

OLD AND NEW JAPAN.

NO III.

BY "Old Japan" is meant the Island Empire as we found it in 1853, with its stagnant, even fossilized civilization, which had changed but slightly for hundreds of years; with its divine Mikado of a lineage 3,000 years old; with its warrior chieftain and actual ruler, the Shogun; with numerous feudal princes (*Daimio*) and their hordes of two-sworded soldiers (*Samurai*) in possession of the provinces; with a vigorous general government and an oppressive feudal system that ground the people to powder beneath the heel of the ruling class and reduced them to abject slavery. Under such a system no social progress was possible. Caste ruled supreme, and the gulf between the classes it was almost impossible to cross. The ruling classes were the only educated ones, though reading, writing and other rudimentary branches were taught the children of the poor in the village schools. Of chances to rise in life there were none. A child could not aspire to do more than his father, his grandfather and his great-grandfather had done before him, or to occupy a higher position in society. "Like father, like son," was in its broadest sense the underlying principle of Japanese society. There was no encouragement for genius in any of the fields of science, mechanics, literature or art. Every one was content to travel in the same ruts his ancestors had made centuries before.

This fixed state of society continued for nineteen years after the visit of Commodore Perry, and it was not until 1872 that the spirit of resistance to innovations finally gave way completely before foreign pressure, and "New Japan" had its birth. It was my privilege to study the old system for nineteen years, and then for eleven years more to watch the development of the new life which had been infused into the Mikado's realm, and witness the marvelous transformation of customs and ideas which followed. Japan was like a living mummy, enveloped in its manifold wrappings of ancient custom, suddenly brought to the light of day. Ancient and modern civilization were brought face to face. Then, after a season, like a chrysalis, it burst its bonds and sprang into a new and more beautiful life. It is of this old and encrusted civilization and this sudden awakening into a new and progressive life of which I speak and with which I became familiar by years of intermingling with the people of all classes through both the old and new régime.

It was on the 17th of July, 1853, that Commodore Perry sailed out of Yedo Bay, with the intention of wintering in China and returning in the spring to receive the Mikado's reply to the letter of President Fillmore. As the fleet passed down the bay, the ships in tow of the steamers, the shore on either side was thronged with natives, while on the waters of the bay hundreds of boats darted hither and thither, all intently watching the marvel of four vessels cutting rapidly through the water without a sail being unfurled. As they passed the fort at Uragawa the garrison, which had before taken to their heels when they had supposed that enormous engine of

destruction, the *Mississippi's* smoke-stack, to be pointed at them with hostile intent, again scampered up the hill, but this time only for the purpose of obtaining a better view of the departing fleet. The receding landscape was beautiful, and above all objects the sacred Fuji-Yama stood out bold and commanding in the clear sunlight, true to its name, the "Peerless Mountain," the most beautiful object in all the landscapes of Japan.

Just off the entrance to the bay black clouds of smoke were rising from a low volcanic island, which had suddenly blazed up into the sky but a few nights before, lighting up the country for miles around. In the dim distance could be discerned the small island of Hatchijoa, used as a penal colony by the Government. To the eye all was beautiful on land and sea. It was impossible that these people could live in the midst of such scenes and not be impressed in a certain measure with their beauty and a desire to reproduce them. Their many works of art show this, and yet they lived, as it were, in the dim past, in the civilization of the ancients, unprogressive and unambitious. As we departed from the bay none realized in what manner and how quickly our desire for a moral and social resurrection of this people would be accomplished. It was at this time that several small islands lying just within the entrance were named in honor of our ships and some of the officers, and these titles they bear to the present day. The fleet separated, each vessel going to some designated port or engaging in the exploration of some portion of the coast or outlying islands. Commodore Perry returned in the *Mississippi* to the Loochoo (spelled *Riukiu* by the natives) Islands, to resume the negotiations begun there a few weeks before. Nappa, the most important harbor, was reached on the 25th of July.

The Loochoo Islands, over which Japan and China have been so long disputing, and which frequently fill so much space in the telegraphic columns of the press, are peopled by the same race as the islands of Japan, and are in reality a portion of that empire, though not bound to it by close political ties. Their position has always been a complicated one, compelling them to adopt the "Good Lord, Good Devil" policy. Being actually a feudal dependency of the ruler of Satsuma, the most southwestern of the main group of Japanese islands, they were exposed in times past to inroads by Chinese freebooters, and in order to pacify this powerful and unscrupulous neighbor, they yearly dispatched a secret embassy to Peking bearing tribute to the Chinese emperor. Of late years the Chinese Government has used this secret tribute as a foundation upon which to build a claim for complete domination of the islands, and this is the cause of the existing trouble between the "Pearly Emperor" of China and the "Son of Heaven" who presides over the destinies of Japan. Between the two the hapless Loochooans are kept in a constant state of turmoil.

No one expected the full opening of Japanese ports for several years to come, and therefore Commodore Perry had decided to establish on the Loochoo Islands a coaling station for steamers that were expected to be put