ANY of us dream of the simple life. Some strive for it; few attain it. An eminent author has said only those with great wealth and enormous strength can live it. With the Japanese this is not so. The simplicity of their daily existence has been cultivated until it is an art. Each man’s status in society is definitely fixed. It is the grade in which his forefathers lived and in which his children’s children will live. There is no striving for a higher place. He is satisfied with his position, accepts it as a matter of course, and makes the most of it. Only by some overt evil act will he drop into a lower grade, and it must be a phenomenal deed or service to the state that will raise him even one degree higher in social rank.

This stability of position has an important influence upon the nation. No one wishes to appear different from what he really is, and as a consequence there is no greed for wealth. You will say this must kill ambition. If ambition is a struggle solely for money and position, then it does kill ambition, but it does not kill ambition to excel in one’s own craft or calling.

With the struggle for wealth eliminated, the craftsman, the artisan, the mechanic have been able to take time to work in the most perfect and durable manner. It has been unnecessary for them to earn much money, as living has been cheap. The Japanese housewife is thrifty, and the needs of a family are few.

The fact that a Japanese is content in his own sphere is the keynote of the success of their simple life. It is of no value for him to make a false impression, so the element of show or push is left out.

We all know of the tiny proportions of a Japanese house, but we do not know of the ease and comfort taken in these houses. In considering the simple life of Japanese we must divest ourselves of western ideals and prejudices and look at existence from that point of view. For example, let us take a house near the Imperial Park in Kyoto, occupied by a college professor.

The day I first called there with a Japanese friend it seemed gem-like in the perfection of its smallness. Our interest in it was keen, for
I hoped some day to have a similar house, and when the opportunity offered I boldly plied our host and hostess with questions.

The house, a wooden structure twenty-four feet by twenty-five, was on a plot of land thirty feet front and fifty feet deep. It was shut in by an artistically made bamboo fence five feet high. The fence was solid, so no prying eyes might see in. As our "rickshaws" drew up to the gate my coolie dropped the shafts and knocked sharply. A sound of wooden clogs pattering over stones was heard, a bolt was drawn, and there stood the little maid, all smiles and bows. "Yes, the master and mistress were home. Would we honorably enter?"

Stepping down from the "rickshaws" we passed through the gate to the vestibule. There, leaving my shoes, and my friend and the maid their sandals, we entered the house in stocking feet.

The first room, a six-mat one, was nine by twelve feet. It was divided by sliding screens from the one next the garden, a corner room twelve feet wide and at that time twenty-four feet long. Through the center of this large room were the iron grooves in the floor and overhead for the sliding screens that at night would divide it into two sleeping-rooms, but as the day was warm and fair the screens had been lifted out and stacked away, leaving an unbroken space.

Sinking to our knees on the soft cushions laid on the floor, we awaited the arrival of our hostess. A patter of light feet, the sliding of a screen, and she appeared. Laying our outspread hands before us on the straw mats we made deep reverences in response to her bows of cordial greeting. Having brought with us as a gift a box of sweets, tied with the red and white gift string and the slip of paper folded like an arrow's sheaf, we slid it gently toward the little lady. She received it graciously, but, according to etiquette, neither touched or opened the box.

When formalities were over and we were pleasantly chatting, in walked the husband and professor just back from college.

His greeting was the antithesis of his wife's. Standing erect he shook hands with us, saying, "How do'do, glad to see you." Then sotto voce to me, "Can you stand the floor? for I am the proud possessor of two chairs, one of which I will gladly get you." Assuring him that I was perfectly comfortable on the floor, he sank down beside us
on a cushion, remarking, "I myself prefer a chair when I am wearing European clothes."

Our first observation was, "What a lovely garden you have." To which he replied, "Yes, isn't it nice? Come out and have a look at it." Slipping our feet into sandals we found on the veranda we stepped down to the ground.

The garden was twenty by thirty feet and charmingly laid out. There was a tiny lake, a miniature mountain, a clump of dwarfed trees, some beautiful iris in bloom, several curiously shaped and highly prized stones, but not a spear of grass.

All this was concealed from the street and only to be seen from the rear of the house, where are invariably the best rooms.

"Dr. Nagai," I said, "tell me how much you pay for this place, as it is just such a one as I hope to have." "Isn't it too small for you?" he asked. "You Americans like space." "No," I answered, "when I am in Japan I want to do as the Japanese do, and not as we do in the States."

"I pay twenty yen a month," replied Dr. Nagai. "That is high rent for a professor, but the house is so near the college I can walk back and forth and come home for dinner. In that way I save the cost of a "rickshaw" and one meal each day, so I can afford to pay a higher rent. As I have not repaid all the money I borrowed for my foreign education we must live closely until I am free from debt. To build such a house as this would cost twelve hundred yen, and the land is valued at six hundred yen."

WHEN we went inside he said to his wife, "Yoshi san, show our guests about. They would like to see how we live." "There is but little more to show," she replied, "your study, the kitchen, and the bath are all that remains to be seen."

The space of twenty-four by twenty-five feet was divided as follows: One entered the vestibule, which was four by six feet. Next to that came the kitchen, four by eight feet; then a closet four by four feet, and last the bath, four by six feet. These small spaces reached across the front of the house. Then came two rooms, nine by twelve feet, and the front ones twelve feet square.

The small room we had passed through was pure Japanese, the second one as near like a foreign professor's study as Dr. Nagai could
JAPANESE DOORWAY, SHOWING FINE, SIMPLE STRUCTURAL LINES AND CRAFTSMAN-LIKE USE OF BAMBOO, AND INCIDENTALLY A PRETTY SOCIAL COURTESY
"DINNER IS SERVED"

PREPARING THE MEAL IN A JAPANESE KITCHEN
EVEN LAUNDRY WORK IS A PICTURESQUE CEREMONY

TO COOK A MEAL IN JAPAN IS TO MAKE YOURSELF INTO A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE
afford to make it. His furniture consisted of a working table that took the place of a desk, and cost less; a revolving bookcase, a bookcase made of pine boards that covered the nine feet of dividing screen and reached to the ceiling; two wooden kitchen chairs and a stool. Books, all scientific works in German and English, filled the cases, covered the table, and overflowed on the floor. The floor was bare boards, as the legs of chairs and tables would destroy straw mats, and a rug was expensive. The room was ugly bare.

The hideousness of our poverty forced itself on my mind. Why need our cheap furniture be so brutally ugly? Things in Japan could be cheap and yet be durable and artistic. Quickly reading my thoughts, Dr. Nagai said, "You don't like my study. It is ugly, but it is the books that count. I love my books."

Sliding back a wooden door in a wooden partition he said, "Here is comfort, simplicity and prettiness all combined."

It was the bathroom, a tiny space four by six feet. In it were four objects, a stool to sit upon when washing oneself before getting into the bath; a shining brass wash-basin; a wooden pail and dipper, in which to fetch the bath water; and the tub. The tub, like most private baths, was round, casket-shaped, and made of whitewood. It was perhaps thirty inches in diameter and twenty-seven inches high. A copper funnel, or tube, passing through the bottom went up inside close to the edge. This, filled with lighted charcoal, supplied heat for the water. The pipe was higher than the tub, so the water could not leak inside. A few transverse bars of wood fitted into grooves and formed a protection so the bather could kneel in the tub without coming in contact. The walls of the wood with a pretty pine laid with a grooved so the into a gutter and pipe to the yard. lattice-window and light. As a ventilation the two a foot below the tice of bamboo with the hot pipe. room were of white-grain, the floor of slight slope and water might flow through a bamboo A moon-shaped high up let in air provision for more outside walls for ceiling were lat-slats.
As my eye traveled from object to object I quickly sized up the cost. For the tub eight yen, and it would last indefinitely; two yen for the brass basin; fifty sen for the pail and dipper, and twenty-five sen for the stool. Eleven yen would fit up my bathroom, and I asked for nothing nicer.

"Would you like to see the kitchen?" the wife inquired. "It is very small and very dirty." "Indeed we should," I replied, for rarely had I been in a truly Japanese kitchen. The little wife was half right—it was very small, being four feet by eight, but it was not very dirty. In fact it was spotlessly clean. There was no range and no oven. In their place were two plaster contrivances of one hole each into which were poked short pieces of wood or charcoal and on top of which were placed the pots and pans. In a small cupboard containing a few shelves and a couple of drawers were the cups, bowls, chopsticks, and trays used for serving the meals and the few pots, pans, spoons and knives for cooking and preparing the food. There were no chairs or table, as the Japanese sit on their heels when doing kitchen work. The maid, squatting before one fire-pot was watching the rice boiling for the evening meal. When the fire flagged she brightened it by blowing through a bamboo tube or fanning it, and all the while she fed it with faggots about as large as a lead pencil.

BETWEEN the kitchen and bathroom was the square closet. Sliding back the door (there was not a hinged, swinging door in the house) we were shown the bedding neatly stowed away. A chest containing Madam's garments stood on the floor, and on shelves were the dress suit of the Professor and his native clothes. With the exception of a cupboard and a few drawers in the chigai-dana and the box-like receptacle for sandals in the vestibule, there was no other place in the house for keeping one's possessions, so it behooved one to have few.

Returning to our cushions the maid brought tea, and we sat down prepared for a long chat. My thoughts were still running on the cost of things, and here was the chance to get information.

"Tell me, Dr. Nagai," I said, "when you rented this house did you furnish the mats?" "No," he replied, "the mats were supplied. The rent would have been several yen a month less could I have bought my own mats, but I had not the money. These two rooms," he con-
continued, “are eight-mat rooms each, and the smaller one contains six mats. A good mat costs at least five yen, so for them I should have had to pay one hundred and twenty yen. The first things we buy when my foreign expenses are paid will be fresh, new-mats, and with care they will last us our life.”

“What we brought to the house,” he added, “were our kitchen furnishings, our clothes, bedding, the ornaments for the tokonoma and chigai-dana, my books and study fittings, and the hibachis and tabako-bon.”

In the room where we sat were two recesses or alcoves called tokonomas. Before one of them my cushion had been placed as an evidence that I was the guest of honor. The tokonomas were at opposite ends of what in a house of ours would be the outside walls, so when the dividing screens, or fusuma, were in place a tokonoma would be in each room. They were the beauty spots of the house. Besides the tokonoma recess, there is usually a second and smaller one called chigai-dana. These tokonomas were three feet wide and two feet deep. The floor, raised six inches above that of the mats, was one slab of polished wood. In the center of the tokonoma was a rare bronze vase in which was a beautiful floral arrangement. Above the vase a scroll picture, called kakemona, hung. The ornament on the chigai-dana was a dwarf tree.

Besides the linen cushions upon which we sat, the only other objects in the room were two hibachis and a tabako-bon. The hibachis were the fire-bowls upon which rested the ever-present water-pot for boiling the tea-water. They were both so handsome it was evident they were heirlooms or wedding gifts; one was of rare porcelain; the other of wood inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl. An hibachi is a necessity in every household. Besides boiling the tea-water it serves as the only means of heating. On cold days when shoji and fusuma (inside and outside screens) are closed, the family will crouch around the hibachis, warming their hands and wrists over the glowing coals, and small as the fire is it really does temper the room. The tabako-bon was a new and cheap affair, costing perhaps fifty cents, but it was dainty and in good taste. It was a wooden box ten inches square. In it was a hollow section of bamboo and a small porcelain bowl containing a heap of ashes, on top of which sparkled a few live
coals. The bamboo was an ash receiver and the bowl gave light for smokers.

THE little wife drew out her tiny pipe and took her three puff’s from it, while the professor smoked his native cigarette as we talked. “I spent four years in New Haven and two years in Berlin,” Dr. Nagai said. “In those costly cities it was hard to live cheaply, but here our needs are so few money goes a long way. Our one servant does easily all the work, and we pay her thirty yen a year. To be sure, my wife gives her a kimono now and again, but they cost only a yen apiece. She lived with my wife’s mother, and is trained so she can make up ripped garments and do all necessary sewing. When my wife has guests she prepares and serves the meal so well we need only buy sweets.” “Can she wash?” I asked heedlessly, with my mind still on the possible house of my own. “Our wash is so small she can easily do it,” he replied. “With you it would be necessary to send your clothes to a laundry, as I do my foreign garments.”

Then I remembered that in a Japanese household there were no tablecloths, napkins, sheets, pillow-cases or curtains to be done up, for none of these were used. The meals were served on individual lacquer trays, and each person carried in his sleeve a paper napkin that was destroyed when soiled. The bedding consisted of futones, heavy wadded comfortables. One laid on the floor served as a bed, and a second one furnished all the covering necessary. Pillows were curved wooden blocks or hard rolls of rice husk, and over these each night was tied a sheet of fresh, white paper. The Japanese take so many hot baths, two a day being the usual number, that their garments do not become soiled as do ours. When their kimonos are dirty they either wash them intact, in tiny tubs, before which they crouch, or rip them up and wash out the pieces.

Their drying process takes the place of our ironing, for they never use an iron. The ripped pieces, very wet, will be spread smooth and flat on long boards. These boards are then stood against the sides of the house in the sun and air. When dry the material is carefully pulled off and will be as stiff and smooth as if it had been starched and ironed.

“Do tell me what your other expenses are?” I asked. “Fuel,” he answered, “costs about twenty-five yen a year, light ten yen, and ten
yen a year I pay to the government for my house tax. Then there is
the item of clothes. Mine are expensive, for I must have both foreign
and native, but my wife was so well provided at our marriage that
she has bought nothing since. Last year I spent fifty yen on clothes.
Our food costs us about a hundred yen. You know there is never any
waste in a Japanese kitchen, and every morsel cooked is eaten.”

Taking a note-book from his
pocket he jotted down these items:
Rent .................. 240 yen
House tax ........... 10 “
Wages ................. 30 “
Fuel .................. 25 “
Light .................. 10 “
Clothes ................. 50 “
Food .................. 100 “

465 yen

“Four hundred and sixty-five
yen,” he said. “Yes, that is close
to what we spent, for my salary is
eight hundred yen a year, and I
paid off two hundred yen of my
debt. There is only a hundred and
fifty yen left,” he added thank-
fully; “so this year, unless there is
sickness, I can pay all I owe, start
an account in the savings bank
and perhaps buy a book or two.”

Four hundred and sixty-five
yen, two hundred and thirty-two
and a half of our dollars, and a
college professor of applied science could live comfortably on it in a
delightful little nest of a house in a good neighborhood.