

# A Fruitful Exchange

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By RUSSELL BAKER

WASHINGTON, Sept. 27—Before President Nixon's meeting with Emperor Hirohito, many persons here had feared that the two men would find nothing to talk about because of the probability that no Emperor of Japan will have anything at all in common with any President of the United States.

Fortunately, there was no cause for concern. Each of these two great men had been so magnificently briefed by his expert advisers that the conversation was able to flow easily and naturally. As host, President Nixon spoke first, welcoming the Emperor with an apology for the humbleness of Alaska and assuring him that it was perfectly all right to take off his shoes if it would make him feel more at home.

Emperor Hirohito responded by clapping the President heartily on the back, playfully feinting a left hook at the Presidential ribs and saying, "You're looking great, Mister President. How's the wife?"

The President said that Mrs. Nixon would be flattered beyond expression when informed that His Imperial Highness had inquired about her. He himself, the President went on, was extremely honored by the inquiry, for it was a great compliment to his own judgment to have selected for a wife a woman whose well-being might be inquired about by the Emperor.

"Don't mention it," said the Emperor.

The President then suggested that the Emperor slip into his kimono while he, the President, got into his terry-cloth bathrobe. He said that they could then sit on the floor and have the tea ceremony.

The Emperor said that if it was all right with the President he would prefer to sit in a rocking chair and have some hamburgers sent up from a drive-in. At this, Mr. Nixon dropped a lotus petal in a glass of water, which was the signal for the aides to bring a rocker, cancel the tea ceremony and send up four hamburgers, hold the pickle.

"How'd you leave things in Washington?" the Emperor asked next.

The President thanked the Emperor for asking about Washington, a city that would be entirely unworthy of the Emperor's slightest interest, he added, were it not for the Japanese cherry trees.

The Emperor said that, personally, he could take cherry trees or leave them alone. What he would really like Japan to send to America, he said, was a right-handed slugger who could hit .340.

President Nixon asked the Emperor's permission to tell him something extremely personal.

"What's an Emperor for?" the guest replied, with a wink.

## OBSERVER

The President confided that when he was at Whittier College as a young man his consuming ambition had been to become a great sumo wrestler. One of the saddest days of his life, he said, was the day his coach told him he would never weigh 385 pounds and be only four feet two inches tall and could, therefore, never wrestle sumo on the first team. He had had to be content sitting on the edge of the mat as a stretcher bearer, he told the Emperor.

Emperor Hirohito said that, well, nobody could win them all.

President Nixon asked the Emperor who he thought was going to be number one this year in sumo wrestling.

The Emperor said that it was always a mistake to bet against Notre Dame. He asked the President how the weather was in Washington, how the weather had been on the flight to Alaska and whether the President thought it would rain tomorrow.

The President congratulated the Emperor on the quiet grace and simple beauty of those questions and said that he was unbearably embarrassed by his inability to answer them, as he would like to, with one perfect haiku, but that unfortunately his ghost writers had been unable to compose even so much as a pedestrian haiku, although the Emperor's questions had been anticipated for weeks and the poor wretches had been laboring at the haiku bench for days.

The Emperor became very grave at hearing this news and said that labor was a splendid thing, even when it bore no fruit, because laboring made people good and pleasant-tempered and enabled them to live in dignity. He had gotten where he was today, the Emperor went on, because he had followed the inspirational example of his father, who, although an Emperor, had never hesitated to work overtime and weekends at the imperial chores.

He added that he had no patience with loafers who sat around dogging it at the lens factory or on the transistor-radio production line and then went home and complained to their families that they hadn't been given a fair chance at being Emperor.

President Nixon said he was a great admirer of Japanese art and asked the Emperor's permission to inform him that he liked "Rashomon" almost as much as "Patton."

The Emperor said that King Kong was the greatest monster ever filmed, adding, "and that includes Godzilla."

The time allotted for their meeting had been exhausted fifteen seconds before the Emperor's remark and, on this note of mutual understanding, the meeting concluded.