

POETRY AND THE PACIFIC WAR

By F. LANGER

One immediate result of the outbreak of the "War of Greater East Asia" (*Daitoa-Senso*) has been a flood of poems. Even some of Japan's most renowned poets have emerged from their seclusion to prove that they have not lost contact with the feelings of the people.

From among all these poems we have chosen two examples which seem to us worthy of translation. They are "*Daitoa-Senso*," by Hakushu Kitahara, published in *Nippon Hyoron*, and Haruo Sato's "Song of the Kuroshio," published in *Kaizo*.

Hakushu Kitahara is one of the few really outstanding poets of modern Japan. Every Japanese is at least familiar with his name. Most of his poems are written in what is known

as the *Waka* form. The *Waka* is composed of thirty-one syllables, in the order 5-7-5-7-7. A poem consists of one or more 31-syllable groups. "*Daitoa-Senso*" is made up of ten such groups. As Japanese poems are never rhymed (probably because of the similarity of all endings in the Japanese language), and little use is made of onomatopoeia, rhythm is of the utmost importance. The above-mentioned 5-7 meter is also found in the well-known 17-syllable "*Haiku*" poems (in the order 5-7-5), and has been used for more than a thousand years, ever since the earliest appearance of Japanese poetry.

"*Daitoa-Senso*" was written soon after the outbreak of the Pacific war. This makes it interesting, although the poem does not show the poet at his best.

"DAITOA-SENSO"

(The War of Greater East Asia)

By Hakushu Kitahara

Our lord has declared war
And there arose the fight
We call the war of *Daitoa*.
Now over all the countries
Ruled by our sovereign,
The holy Emperor,
There breaks the day.
His matchless thought to rule,
Not only Asia's earth,
But sea and sky!
Where in the days of yore
The holy ancestor of our lord
Went soaring through the skies,
Now our fliers roar
Above the endless waves.
And angry gods descend
On Honolulu's wintry skies,
The ether says.

Barely a second has died away
Since war broke out,
And strong we stand,
Controlling sea and sky.
Fearfully they look
As if they saw a god,
Yet straight and clean
Is our path, the path of Yamato!
Let thy great and holy thought
That all the people of the earth
May share one roof
Come true!
The thunder rending Asia's waves
Has died away,
And calm prevails.
Six hundred million subjects
Pure and true
Will live on boundless seas
And under lofty skies.

Haruo Sato is one of the giants in the Japanese world of letters. Born in 1892, he rose to fame through his novels "*Denen no Yuntsu*" (Rural Melancholy) in 1919 and "*Tokai no Yuntsu*" (Urban Melancholy) in 1922. Ever since that time his pen has not been idle. He has written verses and short stories, establishing a firm reputation in Japanese literature.

What the war atmosphere has meant even to a poet like Haruo Sato may be seen by comparing his poem "Kuroshio" to the motto of his first novel, *Rural Melancholy*, taken from a poem by Edgar Allen Poe:

"I dwelt alone
In a world of moan
And my soul was a stagnant tide."

The "Song of the Kuroshio" is not written in *Waka* form, but still adheres on the whole to the time-honored 5-7

meter. Kuroshio (black salt), is the Japanese name for the Current of Japan which comes from Formosa and travels in a wide sweep to the shores of California, passing the coast of Japan on its way. The part of the country called "Ki" by the poet—the full Japanese name is Ki no Kuni—is situated in southwestern Japan.

The poem was written two days before the outbreak of the war. This fact is worth mentioning as it shows that the battle of Hawaii was, in the opinion of the Japanese, something which was bound to happen sooner or later.

The reader may wonder whether the Kuroshio has changed its direction since last year. He need not worry about this: the poet has taken the liberty of changing the direction to suit his purpose.

THE SONG OF THE KUROSHIO

By Haruo Sato

When I was young
I stood on Kyushu's mountainous shores.
But what I saw there—
Was it the shadow of the cloudy sky?
Dark on the ocean's endless plains
Waving and rolling towards the Pacific
Gracefully in the billows blue,
But overflowing and immensely deep,
Southward it runs untiringly,
The Kuroshio, current of Japan.

And thus I found
Our country's true ideal:
To bestow wealth on our land
And give the world its peace.
Nobody shall stand in its way,
Even if I should die
Giving my life away on the ocean's wave!
Still in my heart it calls
Southward, southward!
O Kuroshio, Japan's stream!

Where, sovereign, thou once stoodst
On Kinokuni's cape,
There should our statesmen be,
Looking upon the rolling current of
Japan
Amid the boundless ocean plains.
And should windspouts arise,
Fierce and evil, serpent-like,
There are still stronger eagles
In the skies of Yamato!
Behold, southward they fly
O Kuroshio, stream of Yamato!