

**JAPANESE
IMPRESSIONS: WITH A
NOTE ON CONFUCIUS**

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Japanese Impressions: With a Note on Confucius by Frances Rumsey & Paul-Louis Couchoud
& Anatole France

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FRANCES RUMSEY & PAUL-LOUIS COUCHOUD & ANATOLE FRANCE

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WITH A NOTE ON CONFUCIUS ♣ ♣

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

PAUL-LOUIS COUCHOUD ♣ ♣

BY FRANCES RUMSEY, WITH

A PREFACE BY ANATOLE FRANCE

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TO
THE EXQUISITE MASTER
ANATOLE FRANCE
P.-L. C.

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PREFACE

I



THE French author whom I have the honour to present to this English public—considered as it is by H. Taine to be the most serious, the most reserved and the most attentive in the world—is worthy, I am certain, to occupy the leisure of so estimable a collective sensibility. M. Paul-Louis Couchoud, former scholar of the École Normale, professor of philosophy and doctor of medicine, published in 1902, while still very young, a book which already disclosed the centre of attraction of a mind ceaselessly stirred by an ardent curiosity, but which revolves about a central point in that it is harmonious and fundamentally informed. This book is a study on Spinoza (published by Alcan) conceived in an original manner. In his belief that the doctrine of a philosopher is an historic event, the author has attached the work of the excommunicated Jew of Amsterdam to those exterior circumstances which can explain it; he acquaints us with the surroundings in which Spinoza lived and unfolds an animated and inspired series of pictures. Thus the vocation of M. Couchoud was manifest at an early hour. He has since made important studies in psychiatry, he has conducted

laboratory researches and has even isolated a new germ. But his chief desire is to place his acquisition at the service of the modern Clio and his interest is to meditate on the history of the moral ideas which constitute the common base of each human generation.

It is thus that he has been led to the study of the origin of Christianity. Having reached the splendid meridian of the road of life, he is consecrating the years of his rich maturity to the composition of a book which will present under a new aspect the obscure beginnings of a religion that has conquered a vast portion of the world. As much as it has been given to me to know of this work in process of formation inspires a vivid interest and that enthusiasm which emanates from the presentiment of a great accomplishment : *Nescio quid majus nascitur . . .* I shall not finish the phrase : it would be a lapse of taste to assume the oracular tone. But it is none the less true that attentive minds, in Europe and in America, see this exegesis, after three centuries of effort, touch on the verge of those results least awaited by the ignorant multitude. How magnificent and how worthy of praise are those men who, with infinite labour, surmounting almost insurmountable obstacles, and surrounded by the indifference or the hostility of the mass, ceaselessly seek the truths which are essentially necessary to liberty of mind and to tranquillity of heart.

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But I have not characterized Dr. Couchoud until I have defined his familiar spirit, which whispers perpetually in his ear and leads him at its will.

This spirit is the same which goaded the old Herodotus to wander throughout the known world of the Greeks, to visit the barbarians and to study their customs, and which furnished the matter of his tales; it is the spirit which haunts the curious and sincere soul whose jealous care is to paint from nature—the spirit of travel; that spirit which led Marco-Polo to the Great Mogul, at the price of cruel fatigues and numberless dangers. To-day one is a Marco-Polo without difficulty. Favoured by the genius of his time, Dr. Couchoud has since the days of his early youth circled the world. The book which I am here presenting, *Japanese Impressions*, owes much to this familiar spirit in him. The title, if it be not exact as a definition, at least promises us a charming voyage, and it does not disappoint us. The volume is actually composed of five studies, three of these consecrated to Japan, where the author lived, and one to China which he visited.

How gradual, after all, has been our advance in the knowledge of the planet we inhabit, one of the smallest of its system, which is itself not one of the greatest of the heavenly systems. Even yesterday, for the European consciousness, the Far East was scarcely included in the philosophy of history. It is given no place in the *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* of Bossuet. Voltaire's genius divined China; but he did not understand it, and in the eighteenth century it was to us a still inaccessible country. Ernest Renan, whose mind was so wide and so curious, concerned himself little with it. In my youth no one revealed to me the grandeur and the beauty of the antique Oriental civilizations. China was scarcely known to us save by its porcelains,