

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

Vol. XX.

TORONTO, OCTOBER 13, 1900.

No 41.

The Ring and the Cross.

By S. F. S.

Can a jewelled hand lift the cross high?
The voice of my friend was grave.
Can the slender wrist that is weight so,
Raise over the ranks of sin and woe
The sign which alone can save?"

My questioning eyes met the speaker's own,
Love-lit of the Christ above,
Then dropped on the single ring I wore
A ring which for me the legend bore
Of an earthly father's love.

"The hand that once to the cross has clung,"
Went on the low, grave tone,
"Must ever be proffered to human need,
Must be one in whose palm the world may read
Marks like to the Master's own.

"The flash of your diamond may blind the eyes
Of one who is seeking light;
And what if, because of its cold, hard ray,
One soul that ere now might have found the day
Be wandering still in night?"

"If your sharp-cut jewel should wound a hand
You take in a loving grasp,
Can you pray that the Master who sends you forth
To walk as he walked through a suffering earth
Will hold your own in his clasp?"

O loving Lord, through thy servant's lips,
Spoke thine own sweet voice to me!
My hand is bare, and my heart is light,
And the token of love is laid to-night
"On the altar," Lord, for thee.
—All the World.

THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN.

II.

Interest in the empire of Japan increases. Twenty 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 pen-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



RUINS OF THE CITADEL OF AIZU CASTLE.

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.

YOKOHAMA.

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 Mississippi Bay." It is a cosmopolitan city, aimed at 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 missionary 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 miser-

ably 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."

HOME LIFE.

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 "tatami" "heavily padded mats about seven feet long, three feet wide, and about two inches thick. They constitute the principal features 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, and 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.

Travel is generally prosecuted by means of the "ubiquitous Jirikisha 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.

MORALS.

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 distinction 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 practiced, that it is practiced 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, and brandy have never been made. But the Japanese soon acquire 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 *dolium tremens* was known in the empire. Smoking, though not uncommon, is reduced to a genteel art, which women practice with propriety. But minute quantities are smoked at a time, and only a couple of whiffs are taken at once. It is so gracefully and moderately indulged in as neither to injure the health nor make the smoker offensive.

The labour problem remains for future solution in Japan.

The masses will be many years in forgetting the old distinction between themselves and the upper classes. They regard the "Samurai" with instinctive fear and respect. They yet look upon them as beings inherently superior to themselves. But the day will surely come when the labourer will begin to question his own inferiority. He will query whether he has not more than merely the right to exist, whether he is not entitled to a few of the pleasures, and to a few of the relaxations of life. When that time comes, the Japanese will see the application of the tenth and eleventh commandments, which contain in fact the only principles that can adjust this question here or anywhere else.



A QUIET CORNER IN A BUDDHIST CEMETERY.