

# That Splash of Saffron

SESSUE HAYAKAWA, A COSMOPOLITAN ACTOR WHO, FOR REASONS OF NATIVITY, HAPPENS TO PEER FROM OUR WHITE SCREENS WITH TILTED EYES

By Grace Kingsley

Photography by Raymond Stagg.

**N**O, Sessue Hayakawa, the world's most noted Japanese photoplay actor, does not dwell in a papier-mache house amid tea-cup scenery.

He is working in pictures in Los Angeles, and he lives in a "regular" bungalow, furnished in mission oak, and dresses very modishly according to American standards. Even his gods are forsaken, for he owns an English bull-pup, named Shoki, which means "destruction," and is the name of a Japanese god.

Mr. Hayakawa's first picture success was in "The Typhoon," following which he appeared in "The Wrath of the Gods," and his latest success is in his role of the Japanese in the Lasky production of "The Cheat," with Fannie Ward.

But great as has been his success in these roles, he does not like them.

"Such roles are not true to our Japanese nature," he said. "They are false and give people a wrong idea of us. I wish to make a characterization which shall reveal us as we really are, and I am glad to say I am soon to have that opportunity, for Miss Jeanie MacPherson,

son, scenario writer for the Lasky Company, is writing a play for me in which I shall play a Japanese who shall do justice to the real Japanese character, and show its best traits."

Not only has Hayakawa introduced Japanese roles in America, but he has played American and English roles in Japan, having the distinction, indeed, of having introduced American and English drama in his native land. He played "The Typhoon" there; also Ibsen and Shakespeare, making an especial hit as "Othello."

"Do the Japanese like foreign drama? Oh, very much indeed; that is, serious drama. They do not care for your comedy, not even Shakespeare's. Probably comedy is too local in its significances. They are beginning to like the Russian drama also. Tolstoi's 'Resurrection' made a big hit. They like also the serious French drama."

"Do Japanese actors like appearing in English drama?" was asked.

"Oh, very much indeed. It gives them a new medium



*This son of the Samurai can wield the traditional weapon of his clan in the traditional manner.*



of expression, as it were. There is more freedom. The Japanese plays, following Japanese tradition, are so full of repression. We of the Japanese have no way of expressing ourselves in some emotions, because of this traditional repression. Also there is more variety of characterization.

"But do you know,"—here Hayakawa made a most interesting point,— "when playing an American or English character, even in Japan, I find it necessary to use the English language. I find it

*Hayakawa says that such plays as this—"The Cheat," in which he and Fannie Ward made a great success—are not true to Japanese character.*

which is attended, not by geisha girls, but by girls of the better classes.

"Japan likes the American motion pictures. And these are shown everywhere there. Sub-titles are not used. Instead a man stands beside the screen and reads lines, changing his voice for the different



*"Still" photographs from the Lasky photoplay.*

characters, speaking in high falsetto when interpreting a feminine role."

"Do you mean to go back to Japan?" I asked.

"Yes,—next year if war conditions permit. I mean to give them the best drama which I can get from the English-speaking stage. And I

impossible to get the proper facial expression or the right action when I translate the words of an American or English character into Japanese. Most of the Japanese understand English nowadays, and they did not really like your drama until I gave it to them in English.

"The Japanese do not like musical comedy, but strangely enough a school of the ballet is established now in Tokio,

shall do them in English, except in case of 'The Typhoon,' 'The Bondman' and such dramas, in which case those playing the roles of the orientals will speak Japanese, the others speaking English."

Sessue Hayakawa is twenty-seven years old. He was sent to a naval school in his early youth to prepare for the navy. But his uncle was the celebrated Japanese actor, Otto Kawakimi, and as the young man was





*Even his gods are forsaken, for he has called the bull-pup "Shoki," the name of the Japanese deity of Destruction.*

fascinated by the stage, he entered his uncle's company, in which was also the great Japanese actress, Madame Yacco, the first Japanese woman to win recognition in the drama.

Madame Yacco is the aunt of Sessue's wife, who is Tsuru Aoki, a Japanese actress now appearing in pictures with Thomas H. Ince, in California. Little Aoki San was in Madame Yacco's company when Hayakawa joined it, and they soon became attached to each other. Mme. Yacco's company played in the Shintomi Za and the Teikoku Za, two leading Japanese theaters.

The great actress and her company planned an international tour, a few years ago, and young Hayakawa and his wife accompanied them to this country. It was then Hayakawa planned to introduce the American and English drama into Japan, and he studied English drama and literature at the Chicago University for a year, and translated a number of the English classics into Japanese. Having returned to Japan and made a success in Ibsen and Shakespeare as related above, he came back to this country, and played all along the Pacific Coast at the head of the Japanese organization.



*Little Aoki San (Tsuru Aoki) was in Madame Yacco's company when Hayakawa joined it.*