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Isabella Lucy Bird

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

To those of my readers who are familiar with Japan I offer an apology for a chapter of elementary facts, and ask them to omit it. The few who have never previously read a book on Japan, and the many who have forgotten what they read, or whose far eastern geography is rusty, or in whose memories the curious inventions of some early voyagers stick, or who still believe in *hara kiri* and the existence of a shadowy Mikado at Kiyôto, and a solid Shôgun at Tôkiyô, are requested to read it.

If an eminent writer found that "educated Britons" required more than one re-statement of the fact that the coco palm and the cacao bush are not one and the same thing, it is not surprising that such facts as that the "Spiritual" and "Temporal" Emperors are fictions of the past, and that the most northern part of Japan with its Siberian winter is south of the most southern point of England, are not always fresh in the memory. Were it so, such questions and remarks as the following could not be uttered by highly educated, and, in some respects, well-informed people. By a general officer's wife, "Is Sir Harry Parkes Governor of Japan?" By a borough M.P., "Is there any hope of the abolition of slavery in Japan?" By a county M.P., "Is the Viceroy of Japan appointed for life?" By one gentleman holding an official appointment in India to another,

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both having been crammed for Civil Service examinations within the last two years, "Japan belongs to Russia now, doesn't it?" "Yes, I think China ceded it in return for something or other a few years ago," and in the same connection, an officer holding a high military appointment contended not only that Japan belongs to Russia, but that it is on the Asiatic mainland, and was only convinced of his error by being confronted with the map; the mistake in both the latter cases probably arising out of a hazy recollection that Japan surrendered Saghalien to Russia a few years ago in exchange for some small islands.

The suppositions that Sir Harry Parkes is Governor of Japan, that Japan is tributary to China, that the Japanese are Roman Catholics, that Christianity is prohibited, that the people of the interior are savages, and that the climate is tropical, have been repeated over and over again in my hearing by educated people, and mistakes equally grotesque frequently find their way into the newspapers; so true is it that, unless we are going to travel in a country, to fight it, or to colonise it, our information is seldom either abundant or accurate, and highly imaginative accounts by early travellers, the long period of mysterious seclusion, and the changes which have succeeded each other with breathless rapidity during the last eleven years, create a special confusion in our ideas of Japan.

So rapid, indeed, have these changes been, that on turning to Chambers's admirable *Encyclopædia*, I find that the edition of 1863 states that there are two Emperors, Spiritual and Secular, that Japan is ruled by an aristocracy of hereditary *daimiyô*, that the weapons used by the army are matchlocks and even bows and arrows, that the navy is composed of war junks, that the iron cash is the only circulating medium, that the most remarkable of existing customs is *hara kiri*, that only men of rank can

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enter a city on horseback, and that the area of the Empire is estimated at 265,000 square miles,—many of which statements were substantially correct sixteen years ago.

The few facts which follow are merely given for the purpose of making the succeeding Letters intelligible. Sixteen days' sail from America, forty-two from England, and four from Hong Kong, Japan lies only 20 miles from Kamtchatka, and a day's sail in a junk from the Asian mainland of Corea. The Japanese Empire, which is said to be composed of 3800 islands, extends from Lat. 24° to 50° 40' N., and from Long. 124° to 156° 38' E., that is to say, that its northern extremity is a little south of the Land's End, and its southern a little north of Nubia. Straggling over 26° of latitude, and extending southwards to within thirty miles of the Tropic of Cancer, a man may enjoy a nearly perpetual summer in Yakunoshima, or shiver in the rigours of a Siberian winter in Northern Yezo. The traveller's opinion of the climate depends very much upon whether he goes to Japan from the east or west. If from Singapore or China, he pronounces it bracing, healthful, delicious; if from California, damp, misty, and enervating. Then there are good and bad seasons, cold or mild winters, cool or hot summers, dry or wet years, and other variations, besides a greater variety of actual climates than the mere extent of latitude warrants.

Thus the eastern coasts are warmed by the Kuro Shiwo, the gulf-stream of the North Pacific, and the western are chilled during many months of the year by a cold north-west wind from the Asiatic mainland, which gathers moisture from the Sea of Japan, while the climate of Northern Yezo is Siberianised by the cold current from the Sea of Okotsk. Climate is further modified by the influence of the monsoons, but, on the whole, it may be said that the summer is hot, damp, and cloudy, and the winter cold, bright, and relatively dry; that the spring

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and autumn are briefer and more vivid than in England; that the skies are brighter, and the sun hotter and more lavish of his presence; that there is no sickly season; that there are no diseases of locality; and that Europeans and their children thrive well in all parts of the Empire

There are, however, certain drawbacks, such as the throbbing and jerking of frequent earthquakes, the liability to typhoons in July, August, and September, the uncertainty as to the intentions of certain dormant but not extinct volcanoes, and mild malaria.

The area of this much-disintegrated Empire is 147,582 square miles, *i.e.* it is considerably larger than Great Britain and Ireland, Prussia, or Italy, considerably smaller than France, and not so large as any one of the eighteen provinces into which China is divided. Among its 3800 islands Honshiu [Nippon], Kiushiu, Shikoku, and Yezo, are the most important. These islands are among the most mountainous in the world; there are several active volcanoes, and the extinct ones, of which the well-known Fujisan, 13,080 feet high, is the loftiest, are almost innumerable. The area of forest is four times as great as that of the cultivated land; the lakes are few, and, with the exception of Lake Biwa, small; the streams are countless, but the rivers are mostly short and badly suited for navigation. There are few harbours on the east coast, and almost none on the west, but such as there are, are deep and capacious. The soil is mainly disintegrated basalt, and is not naturally very prolific. The scenery is often grand, and nearly always pretty, and if there be monotony, it is, as Baron Hubner says, "the poetry of monotony." The luxuriance of the vegetation and the greenness in spring and throughout the summer are so wonderful that the islands of the Japanese Archipelago might well be called the Emerald Isles. Even winter fails to bring brownness and bareness. Evergreens of

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150 varieties compensate for the leaflessness of the deciduous trees, every landscape is bright with the verdure of springing crops, and camellias with their crimson blossoms light up leafage covered with snow. The mountains of Japan are covered with forest, and the valleys and plains are exquisitely tilled gardens.

The Empire is very rich in flowers, and especially in flowering shrubs. Azaleas, camellias, hydrangeas, and magnolias all delight the eye in their seasons with a breadth and blaze of colour which cannot be described, and irises, peonies, cherries, and plums, have their special festivals. The classic lotus with its great pink or white cups, the *Paulownia Imperialis*, a tree which bears erect foxglove blossoms, deutzias with their graceful flowers, rhododendrons, wistaria, and many greenhouse friends, are as common as hawthorns and hedge-roses with us. Savatier enumerates 1699 species of dicotyledonous plants in Japan, and the monocotyledonous are proportionately numerous. Among the former are eight species of magnolia, seven of hydrangea, twenty of rhododendron, fourteen of ilex, twenty-two of maple, twenty-two of oak, four of pine, and nine of fir. Among the novelties in flowering shrubs and gorgeous lilies, the English ivy, sundew, mistletoe, buttercup, marsh marigold, purple and white clover, honeysuckle, coltsfoot, sow thistle, veronica, and many others, rejoice the traveller's eye by their familiar homeliness. Among the trees which claim homage either from their beauty or majesty, the *Cryptomeria japonica*, the *Camellia japonica*, the *Zelkawa keaki* (a species of elm), the *Salisburia adiantifolia*, the *Magnolia hyperleuca*, and the *Persimmon*, are in the first rank, and the eye rests with special delight on the great bamboo, whose feathery, bright green foliage massed against groves of coniferæ seems to combine the tropics with the temperate zone. The 26° of latitude through which the

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Empire extends give it an infinite variety of vegetation, from the rigid pine and scrub oak of Yezo to the palms, bananas, and sugar-cane of Kiushiu. Ferns are abundant and very varied, but indigenous fruits are few, small, sour, and tasteless.

The fauna is meagre, consisting chiefly of deer, bears, wolves, wild boars, badgers, foxes, monkeys, snakes, and small ground animals; eagles, hawks, herons, quails, pheasants, and storks, are numerous, and crows are innumerable, but birds of sweet voice and brilliant plumage are mournfully rare, and silence is a characteristic of nature in Japan; nor do imported animals make up for the lack of indigenous ones. They have no place in Japanese landscape. There are no grass fields or velvety pasture lands, or farmyards knee-deep in straw, and flocks and herds form no part of the wealth of the Japanese farmer. Oxen are used for draught alone, and not by any means generally. Horses are used as beasts of burden and for riding, but the Japanese horse is a mean, sorry brute, a grudging, ungenerous animal, trying to human patience and temper, with three *movements* (not by any means to be confounded with paces)—a drag, a roll, and a scramble. The ass, mule, and pig, are only to be seen on experimental farms. Cowardly yellow dogs, much given to nocturnal howling, miserable misrepresentations of the Scotch collie, abound, and are probably indigenous, besides which there are imported lap-dogs dwarfish and objectionable, and domestic cats, mostly with only rudimentary tails. Ducks and the ubiquitous barn-door fowl are everywhere. Mosquitos are nearly universal between April and October, and insects which stab and sting abound.

Railroads have been introduced between Yokohama and Tôkiyô, and Kobe, Kiyôto, and Otsu, seventy-six miles in all. The main roads vary in width from thirty feet to that of mere rude bridle tracks, and the bye-roads are

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“ORIENTAL MAGNIFICENCE.”

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narrow tracks only passable for pack-horses. Nearly all travelling must be done on foot or on pack-horses, or in covered bamboo baskets, called *kago*, carried by men, or on the level in *kurumas*, two-wheeled vehicles drawn by men. There are *yadoyas* or inns on most of the routes, and post stations where horses and coolies can be procured at fixed rates.

The population of 34,358,404 souls, or about 230 to the square mile, is larger by a million than that of the United Kingdom, exceeds that of Prussia by nine millions, and that of Italy by seven millions, but is less than that of France by a million and a half. With the exception of 12,000 Ainos, and about 5000 Europeans, Americans, and Chinese, this population is absolutely homogeneous, and yellow skins, dark, elongated eyes, and dark, straight hair, are the rule. The same language, with certain immaterial provincialisms, is spoken by all the Japanese of the Empire, and similar uniformity prevails in temples, dwelling-houses, and costume.

Japan is beyond the limits of “Oriental magnificence.” Colour and gilding are only found in the temples; palaces and cottages are alike of grey wood; architecture scarcely exists; wealth, if there be any, makes no display; dull blues, browns, and greys, are the usual colours of costume; jewellery is not worn; everything is poor and pale, and a monotony of meanness characterises the towns.

The Japanese of the treaty ports are contaminated and vulgarised by intercourse with foreigners; those of the interior, so far from being “savages,” are kindly, gentle, and courteous, so much so, that a lady with no other attendant than a native servant can travel, as I have done, for 1200 miles through little-visited regions, and not meet with a single instance of incivility or extortion.

Foreigners in Japan are still under restrictions, *i.e.* they are only allowed to settle and trade in Yokohama,

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Nagasaki, Tôkiyô, Kobe, Osaka, Hakodate, and Niigata. Nor can they travel beyond a radius of 25 miles from the "treaty ports," without a "passport," or formal permission from the Government, obtainable only for a given time and route. Foreigners are not under Japanese jurisdiction, but are tried for offences in their own consular Courts, and their privilege of "extra-territoriality" is regarded as a great grievance by the Japanese, and is a constant bone of contention between the Japanese and Foreign Governments.

The mystery of a "Spiritual Emperor," secluded in Kiyôto, and a "Temporal Emperor" reigning in Yedo no longer exists; the Shôgunate is abolished, Yedo has become Tôkiyô; the *daimiyô*, shorn of their power and titles, have retired into private life; the "two-sworded" men are extinct, and the Mikado, a modern-looking man in European dress, reigns by divine right in Tôkiyô, with European appliances of "ironclads," "Armstrongs," and "needle guns," and the *prestige* of being the one hundred and twenty-third in direct descent from the Sun Goddess, the chief deity in the Pantheon of the national religion. His government is a modified despotism, with tendencies at times in a constitutional direction. Slavery is unknown, and class disabilities no longer exist.

Shintô, a rude form of nature and myth worship, probably indigenous, containing no moral code, and few if any elements of religion, is the "state," and "state endowed" church, but Buddhism, imported from Corea in the sixth century, and disestablished since the restoration of the Mikado, has a firmer hold on the masses, the higher classes contenting themselves with a system of secular philosophy while giving a nominal adhesion to Shintô for political purposes. Christianity is quietly tolerated, and Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Greeks, claim among them about 27,000 converts.

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Politically, Old Japan is no more. The grandeur of its rulers, its antique chivalry, its stately etiquette, its ceremonial costume, its punctilious suicides, and its codes of honour, only exist on the stage. Its traditional customs, its rigid social order, its formal politeness, its measured courtesies, its ignorant patriotism, its innumerable and enslaving superstitions, linger still in the interior, specially in the regions where a debased and corrupt form of Buddhism holds sway. Over great districts of country on the unbeaten track which I traversed from Nikkô to Aomori, the rumble of the wheels of progress is scarcely yet heard, and the Japanese peasant lives and thinks as his fathers lived and thought before him.

Since my return, I have frequently been asked whether the rage for western civilisation is likely to be more than a passing fancy, and whether the civilisation itself is more than a temporary veneration? It is only seven years since the mission of Iwakura and his colleagues visited Europe and America with the view of investigating western civilisation and transplanting its best results to Japanese soil, and only nine since the magnificent and complicated system of Japanese feudalism was swept away. Of the men who rule Japan, only two are "aristocrats." With the impetus of the new movement, springing mainly from the people, and from *within*, not from without, we have undoubtedly two of the elements of permanence.

Many Europeans ridicule Japanese progress as "imitation," Chinese and Koreans contemplate it with ill-concealed anger, not unmixed with jealousy, yet Japan holds on her course, and, without venturing to predict her future, I see no reason to distrust the permanence of a movement which has isolated her from other Oriental nations, and which, in spite of very many extravagances and absurdities, is growing and broadening daily. The

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religion, letters, and civilisation which she received from China through Corea ("veneering," it may have been said), have lasted for twelve centuries. The civilisation which comes from the far West in the nineteenth century is not a more sweeping wave than that which came from Corea in the sixth, and is likely to produce equally enduring results, specially and certainly if Christianity overthrows Buddhism, the most powerful influence from without which has hitherto affected Japan.

The transformations which are being accomplished are under the direction of foreigners in Government service, and of Japanese selected for their capacities, who have studied for some years in Europe and America; and the Government has spared neither trouble nor expense in securing the most competent assistance in all departments, and it is only in comparatively few instances that it has been badly advised by interested aliens for the furtherance of personal or other ends. About 500 foreigners have been at one time or other in its service, and though they may have met with annoyances and exasperations, the terms of their contracts have been faithfully adhered to. Some of these gentlemen are decorated with high-sounding titles during their brief engagements; but it must be remembered that they are there as helpers only, without actual authority, as servants and not masters, and that, with a notable exception, the greater their energy, ability, and capacity for training, the sooner are their services dispensed with, and one department after another passes from foreign into native management. The retention of foreign *employés* forms no part of the programme of progress. "Japan for the Japanese" is the motto of Japanese patriotism; the "Barbarians" are to be used, and dispensed with as soon as possible.

Of the present foreign staff the great majority are teachers; considerably more than half are English, and