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Isabella Lucy Bird

Excerpt

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## NOTES ON YEZO.

Physical Characteristics—The Colonisation Department—The New Capital  
 —The Fisheries—Hakodaté—A Vigilant Police—The “Hairy Ainos”  
 —Yezo Fascinations.

SEPARATED from the main island of Japan by the Tsugaru Strait, and from Saghalien by the narrow strait of La Perouse, in shape an irregular triangle, extending from long.  $139^{\circ} 50'$  E. to long.  $146^{\circ}$  E., and from lat.  $41^{\circ} 30'$  N. to lat.  $45^{\circ} 30'$  N., its most northern point considerably south of the Land's End, Yezo has a climate of singular severity, a heavy snowfall, and, in its northern parts, a Siberian winter. Its area is 35,739 square miles, or considerably larger than that of Ireland, while its estimated population is only 123,000. The island is a mountain mass, with plains well grassed and watered. Impenetrable jungles and impassable swamps cover much of its area. It has several active volcanoes, and the quietude of some of its apparently extinct ones is not to be relied upon. Its forests and swamps are drained by innumerable short, rapid rivers, which are subject to violent freshets. In riding round the coast they are encountered every two or three miles, and often detain the traveller for days on their margins. The largest is the Ishkari, famous for salmon.

The coast has few safe harbours, and though exempt from typhoons, is swept by heavy gales and a continuous surf. The cultivated land is mainly in the neighbourhood of the sea,

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with the exception of the extensive plain around Satsuporo. The interior is forest-covered, and the supplies of valuable lumber are nearly inexhaustible, and include thirty-six kinds of useful timber trees. Openings in the forest are heavily grassed with the *Eulalia Japonica*, a grass higher than the head of a man on horseback; and the forest itself is rendered impassable, not only by a dense growth of the tough and rigid dwarf bamboo, which attains a height of eight feet, but by ropes and nooses of various vines, *lianas* in truth, which grow profusely everywhere. The soil is usually rich, and the summer being warm is favourable to the growth of most cereals and root crops. The climate is not well suited to rice, but wheat ripens everywhere. Most of the crops which grow in the northern part of the main island flourish in Yezo, and English fruit-trees succeed better than in any part of Japan. I never saw finer crops anywhere than in Mombets on Volcano Bay. Cleared land, from the richness of the soil formed by vegetable decomposition, is fitted to produce crops as in America, for twenty years without manuring, and a regular and sufficient rainfall, as in England, obviates the necessity for irrigation.

The chief mineral wealth of Yezo is in its coalfields, but the Government is jealous of the introduction of foreign capital, and till the embargo is removed, it is unlikely that this source of wealth will be utilised on a large scale, and much of the money appropriated for the development of mines is frittered away by official "squeezes" *en route*. But this coal may eventually turn out of great importance to the world. Mr. Lyman, the able head of the Geological Survey, estimates the quantity of coal in the Yezo coalfields at *one hundred and fifty thousand million tons*; in other words, that Yezo could yield the present annual product of Great Britain for a thousand years to come!!!

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## YEZO. THE "DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT." 3

The official name of Yezo is the *Hokkaido* or Northern Sea Circuit, and owing to various circumstances, actual and imaginary, it is under a separate department of the Government called the Colonisation Department, known as the *Kaitakushi*, or, as we should say, the "Development Department." This department has spent enormous sums upon Yezo, some of which have been sunk in unprofitable and costly experiments, while others bear fruit in productive improvements. The appropriation of this year is over £302,000. The island differs so much in its general features and natural products from the rest of Japan, that it is exempt from the ordinary taxes, and is subject to special imposts on produce, which bring in a revenue of about £72,000 annually, a large sum to be paid by a small population.

Satsuporo, on the Ishkari River, is the creation of this Department. The chief and most hopeful of its operations there is an Agricultural College on the model of the Massachusetts Agricultural College, under native direction, but with a staff of four able American professors. Its graduation course is four years, and the number of students is limited to sixty. It gives a sound English education, with special attention to surveying and civil engineering, as required for the construction of ordinary roads, railroads, drainage and irrigation works, and such thorough instruction in agriculture and horticulture as is required by the necessities of farming in Yezo. There are model farms both at Satsuporo and Nanai, near Hakodaté, and nursery gardens for exotic trees, vegetables, and flowers. The department is introducing sheep and pigs, and by importing blood stock is endeavouring to improve the breed of horses and cattle. At Satsuporo it has extensive sawmills, a silk factory, a tannery, and a brewery, and large flour mills both there and at Nanai.

It would be uninteresting to give a list of all which

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the *Kaitakushi* has attempted for the development of Yezo. Many of its schemes have proved utterly abortive, and some which still exist are not carried out with the completeness and perseverance necessary for success. Its funds are undoubtedly eaten up by superfluous officials, who draw salaries and perpetrate "squeezes," and do little besides smoke and talk. Roads are much needed. The broad road from Hakodaté to Satsuporo, on which much money is always being expended, is in a permanently wretched state, and is mainly available for long strings of pack-horses, whose deep cross ruts had not disappeared even in September; and the steam-ferry of twenty-five miles on this main road is carried on by a steamer whose extreme speed is five miles an hour, and whose boilers, to use the expressive native phrase, are constantly "sick." The theories of "development" are very good; mistakes have been and are being made; some valuable practical measures are neglected in favour of Utopian experiments, and some good results are being attained.

The Government is supposed to have two objects in view in developing Yezo. One is to provide a field for emigration for the inhabitants of those parts of Japan which are supposed to be over-populated, and the other, by building up a population in Yezo, to erect a sort of bulwark against aggressive designs which are supposed to be entertained by Russia, a power which is as much distrusted in Japan as in England. Colonies have been settled in several favourable regions; grants of land have been made to a great many *samurai*, and at Satsuporo nearly 1000 soldiers are settled with their families in detached houses, each with several acres of land; seeds and fruit-trees are sold to settlers at a very low price, and many agricultural advantages are provided which do not exist on the main island; but still, either from a natural disinclination to emigrate, or from a dread of the taxes

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YEZO.

SALMON FISHERIES.

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imposed on produce, the *Hokkaido* fails to attract a population, and a region which could support six millions has a scattered sprinkling, and that mainly round the coasts, of only 123,000 souls.

The fisheries of Yezo are magnificent, and rival those of the opposite coast of Oregon; but they are overtaxed, the tax levied being from 10 to 25 per cent on the yield. Salmon is the specialty, but cuttle-fish, seaweed, and *bêche de mer* are also important articles of export. There are many fishing stations on the southern coast, but the most important are at Ishkari in the north, near Satsuporo, the new capital. The salmon-fishing there is one of the sights of Japan. Some of the seines are 4000 feet in length, and require seventy men to work them. A pair of such, making three hauls a day, sometimes catch 20,000 salmon, averaging, when cured, 10 lbs. each. The revenue from the fisheries of the Ishkari river alone is \$50,000 annually. Yezo fish is not only sent throughout the interior of Japan, but is shipped to China. The Ainos, the aborigines of the island, are largely employed in the fishing, and an immense number of emigrants from the provinces of Nambu and Ugo resort to Yezo for the fishing season.

Hakodaté, the northern Treaty Port, a flourishing city of 37,000 people, is naturally the capital, with its deep and magnificent harbour well sheltered in all winds. Situated on a gravelly hill-slope, with a sunny exposure and splendid natural drainage, it is fitted to recruit energies which have been exhausted by the damp heat of Yokohama and Tôkiyô. Though it has occasionally nine inches of snow on the ground in November, the snowfall is not excessive, as it is in the north of the island; it does not lie permanently on the ground, and there are many sunny winter days, so many, indeed, that the slush is worse than the snow. It has a mean annual temperature

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of about  $10^{\circ}$  below that of Yedo, but the range in the direction of cold is much greater. The minimum is  $2^{\circ}$ , and the maximum  $88^{\circ}$ . The nights, even in hot weather, are nearly always cool. In a period of nine years the annual rainfall has averaged 51.9 inches, and the average number of rain days is about 98.

Hakodaté is annually falling away as a foreign port. In fact, its foreign trade is reduced to nothing. It has only two foreign firms, and its foreign residents, exclusive of Chinese, only number 37. If it were not for the number of ships of war which visit it every summer, and for the arrival of a few visitors in impaired health, it would be nearly as dull as Niigata. But as a Japanese port it is an increasingly thriving place. It is unprofitable for foreign vessels to come so far to this *one* point, now that Japanese steamers, which can trade at *all* ports, are so numerous. Foreign merchandise is now imported by Japanese merchants in Japanese ships, and the chief articles of export—dried fish, seaweed, and skins—are sent direct to China and the main island in native vessels. Fine passenger steamers of the *Mitsu Bishi* Company run between Hakodaté and Yokohama every ten days, and to Niigata once a month, besides cargo boats, and junks and native vessels of foreign rig arrive and depart in numbers with every fair wind.

The Government buildings are extensive, and the hospital and prisons are under admirable native management. Remote as Hakodaté is, it does not seem to me to be behind any city of its size in enterprise, general comfort, cleanliness, and good order. The *Kaitakushi* has seventeen schools in the city, in which the pupils are taught reading, writing, and arithmetic up to fractions, along with universal history and geography; besides which there are numbers of private schools, which only teach reading and writing. Some of the shopkeepers, in a most

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YEZO.

A VIGILANT POLICE.

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enlightened spirit, have established an evening school for apprentices and assistants between twelve and eighteen, who are engaged during the day, and the fees for all these schools are moderate.

The Post Office and Custom House are efficiently managed by Japanese officials, in conformity with foreign usages; and though the Judicial Department gives little satisfaction, the police are so efficient that H.B.M.'s Consul officially reports that "no thief or criminal can escape the vigilance of the authorities!" Japanese ship-carpenters are designing and turning out small schooners of foreign rig, and Japanese merchants import foreign goods, such as clothing, provisions, hardware, crockery, glass, fancy goods, and alcoholic liquors, to such an extent that the absence of a foreign store is scarcely felt.

Such are some of the signs of progress in a city which, when Mr. Alcock visited it in 1859 to instal the British Consul, had a population of only 6000 people, and was only resorted to by a few whalers!

It is the centre of missionary operations for the island; and at present the Greeks, Romanists, Church Missionary Society, and American Methodist Episcopal Church, have agents there, limited, of course, to the treaty distance of twenty-five miles, unless they obtain travelling passports under the ordinary regulations.

Besides Hakodaté, there are only two towns of any importance—Matsumae, a decayed place of about 16,000 people, formerly the residence of a very powerful *daimiyô*; and Satsuporo, the capital, a town of 3000 people, laid out on the plan of an American city, with wide, rectangular streets, lined by low Japanese houses and shops, and tasteless, detached, frame houses. The American idea is further suggested by the *Kaitakushi* offices with a capitol copied from the capitol at Washington. Besides the Government Buildings and those which have been previ-

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ously mentioned, there is a hospital under the charge of an American doctor.

Near Satsuporo are several agricultural settlements, and the experiments there and elsewhere on the island prove that though the winter is long and severe, the climate and soil are specially favourable for winter wheat, maize, millet, buckwheat, potatoes, peas, beans, and other vegetables and cereals, as well as for Japanese hemp, which commands a high price, owing to the length, fineness, and silkiness of its fibre. Thousands of acres of well-watered grass-land lie utterly useless in the neighbourhood of Satsuporo on the Ishkari river.

Wild animals and game in large numbers have their home in the impenetrable forests of the interior. In the Hakodaté market, at different seasons of the year, are to be bought at moderate prices, grouse, hares, quail, snipe, teal, venison, woodcock, wild duck, and bear; and bear-furs and deer-skins are among the important articles of export.

The chief object of interest to the traveller is the remnant of the Aino race, the aborigines of Yezo, and not improbably of the whole of Japan, peaceable savages, who live on the coasts and in the interior by fishing and hunting, and stand in the same relation to their Japanese subjugators as the Red Indians to the Americans, the Jakkoons to the Malays, and the Veddas to the Sinhalese. In truth, it must be added that they receive better treatment from their masters than is accorded to any of these subject races. The Letters which follow contain all that I could learn about them from actual observation, but Mr. Yasuda Sadanori, First Secretary of the *Kaitakushi* Department, has supplied a few additional facts at the request of Sir Harry Parkes:—

“A rough census of the Ainos made in 1873 gives their numbers at—



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	Males	.	.	6118
	Females	.	.	6163
	Total	.	.	12,281

Since that year no separate census has been made, but the Ainos are believed to be decreasing in number.

"As regards taxes, they pay partly in money and partly in kind.

"The education law of the Ministry of Public Instruction does not apply to the *Hokkaido*, but a similar system has been adopted by the *Kaitakushi* Department, and is applied to all inhabitants of the island without distinction of origin, the object of the Imperial Government being to teach Ainos and Japanese alike.

"Special arrangements have been made for the purpose of enabling the Ainos to live."

The "hairy Ainos," as these savages have been called, are stupid, gentle, good-natured, and submissive. They are a wholly distinct race from the Japanese. In complexion they resemble the peoples of Spain and Southern Italy, and the expression of the face and the manner of showing courtesy are European rather than Asiatic. If not taller, they are of a much broader and heavier make than the Japanese; the hair is jet black, very soft, and on the scalp forms thick, pendant masses, occasionally wavy, but never showing any tendency to curl. The beard, moustache, and eyebrows are very thick and full, and there is frequently a heavy growth of stiff hair on the chest and limbs. The neck is short, the brow high, broad, and massive, the nose broad and inclined to flatness, the mouth wide but well formed, the line of the eyes and eyebrows perfectly straight, and the frontal sinuses well marked. Their language is a very simple one. They have no written characters, no literature, no

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history, very few traditions, and have left no impression on the land from which they have been driven.

In Yezo the traveller is conscious of a freer atmosphere than he has breathed on the main island, and it is not only the air which circulates more freely, but men and beasts have plenty of elbow-room. You can get a tolerable horse, and ride him where you please, without being brought up by a trespass notice or a rice swamp; you go off the roads and gallop for miles over breezy commons by the sea-shore, covered with red roses; you can lead a half-savage life, and swim rivers, and climb mountains, and "light a fire in woods," without offending against "regulations;" in a word, you can do all that you may not do on the main island; and apart from the interest of investigation and observation, there is a charm about the thinly-peopled country, a fascination in the long moan of the Pacific between Tomakomai and Cape Erimo, in the glorious loneliness of the region round Volcano Bay, and in the breeziness and freedom of Yezo life, which make my memories of Yezo in some respects the most delightful which I have brought away from Japan.