

Unbeaten Tracks in Japan

by Isabella L. Bird

AN ACCOUNT OF TRAVELS IN THE INTERIOR
INCLUDING VISITS TO THE ABORIGINES OF YEZO
AND THE SHRINE OF NIKKO BY ISABELLA L.
BIRD

REFACE

Having been recommended to leave home, in April 1878, in order to recruit my health by means which had proved serviceable before, I decided to visit Japan, attracted less by the reputed excellence of its climate than by the certainty that it possessed, in an especial degree, those sources of novel and sustained interest which conduce so essentially to the enjoyment and restoration of a solitary health-seeker. The climate disappointed me, but, though I found the country a study rather than a rapture, its interest exceeded my largest expectations.

This is not a "Book on Japan," but a narrative of travels in Japan, and an attempt to contribute something to the sum of knowledge of the present condition of the country, and it was not till I had travelled for some months in the

interior of the main island and in Yezo that I decided that my materials were novel enough to render the contribution worth making. From Nikko northwards my route was altogether off the beaten track, and had never been traversed in its entirety by any European. I lived among the Japanese, and saw their mode of living, in regions unaffected by European contact. As a lady travelling alone, and the first European lady who had been seen in several districts through which my route lay, my experiences differed more or less widely from those of preceding travellers; and I am able to offer a fuller account of the aborigines of Yezo, obtained by actual acquaintance with them, than has hitherto been given. These are my chief reasons for offering this volume to the public.

It was with some reluctance that I decided that it should consist mainly of letters written on the spot to my sister and a circle of personal friends, for this form of

publication involves the sacrifice of artistic arrangement and literary treatment, and necessitates a certain amount of egotism; but, on the other hand, it places the reader in the position of the traveller, and makes him share the vicissitudes of travel, discomfort, difficulty, and tedium, as well as novelty and enjoyment. The "beaten tracks," with the exception of Nikko, have been dismissed in a few sentences, but where their features have undergone marked changes within a few years, as in the case of Tokiyo (Yedo), they have been sketched more or less slightly. Many important subjects are necessarily passed over.

In Northern Japan, in the absence of all other sources of information, I had to learn everything from the people themselves, through an interpreter, and every fact had to be disinterred by careful labour from amidst a mass of rubbish. The Ainos supplied the information which is

given concerning their customs, habits, and religion; but I had an opportunity of comparing my notes with some taken about the same time by Mr. Heinrich Von Siebold of the Austrian Legation, and of finding a most satisfactory agreement on all points.

Some of the Letters give a less pleasing picture of the condition of the peasantry than the one popularly presented, and it is possible that some readers may wish that it had been less realistically painted; but as the scenes are strictly representative, and I neither made them nor went in search of them, I offer them in the interests of truth, for they illustrate the nature of a large portion of the material with which the Japanese Government has to work in building up the New Civilisation.

Accuracy has been my first aim, but the sources of error are many, and it is from those who have studied Japan the

most carefully, and are the best acquainted with its difficulties, that I shall receive the most kindly allowance if, in spite of carefulness, I have fallen into mistakes.

The Transactions of the English and German Asiatic Societies of Japan, and papers on special Japanese subjects, including "A Budget of Japanese Notes," in the Japan Mail and Tokiyo Times, gave me valuable help; and I gratefully acknowledge the assistance afforded me in many ways by Sir Harry S. Parkes, K.C.B., and Mr. Satow of H.B.M.'s Legation, Principal Dyer, Mr. Chamberlain of the Imperial Naval College, Mr. F. V. Dickins, and others, whose kindly interest in my work often encouraged me when I was disheartened by my lack of skill; but, in justice to these and other kind friends, I am anxious to claim and accept the fullest measure of personal responsibility for the opinions expressed, which, whether right or wrong, are wholly my own.

The illustrations, with the exception of three, which are by a Japanese artist, have been engraved from sketches of my own or Japanese photographs.

I am painfully conscious of the defects of this volume, but I venture to present it to the public in the hope that, in spite of its demerits, it may be accepted as an honest attempt to describe things as I saw them in Japan, on land journeys of more than 1400 miles.

Since the letters passed through the press, the beloved and only sister to whom, in the first instance, they were written, to whose able and careful criticism they owe much, and whose loving interest was the inspiration alike of my travels and of my narratives of them, has passed away.

ISABELLA L. BIRD.

LETTER I

First View of Japan--A Vision of Fujisan--Japanese Sampan-"Pullman Cars"--Undignified Locomotion--Paper Money--The Drawbacks of Japanese Travelling.

ORIENTAL HOTEL, YOKOHAMA, May 21.

Eighteen days of unintermitted rolling over "desolate rainy seas" brought the "City of Tokio" early yesterday mornng to Cape King, and by noon we were steaming up the Gulf of Yedo, quite near the shore. The day was soft and grey with a little faint blue sky, and, though the coast of Japan is much more prepossessing than most coasts, there were no startling surprises either of colour or form. Broken wooded ridges, deeply cleft, rise from the water's edge, gray, deep-roofed villages cluster about the

mouths of the ravines, and terraces of rice cultivation, bright with the greenness of English lawns, run up to a great height among dark masses of upland forest. The populousness of the coast is very impressive, and the gulf everywhere was equally peopled with fishing-boats, of which we passed not only hundreds, but thousands, in five hours. The coast and sea were pale, and the boats were pale too, their hulls being unpainted wood, and their sails pure white duck. Now and then a high-sterned junk drifted by like a phantom galley, then we slackened speed to avoid exterminating a fleet of triangular-looking fishing-boats with white square sails, and so on through the grayness and dumbness hour after hour.

For long I looked in vain for Fujisan, and failed to see it, though I heard ecstasies all over the deck, till, accidentally looking heavenwards instead of earthwards, I saw far above any possibility of height, as one would have

thought, a huge, truncated cone of pure snow, 13,080 feet above the sea, from which it sweeps upwards in a glorious curve, very wan, against a very pale blue sky, with its base and the intervening country veiled in a pale grey mist. {1} It was a wonderful vision, and shortly, as a vision, vanished. Except the cone of Tristan d'Acunha--also a cone of snow--I never saw a mountain rise in such lonely majesty, with nothing near or far to detract from its height and grandeur. No wonder that it is a sacred mountain, and so dear to the Japanese that their art is never weary of representing it. It was nearly fifty miles off when we first saw it.

The air and water were alike motionless, the mist was still and pale, grey clouds lay restfully on a bluish sky, the reflections of the white sails of the fishing-boats scarcely quivered; it was all so pale, wan, and ghastly, that the turbulence of crumpled foam which we left behind us, and

our noisy, throbbing progress, seemed a boisterous intrusion upon sleeping Asia.

The gulf narrowed, the forest-crested hills, the terraced ravines, the picturesque grey villages, the quiet beach life, and the pale blue masses of the mountains of the interior, became more visible. Fuji retired into the mist in which he enfolds his grandeur for most of the summer; we passed Reception Bay, Perry Island, Webster Island, Cape Saratoga, and Mississippi Bay--American nomenclature which perpetuates the successes of American diplomacy--and not far from Treaty Point came upon a red lightship with the words "Treaty Point" in large letters upon her. Outside of this no foreign vessel may anchor.

The bustle among my fellow-passengers, many of whom were returning home, and all of whom expected to be met by friends, left me at leisure, as I looked at unattractive,

unfamiliar Yokohama and the pale grey land stretched out before me, to speculate somewhat sadly on my destiny on these strange shores, on which I have not even an acquaintance. On mooring we were at once surrounded by crowds of native boats called by foreigners sampans, and Dr. Gulick, a near relation of my Hilo friends, came on board to meet his daughter, welcomed me cordially, and relieved me of all the trouble of disembarkation. These sampans are very clumsy-looking, but are managed with great dexterity by the boatmen, who gave and received any number of bumps with much good nature, and without any of the shouting and swearing in which competitive boatmen usually indulge.

The partially triangular shape of these boats approaches that of a salmon-fisher's punt used on certain British rivers. Being floored gives them the appearance of being absolutely flat-bottomed; but, though they tilt readily, they

are very safe, being heavily built and fitted together with singular precision with wooden bolts and a few copper cleets. They are SCULLED, not what we should call rowed, by two or four men with very heavy oars made of two pieces of wood working on pins placed on outrigger bars. The men scull standing and use the thigh as a rest for the oar. They all wear a single, wide-sleeved, scanty, blue cotton garment, not fastened or girdled at the waist, straw sandals, kept on by a thong passing between the great toe and the others, and if they wear any headgear, it is only a wisp of blue cotton tied round the forehead. The one garment is only an apology for clothing, and displays lean concave chests and lean muscular limbs. The skin is very yellow, and often much tattooed with mythical beasts. The charge for sampans is fixed by tariff, so the traveller lands without having his temper ruffled by extortionate demands.

The first thing that impressed me on landing was that there were no loafers, and that all the small, ugly, kindly-looking, shrivelled, bandy-legged, round-shouldered, concave-chested, poor-looking beings in the streets had some affairs of their own to mind. At the top of the landing-steps there was a portable restaurant, a neat and most compact thing, with charcoal stove, cooking and eating utensils complete; but it looked as if it were made by and for dolls, and the mannikin who kept it was not five feet high. At the custom-house we were attended to by minute officials in blue uniforms of European pattern and leather boots; very civil creatures, who opened and examined our trunks carefully, and strapped them up again, contrasting pleasingly with the insolent and rapacious officials who perform the same duties at New York.

Outside were about fifty of the now well-known jin-ti-kishas, and the air was full of a buzz produced by the rapid

reiteration of this uncouth word by fifty tongues. This conveyance, as you know, is a feature of Japan, growing in importance every day. It was only invented seven years ago, and already there are nearly 23,000 in one city, and men can make so much more by drawing them than by almost any kind of skilled labour, that thousands of fine young men desert agricultural pursuits and flock into the towns to make draught-animals of themselves, though it is said that the average duration of a man's life after he takes to running is only five years, and that the runners fall victims in large numbers to aggravated forms of heart and lung disease. Over tolerably level ground a good runner can trot forty miles a day, at a rate of about four miles an hour. They are registered and taxed at 8s. a year for one carrying two persons, and 4s. for one which carries one only, and there is a regular tariff for time and distance.

The kuruma, or jin-ri-ki-sha, {2} consists of a light

perambulator body, an adjustable hood of oiled paper, a velvet or cloth lining and cushion, a well for parcels under the seat, two high slim wheels, and a pair of shafts connected by a bar at the ends. The body is usually lacquered and decorated according to its owner's taste. Some show little except polished brass, others are altogether inlaid with shells known as Venus's ear, and others are gaudily painted with contorted dragons, or groups of peonies, hydrangeas, chrysanthemums, and mythical personages. They cost from 2 pounds upwards. The shafts rest on the ground at a steep incline as you get in--it must require much practice to enable one to mount with ease or dignity--the runner lifts them up, gets into them, gives the body a good tilt backwards, and goes off at a smart trot. They are drawn by one, two, or three men, according to the speed desired by the occupants. When rain comes on, the man puts up the hood, and ties you and it closely up in a covering of oiled paper, in