

most agreeable *souvenirs* of my Eastern life, and, indeed, of my whole life. The Japanese characters are the same with the Chinese, though the languages are different, just as the Roman character only is used in all the different languages of Europe. Like the Chinese, the Japanese write with a hair pencil, and from the top to the bottom of the paper, beginning on the right hand. The rapidity and delicacy with which these characters are made, so complex and intricate that the inexperienced eye is unable to follow the strokes, and the hand to copy them, are astonishing. The names were written as follows: *Natabyash Eiyumohn; Nisi Tomida; Namura Gavachiro; Yocogama Matonjan; Kitamra Mochihiro; Isibasi Skedsuro; Jwaysay Yasiro; Misima Soatara Isoda Keinoske*. As the young men had obtained a smattering of Dutch from the Dutch residents in Desima, they were not ignorant of the Roman alphabet, and the first labour was in teaching the sounds of the letters. And truly, "*Uic labor; hoc opus est,*" as I never knew or imagined before; nor can any one appreciate it without a similar experience. Hours were spent, from day to day, in this effort, either the ear of the students being unable to catch the slight difference of sound in certain cases, or else, as is more probable, the organs of speech being too rigid and fixed by use and time, and becoming unable to give the nice modulations which would have been easy at an earlier period. At length, however, the sounds of the letters were all mastered, vowels, consonants, and diphthongs, except the single letter *r*, which defied all efforts. For two long months this task was repeated, day after day, and at last abandoned, in utter despair, the young men often bursting out into a loud laugh at their own grimaces, and distorted countenances and unearthly sounds, as they attempted to pronounce this letter, but more frequently mortified, and ready to burst into tears. Some, however, at length came pretty near to the true sound, while others could do nothing with it. The Japanese have not the sound of that letter, and uniformly pronounce *l* like *r*.

Thus they proceeded from the alphabet to monosyllables, and from monosyllables to polysyllables, and at last to easy lessons in reading. Then came the most serious difficulty—a labour which at first was most exhausting—becoming a *living dictionary*, in imparting ideas to words which to the interpreters had no meaning.

The next labour was upon the English grammar, where no difficulty was experienced except in the *verb*, which in conjugation, in moods, tenses, inflections, and auxiliaries, is so unlike the Japanese verb, that it seemed to the students the absolute demonstration of "outer barbarism."

The next study was arithmetic, which was no study at all; for they seemed to understand it by intuition. Like the Chinese, the Japanese use a calculating machine, with which they solve questions with astonishing rapidity and accuracy, leading me to suspect they would be prejudiced against the *Arabic* figures and system of computation; or if they were willing to adopt them, that they would work with them awkwardly and vexatiously. To my surprise and delight, they needed but little instruction, when they "walked through" the arithmetic like old experts. They had never seen slate or pencil; and when they were given to each of them, and they saw the economy, as well as the convenience, above the calculating machine, and hair-pencils, ink, and paper, they were as happy as though they had received a fortune. The Japanese have little of the poetical temperament; but they are well endowed with the bump of good common sense and practical judgment, and cannot fail to excel in mathematics and the mechanic arts.

Geography next came up, which was the more

interesting to them, from having in my possession a good supply of the best maps, which were spread out before them as the study was pursued.

*U. S. Flag-Ship Powhattan,
Sea of China, March 16th, 1859.*

I have remarked that my Japanese interpreters displayed an admirable order of mind for mathematics, in further test of which, I put them into algebra, in its fundamental principles, in which they seemed to be quite at their ease, making their study a diversion rather than a labour. Nothing proposed in the course of studying was distasteful, nothing intimidated, and nothing attempted was invincible. They had not the least knowledge of astronomy beyond what their eyes taught them; and when the comet appeared in such length and splendour above the western mountains, they contemplated the strange sight with admiration, but not with terror, though they had no science or theory to account for it. Their sensible enquiries led us for a while from the geography of the earth to that of the heavens; and being furnished with good maps of the skies above us, as well as of the globe beneath us, it was easy to give them distinct and satisfactory ideas of astronomy, without going into the regular and thorough study; for which time was wanting. Very naturally, and indeed almost inevitably, the comet became an associate teacher in my seminary, furnishing the opportunity I was seeking to discourse on the great themes of God and his character, which I was wishing to introduce, and resolved to introduce, but not violently, or in a way to create offence and distrust, remembering the *place* where I stood, and its *history*. When questions were proposed about the comet, it was easy and natural to proceed from the *effect* to the *cause*, and to discourse on the existence and character of God, and the origin, the extent, and the laws of the material creation. The absurdity and folly of idols and idol worship were then argued, from the utter inability of all the numberless and huge blocks of stone and wood, however painted and gilded, in the temples which crowned all the hills that looked down upon us, to create, or move with such power, rapidity, and regularity, absolute and never failing, the immense machinery which the interpreters saw above them and around them, and of which the long, blazing, and beautiful comet in the heavens was a part and exponent. Not only did they take no offence, but they listened with attention and respect, and seemed to give their assent. At this stage I did not venture to refer to *Christianity*: waiting for some enquiries from them to bring the subject up. But a triumph was already won; the Japanese mind is wonderfully logical; it listens to arguments patiently, even when they are against established prejudices and opinions, and when it is convinced, unlike the Chinese mind, it feels under obligation to follow the conviction. From what afterwards appeared in the young men's faces and conversation, I had not a doubt they saw the foolery of idols, and held them in utter contempt. They seemed to be ashamed of them as a national reproach. I was sincerely thankful for the appearance of Donati's comet in Japan, it so readily turned lecturer, and rendered me such important aid.

The interpreters were soon put to the task of writing exercises in English, as the best method of mastering the language, instead of merely a conversational smattering in it. Great labour was required in teaching the proper arrangement of words in the construction of a sentence so different in the Japanese collocation from our own, while much patient drilling was needed in *punctuation*, of which they seemed to have no knowledge. The students used a hair pencil, instead

of a pen, in writing their exercises, and India ink instead of our own, while the paper was made from the bark of a tree, called the "paper-tree," a species of mulberry; but so soft and spongy was the paper, that a common pen could not be made to move over it without blotting, or tearing it in pieces. Still resting the hand on the wrist, and holding the pencil nearly perpendicular, they not only write with great rapidity, but in a round, manly, and even graceful hand, so perfect that one would think they had never written any but the Roman characters. There was not a poor hand in the whole number.

These exercises have so much interest, both as curiosities, being the *first compositions in the English language* ever attempted by the Japanese, and also as illustrations of Japanese talent in the rapid progress made by the student, that a selection from them shall be sent to the *Journal of Commerce*, in every particular, however minute, just as they came from the hands of the young men.

As before intimated, the great object in taking upon myself so severe a labour, was to ascertain the state of the Japanese mind toward Christianity, and by these gratuitous services, make, if possible, an impression on the young men and the Japanese officials, favourable to the attempts certain to be made, and soon to be made, to re-introduce Christianity. It was not wise to introduce the subject of Christianity at once, and bluntly. The Japanese are remarkable for their courtesy, and regard to others' feelings; and they would have been disgusted if not exasperated by anything bearing the appearance of rudeness. I waited, therefore, till I had secured the confidence of the governor, and the confidence and, I may add, the affection of the young men, nor even then did I make an onslaught, but as I before remarked, waited for incidents or enquiries which should make the religious turn of the instruction natural and inevitable, and throw the responsibility, if any where, upon the Japanese themselves. Soon an opportunity was presented by the questions asked by one of the students, when the words *church, pulpit, organ, and choir*, occurred in one of the reading lessons. This led to the explanation of the form of church edifice, the Sabbath, public worship, the singing in the church, the construction of an organ, and the manner of playing it, the preacher and what he preached, and the happy effects of preaching upon those who heard and obeyed it. Thus Christianity in all its doctrines and duties was expounded at their own request, and to which they listened with undivided and untiring attention. Having stated what there was in the church, it was natural to remark what there was not in it. There were no idols, as in the Japanese temples so thick around us. God is a *spirit*. God is like the *mind* or the *soul*, in man, which has power, thinks, and feels, but which we cannot see, or touch, or hear. No statue or picture, therefore, can represent God. I asked them just to look at their idols; how ugly, how stupid, they are, which know nothing, and do nothing, and instead of helping those who worship them, cannot even help themselves. For they can be kicked; they can be thrown into the streets, and be broken in pieces, and yet cannot prevent it or even resist it! How absurd, then, to make them, and more absurd to worship them! The students listened attentively, and evidently were convinced, for, as I have before said, they have excellent logical powers, at the same time they looked sad, as though all this was indisputably true, and yet they knew not what to do. Thus, as the comet had come to aid me in teaching natural theology, these few isolated words casually occurring in a reading lesson, and which the young men could not understand, opened the way, by a simple compliance with their request, to