THE HORSELESS CARRIAGE OF JAPAN

By Onoto Watanna

Illustrated by Karl L. Anderson

A ROLLING DRIVE IN TOKYO

Although the jiriksha is by far the most conspicuous and numerous of all vehicles presently used in Japan, and foreigners have come to regard it as a very old and Oriental institution, yet as a matter of fact it is not as old as some people claim. It was introduced into that country by Takayama Koke and two others who claimed to be its inventors, though their claim was disputed by an American missionary. However, the dispute was, it was Takayama Koke and his partners who first obtained government permission to use it. It consisted in those days of nothing more than a box supported by four poles, which rested on the axle connecting the two wheels. There were no springs on the vehicle, and it was most uncomfortable. However, one Akira Daisuke, a native of Yedo, and a man of much skill in mechanical devices, saw the possibilities in the new vehicle and to him is due the vast improvements that have made the jiriksha the most comfortable and delightful of two-wheel carriage that is to day. Soon after the Restoration, when his former calling of supplying arms and munitions to the Shogun was no longer possible, he opened a workshop in Ginn, the main street of Tokyo, and began the manufacture of the improved jiriksha. It was successful in he was making his vehicle all that could be desired in the way of comfort and elegance, that in a few years his business was prosperous.

The vehicles built by Akira Daisuke for the private use of his richest customers were said to be works of art, and there have never been nor are there existing to-day, any like them, sure such as are kept as curios and curiosities in some families. The body of the vehicle was lacquered black, yellow, green, crimson, and adorned with beautifully colored representations of warriors, actors, women, birds, beasts, fish, trees, arabesques and famous scenic pictures, and on its back the owner's arms and his name were worked in gold. The inside of the vehicle was padded with the finest rice-straw, and the upholstery was so thick and heavy that it was hardly possible to see a spot of the original plain surface of silk or satin. It would be a shame to sit in one of these today more than a few minutes. The elegance and luxury of these exquisite old lacquer jiriksha, which are practically extinct to-day.

The jiriksha-man waits at the street-corners and solicits fares, though this is contrary to the exact police regulations. However, though he is a jiriksha-man, he is not as principle as he might be, and has little, if any, regard for the police or his government. In fact, he is whichever is overcharging the scale of fares set by the police, but as a rule the customer himself pays little attention to this. The fare is usually haggled over before riding, and while they ride, and sometimes great distance is covered, the fares are not increased. The jiriksha-man also generally (unlawfully) demands drink-money, especially when he is forced to wait at two-hour or pleasure routes on the road. He is constantly being set on by the police for charging more than the rate prescribed by the law, yet he put down former customers unless his demands are acceded to, etc. However, as I said before, the jiriksha-man is a most contented creature for the police regulations, though he obeys them minutely as regards the rules of the road, which are also set by the police. The jiriksha-man must always take the left side of the road where there is a carriage-way apart from the footpath; when they are on the same side, they take turns. On meeting other vehicles, horses or foot-passengers, the left side must be taken, but the jiriksha must go to the other side on meeting troops, artillery or convicts.

The occupied jiriksha has the right of way in meeting an empty one. When a jiriksha

desires to overtake another ahead of it, it is necessary to first call out, then when the latter moves to the right, it is to pass. At a street-corner a jiriksha turns sharply to the left, but wheels in a large curve to the right. Postel-carts, horses, engines of fire-brigades, water-carts, funerals, etc., all stand the jiriksha-man to the right. By following these really simple instructions collisions are avoided.

The jiriksha-man employed in private houses is, however, the best off of all. He is generally of a better class and sometimes holds his position for a lifetime.

But the jiriksha-man will show you the graces of the lovers who committed jushii to become wedded in you their pretty girls, and will give you the reason why lovers pray at their graves; he will tell you, while you ride with him all the way. He knows the country well, and is tried as to the spots in which there are jiriksha-man. He always asks you to sit on the seat, so that it is true he may "spot" you as being one whom it is worth his while to keep in touch with during your entire visit in the city, and you will find it difficult to leave the hotel without encountering him hard, importantly soliciting your patronage, though on each and every occasion he will call to you as though you were an utter stranger to him and he has never seen you before, or does not recognize you as the person who tipped him so well the previous day.

In these days, the streets are literally lined with vehicles of all sorts and kinds, when carriages of the most approved kind brush against each other, and dog-carts and carriages, with the exception of those of officials and the like, are all running at full speed. This, however, is not true of the jiriksha-man, he maintains a speed of four or eight cents a day.

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