

Omachi and its Gods.

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No. II.

IN OMACHI.

The Gentle Reader will please recall that he stretched out his travel-weary limbs last night on the thick futon, and laid his head, tired with the sights and sounds of a strange land, on the short, hard bolster of buckwheat bran, under the green tabernacle of mosquito netting, in the up-stairs room of Mr. Kaneko's home, at the preaching place in Omachi. The bran bolster is hardly equal to a good hair pillow, but is as much better than the block of wood, with a wad or cushion of chaff or bran on top of it, which is still the almost universal support of the Japanese head in hour's of slumber, as the hair pillow is to be preferred to the old-fashioned bag of feathers, in which our fathers smothered their heads. The bran bolster, though it is rather high and firm, would hardly keep the Gentle Reader awake, nor would the hardness of the bed, for two or three thickly wadded futon on a *tatami*, make almost as comfortable a couch, as a hair mattress over a spring bed,—and a far better one than those heir-looms of musty feathers, which have not yet been entirely banished from the happy homes of America—but he is to be congratulated if he is so sound a sleeper, that he does not waken till the morning sun comes slanting in from the crest of the green hills, and across the brown roofs of the town. It is a never ceasing wonder what a deal of noise a little, dead-and-alive looking Japanese town manages to make between bed time and sunrise. The other day I was in Itoigawa, a town of 6000 "mouths" on the Japan Sea, three days' tramp from Omachi. To look at it from the hills behind the town, or from the deck of the little steamer that plies along the coast, one would think it wrapped in perpetual hush and drowsiness, a place for slumber and meditation. But take a front room in Rapid River Hotel, in the middle of the town, and while by day there is only sufficient hum of life and business to enliven the hours, at night the amount of noise is out of all proportion to the population. The racket and clamor would do credit to a large and busy city. Omachi is perhaps a trifle quieter, but there is great room for improvement. The loud talking and laughter of the passing crowds, and the noisy scuffle of their wooden *geta* over the rough, stony street, give place at length to a few hours of a quiet, that is sharply broken from time to time by the merciless click-clack, click-clack of the night watchman going his rounds. What earthly purpose this racket serves, apart from giving any night depredaters due warning that the watchman is coming, that they may find suitable hiding places, I have not been able to discover. It may be a sort of notice to the citizens that the watchman is not neglecting his duties.

The Japanese are late to bed and early to rise. At 3.30 the steam-whistles of the several silk-spinning factories mingle their music with that of the dawn-greeting chanticleers, and presently the little companies of spinning-girls, scuffle hastily by on their way to work, for 4 o'clock must see them in their places. And now with much rattle and clatter the *amado* or raindoors, that form the front and rear walls of the houses at night, are slid open, the slapping of paper dusters in the *shōgi*, shows that the neighbors are putting their rooms to rights, and soon in kitchens and workshops and stores, the day's duties are fully begun. The Japanese are an industrious people. The farmers have some intervals of comparative leisure between their busy seasons, as farmers in all lands have, but the merchants and mechanics are at their labors late and early, seven days in the week, and with the exception of a day or two at New Year's, from year's end to year's end. Those who are their own masters may take a siesta after dinner, during the summer, or an occasional holiday; the national or town religious festivals may make a little break in the routine; but I think I am safe in saying that from sunrise till late in the evening, 365 days in the year the shops and stores of Omachi, and its 10,000 sister towns, are open for business. Of course this means a lack of energy, and a shortening of the period of vigor, but the Japanese are slow to understand this, and even the Christians can with difficulty be persuaded to observe a day of rest.

But while we are talking over these matters, the soft notes of a temple bell sound six. We make our toilet at the low wooden sink in the kitchen at the foot of the stairs. Above it hangs a bamboo pole for the towels, and beside it is a large tub of water and a tin dipper. In the sink are one or two tin wash basins. The kitchen is simply a sort of platform between the *doba*,—earthen court which forms a passage through the house—and one of the ordinary rooms. It is about 12 feet long by 3 in breadth, and in addition to the sink there are two or three shelves with kitchen utensils, and the appliances for cooking. These consist of a *hibachi*, a box partly filled with ashes, on which a charcoal fire is made, and one or two *shichirin*, which look like tubs made of pottery. These are so made that there is a draft from below, and a good hot fire of charcoal can soon be prepared. In most of the homes the cooking is done over the *hettui*, a kind

of double *shichirin*, and at the *iroro*, an open hearth, with the fire on a bed of ashes, and pots and kettles suspended above, from the roof, by a rude but clever contrivance. In both of these wood is the fuel employed, and great is the smoke that fumigates the house. A few earthen vessels, like pots somewhat, for cooking in, and one or two iron kettles, make up most of the kitchen furniture. Mrs. Kaneko is kneeling before one of the *shichirin*, cooking the morning rice, or slicing up the cucumbers or radish, which are to serve as a relish for breakfast. At 6.30 the little family assembles in our room for morning worship. At 7 the voice of old Mr. Kaneko is heard from below "sensei, gohan!" "Elder born, the honorable meal!" We kneel, sitting on our feet, on cushions, around a small square table a foot in height. In the middle of the table are the dishes containing the relishes to be eaten with the rice, pickled radish perhaps, or a composition made from beans. In place of knife and fork and spoon, a pair of chopsticks is laid before each of us. Beside the table is the pot of rice, and perhaps another with a kind of soup the principal ingredient of which is beans, and which is flavored with dried bonito. Rice is the principal dish at each meal, but in addition to the pickles, there is usually either the soup just mentioned, or some kind of vegetable and occasionally fish or eggs served in various styles. The Gentle Reader will hardly make a hearty meal without recourse to his canned goods, but an old stager like myself can dine squarely without a supplementary course, if necessary. There is no table-cloth, and if one needs a napkin, he fishes a piece of soft paper out of his sleeve. When the meal is ended, tea or barley water is served to each one in his empty rice bowl. He rinses off the ends of his chopsticks in this, puts them away in a little box ready for next meal, and drinks off the contents of the bowl.

Housekeeping is a very simple affair with the Japanese, and leaves abundant leisure on the housewife's hands. The rooms are practically without furniture, and the beds, clothing, and food very simple, and in consequence the labors of sweeping, dusting, bed-making, washing, cooking, etc., are reduced to a minimum. In this respect, if in few others, the Japanese matron may well be envied by her sisters in the West.

But now that we have had breakfast, let us take a look at the town. Omachi lies at the upper and northern end of the fertile and populous plain of Matsumoto, and is the northern outlet for traffic between that plain and Nagano, the chief city of the province, in one direction, and the valley of the Itoigawa and the west coast, in another. It is also the county town of Kita Azumigori—the county of North Cloudy Peace. It lies in the midst of wide spreading rice fields, dotted here and there with small farming villages. The whole is set within a circle of hills, rising from a thousand, to six or seven thousand feet above the level of the plain, which is itself several thousand feet above the sea. The view from any of the neighboring hills is very charming, the town lying like a low gray island, in a wide lake of tranquil green, about which stand the strong protecting mountains, such a view as you may see repeated, with slight variations, a thousand times, in Japan. The town numbers a thousand doors, or dwellings. This means a trifle over a thousand buildings, for some of the well-to-do have *godowns*, or store-houses standing apart from their homes. The shops and stores, however, are simply the lower or front rooms of the dwellings. The population of a Japanese town is estimated by counting the "doors" or dwellings, and reckoning five persons to each dwelling, that being the average family. Consequently Omachi is estimated at 5000 "mouths," the mouth standing for the man, as the door stands for the dwelling. Whether the fact that the Japanese are such a talkative race, or the seriousness of the problem, with which the average family has to cope, as to how its five mouths may be filled, has anything to do with this method of enumeration, I am not able to state.

The thousand houses of Omachi are built much more closely together than would be the case in a Canadian town of the same size. For the most part they stand cheek by jowl, and the north end of one forms the south end of the other. From a little distance the town looks as though it were composed of a few very long narrow houses. These houses are built close up to the street line, and whatever there is in the way of yard or garden is at the rear. Omachi boasts one main street through the chief business portion of the town, a street of some 60 feet in width, which is much beyond that of the average Japanese town, and several subordinate or parallel streets, with narrow alleys crossing at convenient intervals. The houses, except on the outskirts, are of two stories, the Yamacho Hotel alone rising pretentiously to the dizzy elevation of three. In the village and hamlets, where land is not quoted at so much per foot front, the dwellings are almost invariably of one storey, but have loftier rooms, and cover a deal more ground. In the house in which I am writing, which is perhaps a trifle smaller than the average, the frontage is 16 feet, and the depth about 40 feet, giving a floor area of about 600 sq. feet, inclusive of the earthen court and passage way, which occupy 180 of this, but should not be counted out as they take the place of porch, hall, and fuel shed with us in Canada. The upper storey is usually only finished in part, as in this house, where it consists of one

room 16x12. The remainder of the space below the roof is a dark and shadowy region of timbers black with years of smoke, and festooned with cobwebs that fear no broom. The rooms in these two-storey houses, both down stairs and up, are about six feet in height, which with the elevation of the roof, which has much the slope common in Canada, and the space between the lower floor and the street level, of about a foot, makes the whole height of the house some 17 feet, which may be considered the average attitude of the dwellings of the town. The houses have no foundations, properly speaking. After the ground is levelled and beaten hard, narrow timbers are laid down, forming the ground plan of the house, and on these it stands. There are no front or rear walls, the place of these being taken by a stout lattice, paper doors, or wooden doors, as the case may be. The paper and wooden doors slide in grooves below and above, and can be removed at will, and the lattice is also removable, so that the whole house is readily thrown open to the neighborhood, or the genial influences of the season. An English school-boy is reported to have said that "Bombay is built in a hollow surrounded by hills, and the climate is such that the inhabitants are compelled to live elsewhere." If the people of Japan do not move out-doors in summer, they bring out-doors in. The roofs of village and farm houses are usually of thatch, either of rice or other straw, or of Kaya, a strong grass. This thatch is laid on very thick, the roofs of some buildings being three or four feet in thickness, which cuts off all heat from above, and makes a fine nesting place for rats. A newly thatched house has a clean, attractive look, and when it is weather beaten, mossy, grown up to grass and flowers, with perhaps a rudimentary forest here and there where rice seed have found lodgement, it is very picturesque, set amid the bystander trees. The town roofs are occasionally of tile, but usually of shingle. The shingles immediately under my inspection at present are long and narrow and of unequal proportions, and would give a night-mare to a shingle-miller in New Brunswick. They are laid on thickly, almost like a thatch of wood, and are held in place by nails sparingly used, or very commonly by narrow strips of board laid above at intervals, upon which are set rows of heavy stones from the nearest river bed. A row of large stones also adorns the ridge-pole. In localities where high winds are to be expected, as on the hillsides, and by the coast, these rows of stones are so numerous as almost to hide the shingles. At Itoigawa, on the west coast, the half roof, in sight of the house opposite my hotel window, was safe-guarded against the sea-breezes by some 500 of these stones, not such as one would use as missiles to drive away a night-disturbing dog, but such as would serve excellently for cannon ball in an extemporized war. How the slender uprights of a Japanese house-frame support this mass of rock, in addition to the massive timbers of the roof would be a nice problem in mechanics. One shudders to think what an avalanche an earthquake might bring down on the pates of the passer-by; and these stones are most of them so round and smooth that one wonders how they cling to the roof slope. When a house is to be built, the ground is first levelled and beaten down. A sort of miniature pile-driver is worked by a crowd of men and women, young men and maidens, to a rude chant. The roof frame is then fitted together. Then the scaffolding of round wooden poles for uprights, and other cross-poles for standing on, all fastened together with straw ropes, is erected, and in the case of a large building makes a regular forest. Then the sills are laid, the slender posts set up, the roof-frame put in position and shingled or thatched, and the walls, of wattle and mortar, speedily built in. In the better class of houses the rough gray mortar is covered with a shining white plaster, such as we employ for inside finish in America. The cost of erecting the average Omachi dwelling, of three or four rooms, with *shōji*, *amado*, lattice, and *tatami* mat complete, and ready for occupation is said to be about 200 yen, or \$100.00. A town whose dwellings are worth that sum, on the average, is considered a pretty well-to-do community. The preaching-place would perhaps be valued, above the ground, at \$150.00, and we pay a monthly rent of \$1.37. But I must climb back to the roof. There is no chimney, a few stove pipes running up above the silk factories being the nearest approach to such a structure. For the ordinary warming of the rooms, the *hibachi*, or brazier, with its handful of glowing charcoal is thought sufficient, or in extreme weather, the *kotatsu*, a box sunk in the floor in the centre of the room, with a charcoal fire in it, and a low frame above it covered with a *futon*, around which the family sit with their legs under the *fuon*. The smoke from the *shichirin* and the *iroro* or the *hettui*, first meanders gently around the house, then ascends among the beams of the roof, and leaving a good measure of soot behind it percolates out through the thatch or shingles, or, in part, finds its way to a little pyramidal ventilator perched on the roof. This method of liberating the smoke makes the upper part of Japanese indoors very black,—in the eyes of a Japanese, "black, but comely." The roofs terminate in deep eaves, which usually are sufficient to protect the up-stairs rooms from sun and rain, and from the top of the first storey a shade roof extends out ten feet or so over the street, and a less distance over the back yard, protecting the lower rooms. This shade roof, over what would be the sidewalk at home, serves not only to shield the shops and stores from the weather, but affords shelter to the pedestrian on emergency, so that one can practically walk the length of the town under cover.

Missionary Conference at Vizianagram.

EXAMINATIONS IN TELUGU.

You are, perhaps, aware that our Board introduced a system of examinations in the vernacular about a year ago. They now require that all new missionaries (wives of missionaries not included) pass three exams. Some of us think that this step should have been taken years ago, but we welcome it now and regard it as a case of "better late than never." I notice that the A. B. M. U. in Boston has introduced the same thing upon all their mission fields. It secures to the new missionary (1) a definite course of study, and one which is being

continually from time something a valuable principles of the uninterrupted sometimes "stimulus" of the language a systematic end of it. of course) in his eye being required has been and other and a per examination standard Our mission Gullison, finely in Gullison, They have credit, I them. The Sister Har the Church glory) at they have invaluable pursuing—and these there with at Bimlipa welcome into the Bimlipata such a dev

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