

Omachi and its Gods.

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No. 1.

TO OMACHI.

I wonder if the gentle reader of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR would be interested in a brief account of an ordinary Japanese town; not one of the show-places of the empire, much trodden by the feet of "planet-pilgrims," and much described in the tones in which they narrate the events of the days of their pilgrimage,—places like Nikkō, Enoshima, Kyōto and Nara; nor one of the great towns which foreign trade has caused to flourish beside the sea, Yokohama, Kōbe, or Nagasaki, where Europe rather throws Asia into the shade; but an average, hum-drum, out-of-the-way, behind-the-times community, sample of the countless unimportant towns that shelter so large a proportion of Mutsuhito's loyal subjects. If that gentle reader thinks he would, or she would, as the case may be,—and that reminds me of a letter which one of the missionary ladies received from a young Japanese, with some ignorance of English. He was evidently armed with a Ready Letter Writer, and began his epistle:

"Mrs.

Dear Sir, Madam, or Miss, as the case may be," and then venturing into the deep waters of original composition, he informed the lady that on the occasion of his recent call upon her, he had been "dumbed by your splendid." And that reminds me of a specimen of "English as she is wrote" in Japan, quoted in a recent Kōbe paper from the label on a tin of Japanese canned goods:

"Direction: If several person will be to eat this in that manner, they shall feel satisfied nutrition and very sweet or it can be put in the Hot Water for the half hour and then take off the Lid. They shall be proper to eat. It can be supply without putridity for several years."

But, oh! to hear Japanese as she is spoke by the newly arrived missionary, and some of more mature experience!—I say, if the reader thinks he would enjoy a glimpse of such an every-day town, let me introduce to him this very Omachi where I sit writing this blessed minute, in my prophet's chamber in the home of Mr. Kaneko, the native preacher, right in the centre of the town. Instead of transporting him hither in the twinkling of an eye, and setting him down in *mediis res*, where the multitude of unaccustomed sights would confuse his Canadian eyes, let me ask him to seat himself with me in one of the narrow, old-fashioned cars at the railway station in Yokohama, and make his debut in Omachi in the ordinary manner, when the experiences of the journey shall have prepared him somewhat to distinguish its various features. It is about seven o'clock of a sultry July morning when, having checked our baggage, and succeeded in squeezing our way through the gates, amid the jostling crowd of Japanese travelers who, on such occasions, pay slight regard to age, sex, or previous condition of servitude, we board our car, and having put up our pith helmets on the netting, and spread our fans, settle down to enjoy the journey. We are in a second-class carriage, for we are neither "lords, globe-trotters, nor fools," that we should aspire to the luxury of the first, and the gentle reader might find the atmosphere of the third rather trying this warm day, crowded as it is, and redolent of tobacco and other fragrances. Third class is quite good enough for a missionary, and the half cent a mile which he pays for his transportation is a sufficient drain upon the funds for mission work which the liberality of the churches places at his disposal; and then the third-class car, crowded with the common people, offer good opportunities for seed-sowing, as he goes on his journey. In this middle-class car in which we find ourselves we notice that our fellow-passengers are well-to-do Japanese, the men largely in foreign dress, and the women in expensive native attire, much more becoming to them than western fashions would be. Foreign clothing is sufficiently unbecoming to the average Japanese gentleman, but when his wife commits the unusual folly of decking herself out in imported finery, it is a grief to all who pass by. Even in her own becoming and soft-toned attire she is far behind her western sisters in personal charms, although some tourists of a certain stamp profess to find Japan a "garden of beautiful women." One cannot but esteem many of them for the gentleness, patience, and self-effacement, which are the womanly virtues of Japan, and once in a while, in years perhaps, one sees a face attractive enough to arrest his attention, by the very fact of its rarity, but how anyone can forget the sweet, pure, wholesome faces of our English and America maids and matrons, shining with goodness and intelligence, and expend his exclamation marks on the daughters of Japan, passes my comprehension. "But there is no accounting for tastes, as the old woman said when she kissed the cow,"—if I may be permitted a homely proverb. However, we did not set out to study our fellow passengers, but to make the best of our way to Omachi.

Pulling out from Yokohama we run north through broad expanses of paddy-fields, rich, dark green with the already earing rice, and past many villages where straw-thatched houses show among the trees, past temples

dimly seen through the great pines or cedars that stand around them, past little, lonely graveyards between the fields or on the edge of the hills. At our right, now close at hand, now hidden from sight, in the Gulf of Yedo, with a fleet of merchant men and men-of-war flying many flags, for Yokohama is one of the marks of the nations. About an hour brings us to the southern extremity of Tōkiō, and thence, instead of proceeding into the city, we transfer to a suburban branch, on which we skirt the city on the west till we strike the main trunk line for the north and northwest. This circuit occupies about an hour, and gives us glimpses of tea-gardens, where groups of girls, their heads bound in bright kerchiefs, are picking the young leaves into deep baskets. Here, also, are plantations of ornamented trees and shrubs, destined for the tiny, picturesque Japanese landscape gardens. We arrive at the main line just in time, if our engineer has lived up to his schedule, to catch the train from the Ueno station of Tōkiō, for the north and west. Running midway between those points of the compass, we first cross the broad, rich plain of Musashi. As far as the eye can reach it is one sea of waving rice, dotted with little islands of villages and groves, and, with the mid-forenoon sun shining upon it, truly a beautiful sight. The farmers are doing the second weeding, and as they work along, stooping low between the rows of rice-plants, merely their broad concave straw hats appear above the grain, and look for all the world like rows of mammoth mushrooms. An hour or two and we reach the first gentle slopes that stretch up toward the yet distant mountains, and find the rice fields gradually giving place to fertile, undulating plains, devoted to barley, beans, mulberry vines and other upland crops. The country here is especially beautiful in May, when the grain, yellowing for the sickle, clothes all the rolling prairie, and reminds one of the best parts of Iowa. Now the wheat and barley are harvested, and the second crops do not yet make amends for this loss to the landscape. As we proceed, and cross the province of Kōzuke, between the plains of Musashi and the mountains of Shinano, we find a large part of the soil devoted to mulberry plantations, and as we go farther this will be still more noticeable, for we are on the border of one of the chief silk producing districts of Japan. It is the time of the second crop of silk-worms, and the silk-raiser and his family are as busy as bees attending to their wants. The worms are diligently feeding, with an eye single to business, in their shallow trays of plaited bamboo, in the spare rooms of his house, and the mulberry branches are swaying in the breeze a mile or two miles away, perhaps, and to gather the leaves, carry them home, chop them up, deacon them out, and so forth, is no light task when a large crop of worms is being pastured. But we will pass on, for we can examine the silk industry at Omachi at our leisure, if we so desire.

Mid-afternoon finds us at the western limit of Kōzuke, and at the base of the mountain range which divides that province from Shinano. We have not come very far in our eight hours travel, about 120 miles only, for the iron horse in Japan is like the rest of the equine species there, and not much accounted of for his speed. Here a cog line, with an inclination of one foot in fifteen, takes us up the mountain side. A different species of iron horse is attached, and we go slowly puffing up through 26 tunnels, to the Plain of Karuizawa, some three thousand odd hundred feet above the sea, say 3,500. We have passed, during our leisurely skyward journey of about an hour, from the Province of Kōzuke into that of Shinano, which, with that of Hida, west of it, forms the central mountain mass of Japan, the Switzerland of the sunrise kingdom. The plains and valleys of this region are from 2,000 to 4,000 feet above sea level, and up from them rise the mountains, massive and lofty on every side. Here, in full view of us, as we emerge from the 26th tunnel, is great round-shouldered Asama, a yet live volcano 8,500 feet in height, with a heart of fire which tourist's make nocturnal ascents to the edge of the crater to behold, and, as we look at it now, a white banner of sulphurous steam waving at its summit. A little farther west are mighty ranges of granite hills, lifting their rugged crests eight, nine, ten thousand feet into the blue and showing patches of snow even when the dog-star burns. It is a land of pure air and sweet water, whose scenery satisfies the heart, and whose mountain paths invite to health-restoring exercise, and on yonder edge of this Plain of Karuizawa, at the foot of one of the encircling ranges of hills, is the summer colony of missionaries and other foreigners, 300 strong. They are gathered from all parts of Japan, with some from Corea and China. They have escaped for a few weeks from the debilitating heat of the low-lands, and are having their annual holiday. There are some tennis courts, and a few have brought their wheels, but to most the broad flowery plain, and the breezy hills form the chief attraction, and walking parties or climbing excursions are the order of the day. Many, who have spent the year in lonely inland stations, cut off from the society of foreigners, find their chief pleasure in forming or renewing acquaintances with their fellow workers from other fields. But rest, and the pleasure of social life and of out-door amusements, do not monopolize these precious

weeks among the hills. Some are holding their annual denominational mission conferences; some are digging away at the difficult Asiatic languages in which they must do their work, Japanese, Korean, or Chinese; some are collecting material for the schools or evangelistic work of the ensuing year. There is very little *dolce far niente* in the atmosphere. There are week-night and Sunday services for both foreigners and Japanese. There are Bible classes, or conferences for the deepening of spiritual life, for all denominations. This year the evangelist, Mr. Needham, is to hold such a conference here, and at other of the summer resorts, as preliminary to his winter's work for the foreign population of Japan. I wish we had time to stop over a train and call at two or three of the neat little summer cottages, but the Gentle Reader's time is precious, as well as my own, and we must go on our way. Our train moves along at the usual moderate gait, across the blooming uncultivated moor of Karuizawa, along the base of Asama, and on west through fertile valleys of rice and mulberry, past many villages and towns of low walled, thatched, or tile-roofed houses, and at six o'clock brings us to Nagano, the chief city of the Province of Shinano. We put our baggage into a jinrikisha, and walk up the long, narrow, steep, busy street, along which the city is built, for Nagano is essentially a city of one street. Every house seems to be a work-shop or a store, or both together, the inmates living in the back or upper rooms, and as all these shops and stores are broad open to the street the air is full of the pleasant clatter and chatter of industry and commerce. Fifteen minute's walk brings us to the Yamaya,—Mountain House—where we shall find hospitality for the night. As we step into the earth floored court which occupies a large part of the lower storey, we are welcomed by the deep bows and honorific salutations of mine host and his subordinates, who are overcome with lowly gratitude that we have deigned to augustly enter. Leaving our shoes in the court we ascend by ladder-like stairs to our neat, pretty little room in the third storey, escorted by several servants on whom has fallen the honor of taking up our baggage. A sort of towel-rack, a little folding screen, a table ten inches high and two feet square, in the centre of the room, with two cushions on the floor beside it, comprise everything in the way of furniture, but these are good of their kind, and with the quiet tints of the wall paper, the clean *ta ami* that form the floor and dainty wood-work, afford a very pretty useful effect. These *tatami*, I may as well explain at once, as we shall sit and lie on them—sleep, I mean, not romance about our youthful exploits in trout fishing—during all our stay in the interior, are mats made of closely packed and bound rice-straw, covered with a matting of fine, well-woven rushes. The mats are three inches thick, three feet wide and six feet long, and are laid side by side over the whole floor. When new, and of good quality, they form as pretty a floor as one could wish. Presently the waiting girl brings us a little brazier at which to light our pipes, and is surprised to find that we eschew the weed, as in Japan everybody smokes, men and women alike, with the exception of a good many of the Christians. Her next venture is more successful and we accept the tray of cakes and tea which she sets on the little table beside us. While we are sipping a few of these tiny cups of milk-and-sugar-less tea, and sampling some of the artistic, but not very toothsome cakes, the paper doors slip aside again and the girl invites us to deign to augustly enter the honorable bath. We welcome the idea of an honorable bath, after the heat and dust of our journey, but we find that a number of other honorable guests have already deigned to augustly enter it, and that several honorable guests, of various sexes, are even now augustly bobbing up and down in it, without any *impedimenta* in the way of clothing, and that moreover the temperature of the honorable hot water, is too near the boiling point for any one but a lobster or a Japanese, and we again augustly climb up to our honorable apartment, and summoning a waiting-girl, by a touch on the electric button, give orders that supper be forthcoming without delay. The usual method of calling a waiter is by clapping the hands smartly several times, when far in the regions below, or the regions beyond, is heard the answering "H-e-e-i-i-i!" which means that you will receive immediate attention, but this hotel puts on a little more style, if you please. Presently two little lacquer trays, or tables, are brought in, and one is placed beside each of us, on the *tatami*. These trays are about a foot square, and stand about five inches from the floor. On each of them are five dishes, like bowls or saucers, one at each corner, and one in the centre. One is for the inevitable rice; one contains a soup made from beans and radish, flavored with bonito; one is for fish, eggs, meat, or some kind of vegetable, and the fourth corner is occupied by a bowl of soup made with eggs, fish or chicken, or sea weed perhaps. The little saucer in the centre contains pickles, or what answers to these in Japan. This last we leave severely alone. The rest are good enough after you get used to them, and the missionary sips heartily from them plying his chopsticks dexterously, while the Gentle Reader dips his spoon in here and there, his look of curiosity gradu-

ally changed term, till he from his lu down a boy sits near, v and while odor of the room with over, and inspection must h thick w one upon t upper one above, for bran make the narrow being thus and sprink against fe invited to

Next m our toilet wash-plac sists of a it, and a wait our t copper bas a toilet as beds have swept and the order brought in breakfast. bills paid- apiece for pare for the spare the famous te of Hagano put on our *waraji*, sti in *tabi*, fo seen our b peasant, w entreaties our tramp No! we though I d in one day and tender-fo and we w hurry. Om road, we s day is wa Shinano R thousand R the west Nagano, w in the stre viding pow little farth right bank flat ferry b not yet be and traffic throughout of the stre would see keeping th many mill in addition caused by but it is at

We ste our bagga seems dan and pulls of a straw cent and a continue o The scene making of close toge to elbow t foaming a make room with fores the wild d are clothe tiny brow We halt a rest in the cedar grov the distan from Nago us into its is brought when we l plunged th appreciate "Thou ga

Our exp modest h wash-stan humble. The futon night, an powder, its seamy attentive a vice for th hotel at on way in the of 18 cents a Japanese lodging, w so much i though we total expe from, 25c.