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Japanese Girls and Women

After spending a year in Tokyo, American teacher Alice Mabel Bacon (1858–1918) became the first author to usher Western readers into the graceful, paper-walled realm of the Japanese woman. An intimate friend of several Japanese ladies, Bacon was privy to a domestic world which remained closed to male visitors. This 1891 work begins with birth and childhood, including the colourful, kimono-like dress of infants, their ornate dolls, and their education in handwriting, flower painting and etiquette. Trained for a lifetime of service to her husband and his parents, the Japanese woman was praised for her loyalty and obedience. But new Western influences, especially on education, were challenging the old ways. Bacon evocatively depicts Japanese women unsettled by their modern education, yet saddled with traditional cultural expectations. With its insight into Japan's class system, cultural history and moral framework, this book remains an essential complement to any study of Japanese social history.

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University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108080941

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2015

This edition first published 1891

This digitally printed version 2015

ISBN 978-1-108-08094-1 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect
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JAPANESE GIRLS AND
WOMEN

BY

ALICE MABEL BACON

LONDON
GAY AND BIRD
1891

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The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.
Printed by H. O. Houghton & Company.

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To
STEMATZ, THE COUNTESS OYAMA,
IN THE NAME OF OUR GIRLHOOD'S FRIENDSHIP, UNCHANGED AND
UNSHAKEN BY THE CHANGES AND SEPARATIONS OF OUR
MATURER YEARS,
This Volume
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

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PREFACE.

IT seems necessary for a new author to give some excuse for her boldness in offering to the public another volume upon a subject already so well written up as Japan. In a field occupied by Griffis, Morse, Greey, Lowell, and Rein, what unexplored corner can a woman hope to enter? This is the question that will be asked, and that accordingly the author must answer.

While Japan as a whole has been closely studied, and while much and varied information has been gathered about the country and its people, one half of the population has been left entirely unnoticed, passed over with brief mention, or altogether misunderstood. It is of this neglected half that I have written, in the hope that the whole fabric of Japanese social

life will be better comprehended when the women of the country, and so the homes that they make, are better known and understood.

The reason why Japanese home-life is so little understood by foreigners, even by those who have lived long in Japan, is that the Japanese, under an appearance of frankness and candor, hides an impenetrable reserve in regard to all those personal concerns which he believes are not in the remotest degree the concerns of his foreign guest. Only life in the home itself can show what a Japanese home may be; and only by intimate association — such as no foreign man can ever hope to gain — with the Japanese ladies themselves can much be learned of the thoughts and daily lives of the best Japanese women.

I have been peculiarly fortunate in having enjoyed the privilege of long and intimate friendship with a number of Japanese ladies, who have spoken with me as freely, and shown the details of their lives to me

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as openly, as if bound by closest ties of kindred. Through them, and only through them, I have been enabled to study life from the point of view of the refined and intelligent Japanese women, and have found the study so interesting and instructive that I have felt impelled to offer to others some part of what I have received through the aid of these friends. I have, moreover, been encouraged in my work by reading, when it was already more than half completed, the following words from Griffis's "Mikado's Empire:"—

“The whole question of the position of Japanese women—in history, social life, education, employments, authorship, art, marriage, concubinage, prostitution, benevolent labor, the ideals of literature, popular superstitions, etc.—discloses such a wide and fascinating field of inquiry that I wonder no one has as yet entered it.”

In closing, I should say that this work is by no means entirely my own. It is, in the first place, largely the result of the in-

terchange of thought through many and long conversations with Japanese ladies upon the topics herein treated. It has also been carefully revised and criticised; and many valuable additions have been made to it by Miss Umé Tsuda, teacher of English in the Peeresses' School in Tōkyō, and an old and intimate friend. Miss Tsuda is at present in this country, on a two years' leave, for purposes of further study. She has, amid her many duties as a student at Bryn Mawr College, given much time and thought to this work; and a large part of whatever value it may possess is due to her.

I would say, too, that in the verification of dates, names, and historical incidents, I have relied altogether upon Griffis's "Mikado's Empire" and Rein's "Japan," knowing that those two authors represent the best that has been done by foreigners in the field of Japanese history.

This work also owes much, not only to the suggestions and historical aids con-

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tained in the “Mikado’s Empire,” but to Mr. Griffis himself, for his careful reading of my manuscript, and for his criticisms and suggestions. No greater encouragement can be given to an inexperienced author than the helpful criticism of one who has already distinguished himself in the same field of labor; and for just such friendly aid my warmest thanks are due to Mr. Griffis.

A. M. B.

HAMPTON, VA., *February*, 1891.

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