by a direct examination of those works which the verdict of posterity has marked out as most worthy of notice, to ascertain their character and place in literature, and to grasp as far as possible the ideas which inspired them. In the following pages comparatively little space has been devoted to what is necessarily a record of personal impressions and opinions, the outcome of rough pioneer work, and having little claim to be considered as mature literary criticism. It seemed preferable, especially in the case of a literature so little known to the English public as that of Japan, to allot ample room to translated extracts, and to such biographical notices as are necessary to show what manner of men the authors were. The general plan, however, of this series has not been lost sight of. Important

writers have been treated at comparatively greater length, to the neglect of many lesser notabilities, and an attempt has been made, in so far as the state of our knowledge permits, to follow the movement of the literature, and to trace the causes which determined its character at particular periods. Writers on European literatures are entitled to take for granted, on the part of their readers, a previous acquaintance with the leading facts of the political and religious history of the country with which they are dealing. In the case of Japan, however, it has been thought not superfluous to add a few data of this kind, without a knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the course of the literary development. In justice to Japanese literature, it is right to draw attention to some obstacles which prevent any translations from giving an adequate idea of its merits. The Italian adage is particularly applicable to translators from the Japanese. Even when they have a competent knowledge of the language they cannot possibly reproduce all the metaphors, allusions, quotations, and illustrations which form the stock of the Japanese author, and which are in great part unintelligible without a profusion of explanatory notes intolerable to the reader.

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