

TRAVELLER FROM TOKYO

TRAVELLER FROM TOKYO

By the same author

THE GURKHAS: Their manners, customs and country.

(In collaboration with W. Brook Northey.)

OFFICIAL HANDBOOKS FOR THE INDIAN ARMY: GURKHAS.

LIVING WITH LEPCHAS: A book about the Sikkhim Himalayas.

TRAVELLER FROM TOKYO

John Morris

LONDON
THE CRESSET PRESS
1943

First published October 1943

*This book is produced in complete
conformity with the authorised
economy standards*

*Printed by the Shenval Press
London and Hertford*

Acknowledgments

My thanks are due to Messrs. Hammond, Hammond & Company Ltd., for permission to quote a paragraph from *Report from Tokyo*, by Mr. Joseph C. Grew; to Messrs. Hamish Hamilton and the American publishers, Reynal & Hitchcock, Inc., for a brief extract from *Tokyo Record*, by Mr. Otto D. Tolischus; and to the Cambridge University Press for a quotation from *The Structure of Morale*, by Dr. J. T. MacCurdy.

J. M.

Contents

Prologue (1937)	9
-----------------	---

PART I

MY LIFE IN JAPAN (October 1938 to December 1941)

1. How I went to Japan	14
2. Arrival in Yokohama	15
3. The Imperial Hotel, Tokyo	16
4. Finding a house	17
5. Concerning the telephone	21
6. Engaging a servant	23
7. Japanese food	26
8. Japanese dress	30
9. The Japanese language	35
10. Education	42
11. The Japanese mentality	51
12. The English language in Japan	56
13. The Japanese Press	59
14. Literature in Japan	63
15. Mountaineering	67
16. Games and sports	72
17. Marriage	75
18. Geisha and prostitution	79
19. The stage and cinema	83
20. Radio broadcasting	92
21. Western music in Japan	95
22. The changing times	99

PART II

AFTER PEARL HARBOUR (7th December 1941 to 29th July 1942)

1. The outbreak of war	102
2. Japanese police methods	107
3. Japanese criminal procedure	112
4. Personal story	119
5. Rationing	120
6. Air Raid Precautions: the American air raid	125
7. My Japanese friends	130
8. Austerity measures: the ban on amusements; changes in education	133
9. Personal story	139
10. The Japanese army	143
11. Personal story	151
12. Departure from Japan	152
Postscript	158

To my mother, Julia

PROLOGUE 1937

I was the only passenger waiting to board the plane at Calcutta. It was on its way across India to the Dutch East Indies. Pools of water lay all over the aerodrome, parts of which were covered with a rank growth of weeds and grass, and there was some doubt whether the plane would be able to land. The noon-day heat was almost visible; it seemed to be bubbling up out of the ground, forming small mirages, so that one could hardly tell which was real water, which imaginary.

The hot damp affected everyone and everything. Beads of moisture trickled down the walls of the concrete waiting shed, trickled down the face of the somnolent Eurasian in charge. He regarded me sleepily, without interest, as I stood on the scales, a typewriter in one hand, a suitcase in the other. Outside, a few coolies, naked except for a loin-cloth, were slowly trundling a large filling-tank, the hose of which trailed along the ground behind them. It would have lightened their work if they had wound it on to its rollers; but either this had not occurred to them, or the effort was too much trouble. They dragged the tank to the edge of the half-obsured landing marks, abandoned it and sat down to smoke. Apparently they could not read the two words of simple English that stared at them, in scarlet letters a foot high, from the side of the tank: "Smoking Prohibited."

There was no one else in sight; the whole place was as deserted as the dead Moghul cities of the north. But to me the scene was typical of my state of mind; I had reached a stage when I could see only the apathy, the deadly inefficiency, like a blight, which in time seems to affect everyone and everything in India.

I supposed I was glad to be leaving; and yet there were some regrets. It could hardly be otherwise after one had lived in a country for fifteen years. But I had lost my curiosity; and when that happens to the Englishman in India it is time for him to leave. No further experience is of any value; its only effect is to blunt the sensibility. Sooner or later there comes a time when one must accept either the standards of one's own people or those of the Indian; drift into a narrow social rut or become a native of the country. Attempts at compromise are not only intellectually dishonest, they lead to a sentimental attitude which is fatal. One

begins finding excuses, condoning everybody and everything. So I was on my way to England, via Japan and the United States.

As for me, I had wanted to meet the Indian on equal terms, but I found that long years of servility and a lack of educational facilities make any sort of equal intercourse impossible; and the ramifications of caste, which it seemed we had even strengthened for our own ends, form a gulf that nothing can bridge. The only thing now left was pity; and pity alone is a poor excuse for staying in a country.

And yet undeniably there is much that is seductive about the European's life in India; the host of willing servants, ponies to ride, a large salary and very often little work. It is pleasant, too, to be treated as though one is the salt of the earth. The trouble with most people was that after a short time in the country they accepted their status without question. It is indeed difficult to refuse the greatness that is thrust upon one, especially as one becomes older, but it is vital to do so if one is to remain a civilised being. I had a feeling that I was being pulled with the force of a magnet back into the British fold. I also knew that before this happened it was imperative to escape. That was why I had decided to leave at three days' notice, and to leave by air. I wanted to put as many miles between India and myself as quickly as possible.

The huge Douglas was coming in on time. The low-lying clouds had deadened the sound of its engines, so that it seemed to appear suddenly out of nowhere. It circled twice and then landed, bumping and splashing through the puddles. Ten minutes later it was in the air again, and there below us were the drab miles of India racing by. I had resisted the pull of the magnet; its power lessened with every minute. Looking down on the widening map I seemed to see the events of the past fifteen years unfolding beneath me, in the way that a drowning man is said to see his past. Only this was no death. Rather was it an escape from death in life, and any regrets were stifled by relief and the beauty of the scene that was unfolding beneath me.

We were coming out over the Bay of Bengal, an infinity of opal, calm and translucent, its surface broken here and there by an irregular ring of coruscating whiteness, waves breaking against submerged atolls. Far to the left was a golden smear, the sandy shore of Akyab. The ocean seemed completely empty. All that long afternoon we droned on over it, and never the sight of a ship. Towards evening we met the first low hills of Burma, arid and monotonous, but their very drabness was restful after so many

coloured miles. And then they too were passed and there below us, standing up in the lush Irrawaddy plain was the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, looking like a giant phallus; a phallus tricked out with diamonds, for just as we circled to make a landing beyond the city its lights were suddenly switched on.

We left Rangoon in darkness, tearing into the night through a lane of smoking flares. Only the harbour lights were visible, like a constellation fallen to the earth. Presently we turned and headed eastwards. We were flying through a void of blackness, but soon a greenish purple glow suffused our private world. It turned to a cold metallic blue, faded and left us again in darkness; then a minute later the sun was gilding our silver wing tips. We turned away from it into the south. Suspended above the northern horizon was a line of ice green mountains, their topmost peaks just catching the dawn's first rays. I supposed them to be on the Tibetan border. They looked completely unreal, as though cut out of a strip of metal, giving the impression that there was nothing behind them.

We were losing height rapidly now and it was possible to see the details of what was below. The whole country was as flat as a pancake and most of it appeared to be under water. Here and there were diminutive houses and patches of grassland. They looked at first like bits of green and dark brown velvet floating in an immense bowl of water, but as we came down even lower they resolved themselves into a chequerboard of ricefields. We seemed now to be only a few feet above the earth, but I could see no sign of a landing ground. We banked steeply and suddenly turned, and for one panic-stricken moment I thought we were about to crash. I am not normally superstitious, but I had been expecting this. I had in fact been so certain that I should not survive this flight that before leaving Calcutta I had insured my life. As I now closed my eyes and gripped the arms of my chair it suddenly occurred to me that the certificates, which I meant to have posted, were still in my pocket and would therefore be destroyed with me. A second later we were taxi-ing on to the concrete runway; we had arrived in Bangkok exactly on time.

I had decided to break my journey here and continue overland to French Indo-China. Bangkok is a city that should be looked at only at dusk or dawn. At such times there is a certain attraction about its baroque sky line. In the harsh light of day it is uniformly ugly, a compound of reed-thatched hovels, office buildings and immense sprawling temples. Most of the latter, originally wooden, have been rebuilt in concrete, in the surface of which millions of

Prologue

tiny fragments of coloured glass have been embedded. Their designers seem to have been imbued with only one idea; to avoid a plain surface at all costs. Decoration is plastered on wherever it is possible to stick it, and tinkling ornaments are suspended from every eave and corner. Looking at these temples from close at hand one is dazzled by the multitudinous squiggles and projections, and the general shape of the building escapes one. Indeed, they give the effect that the ornaments were designed first, the actual building being merely a medium on which to display them. The architect, one thinks, must have been inspired by the sight of an overloaded Christmas tree, fantastically decorated with immense prawns and whiskered lobsters. It was a relief to visit the Siamese white elephants and rest one's eyes on their vast undecorated buttocks; a relief and something of a disappointment, for they are not white but pink.

And then on to Saigon and Hong Kong, where I was to take ship for Kobe. The Sino-Japanese war had now been going on for more than a year, and I had been repeatedly told that this was not a suitable time to visit Japan; that it was no longer possible to travel about in the country, and that the people had become hostile to foreigners. I had disregarded these warnings (which turned out to have nothing to justify them), because I did not think that I should ever again visit the East, and before settling down to become a European I wanted to see as much of it as possible.

I spent on this first occasion exactly three weeks in Japan, during which I visited all the scheduled tourist attractions, did all the things that tourists usually do. I was treated with kindness and courtesy everywhere; in spite of the war, the country seemed to a superficial observer to be functioning quite normally. This was in the autumn of 1937. I have always had a childlike passion for sightseeing, but for some reason or other I went through Japan with eyes that did not stare. It seems absurd, but I can only say that from the moment I stepped off the boat in Kobe I had a strange and inexplicable feeling that I had seen all this before. This feeling remained with me, in fact it became stronger wherever I went. And with it went the certain belief that I should visit all these scenes again.

Here is a possible explanation. I had spent my last six months in India in a lonely Himalayan village, high up near the Tibetan border, where I had gone to study the social life of the people. With me I had only one book, Arthur Waley's *The Tale of Genji*, which is a translation of an immensely long Japanese novel written by a Court lady in the tenth century. This book is a classic, which the

Japanese hold in great esteem; but by no stretch of imagination can it, in its original form, be described as popular reading. Waley's translation had become, however, a best-seller both in England and America, and it has certainly done more than anything else to make Western readers familiar with ancient Japanese culture. It has been criticised by certain Japanese pedants on the grounds that it is not altogether textually faithful to the original. On this point I am not competent to speak, since I have only the most elementary knowledge of written Japanese. But the matter is unimportant, since from a literary point of view Dr. Waley has produced something that will continue to give pleasure so long as the English language remains. But all this is by the way. The point is that I had so steeped my mind in this book before going to Japan that it may account for the feeling of familiarity that I everywhere had.

While I was in Tokyo I was asked to speak to several of the University Mountaineering clubs on the work of the Mount Everest Expeditions, in two of which I had participated as a sort of general factotum, interpreter and transport officer. I was not, never have been, and have not the necessary physique and agility ever to become even a moderately good climber; but I have always been fond of mountain travel and have spent a great deal of my leisure in various kinds of mountain exploration. Modern expeditions are elaborate affairs, the administration of which is complicated and often delicate, and my own inclusion in the parties was due solely to a knowledge of local conditions and people. I have to mention this because I found myself described in the local press as a "world-famous mountaineer", and nothing I could say succeeded in disillusioning the Japanese public. (My undeserved reputation preceded me to America, where I found myself described in the California papers as "MAN FROM LOST HORIZON".)

Although I had a strong presentiment that I should eventually return, when we sailed from Yokohama on the first day of December it did not seem likely that this would happen. But as a result of giving a few lectures in Tokyo, I came into contact with a number of those engaged in University teaching, and was asked vaguely if I would not like to return and join one or other of the faculties. Nothing definite was offered, however, and I gave no thought to the subject. As a matter of fact I would not at that time have accepted an appointment in Japan. I liked the country and had spent an exceedingly pleasant three weeks in it; but I was now possessed by an overwhelming nostalgia for London. A book of mine had just been accepted and I wanted to stay in England and go on writing.

I

MY LIFE IN JAPAN

October 1938 to December 1941

1

It was in the early summer of 1938 that I found one morning among my letters an invitation to a reception at the Japanese Embassy. I was beginning to settle down in London and had almost forgotten the tentative suggestions I had received the year before about going back to Japan. I was now to learn that they meant more than I supposed.

There was nothing unusual about the reception; and I was wondering how soon I could decently escape, when one of the Ambassador's secretaries approached me and said that His Excellency would like to see me in his study. He told me that he had received a cable requesting him to offer me a post as adviser to the Japanese Foreign Office, with which was coupled a lectureship in English at one of the Tokyo Universities. I was a little taken aback; the idea of advising a foreign government seemed rather alarming, and I am not given to tendering advice in any circumstances. But it soon came out that I should not be responsible for anything much more important than dotting an occasional *i* and crossing an occasional *t* in the various documents and statements which Tokyo issued in English. "The post," His Excellency said, "is what is called in your language a sinecure." For a moment I stared, then gave a smile. I had forgotten that the Japanese (as also the Chinese), unless they have been educated abroad, often cannot distinguish between the letters *L* and *R*. When his meaning dawned upon me, however, I thought that I was fully qualified to deal with any sinecure; and as for the lectureship, why not? Emboldened by the Embassy champagne, I accepted on the spot. "But first," I said, before leaving the room, "don't you wish to

make some further enquiries about me?" wondering to whom I could refer him. "That has already been done," he replied, "we have, moreover, engaged your passage. It will save you trouble."

I had always known that the Japanese were efficient, but I was surprised. It did not occur to me at the time that I was already experiencing in England a first taste of peculiar police methods, with which I was to become a great deal more familiar in the future.

2

We berthed at Yokohama on a pouring wet night in October. The customs examination on entering Japan is always severe, and particular attention is paid to the traveller's taste in books. I was doing my best to explain why I had arrived with several hundred volumes when a young man from the Foreign Office was announced. In Japan everybody and everything is rigidly graded, and of course the Japanese Customs Department stands much lower in the official hierarchy than the Foreign Office. Nevertheless the young man bowed low to the Customs Inspector before presenting his visiting card, waiting for it to take effect. It produced, of course, a much lower and more obsequious bow, and then a string of apologies, followed by the rapid chalking of my boxes. I was now free to leave the boat, and my Foreign Office friend, having other arrivals to greet, handed me over to Professor Bo, who was waiting on the quay. The Professor was the dean of the English department at the University where I was to teach and had spent some years in England. He seemed to have nothing to say, however, and answered all my own attempts to start a conversation with a curt monosyllable. In a final effort to thaw him I took out my cigarette case and offered it to him. "Thank you; no," he said, "I am a Christian." I should in fairness add that of the many thousands of Christians in Japan only a very small minority feel that their religious views demand complete abstention from alcohol and tobacco.

We made the train journey up to Tokyo (it takes about thirty minutes) in almost complete silence, and after seeing me to the Imperial Hotel, where I was to stay for the time being, the Professor took his leave, saying that he would call me up on the following morning and give me my instructions.

The Imperial Hotel in Tokyo is worth a few words of description since it is the usual meeting place of diplomats, international crooks and other foreigners living in the capital. The position it occupies in the social life of the city is very much like that which the Hotel Adlon in Berlin used to have in the early days of the Hitler régime. It was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, one of America's foremost architects, and is without doubt one of the most unsuitably constructed buildings in the world. Abnormally low ceilings make the rooms excessively hot in summer, while the maze of useless passages become bitterly cold and draughty in winter; but if one disregards its function and looks upon it merely as an abstract design it is not unpleasing. It was one of the first buildings in Tokyo to be built on earthquake-proof principles, and one of the few large buildings to escape damage in the disaster of 1923. I have myself been inside it during a slight earthquake, and can vouch for the fact that, resting on a bed of semi-liquid mud instead of being built on solid foundations like a normal building, it shakes like a jelly, even in quite a mild shock, but does not fall down. Finally, I may add that since the majority of the Imperial Hotel Company's shares are held by the Imperial Family, guests are expected to observe the strictest propriety. What this means in actual practice is that while no objection is raised to gentlemen entertaining foreign ladies in their rooms, they are not permitted to offer similar hospitality to ladies of the country. Until Japan came into the war the Hotel was patronised almost exclusively by foreigners and Japanese that had been educated abroad, a type that is often more Western than any Westerner.

True to his word the Professor rang me up at half-past six (the Japanese are early risers) the following morning; but I never got his message. It so happened that among the guests staying in the hotel was another John Morris, a well-known American journalist. It appeared that the other Mr. John Morris had been making something of a night of it and had not retired before about 3 a.m. He did not, therefore, appreciate being run up in the early hours of the morning by an unknown Japanese professor who told him he would call for him at eight. I never discovered the exact wording of his reply, but when the professor came to collect me just as I was thinking of getting out of bed he was unmistakably registering disapproval, and it was some weeks before I was able to convince him that I was in reality quite blameless.