

# PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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## SCENES IN JAPAN

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I.

Interest in the empire of Japan increases. Twenty-five years ago that beautiful country was largely an unknown land; but of late, in answer to the demand for fuller and more accurate information in regard to the "Flowery Kingdom" and its inhabitants, books have multiplied, until we are almost ready to cry, "Enough!"

Of the many books relating to Japan and the Japanese, few are more interesting than that by Mr. Maclay, whose "Budget of Letters" is the text of the present article. Mr. Maclay tells us that during his sojourn in "the land of the gods and of the rising sun," he made it a practice "to carefully reduce to writing his observations and experiences." These he afterward re-

wrote in the form of letters, and we have in consequence, a racy, readable and instructive volume. The range of topics covered by these letters is large. We get a glimpse of old feudal times in Japan. We are treated to a vivid picture of life in the interior. Some notion of school-teaching, its difficulties and characteristics, is imparted. Sketches are given of the principal cities and chief points of interest of the country. And, of greater moment than these, we learn of the social problems in Japan, and of the progress of missionary labour among this wonderful people. It will be sufficient to add, in connection with our outline of the general plan of the work, that the time covered by the letters extends from October, 1873, to January, 1878.

One of the earliest points of attraction to the visitor in Japan is Yokohama, a "city built upon a broad tongue of land jutting into Yeddo Bay. On one side is Yokohama harbour; on the other is Mississipi Bay." It is a cosmopolitan city, almost all nationalities being represented; hence it is not the most favourable place to select in order to study Japanese life and character. Yokohama, during Mr. Maclay's knowledge of it, enjoyed the reputation of being "the wickedest place in the empire." This is the natural result of the contact of lower forms of Western civilization with a degraded Eastern society. Even in 1873, however, the presence of the mis-

sionary was beginning to have a salutary effect upon the morals of the people.

Yokohama early became a depot whither European merchants shipped their goods; especially were dry-goods and clothing put upon the market. Early adventures of this kind generally resulted in commercial disaster. "The vast mass of the natives are too miserably poor to invest in anything beyond headgear. Imagine a man, whose yearly income is barely forty dollars, investing in our expensive clothing! Five dollars a month is considered good pay. Seven dollars a month is very good pay, sufficient to keep a wife in considerable style."

Social and home-life in Japan will not call for lengthened reference. A Japanese house, as a rule, is but one story high, and, to our thought, quite small. Mr. Maclay, however, while teaching in the interior, at Hirosaki, was the fortunate possessor of "a good native dwelling, having eight rooms." The only coverings of the floor are the tatamis, "heavily padded mats about seven feet long, three feet wide and about two inches thick. They constitute the principal feature in a native house, for, from their soft nature, they serve as beds, chairs, and tables. They are manufactured of soft rushes, and are bordered with silken edges." Accordingly, in our eyes, a native house would seem very scantily furnished.

The cost of a Japanese house is small; one of three rooms can be built for a sum ranging between twenty-five to one hundred dollars, the furniture costing some fifty dollars additional. There are no doors, their place being supplied by sliding partitions of a not overly strong or thick material. The houses are heated by little braziers, or small square wooden boxes filled with ashes, upon which a few small pieces of red-hot charcoal rest. It is no matter for surprise that one of the chief occupations of winter, with many of the natives, is the task of keeping warm; for while the thermometer does not often register a very great degree of cold, the air is peculiarly damp, and cold sea breezes seem to find their way to one's very bones.

Meals are served on small, square tables about a foot in height, one table being provided for each person, who sits, of course, on the floor. The meal over, the tables are removed.

Frequent bathing, in water of a high temperature is a habit of the Japanese. The bath is heated by a charcoal furnace, connected with one side of the tub. It is not always deemed needful to change the water for each bather, and guests at hotels find it difficult to secure absolute privacy during their ablutions.

Travel is generally prosecuted by means of the "ubiquitous jinrikisha man," who provides a mode of locomotion

not altogether unpleasant. The kago, a sort of palanquin, is, one would judge, an easier mode of travel.

Writing of the social condition of the Japanese, Mr. Maclay expresses the conviction "that, generally speaking, the Japanese men make kind and affectionate husbands, and the women make virtuous and exemplary wives and mothers, and the children are certainly the happiest little impa in the world; their parents fondle and spoil them most effectually, and, at the same time never lose their control over them."

Though the husband has absolute control over the person of his wife, he does not seem to abuse his power as a general rule, though of course, exceptions to the rule occur.

The morals of the people are much as might be expected among those who have always dwelt under

the shadow of heathenism. The people seem to be children in matters of moral distinctions between right and wrong, with this difference, however, between them and children—the absence in the vast majority of cases, of innocence. A maiden, to deliver her father from financial embarrassment, did, and still does, in the judgment of the Japanese, a virtuous and praiseworthy act, by selling herself to a life of sin.

The liquor problem has not yet assumed the proportions in Japan that it has with us. The tame diet of the people, our author tells us, does not tend to produce violent appetites. It must not, however, be supposed that total abstinence is the rule; neither, when practised, that it is practised from principle. Public holidays, especially New Year's Day, are made the occasion of intoxication, and drunkenness is then common. Wine is not native to Japan. Beer, ale, porter, brandy, have never been made. But the Japanese soon acquired a taste for these products of our civilization (?), and the need for prohibitory legislation will undoubtedly be felt in the near future. Sake is the native intoxicant. It produces drunkenness, mild compared with ours, but real enough in all conscience. But Mr. Maclay was not aware that *delirium tremens* was known in the empire. Smoking, though not uncommon, is reduced to a genteel art, which women practise with propriety. But



VIEW OF THE THIRD TERRACE, NIKKO TEMPLES.



RUINS OF THE CITADEL OF AIZU CASTLE.



GLIMPSE OF CHURETSU LAKE.