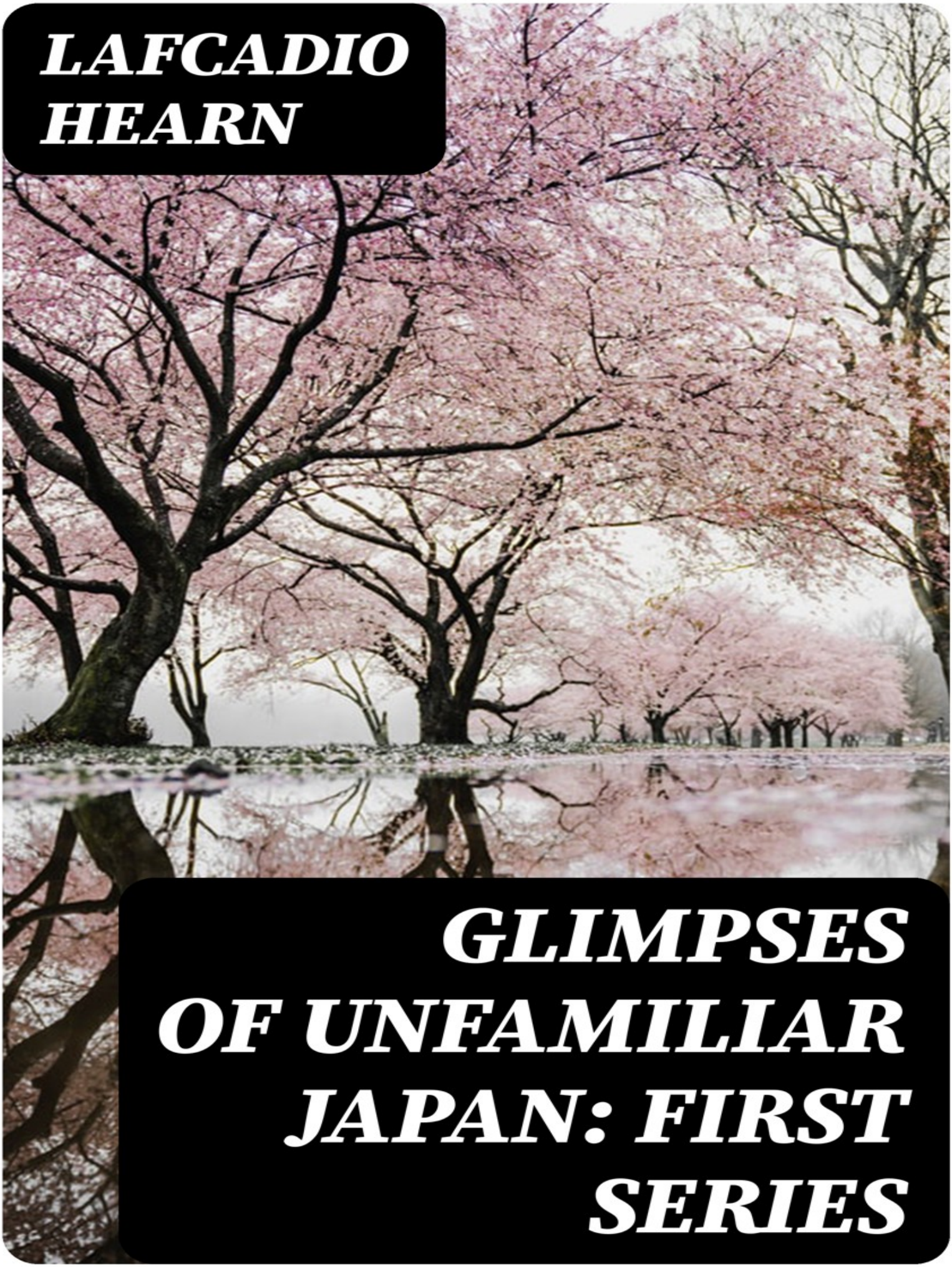
LAFCADIO HEARN



GLIMPSES OF UNFAMILIAR JAPAN: FIRST SERIES

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Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan: First Series

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PREFACE

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In the Introduction to his charming Tales of Old Japan, Mr. Mitford wrote in 1871:

'The books which have been written of late years about Japan have either been compiled from official records, or have contained the sketchy impressions of passing travellers. Of the inner life of the Japanese the world at large knows but little: their religion, their superstitions, their ways of thought, the hidden springs by which they move—all these are as yet mysteries.'

This invisible life referred to by Mr. Mitford is the Unfamiliar Japan of which I have been able to obtain a few glimpses. The reader may, perhaps, be disappointed by their rarity; for a residence of little more than four years among the people—even by one who tries to adopt their habits and customs—scarcely suffices to enable the foreigner to begin to feel at home in this world of strangeness. None can feel more than the author himself how little has been accomplished in these volumes, and how much remains to do.

The popular religious ideas—especially the ideas derived from Buddhism and the curious superstitions touched upon in these sketches are little shared by the educated classes of New Japan. Except as regards his characteristic indifference toward abstract ideas in general and

metaphysical speculation in particular, the Occidentalised Japanese of to-day stands almost on the intellectual plane of the cultivated Parisian or Bostonian. But he is inclined to treat with undue contempt all conceptions of the supernatural; and toward the great religious questions of the hour his attitude is one of perfect apathy. Rarely does his university training in modern philosophy impel him to attempt any independent study of relations, either sociological or psychological. For him, superstitions are simply superstitions; their relation to the emotional nature of the people interests him not at all. [1] And this not only because he thoroughly understands that people, but because the class to which he belongs is still unreasoningly, though quite naturally, ashamed of its older beliefs. Most of us who now call ourselves agnostics can recollect the feelings with which, in the period of our fresh emancipation from a faith far more irrational than Buddhism, we looked back upon the gloomy theology of our fathers. Intellectual Japan has become agnostic within only a few decades; and the suddenness of this mental revolution sufficiently explains the principal, though not perhaps all the causes of the present attitude of the superior class toward Buddhism. For the time being it certainly borders upon intolerance; and while such is the feeling even to religion as distinguished from superstition, the feeling toward superstition as distinguished from religion must be something stronger still.

But the rare charm of Japanese life, so different from that of all other lands, is not to be found in its Europeanised circles. It is to be found among the great common people, who represent in Japan, as in all countries, the national

virtues, and who still cling to their delightful old customs, their picturesque dresses, their Buddhist images, their household shrines, their beautiful and touching worship of ancestors. This is the life of which a foreign observer can never weary, if fortunate and sympathetic enough to enter into it—the life that forces him sometimes to doubt whether the course of our boasted Western progress is really in the direction of moral development. Each day, while the years pass, there will be revealed to him some strange and unsuspected beauty in it. Like other life, it has its darker side; yet even this is brightness compared with the darker side of Western existence. It has its foibles, its follies, its vices, its cruelties; yet the more one sees of it, the more one marvels at its extraordinary goodness, its miraculous patience, its never-failing courtesy, its simplicity of heart, its intuitive charity. And to our own larger Occidental comprehension, its commonest superstitions, however condemned at Tokyo have rarest value as fragments of the unwritten literature of its hopes, its fears, its experience with right and wrong—its primitive efforts to find solutions for the riddle of the Unseen flow much the lighter and kindlier superstitions of the people add to the charm of Japanese life can, indeed, be understood only by one who has long resided in the interior. A few of their beliefs are sinister—such as that in demon-foxes, which public education is rapidly dissipating; but a large number are comparable for beauty of fancy even to those Greek myths in which our noblest poets of today still find inspiration; while many others, which encourage kindness to the unfortunate and kindness to animals, can never have

produced any but the happiest moral results. The amusing presumption of domestic animals, and the comparative fearlessness of many wild creatures in the presence of man; the white clouds of gulls that hover about each incoming steamer in expectation of an alms of crumbs; the whirring of doves from temple-eaves to pick up the rice scattered for them by pilgrims; the familiar storks of ancient public gardens; the deer of holy shrines, awaiting cakes and caresses; the fish which raise their heads from sacred lotus-ponds when the stranger's shadow falls upon the water—these and a hundred other pretty sights are due to fancies which, though called superstitious, inculcate in simplest form the sublime truth of the Unity of Life. And even when considering beliefs less attractive than these, superstitions of which the grotesqueness may provoke a smile—the impartial observer would do well to bear in mind the words of Lecky:

Many superstitions do undoubtedly answer to the Greek conception of slavish "fear of the Gods," and have been productive of unspeakable misery to mankind; but there are very many others of a different tendency. Superstitions appeal to our hopes as well as our fears. They often meet and gratify the inmost longings of the heart. They offer certainties where reason can only afford possibilities or probabilities. They supply conceptions on which the imagination loves to dwell. They sometimes impart even a new sanction to moral truths. Creating wants which they alone can satisfy, and fears which they alone can quell, they often become essential elements of happiness; and their consoling efficacy is most felt in the languid or troubled

hours when it is most needed. We owe more to our illusions than to our knowledge. The imagination, which is altogether constructive, probably contributes more to our happiness than the reason, which in the sphere of speculation is mainly critical and destructive. The rude charm which, in the hour of danger or distress, the savage clasps so confidently to his breast, the sacred picture which is believed to shed a hallowing and protecting influence over the poor man's cottage, can bestow a more real consolation in the darkest hour of human suffering than can be afforded by the grandest theories of philosophy. . . . No error can be more grave than to imagine that when a critical spirit is abroad the pleasant beliefs will all remain, and the painful ones alone will perish.

That the critical spirit of modernised Japan is now indirectly aiding rather than opposing the efforts of foreign bigotry to destroy the simple, happy beliefs of the people, and substitute those cruel superstitions which the West has long intellectually outgrown—the fancies of an unforgiving God and an everlasting hell—is surely to be regretted. More than hundred and sixty years ago Kaempfer wrote of the Japanese 'In the practice of virtue, in purity of life and outward devotion they far outdo the Christians.' And except where native morals have suffered by foreign contamination, as in the open ports, these words are true of the Japanese to-day. My own conviction, and that of many impartial and more experienced observers of Japanese life, is that Japan has nothing whatever to gain by conversion to Christianity, either morally or otherwise, but very much to lose.

Of the twenty-seven sketches composing these volumes, four were originally purchased by various newspaper syndicates and reappear in a considerably altered form, and six were published in the Atlantic Monthly (1891-3). The remainder forming the bulk of the work, are new.

L.H.

KUMAMOTO, KYUSHU, JAPAN. May, 1894.

GLIMPSES OF UNFAMILIAR JAPAN by LAFCADIO HEARN

Chapter One My First Day in the Orient

'Do not fail to write down your first impressions as soon as possible,' said a kind English professor [Basil Hall Chamberlain: PREPARATOR'S NOTE] whom I had the pleasure of meeting soon after my arrival in Japan: 'they are evanescent, you know; they will never come to you again, once they have faded out; and yet of all the strange sensations you may receive in this country you will feel none so charming as these.' I am trying now to reproduce them from the hasty notes of the time, and find that they were even more fugitive than charming; something has evaporated from all my recollections of them—something impossible to recall. I neglected the friendly advice, in spite of all resolves to obey it: I could not, in those first weeks, resign myself to remain indoors and write, while there was yet so much to see and hear and feel in the sun-steeped

ways of the wonderful Japanese city. Still, even could I revive all the lost sensations of those first experiences, I doubt if I could express and fix them in words. The first charm of Japan is intangible and volatile as a perfume.

It began for me with my first kuruma-ride out of the European quarter of Yokohama into the Japanese town; and so much as I can recall of it is hereafter set down.

Sec. 1

It is with the delicious surprise of the first journey through Japanese streets—unable to make one's kuruma-runner understand anything but gestures, frantic gestures to roll on anywhere, everywhere, since all is unspeakably pleasurable and new—that one first receives the real sensation of being in the Orient, in this Far East so much read of, so long dreamed of, yet, as the eyes bear witness, heretofore all unknown. There is a romance even in the first full consciousness of this rather commonplace fact; but for me this consciousness is transfigured inexpressibly by the divine beauty of the day. There is some charm unutterable in the morning air, cool with the coolness of Japanese spring and wind-waves from the snowy cone of Fuji; a charm perhaps due rather to softest lucidity than to any positive tone—an atmospheric limpidity extraordinary, with only a suggestion of blue in it, through which the most distant objects appear focused with amazing sharpness. The sun is only pleasantly warm; the jinricksha, or kuruma, is the most cosy little vehicle imaginable; and the street-vistas, as seen above the dancing white mushroom-shaped hat of my sandalled runner, have an allurement of which I fancy that I could never weary.

Elfish everything seems; for everything as well as everybody is small, and queer, and mysterious: the little houses under their blue roofs, the little shop-fronts hung with blue, and the smiling little people in their blue costumes. The illusion is only broken by the occasional passing of a tall foreigner, and by divers shop-signs bearing announcements in absurd attempts at English. Nevertheless such discords only serve to emphasise reality; they never materially lessen the fascination of the funny little streets.

'Tis at first a delightfully odd confusion only, as you look down one of them, through an interminable flutter of flags and swaying of dark blue drapery, all made beautiful and mysterious with Japanese or Chinese lettering. For there are no immediately discernible laws of construction or decoration: each building seems to have a fantastic prettiness of its own; nothing is exactly like anything else, and all is bewilderingly novel. But gradually, after an hour passed in the quarter, the eye begins to recognise in a vague way some general plan in the construction of these low, light, queerly-gabled wooden houses, mostly unpainted, with their first stories all open to the street, and thin strips of roofing sloping above each shop-front, like awnings, back to the miniature balconies of paper-screened second stories. You begin to understand the common plan of the tiny shops, with their matted floors well raised above the street level, and the general perpendicular arrangement of sign-lettering, whether undulating on drapery or glimmering on gilded and lacquered signboards. You observe that the same rich dark blue which dominates in popular costume rules also in shop draperies, though there is a sprinkling of other

tints—bright blue and white and red (no greens or yellows). And then you note also that the dresses of the labourers are lettered with the same wonderful lettering as the shop draperies. No arabesques could produce such an effect. As modified for decorative purposes these ideographs have a speaking symmetry which no design without a meaning could possess. As they appear on the back of a workman's frock—pure white on dark blue—and large enough to be easily read at a great distance (indicating some guild or company of which the wearer is a member or employee), they give to the poor cheap garment a fictitious appearance of splendour.

And finally, while you are still puzzling over the mystery of things, there will come to you like a revelation the knowledge that most of the amazing picturesqueness of these streets is simply due to the profusion of Chinese and Japanese characters in white, black, blue, or gold, decorating everything—even surfaces of doorposts and paper screens. Perhaps, then, for one moment, you will imagine the effect of English lettering substituted for those magical characters; and the mere idea will give to whatever aesthetic sentiment you may possess a brutal shock, and you will become, as I have become, an enemy of the Romaji-Kwai—that society founded for the ugly utilitarian purpose of introducing the use of English letters in writing Japanese.

Sec. 2

An ideograph does not make upon the Japanese brain any impression similar to that created in the Occidental brain by a letter or combination of letters—dull, inanimate

symbols of vocal sounds. To the Japanese brain an ideograph is a vivid picture: it lives; it speaks; it gesticulates. And the whole space of a Japanese street is full of such living characters—figures that cry out to the eyes, words that smile or grimace like faces.

What such lettering is, compared with our own lifeless types, can be understood only by those who have lived in the farther East. For even the printed characters of Japanese or Chinese imported texts give no suggestion of the possible beauty of the same characters as modified for decorative inscriptions, for sculptural use, or for the commonest advertising purposes. No rigid convention fetters the fancy of the calligrapher or designer: each strives to make his characters more beautiful than any others; and generations upon generations of artists have been toiling from time immemorial with like emulation, so that through centuries and centuries of tireless effort and study, the primitive hieroglyph or ideograph has been evolved into a thing of beauty indescribable. It consists only of a certain number of brush-strokes; but in each stroke there is an undiscoverable secret art of grace, proportion, imperceptible curve, which actually makes it seem alive, and bears witness that even during the lightning-moment of its creation the artist felt with his brush for the ideal shape of the stroke equally along its entire length, from head to tail. But the art of the strokes is not all; the art of their combination is that which produces the enchantment, often so as to astonish the Japanese themselves. It is not surprising, indeed, considering the strangely personal, animate, esoteric aspect of Japanese lettering, that there should be wonderful legends of

calligraphy relating how words written by holy experts became incarnate, and descended from their tablets to hold converse with mankind.

Sec. 3

My kurumaya calls himself 'Cha.' He has a white hat which looks like the top of an enormous mushroom; a short blue wide-sleeved jacket; blue drawers, close-fitting as 'tights,' and reaching to his ankles; and light straw sandals bound upon his bare feet with cords of palmetto-fibre. Doubtless he typifies all the patience, endurance, and insidious coaxing powers of his class. He has already manifested his power to make me give him more than the law allows; and I have been warned against him in vain. For the first sensation of having a human being for a horse, trotting between shafts, unwearyingly bobbing up and down before you for hours, is alone enough to evoke a feeling of compassion. And when this human being, thus trotting between shafts, with all his hopes, memories, sentiments, and comprehensions, happens to have the gentlest smile, and the power to return the least favour by an apparent display of infinite gratitude, this compassion becomes sympathy, and provokes unreasoning impulses to self-sacrifice. I think the sight of the profuse perspiration has also something to do with the feeling, for it makes one think of the cost of heart-beats and muscle-contractions, likewise of chills, congestions, and pleurisy. Cha's clothing is drenched; and he mops his face with a small sky-blue towel, with figures of bamboo-sprays and sparrows in white upon it, which towel he carries wrapped about his wrist as he runs.

That, however, which attracts me in Cha—Cha considered not as a motive power at all, but as a personality—I am rapidly learning to discern in the multitudes of faces turned toward us as we roll through these miniature streets. And perhaps the supremely pleasurable impression of this morning is that produced by the singular gentleness of popular scrutiny. Everybody looks at you curiously; but there is never anything disagreeable, much less hostile in the gaze: most commonly it is accompanied by a smile or half smile. And the ultimate consequence of all these kindly curious looks and smiles is that the stranger finds himself thinking of fairy-land. Hackneyed to the degree of provocation this statement no doubt is: everybody describing the sensations of his first Japanese day talks of the land as fairyland, and of its people as fairy-folk. Yet there is a natural reason for this unanimity in choice of terms to describe what is almost impossible to describe more accurately at the first essay. To find one's self suddenly in a world where everything is upon a smaller and daintier scale than with us—a world of lesser and seemingly kindlier beings, all smiling at you as if to wish you well—a world where all movement is slow and soft, and voices are hushed—a world where land, life, and sky are unlike all that one has known elsewhere—this is surely the realisation, for imaginations nourished with English folklore, of the old dream of a World of Elves.

Sec. 4

The traveller who enters suddenly into a period of social change—especially change from a feudal past to a democratic present—is likely to regret the decay of things

beautiful and the ugliness of things new. What of both I may yet discover in Japan I know not; but to-day, in these exotic streets, the old and the new mingle so well that one seems to set off the other. The line of tiny white telegraph poles carrying the world's news to papers printed in a mixture of Chinese and Japanese characters; an electric bell in some tea-house with an Oriental riddle of text pasted beside the ivory button, a shop of American sewing-machines next to the shop of a maker of Buddhist images; the establishment of a photographer beside the establishment of a manufacturer of straw sandals: all these present no striking incongruities, for each sample of Occidental innovation is set into an Oriental frame that seems adaptable to any picture. But on the first day, at least, the Old alone is new for the stranger, and suffices to absorb his attention. It then appears to him that everything Japanese is delicate, exquisite, admirable—even a pair of common wooden chopsticks in a paper bag with a little drawing upon it; even a package of toothpicks of cherry-wood, bound with a paper wrapper wonderfully lettered in three different colours; even the little sky-blue towel, with designs of flying sparrows upon it, which the jinricksha man uses to wipe his face. The bank bills, the commonest copper coins, are things of beauty. Even the piece of plaited coloured string used by the shopkeeper in tying up your last purchase is a pretty curiosity. Curiosities and dainty objects bewilder you by their very multitude: on either side of you, wherever you turn your eyes, are countless wonderful things as yet incomprehensible.

But it is perilous to look at them. Every time you dare to look, something obliges you to buy it—unless, as may often happen, the smiling vendor invites your inspection of so many varieties of one article, each specially and all unspeakably desirable, that you flee away out of mere terror at your own impulses. The shopkeeper never asks you to buy; but his wares are enchanted, and if you once begin buying you are lost. Cheapness means only a temptation to commit bankruptcy; for the resources of irresistible artistic cheapness are inexhaustible. The largest steamer that crosses the Pacific could not contain what you wish to purchase. For, although you may not, perhaps, confess the fact to yourself, what you really want to buy is not the contents of a shop; you want the shop and the shopkeeper, and streets of shops with their draperies and their inhabitants, the whole city and the bay and the mountains begirdling it, and Fujiyama's white witchery overhanging it in the speckless sky, all Japan, in very truth, with its magical trees and luminous atmosphere, with all its cities and towns and temples, and forty millions of the most lovable people in the universe.

Now there comes to my mind something I once heard said by a practical American on hearing of a great fire in Japan: 'Oh! those people can afford fires; their houses are so cheaply built.' It is true that the frail wooden houses of the common people can be cheaply and quickly replaced; but that which was within them to make them beautiful cannot —and every fire is an art tragedy. For this is the land of infinite hand-made variety; machinery has not yet been able to introduce sameness and utilitarian ugliness in cheap

production (except in response to foreign demand for bad taste to suit vulgar markets), and each object made by the artist or artisan differs still from all others, even of his own making. And each time something beautiful perishes by fire, it is a something representing an individual idea.

Happily the art impulse itself, in this country of conflagrations, has a vitality which survives each generation of artists, and defies the flame that changes their labour to ashes or melts it to shapelessness. The idea whose symbol has perished will reappear again in other creations—perhaps after the passing of a century—modified, indeed, yet recognisably of kin to the thought of the past. And every artist is a ghostly worker. Not by years of groping and sacrifice does he find his highest expression; the sacrificial past is within him; his art is an inheritance; his fingers are guided by the dead in the delineation of a flying bird, of the vapours of mountains, of the colours of the morning and the evening, of the shape of branches and the spring burst of flowers: generations of skilled workmen have given him their cunning, and revive in the wonder of his drawing. What was conscious effort in the beginning became unconscious in later centuries—becomes almost automatic in the living man,—becomes the art instinctive. Wherefore, one coloured print by a Hokusai or Hiroshige, originally sold for less than a cent, may have more real art in it than many a Western painting valued at more than the worth of a whole Japanese street.

Sec. 5

Here are Hokusai's own figures walking about in straw raincoats, and immense mushroom-shaped hats of straw,

and straw sandals—bare-limbed peasants, deeply tanned by wind and sun; and patient-faced mothers with smiling bald babies on their backs, toddling by upon their geta (high, noisy, wooden clogs), and robed merchants squatting and smoking their little brass pipes among the countless riddles of their shops.

Then I notice how small and shapely the feet of the people are—whether bare brown feet of peasants, or beautiful feet of children wearing tiny, tiny geta, or feet of young girls in snowy tabi. The tabi, the white digitated stocking, gives to a small light foot a mythological aspect—the white cleft grace of the foot of a fauness. Clad or bare, the Japanese foot has the antique symmetry: it has not yet been distorted by the infamous foot-gear which has deformed the feet of Occidentals. Of every pair of Japanese wooden clogs, one makes in walking a slightly different sound from the other, as kring to krang; so that the echo of the walker's steps has an alternate rhythm of tones. On a pavement, such as that of a railway station, the sound obtains immense sonority; and a crowd will sometimes intentionally fall into step, with the drollest conceivable result of drawling wooden noise.

Sec. 6

'Tera e yuke!'

I have been obliged to return to the European hotel—not because of the noon-meal, as I really begrudge myself the time necessary to eat it, but because I cannot make Cha understand that I want to visit a Buddhist temple. Now Cha understands; my landlord has uttered the mystical words: 'Tera e yuke!'

A few minutes of running along broad thoroughfares lined with gardens and costly ugly European buildings; then passing the bridge of a canal stocked with unpainted sharp-prowed craft of extraordinary construction, we again plunge into narrow, low, bright pretty streets—into another part of the Japanese city. And Cha runs at the top of his speed between more rows of little ark-shaped houses, narrower above than below; between other unfamiliar lines of little open shops. And always over the shops little strips of blue-tiled roof slope back to the paper-screened chamber of upper floors; and from all the facades hang draperies dark blue, or white, or crimson—foot-breadths of texture covered with beautiful Japanese lettering, white on blue, red on black, black on white. But all this flies by swiftly as a dream. Once more we cross a canal; we rush up a narrow street rising to meet a hill; and Cha, halting suddenly before an immense flight of broad stone steps, sets the shafts of his vehicle on the ground that I may dismount, and, pointing to the steps, exclaims: 'Tera!'

I dismount, and ascend them, and, reaching a broad terrace, find myself face to face with a wonderful gate, topped by a tilted, peaked, many-cornered Chinese roof. It is all strangely carven, this gate. Dragons are inter-twined in a frieze above its open doors; and the panels of the doors themselves are similarly sculptured; and there are gargoyles—grotesque lion heads—protruding from the eaves. And the whole is grey, stone-coloured; to me, nevertheless, the carvings do not seem to have the fixity of sculpture; all the snakeries and dragonries appear to undulate with a swarming motion, elusively, in eddyings as of water.

I turn a moment to look back through the glorious light. Sea and sky mingle in the same beautiful pale clear blue. Below me the billowing of bluish roofs reaches to the verge of the unruffled bay on the right, and to the feet of the green wooded hills flanking the city on two sides. Beyond that semicircle of green hills rises a lofty range of serrated mountains, indigo silhouettes. And enormously high above the line of them towers an apparition indescribably lovely—one solitary snowy cone, so filmily exquisite, so spiritually white, that but for its immemorially familiar outline, one would surely deem it a shape of cloud. Invisible its base remains, being the same delicious tint as the sky: only above the eternal snow-line its dreamy cone appears, seeming to hang, the ghost of a peak, between the luminous land and the luminous heaven—the sacred and matchless mountain, Fujiyama.

And suddenly, a singular sensation comes upon me as I stand before this weirdly sculptured portal—a sensation of dream and doubt. It seems to me that the steps, and the dragon-swarming gate, and the blue sky arching over the roofs of the town, and the ghostly beauty of Fuji, and the shadow of myself there stretching upon the grey masonry, must all vanish presently. Why such a feeling? Doubtless because the forms before me—the curved roofs, the coiling dragons, the Chinese grotesqueries of carving—do not really appear to me as things new, but as things dreamed: the sight of them must have stirred to life forgotten memories of picture-books. A moment, and the delusion vanishes; the romance of reality returns, with freshened consciousness of all that which is truly and deliciously new; the magical

transparencies of distance, the wondrous delicacy of the tones of the living picture, the enormous height of the summer blue, and the white soft witchery of the Japanese sun.

Sec. 7

I pass on and climb more steps to a second gate with similar gargoyles and swarming of dragons, and enter a court where graceful votive lanterns of stone stand like monuments. On my right and left two great grotesque stone lions are sitting—the lions of Buddha, male and female. Beyond is a long low light building, with curved and gabled roof of blue tiles, and three wooden steps before its entrance. Its sides are simple wooden screens covered with thin white paper. This is the temple.

On the steps I take off my shoes; a young man slides aside the screens closing the entrance, and bows me a gracious welcome. And I go in, feeling under my feet a softness of matting thick as bedding. An immense square apartment is before me, full of an unfamiliar sweet smell—the scent of Japanese incense; but after the full blaze of the sun, the paper-filtered light here is dim as moonshine; for a minute or two I can see nothing but gleams of gilding in a soft gloom. Then, my eyes becoming accustomed to the obscurity, I perceive against the paper-paned screens surrounding the sanctuary on three sides shapes of enormous flowers cutting like silhouettes against the vague white light. I approach and find them to be paper flowers—symbolic lotus-blossoms beautifully coloured, with curling leaves gilded on the upper surface and bright green beneath, At the dark end of the apartment, facing the

entrance, is the altar of Buddha, a rich and lofty altar, covered with bronzes and gilded utensils clustered to right and left of a shrine like a tiny gold temple. But I see no statue; only a mystery of unfamiliar shapes of burnished metal, relieved against darkness, a darkness behind the shrine and altar—whether recess or inner sanctuary I cannot distinguish.

The young attendant who ushered me into the temple now approaches, and, to my great surprise, exclaims in excellent English, pointing to a richly decorated gilded object between groups of candelabra on the altar:

'That is the shrine of Buddha.' 'And I would like to make an offering to
Buddha,' I respond. 'It is not necessary,' he says, with a polite smile.

But I insist; and he places the little offering for me upon the altar. Then he invites me to his own room, in a wing of the building—a large luminous room, without furniture, beautifully matted. And we sit down upon the floor and chat. He tells me he is a student in the temple. He learned English in Tokyo and speaks it with a curious accent, but with fine choice of words. Finally he asks me:

'Are you a Christian?' And I answer truthfully: 'No.' 'Are you a Buddhist?' 'Not exactly.' 'Why do you make offerings if you do not believe in Buddha?' 'I revere the beauty of his teaching, and the faith of those who follow it.' 'Are there Buddhists in England and America?' 'There are, at least, a great many interested in Buddhist philosophy.'

And he takes from an alcove a little book, and gives it to me to examine. It is an English copy of Olcott's Buddhist

Catechism.

'Why is there no image of Buddha in your temple?' I ask. 'There is a small one in the shrine upon the altar,' the student answers; 'but the shrine is closed. And we have several large ones. But the image of Buddha is not exposed here every day—only upon festal days. And some images are exposed only once or twice a year.

From my place, I can see, between the open paper screens, men and women ascending the steps, to kneel and pray before the entrance of the temple. They kneel with such naive reverence, so gracefully and so naturally, that the kneeling of our Occidental devotees seems a clumsy stumbling by comparison. Some only join their hands; others clap them three times loudly and slowly; then they bow their heads, pray silently for a moment, and rise and depart. The shortness of the prayers impresses me as something novel and interesting. From time to time I hear the clink and rattle of brazen coin cast into the great wooden money-box at the entrance.

I turn to the young student, and ask him: 'Why do they clap their hands three times before they pray?'

He answers: 'Three times for the Sansai, the Three Powers: Heaven,
Earth, Man.'

'But do they clap their hands to call the Gods, as Japanese clap their hands to summon their attendants?'

'Oh, no!' he replied. 'The clapping of hands represents only the awakening from the Dream of the Long Night.' [1]

'What night? what dream?'

He hesitates some moments before making answer: 'The Buddha said: All beings are only dreaming in this fleeting world of unhappiness.'

'Then the clapping of hands signifies that in prayer the soul awakens from such dreaming?'

'Yes.'

'You understand what I mean by the word "soul"?'

'Oh, yes! Buddhists believe the soul always was—always will be.'

'Even in Nirvana?'

'Yes.'

While we are thus chatting the Chief Priest of the temple enters—a very aged man-accompanied by two young priests, and I am presented to them; and the three bow very low, showing me the glossy crowns of their smoothly-shaven heads, before seating themselves in the fashion of gods upon the floor. I observe they do not smile; these are the first Japanese I have seen who do not smile: their faces are impassive as the faces of images. But their long eyes observe me very closely, while the student interprets their questions, and while I attempt to tell them something about the translations of the Sutras in our Sacred Books of the East, and about the labours of Beal and Burnouf and Feer and Davids and Kern, and others. They listen without change of countenance, and utter no word in response to the young student's translation of my remarks. Tea, however, is brought in and set before me in a tiny cup, placed in a little brazen saucer, shaped like a lotus-leaf; and I am invited to partake of some little sugar-cakes (kwashi),

stamped with a figure which I recognise as the Swastika, the ancient Indian symbol of the Wheel of the Law.

As I rise to go, all rise with me; and at the steps the student asks for my name and address. 'For,' he adds, 'you will not see me here again, as I am going to leave the temple. But I will visit you.'

'And your name?' I ask.

'Call me Akira,' he answers.

At the threshold I bow my good-bye; and they all bow very, very low, one blue-black head, three glossy heads like balls of ivory. And as I go, only Akira smiles.

Sec. 8

'Tera?' queries Cha, with his immense white hat in his hand, as I resume my seat in the jinricksha at the foot of the steps. Which no doubt means, do I want to see any more temples? Most certainly I do: I have not yet seen Buddha.

'Yes, tera, Cha.'

And again begins the long panorama of mysterious shops and tilted eaves, and fantastic riddles written over everything. I have no idea in what direction Cha is running. I only know that the streets seem to become always narrower as we go, and that some of the houses look like great wickerwork pigeon-cages only, and that we pass over several bridges before we halt again at the foot of another hill. There is a lofty flight of steps here also, and before them a structure which I know is both a gate and a symbol, imposing, yet in no manner resembling the great Buddhist gateway seen before. Astonishingly simple all the lines of it are: it has no carving, no colouring, no lettering upon it; yet it has a weird solemnity, an enigmatic beauty. It is a torii.

'Miya,' observes Cha. Not a tera this time, but a shrine of the gods of the more ancient faith of the land—a miya.

I am standing before a Shinto symbol; I see for the first time, out of a picture at least, a torii. How describe a torii to those who have never looked at one even in a photograph or engraving? Two lofty columns, like gate-pillars, supporting horizontally two cross-beams, the lower and lighter beam having its ends fitted into the columns a little distance below their summits; the uppermost and larger beam supported upon the tops of the columns, and projecting well beyond them to right and left. That is a torii: the construction varying little in design, whether made of stone, wood, or metal. But this description can give no correct idea of the appearance of a torii, of its majestic aspect, of its mystical suggestiveness as a gateway. The first time you see a noble one, you will imagine, perhaps, that you see the colossal model of some beautiful Chinese letter towering against the sky; for all the lines of the thing have the grace of an animated ideograph,—have the bold angles and curves of characters made with four sweeps of a master-brush. [2]

Passing the torii I ascend a flight of perhaps one hundred stone steps, and find at their summit a second torii, from whose lower cross-beam hangs festooned the mystic shimenawa. It is in this case a hempen rope of perhaps two inches in diameter through its greater length, but tapering off at either end like a snake. Sometimes the shimenawa is made of bronze, when the torii itself is of bronze; but according to tradition it should be made of straw, and most commonly is. For it represents the straw rope which the

deity Futo-tama-no-mikoto stretched behind the Sun-goddess, Ama-terasu-oho-mi-Kami, after Ame-no-ta-jikara-wo-no-Kami, the Heavenly-hand-strength-god, had pulled her out, as is told in that ancient myth of Shinto which Professor Chamberlain has translated. [3] And the shimenawa, in its commoner and simpler form, has pendent tufts of straw along its entire length, at regular intervals, because originally made, tradition declares, of grass pulled up by the roots which protruded from the twist of it.

Advancing beyond this torii, I find myself in a sort of park or pleasure-ground on the summit of the hill. There is a small temple on the right; it is all closed up; and I have read so much about the disappointing vacuity of Shinto temples that I do not regret the absence of its guardian. And I see before me what is infinitely more interesting,—a grove of cherry-trees covered with something unutterably beautiful,—a dazzling mist of snowy blossoms clinging like summer cloud-fleece about every branch and twig; and the ground beneath them, and the path before me, is white with the soft, thick, odorous snow of fallen petals.

Beyond this loveliness are flower-plots surrounding tiny shrines; and marvellous grotto-work, full of monsters—dragons and mythologic beings chiselled in the rock; and miniature landscape work with tiny groves of dwarf trees, and Lilliputian lakes, and microscopic brooks and bridges and cascades. Here, also, are swings for children. And here are belvederes, perched on the verge of the hill, wherefrom the whole fair city, and the whole smooth bay speckled with fishing-sails no bigger than pin-heads, and the far, faint, high promontories reaching into the sea, are all visible in

one delicious view—blue-pencilled in a beauty of ghostly haze indescribable.

Why should the trees be so lovely in Japan? With us, a plum or cherry tree in flower is not an astonishing sight; but here it is a miracle of beauty so bewildering that, however much you may have previously read about it, the real spectacle strikes you dumb. You see no leaves—only one great filmy mist of petals. Is it that the trees have been so long domesticated and caressed by man in this land of the Gods, that they have acquired souls, and strive to show their gratitude, like women loved, by making themselves more beautiful for man's sake? Assuredly they have mastered men's hearts by their loveliness, like beautiful slaves. That is to say, Japanese hearts. Apparently there have been some foreign tourists of the brutal class in this place, since it has been deemed necessary to set up inscriptions in English announcing that 'IT IS FORBIDDEN TO INJURE THE TREES.'

Sec. 9

'Tera?'

'Yes, Cha, tera.'

But only for a brief while do I traverse Japanese streets. The houses separate, become scattered along the feet of the hills: the city thins away through little valleys, and vanishes at last behind. And we follow a curving road overlooking the sea. Green hills slope steeply down to the edge of the way on the right; on the left, far below, spreads a vast stretch of dun sand and salty pools to a line of surf so distant that it is discernible only as a moving white thread. The tide is out; and thousands of cockle-gatherers are

scattered over the sands, at such distances that their stooping figures, dotting the glimmering sea-bed, appear no larger than gnats. And some are coming along the road before us, returning from their search with well-filled baskets—girls with faces almost as rosy as the faces of English girls.

As the jinricksha rattles on, the hills dominating the road grow higher. All at once Cha halts again before the steepest and loftiest flight of temple steps I have yet seen.

I climb and climb and climb, halting perforce betimes, to ease the violent aching of my quadriceps muscles; reach the top completely out of breath; and find myself between two lions of stone; one showing his fangs, the other with jaws closed. Before me stands the temple, at the farther end of a small bare plateau surrounded on three sides by low cliffs,-a small temple, looking very old and grey. From a rocky height to the left of the building, a little cataract rumbles down into a pool, ringed in by a palisade. The voice of the water drowns all other sounds. A sharp wind is blowing from the ocean: the place is chill even in the sun, and bleak, and desolate, as if no prayer had been uttered in it for a hundred years.

Cha taps and calls, while I take off my shoes upon the worn wooden steps of the temple; and after a minute of waiting, we hear a muffled step approaching and a hollow cough behind the paper screens. They slide open; and an old white-robed priest appears, and motions me, with a low bow, to enter. He has a kindly face; and his smile of welcome seems to me one of the most exquisite I have ever been greeted with. Then he coughs again, so badly that I