WHEN, after three hundred years of complete isolation, Japan opened her doors to the outer world the foreigners who entered found many uniquely oriental arts and ideas resulting from the genius and long introspection of the people.

When the invitation to come and see and be seen was extended, however, it was somewhat Latin in character, for up the flowing Japanese sleeve a big reservation lay concealed. This aftermath was soon apparent to the occidental investigator following close on the heels of the religious and commercial missionaries, but, combat it as he would, the native intention of allowing him to probe just so far, and no farther, was as strong then as it is to-day, and as it doubtless will be a half century hence.

That the innermost thoughts of the Asiatic minds are just as enigmatic to the westerner now as they were when first the yellow physiognomy appeared above the eastern horizon, those who have dealings with them have reason to know. The more one tries to sound the well of that mind the less communicative and more baffling the possessor becomes.

Few of the curious cults of the Japanese so interested certain of these investigators as did jiu-jutsu, or the old samurai art of fighting without weapons. But so strenuous was the native objection to their acquirement of this singular ethical system that what knowledge they were able to
gain of it was trifling and far from satisfactory. Like the missionary who remains for forty years in Asia and in all that time converts to his religion but two-thirds of an Asiatic, one must be content to live long in Japan would he know even fairly well the Japanese mind. A knowledge of this is essential before the foreigner can hope to distinguish the feints and false leadings which hedge about this jiujutsu art—for its exponents are ever fearful of its taking root in foreign lands—and the greatest assiduity is required of those who would gain more than a nodding acquaintance with it. While a smattering of the system can be easily acquired, from six to ten years in the proper atmosphere, and with a natural aptitude, are necessary for a complete mastery of it.

Jiujutsu first became known in Japan in the sixteenth century, and its origin is traced to a learned physician named Akiyama who at that period lived at Nagasaki. While studying medicine in China this savant acquired some knowledge of an athletic system known as hakuda, then much
practised by the Chinese. It consisted of many adroit and effective ways of kicking and striking an enemy in order to gain a victory over him. Akiyama learned three distinct methods of hakuda with their ramifications, as well as twenty-eight ways of recovering a man from apparent death. So signally successful were the latter that kuatsu, or the art of resuscitation, is now a part of the jiujutsu curriculum.

When Akiyama returned to Japan he spent many years elaborating the ideas he received in China, with the result that in time he discovered three hundred and three methods of seizing and throwing an antagonist, and otherwise placing him hors de combat. One day, while pursuing his meditations at the Jenjin shrine at Tsukushi, he observed a willow tree whose branches were covered with snow. Unlike the giant pine which broke before the storm, he noticed that the willow yielded to the weight of the snow on its branches but did not break beneath it. So in accordance was this with his ideas of what the true jiujutsu should be that he straightway established the since famous Yoshin-riu—the spirit of the willow-tree school.

In feudal times there were many military exercises by which the samurai classes were trained for their special form of warfare, and pre-eminent among these was jiujutsu, for this subtle science appealed powerfully to the cunning of these old warriors versed in wrestling, fencing, and sword practise. To-day there are many important schools of jiujutsu in Japan, each differing slightly from the other, but all teaching the root idea propounded by the great Akiyama. In Tokyo alone there are forty different schools, descendants of the various schools of feudal times. In the other cities of the island empire schools abound and the students of the system are many.

As befits its quasi-secret nature jiujutsu* is taught largely in night sessions, and the principal school at Yokohama is nightly crowded with students apparently eager to acquire a knowledge which gives them an advantage over the secretly-dreaded genii of the occidental world. While the majority of the pupils gain considerable proficiency in the system, but few acquire

*Nishinoumi, Champion of Japan.

The word means gaining victory by yielding or pliancy. Pronounced Geejoots.
a complete mastery of the deeper secrets of the higher plane the professors are guardedly jealous, especially toward foreigners, though every year or so turns out a native master of the craft.

In the police departments of Tokyo, Kobe, and Yokohama all the police are obliged to study certain degrees of jujutsu and kuatsu, but no pupil of either receives a single lesson before taking a sacred oath to never reveal the secrets of them. Tradition—public safety even—exacts that the higher degrees of jujutsu shall be taught only to men of perfect self command and of unimpeachable moral character. In the possession of such a person the science is far more potent than hypnotism, for by a swift physical touch a victim’s brain can be benumbed, his hips or shoulders dislocated, an ankle unhinged, or a tendon burst or twisted. By a single lightning-like stroke of the operator one can be made instantly helpless and this would be a sinister and fatal power in mischievous hands.

Signally illustrative of the power of science over brute force are the methods of jujutsu. The principle of the ocean aiding the ship through its resistance to the propeller is embodied in it. For in direct ratio to the strength and resistance of the novice lies the necessity for yielding or suffering the consequences. The uninitiated who would rely upon impetuosity and great muscular strength as counters to the science of his trained opponent would be bested even quicker than would a more resisting weakling with his muscles at rest. A master of jujutsu does not oppose his aggressor by sustained counter-effort as does a boxer. Calm watchfulness and a shirking of physical contact and effort on his part of the play. Then, when the expenditure of the opposing force reaches the point where its impact would mean
injury to the recipient, it is deftly deflected to recoil upon its author, and in such a way that in response to a masterful touch he is made to un hinge his shoulder or his leg, fracture his arm, or even break his neck should the occasion require it.

In the Zuihokwan school in the Government College grounds at Tokyo one may, upon the receipt of the proper admission card, watch the jiu jutsu professor and his pupils going through the elementary physical exercises. The deeper moral precepts—and much of the art is moral in its nature—are taught in the strictest seclusion; a seclusion far more pronounced than when a Freemason takes the highest degree.

In the centre of the large gymnasium-like room is a slightly elevated platform covered with soft Japanese mats. Hanging against the wall near the entrance to the hall is a conspicuous table, inscribed in Chinese characters, the translation of which offers this significant suggestion:

“Profound knowledge is the best of possessions.”

As if obeying a paraphrase of Dante’s famous dictum, all who enter leave emotions behind, for complete self-control is a cardinal principle of this singular cult. The strict silence maintained by the clean-limbed young Japs, writhing, twisting, and falling on the noiseless matting, instantly strike one, and this is foremost among the bizarre impressions one carries from the place. A half-strangulated, jerky grunt is sometimes forced from a falling body, but this and the occasional cracking note of a swiftly moving ankle joint are the only sounds one hears in this vast hall of silence. For all the noise they make the students, policemen, and military spectators impassively, but none the less keenly, watching the game might be taken for graven images or miniature examples of the bronze diabutsu at Kamakura.

On the platform mentioned is a noted professor of the science, and he watches with a critical eye the practising students. At times he selects one from among them and with the lithe grace of a dancing master he explains and illustrates some technical point, the vocal part of which is too softly spoken to reach the alien ear, and the movement too rapid for the eye to register. One thing, however, he cannot conceal from the onlookers, and that is the amazing ease with which he flings the sturdy young Jap about. He in turn seems actuated by powerful springs, which a movement of the master’s hand releases. The learner’s face remains impassive, but I can see his eyes gleam with the satisfaction he feels at the supple ness of his muscles, for, though tossed about like a human cork, with the dexterity of a grimalkin he invariably alights upon his feet. One of the first precepts impressed upon the beginner in jiu jutsu is the necessity of being pliant; for pliancy saves his bones from many a bruise and his muscles from many a twinge. In lectures, discussions, and practise this is taught him, and he is never admitted to serious competition until this essential is graven on his mind. Should his muscles prove less flexible than his will, all physical practise ceases until thorough training brings them to the required standard.

As if to properly exploit the sleight which jiu jutsu has for every thrust wrench, push, and bend, the expert avoids needless clinching with his adversary. One young pupil misinterprets this apparent disinclination to combat, and time and again rushes in only to find himself in troubled waters. As if bewitched by the expressionless yellow mask confronting him, he again and again finds himself in jeopardy, to now wince visibly under the deft touch of the master, or to ignominiously yield where perseverance would mean a twisted ankle, a fractured arm, or maybe a dislocated spine.

When a pupil yields promptly to the superior mind it proves that the basic truths of jiu jutsu are at work within him, and this is always secretly applauded by those initiated in the art.

No man on good terms with his neck and with a knowledge of the Japanese attitude would ever dream of taking a camera to a jiu jutsu competition. Were he to smuggle one in he would gain one lasting impression and lose one camera. The former would develop into a conviction that he had had a narrow escape from nursing a broken neck. As kuatsu does not undertake to assemble decentralized vertebræ, and as a jiu jutsu expert can shake hands with a man and break the shaker’s neck in the act thereof, no one has ever cared to take photographic liberties with them. Could photographs be obtained to the
casual eye they would differ in no wise from certain wrestling positions, for the expert's power lies in the lightning-like touches; in that terrific legerdemain which is too subtle and too swift for the untrained eye to detect.

When jiu-jitsu leaves the purely physical and rises to the physico-psychic plane it is, fair play would brand them as fouls, and after their first appearance they would be ruled off as unfair advantages. As an instance: among the primary physical exercises a student is shown how to gain control of an adversary's arm, straighten it, bend it backward at the elbow joint and use his own arm as a slowly rising fulcrum beneath. This immediately brings the victim to the tips of his toes, to excruciating pain, and to at least a broken arm does he not promptly yield. Another method is to cuinningly destroy the opponent's equilibrium and make him fracture his arm or leg by the force of his falling weight.
Another is what practical westerners would stigmatize as plain choking, in its initial stage. When, however, the antagonist is choked into unconsciousness kuatsu is brought into play, and the purple-visaged subject is promptly and effectively revived. This is one of the simplest resources of kuatsu, and it is accomplished by seizing the patient from behind, placing the base of the operator's thumbs against the lower part of the abdomen and vigorously pushing upward a number of times. Kuatsu has other successful methods for such cases, and it is also resorted to for restoring life to the newly drowned, to those who have been stunned by blows or falls, or to the suffocated. For the successful practise of either kuatsu or jiujutsu a fine knowledge of anatomy is requisite, and therein no doubt lies much of their mystery and power.

As an athletic science, with its concomitant mental agility and moral force, jiujutsu stands head and shoulders above wrestling; as much above it, in fact, as the colossal wrestler shown in the illustration rises above an European. Every noted Japanese wrestler is a student of jiujutsu, but its grips and catches are not allowed in a wrestling contest. Nishinoumi, who is shown in the illustration, and whose championship as a wrestler is proclaimed by the rope about his waist, is an expert jiujutsu exponent. Though extreme caution is employed when selecting men for the highest degrees of the science, a well-conditioned dwarf, a jinricksha drawer, or a sampan coolie physically fit is eligible to a certain number of degrees. That many men in the lower walks of life are students of jiujutsu I know from observation. That a governmental idea lies behind the growing popularity of this cult no one who has investigated the subject is likely to doubt. In the Japanese army to-day every commanding officer is trained in it, and those of high rank are finished students of jiujutsu. Every native soldier knows of the almost magic power which a full knowledge of this gives one, and to this, mayhap, can be traced some of that magnificent discipline for which the Japanese troops are justly famous; a discipline not excelled in any army, and which is the admiration of all the foreign troops.

To the Japanese government—which loves its subjects and is extraordinarily solicitous of their welfare—jiujutsu is doubtless of great service in solving some of the complex military problems which it already foresees must result from the tangled condition of Asiatic affairs. The island soldier is small in stature, and would ordinarily succumb in hand to hand conflict with such physical marvels as the Czar could march to the field. Who can think then, that the Mikado’s advisers—and shrewder statesmen do not exist—are unaware of the tremendous advantages that would fall to the lot of an army of devoted, athletic little men, certain of their power, over a foe unskilled even in a minor degree in this uniquely oriental craft? With this in hand the need of physical force is almost repressed, and at a single bound the native soldier rises to a plane even higher than that occupied by any foreign antagonist. It is the boast of the Japanese soldier that his diminutiveness makes him, as a target, all the more difficult to hit. Be this as it may, in full possession of such a lethal power as jiujutsu, thoroughly devoted to country and willing to die therefor, backed up by the great fleet of the nation and supplied with the excellent equipment now given to the warriors of the empire, he is destined to make his mark, and he will prove very much of a porcupine to any tender-nosed bear that comes sniffing around him.

On more than one occasion belligerent sailors from foreign men-of-war, on shore in Yokohama for a “ripping old time,” have had cause to remember the little brown policeman who, with a dignity and force surprisingly in excess of his size, has led them subdued and wondering back to their respective ships.

That this potent science is worthy of profound study and should become known to the West goes without saying. In direct ratio, however, to the occidental desire to acquire it will be the oriental determination to resist; its expatriation. Like hypnotism and the allied question of the dual mind, jiujutsu may yet occupy a high place in the category of psychic phenomena. In concerted action this trinity of subtle forces might unite antipodal thoughts as well as races and form reconciling links between some of the far-reaching theories at present engaging the occidental mind.