

## CORRESPONDENCE.

Written for this Paper

## THE SOSHI.

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HE war with China is taking away from Japan, for a time, a class of men who have materially disturbed the government. I refer to the Soshi. These are like no other men on

the face of the globe. They are a kind of a cross between an anarchist and political striker, and though they exist in nearly every part of the empire I have never seen them described in letters of travel. They are a peculiar feature of the modern Japan, and are the product of the old feudal system married to the modern civilization. Japan, you know, was twenty-five years ago much like Europe during the middle ages. The Daimios, or nobles of the country, owned the greater part of the land, and each had a number of soldiers or Samurai about him. These Samurai were all soldiers, and the Daimio was expected to support them. When the revolution came and the Daimios gave up their estates, these men were out of a job. They took up with different branches of trade. A large number went into the army. Some were employed in the new government, and today the class is practically wiped out. Springing from it, however, are these bands of Soshi, who are young men, many of whom are ready to sell themselves and their swords to the highest bidder. Every politician has a number of them connected with him, and every political meeting is filled with them. They carry sword-canes, and during elections the papers are full of the attacks of one band of Soshi upon another, and of statements as to how one prominent man, accompanied by his Soshi, was met by another statesman, with his Soshi, and how the two fought the matter out on the street.

During my stay in Japan one of the members of parliament was waylaid by the Soshi of his opponent and well pounded; and another man, also a member of parliament, was attacked about 9 o'clock in the morning, while on his way in a jinriksha to the house of representatives, by ten of these Soshi. One of them threw a bottle of red ink and sulphuric acid at him, and it struck him on the shoulder, but fortunately did not damage. He luckily happened to have two of his own Soshi with him, and these men ran after the Soshi of the opposite party who threw the bottle, and caught him and handed him over to the police. This incident occurred on the 23rd of last May, and from my notes which I took at the time, I see that on May 19th the Japanese papers record

how twenty Soshi attacked the office of a political newspaper and stoned the editors. The most of the officials of Japan have some of these Soshi with them when they go about over the country. In some cases they ride on the outside of their carriages, and in others they follow along on foot.

## A SET OF PROFESSIONAL THUGS.

These Soshi are numbered by thousands, and it is surprising how well they are organized. Outside of those who are attached to the politicians, there are bands or societies of them who work together for their mutual benefit, and who are, in fact, bands of thugs, assassins, blackmailers and strikers. Some of them give their services for their food and clothes, and for two or three dollars a day they will do anything. If they are arrested, you are expected to pay them for the time they stay in prison, and to send a few luxuries now and then to the jail. They are not at all fond of foreigners, and they form a large part of the anti-foreign element of the country. I heard of one instance of a foreigner who had some trouble with a girl. There was a question of ten dollars between them, and the girl had friends among the Soshi. The leader of one of the bands called upon the man and told him he must pay. He refused. They then said they would inform his employers of certain practices which he had been carrying on, and would mix them with lies about others. They threatened to assault him, and he finally concluded that the cheapest way to get out of the matter was to pay the bill. The strangest thing about it was that when he was handing over the money, they gave him a receipt guaranteeing that he would not be troubled by any other Soshi in the country or by them.

## THE AMERICAN MINISTER AND THE SOSHI.

The action of the government as regards these people has shown that they were evidently afraid of them, and it has been the wonder of foreigners that they have not been put down. They have carried on their work openly, and a sign-board was recently stuck up in one of the main business parts of Tokyo which read: "Soshi provided here. Terms moderate for the day or month." Among the men, in fact, who have shown much nerve in the matter are our American minister and the Rev. Clay MacCauley, the head of a school in Tokyo and a Unitarian minister of great prominence in Japan. For some reason or other, the Soshi became incensed at Dr. MacCauley, and they warned him that he must give up his school. They told him he would be mobbed if he not did, and they made all preparations to carry out their threat. Dr. MacCauley went to the American minister, Mr. Dun, and told him the situation. Mr. Dun, who, by the way, is one of the best men who has ever represented us at the court of Japan, was very indignant, and he at once went to the foreign office and told the secretary of state that the government was responsible for the keeping the Soshi in order, and that he proposed to drive, with Dr. MacCauley in the le-

gation carriage, down to the school on the day fixed for the mob, and if they were insulted or attacked in any way the American government would hold the Japanese government responsible for it. The Japanese officials at once took the matter in hand and the Soshi were put down upon this occasion. The streets leading to the school were lined with police, and the result was that Dr. MacCauley and the American minister passed through unharmed and unmolested by even a look.

## HOW MR. DUN SURPRISED THEM.

The American minister is by no means a coward, and it would not be safe for a Soshi to attack him. He stands fully six feet in his stockings, and he weighs about two hundred pounds. He has lived in Japan for years, having been sent there in the first place, through the influence of ex-Senator Allan G. Thurman, who is his uncle. He speaks the Japanese as well as the English, and he was employed in the legation as interpreter and confidential secretary for some time before his appointment as minister. Last New Year, while out driving, with his coachman and footman on the seat, he saw three of the most desperate Soshi with sword canes in their hands on the road in front of him. He knew they did not like him, but he told the coachman to drive slowly. As the Soshi saw him they ranged themselves on both sides of the road, so that his carriage would have to pass between them, and as it came opposite one of them yelled at him the Japanese word for "fool," never supposing he would understand it. Mr. Dun raised his hat, add in the politest and most polished of Japanese paid him the compliments of the New Year. The Soshi was thunderstruck. He looked very sheepish and turned away.

## WHERE THE SOSHI COME FROM.

I asked a number of the prominent men of Japan, including Count Ito, whence the Soshi came, and I was told that they were in most cases disaffected and unsuccessful students. Thousands of young Japanese have been studying professions, and there are hundreds upon hundreds of lawyers and doctors more than are needed. The government places are all overcrowded, and the universities have been turning out their graduates by the hundreds a year. The brightest students have been picked out by the government and sent abroad to finish their educations. When they have come back they have been given positions, and those who were not fortunate have had to stay out. The "outs" have banded together, and they have formed these organizations which are, to a certain extent, insurrectionary in their tendencies. They would be a bad element in case of a revolution, and they form one of the worst features of the new Japan. They hang around parliament, and they have been growing in numbers rapidly up to the time of the present war. This will probably carry off a good many of them, if the Chinese have the nerve to kill any outside of their own troops, which they seem not to have.

## THE JAPANESE PARLIAMENT.

Speaking of the Japanese parliament, it is the baby congress of the world, and it is one of the most interesting legislative bodies in existence. It has two houses which sit in a building not unlike a great