



THE BOOK OF TEA

by Okakura Kakuzo

Introduction by Bruce Richardson

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There have been various editions published of *The Book of Tea* since Okakura Kakuzo wrote it in 1906. But, none, by far have been as beautifully illustrated and designed as Bruce Richardson's 2011 edition. His introduction, "As a Stream Runs Through Grass" is superb in its content. He selected ancient illustrations by Katsushika Hokusai from woodblock prints depicting Mount Fuji in different seasons. He writes of Okakura's scholarly life and longtime friendships, particularly with Isabella Stewart Gardner.

Kakuzo enlightens the reader to understand the harmony, purity, respect, and serenity that one may find while having tea and enjoying the simple way of life. It doesn't begin and end with just tea. We must embrace one another with kindness and a willingness to do good things for mankind—share the Cup of Humanity. *The Book of Tea* is an important source of comfort in this hurried world. The simplicity of *The Tea Room* sheds humility to those who enter. Okakura writes: "One of the first requisites of a tea master is the knowledge of how to sweep, clean, and wash, for there is an art in cleaning and dusting." He writes about Art Appreciation, stating: "We must remember, however, that art is of value only to the extent that it speaks to us." His words are pertinent to modern day living. He goes on to say, "In this democratic age of ours men clamor for what is popularly considered the best, regardless of their feelings. They want the costly, not the refined; the fashionable, not the beautiful. . . . The name of the artist is more important to them than the quality of the work." There are chapters on The Schools of Tea, Taoism and Zennism, Tea Masters, and even Flowers. Okakura Kakuzo was a gentle soul. He pens, "In joy or sadness, flowers are our constant friends. We eat, drink, sing, dance, and flirt with them. We wed and christen with flowers. . . . When we are laid low in the dust it is they who linger in sorrow over our graves."

Bruce Richardson features stunning sepia-toned black and white photographs of Japanese tea workers in the final section—"Japanese Tea Exports in the Late 1800s." The chapter begins with a mention of Commodore Perry and his "Black Ship" opening the port of Yokohama in 1859. Bruce apprises the reader of the popularity amongst Americans of Japanese green tea in the late 19th century.

Bruce and Okakura must be kindred souls. Richardson's gift of this publication and his added sentiments and knowledge of Kakuzo's life is a present to cherish.