

Chapter Twenty-six

THE EAST IS BLOSSOMING



AFTER I found out where I stood with the Government, the silent friends who had come and gone so frequently from the Ishimoto home produced plans for various meetings. In each one the address was to a particular class which did not mingle with others—commercial, educational, medical, parliamentary.

The Kaizo group were intensely disappointed that I could not deliver the lectures I had prepared and for which they had invited me to Japan. As a compromise we agreed that I should have to focus my War and Population talk around Germany and the Allies. It was going to be difficult, because I was not satisfied with the European facts and figures I had.

My first meeting was at the Tokyo Y M C A. Shortly before one o'clock I was escorted with great ceremony into a room behind the auditorium, pungent with smoke from a charcoal stove. Then I was presented to a gathering of about five hundred—prosperous-looking men, well-dressed women, students, a number of foreigners, a Buddhist priest or two, and a liberal sprinkling of the Metropolitan Police to make certain my audience thought no dangerous thoughts as a result of my speech.

Most of the auditors apparently understood some English, because while I was speaking they leaned forward attentively, laughing in the proper places, but when I paused for the translation they relaxed, rustled papers, and whispered to each other.

I had discovered that the five-hour clause in my contract was no

mistake and no joke. Standing from one until six was a frightful strain. The lecture with interpretations took three hours, although I could have delivered it in one, and questions took two more. Many of these were on subjects entirely alien to my own. "What do you think of missionaries? What do you think of Christianity? Are you yourself a Christian?" This last was naïvely posed, and, thoroughly aware of the significance of what it meant truly to be a Christian, I replied, "I'm afraid I'm not a very good one."

My questioner put out his chest and said confidently, "I am."

I seemed to recall my adolescence when I had exacted the last ounce of righteousness from every breathing hour. Many of the Japanese converts had this spirit. They were trying to change their ancestral ideas of morality and, instead, adopt wholesale the Christian code without having had time to assimilate it.

The most painful experience I had in Japan was in addressing the Tokyo medical association. The volunteer interpreter was a young doctor who had been on a three weeks' tour of America, and his command of English was correspondingly slight. From the attitude of the audience I could tell whenever he was not conveying my meaning as I had intended it, though I did not always know what specifically was wrong. The Baroness, unable to bear his mis-translation of "prevention of conception" as abortion, which she knew would distress me intensely, finally rose and attempted to correct the erroneous impression he was giving. But the meeting was over before she could make it clear.

Nothing had been said about remuneration. I expected none. But the next day an army of ten rickshas appeared. The officers of the society, laden with packages and bundles, presented themselves. One by one they offered boxes in which I found an elaborate kimono, an embroidered table cover, a purse, a fan, a cloisonné jar, and, in conclusion, the President offered me the smallest package of all, wrapped in tissue and tied with a paper tape on which were the characters wishing me health, happiness, and longevity. Opening it I found crisp new bills in payment. This delicate gesture was typically Japanese.

At other meetings we usually sat on clean, fresh mats, the room might be chilly, but a little charcoal burner was beside you and occasionally you warmed your hands over it. I liked the service and the

food which the maids silently brought all at once on a tray, covered over and steaming hot. After *saké* in diminutive porcelain cups the group was ready to converse, and it was cozy and interesting. Often we did not get away until midnight because, although the discussion was carried on in English, each remark was translated for the benefit of those who did not understand. The Baroness always went with me, and it was a revelation to them to have one of their own country-women present.

I had heard much talk of the Elder Statesmen, but nobody at the Peers' Club, where I gave an afternoon address, seemed to be even elderly. They were curious to know why women were divorced, whether they wanted more than one husband, whether they really could ever care for more than one man, the nature of their love for children, how long it could continue. They were like Europeans in the frankness with which they regarded the relationship of the sexes. Yet they were not satisfied with the accepted Japanese tradition—on the one hand geisha girls who played and coquetted and amused them, and on the other wives whose place as yet was definitely in the home. They asked, "Is it not true that the American woman can be all things to her husband—his companion, mother of his children, mistress, business manager, and friend?"

I agreed with them that this was the ideal, but had to confess that by no means every American wife fitted into this picture.

Many of the Japanese had themselves forgotten that in the heroic and epic days women had enjoyed freedom and equality with men. Only with the rise of the powerful military lords in the Eighth Century had this most rigid, most persistent, and most immovable discrimination arisen.

The *Ona Daigaku*, the feudal moral code, counseled

A woman shall get up early in the morning and go to bed late in the evening. She must never take a nap in the daytime. She shall be industrious at sewing, weaving, spinning, and embroidery. She shall not take much tea or wine. She shall not visit places of amusement, such as theaters or musicals. She must never get angry—she must bear everything and always be careful and timid.

The resultant upper-class Japanese lady, exquisite and decorative, was a living work of art particularly created by the imagination of

numberless generations of men My original conception of all Japanese women had been fashioned out of romantic fallacies—partly by the three little maids from school who simpered through the *Mikado*, and to no small extent by the gaudy theatricalism of *Madama Butterfly* The unrestrained exoticism of Pierre Loti and Lafcadio Hearn had strengthened my illusions, as had also the color prints that had aroused so much enthusiasm towards the end of the century

But I soon found the cherry blossom fairyland was being destroyed by the advent of machinery In Yokohama and Kobe you heard factory whistles and saw tall smokestacks, new shipyards, and great steel cranes The Industrial Revolution, accomplished in our Western countries gradually, had invaded the Island Empire with an impact and a shock the repercussions of which were still evident It had not brought freedom to the women whose low status was admirably suited to the purpose of manufacturing with its ever-increasing demand for cheap and unskilled labor

Practically half the female population, some thirteen millions, were engaged in gainful occupation though few were economically independent In the mill districts mothers scolded their small daughters by threatening, "I'll sell you to the weavers" These *kaiko*, or "bought ones," served as apprentices generally from three to five years Modern Japanese industrialism had been able to take advantage of an ancient Oriental habit of thought which placed slight value on the girl child

I spent half a day as the guest of the Kanegafuchi plant, the largest cotton mill in the Empire and the ideal industrial institution which was to be a model for others, comparing favorably with one of our best But Kanegafuchi was the exception On the average, employees in other mills worked a twelve-hour shift, day and night, amid the deafening roar of relentless power engines Dust and fine particles of fabric fell like minute snowflakes upon them Their growth was stunted, their resistance to infection and malignant disease broken down In a silk-spinning mill at Nagoya conditions were only slightly better I found over seven hundred girls, some no more than ten years of age, swiftly twirling off the slender threads from the cocoons and catching them on the spindles They were pathetic, gentle,

homeless little things, imprisoned in rooms with all windows closed to keep them moist and hot. A quarter of their seven dollars a month wages had to go for board.

Only by the graciousness and charity, in a sense, of the upper classes were the household servants saved from institutions. When the Baroness, for example, had married, some of them—cooks, maids, and nurses—had stayed with her parents, some had gone to another sister, some had come to her and been set to training the new ones. With her they had a home for life. This system accounted in part, at least, for the fact there were no beggars or mendicants in Japan.

Essentially conservative, essentially the product of a strange and scarcely understood past, the Japanese woman in my opinion did not possess in her typical psychology any strong leanings towards rebellion. This was true even among the many women writers on papers and magazines. Those who interviewed me were intelligent, but I was constantly amazed at their ancient and domesticated outlook.

I did not believe the woman of Japan would discard her beautiful costume or sacrifice her esthetic sense upon the altar of Occidental progress and materialism. The kimono was her chrysalis. Outwardly it was often of some thick serviceable goods, dull brown or black, shot through with threads of purple or blue. Yet underneath were silks of the brightest and most flaming hues, formalized for each particular occasion. Only a fleeting glimpse was caught of these as she walked. They were symbolic of her present position in society.

From the lowest serving maid to the finest aristocrat, certain indelible traits immediately impressed themselves. First of all was the low, soft, fluttering voice, like art and music combined. They were too modestly shy to talk out loud, you could scarcely hear them in a small room. Perhaps one reason men did not take their opinions seriously was because they did not speak up. I heard on every side of the New Woman—but I never saw her. Only those who had turned Christian showed any signs of thinking independently. To be a Christian seemed to imply being a rebel or radical of some kind. They told me it with great secret pride.

This was the single place where I had found men rather than women responding to the potentialities of birth control. The former

wanted to learn and thereby make of themselves something better. They were more and more in touch with the ideas of the Western world, and were broadening themselves through travel. I was confident a shifting environment was going to extend the masculine point of view and, if birth control could be proved of benefit to them, they would practice it. At that time I did not agree that East and West could never meet.

Japan was undoubtedly a man's country. Wherever we went, Grant was Exhibit A. He was a tall, dark, rather gawky youth, with adolescent manners but always cheerful. In private houses butlers and maids paid him much attention, and, in hotels, as soon as we entered the dining room everybody, because he was a man child, rushed to anticipate his wishes, to see that he was made comfortable. I straggled on behind. At our first appearance in one of these, the little girls who were being trained as waitresses and whose duty it was to bow the guests in and out were obviously confused. When we were seated at the table the proprietor apologized, "You must excuse them because they are so young, and they have their minds too much on this young gentleman."

The Yoshiwara, to which some missionaries escorted me, was certainly an integral part of this man's world. First we visited the unlicensed quarter, winding in our rickshas among alley-like streets lined with small houses. The dark eyes of the girls peered out through slits in the screen walls. Working men were standing in the muddy roadways, chattering, scrutinizing the prices which were posted in front like restaurant menus—so much per hour, so much per night. A door opened to admit a visitor. The light in the lower story vanished and soon another twinkled upstairs, or a light went out above and reappeared below, the door opened again and a figure emerged. Hundreds of lights behind paper windows seemed to flicker on and off constantly, low to high, high to low. The sordidness, the innumerable, shining eyes made me shiver involuntarily.

After we crossed a bridge to the licensed quarter the scene changed immediately. The wide thoroughfare, with a row of trees down the center festooned with electric globes like a midway, was clean and inviting. The amply-built houses had an air of spaciousness and luxury, their lanterns sent out a soft, alluring gleam, and carefully culti-

vated gardens produced a profusion of flowers in the courtyards. This part of the Yoshiwara appeared a delightful place. Its attraction for the girls was obvious, they would rather seek a livelihood in this fashion than in the dismal factories. Nor was it odd that they should find more romance here with many men than drudging for one all their days as the "incompetents" they became after marriage under the domination of their mothers-in-law.

Through portals as broad as driveways the patrons, much better dressed than those in the unlicensed quarter, strolled up to view the photographs of the inmates, posted like those in the lobby of a Broadway theater. In some frames was only the announcement, "—— just arrived, straight from —— No time for picture." The clients did a great deal of "window shopping." Newcomers from the country might have eight or nine visitors an evening, an older one but two or three. Many of the girls came from good families, frequently to lift their fathers or brothers out of debt. They sent their earnings back and, as soon as they had accumulated a sufficiency, often went home, married, and became reputable members of society.

But in spite of the Yoshiwara's artificial glamour, the crowd of men swarming like insects, automatically reacting to the stimulus of instinct, was unutterably depressing.

We walked home at midnight through the sleeping city, mysterious and quiet, not like a city at all—no jumping signs or illumination, but more like a nice, low-ceilinged room trimmed with old, brown-stained oak, and only here and there a glow.

Nothing else in my travels could compare with that month in Tokyo. The language was strange and unfamiliar. The bells in the shafts of the rickshas, ringing for pedestrians to get out of the way, added a bizarre note. The queer, clicking sound of the wooden geta was different although somewhat reminiscent of the clop, clop, of the Lancashire wooden shoes, which also were taken off at the door and exchanged for slippers. All the smells and the sights were quite new, even the signs on the shops were unreadable. In Europe, you could usually guess from some root word what kind of merchandise was for sale within. But not so in Japan. One day I stopped, totally puzzled, to inquire the whereabouts of a store the address of which had been written down for me. I showed my slip of paper but nobody

there could help me I went on Fully three minutes later the pattering of hurried steps behind me caused me to turn Here was one of the clerks He had gone to the trouble of looking up the address I had asked for and had come to act as guide to make sure I arrived

Throughout Japan the custom of greeting you and seeing you off was touching, and gave you a charming remembrance of a world where friendships were worth time and consideration When a Tokyo doctor heard I was leaving Yokohama eighteen miles away at eight o'clock in the morning, he presented himself at seven to bring me a box of choice silk handkerchiefs He must have risen at five to do so

From the window of the train for Kyoto the faces of the old men trudging along the road looked curiously like the drawings of them Everywhere were small village houses and, since I could see through from front to rear, I wondered where the peasants and their numerous offspring ate and slept

The former capital was fascinating The shopkeepers appeared to esteem their visitors more highly than the goods they had to sell, though Kyoto blue and, more especially, Kyoto red were like no other colors anywhere If ever you see the latter, buy it if you can, cherish it among your treasures, save it for your children, because it is the most beautiful of all reds

It was now April, the festival of spring and of the geishas, the jealously guarded and chaperoned entertainers, singers, players Everybody was anticipating the flowering of the cherry trees, and with the rest of Kyoto I went to see the enormous, spreading, willow cherry, then in dazzling white blossom It was several hundred years old, its limbs which grew out and drooped towards the ground were propped up with care, and around it was a superbly groomed landscape garden The proprietors of hotels near such trees erected unpretentious tea houses, temporary in character, where hundreds of people kept vigil You could not help having respect for a people whose love of a tree brought them from miles away and who waited day and night throughout the duration of its brief blooming They paid deference to it as they did to a great artist who they knew could live just so long

The Japanese designed their gardens with the mood of the individual in mind Some were filled with music, water, birds, activity, and

there you could go to be cheered when gloomy and despondent. As soon as I entered the Golden Temple grounds its influence fell upon me. Everything was planned for thought and concentration. No color, no noise, no rushing of water, no singing birds distracted the attention. Only at certain hours could you even walk about, because movement was disturbing to meditation.

Japanese hospitality reached its finest flower in Kyoto, and the supreme day of entertainment was offered by a generous and considerate doctor. On inviting me to luncheon he said he would call with his car at ten in the morning. This seemed a bit early, but it appeared he wanted me first to visit the Museum of Art. Here was no wandering through miles of rooms so that the eye was wearied and no lasting impression was gathered. Instead, I was shown only the one most prized specimen of paintings, porcelains, and rare screens. Afterwards, I was ushered into the library to see a collection of precious manuscripts, then back through the city for a few especially renowned views, and finally at noon to the doctor's home. His wife and two daughters greeted me and I was introduced to the guests. Little short-legged trays were put before our floor cushions, and we all picked up our chopsticks. I envied Grant his dexterity.

After the trays had been removed, we conversed until the business men had to return to their offices. But a fresh group of guests took their places, and with them appeared a painter. An easel was set up and each of us in turn made a single brush line on the rice paper—some straight, some curved, some vertical, some horizontal, criss-crossing each other in every direction. Then the artist took his brush and, amid exclamations of wonder and appreciation, with a few expert strokes converted the melange into a flower pattern, a lake, or a mountain.

An hour or so of this pleasure and the easel was swished away, the painter vanished with his colors, and a sculptor was substituted. We were now supplied with dabs of clay which we began to mold, the sculptor going from one to another to give assistance. If you were clever, as several of the Japanese were, works of art resulted. I created a plain jug with handle and lip, was taught how to draw a design upon it and how to paint it. Next day it was delivered to me, baked and glazed.

Later we were escorted to the garden where we congregated beneath an open tea house perched high on a rock. There the younger daughter tended a tiny fire and brewed a ceremonial tea—no simple brew, but leaves of a special sort, beaten until the beverage was bright green. When we had enjoyed this delight we strolled about, admiring the brooklets, the dwarf pines, the shrubs, the iris in bloom.

We returned to the house to find, as though in a play, that the scenery had all been changed. Different screens were up, fresh flowers in the vases, the women of the household in more elaborate costumes, and new visitors waiting. Grant and I alone seemed to remain static.

Now on the immaculate matted floor appeared little charcoal stoves. The evening meal was served by the mother and daughters as a marked honor to their guests. This time I was brought a spoon and fork, apparently I had not been very deft at lunch in handling my chopsticks. After dinner came yet more people and yet more conversation. I had been talking steadily since early morning, the topic being selected according to the type of gathering. In the evening it was population, and more serious. Sometimes I forgot myself and spun out involved English phrases, then, realizing they had missed fire, had to go back and choose key words more easily comprehended.

This continued until midnight or later. At last we had to excuse ourselves and ask to be taken home, because we were leaving for Kobe the next morning.

The doctor and his wife, accompanied by some of their friends, were at our hotel betimes, all with boxes and bon voyages. This reversal of the Occidental custom of bestowing presents on one's host or hostess was an enchanting way of conducting the amenities of life. They wanted no return for their hospitality. I had arrived in Japan with one small trunk and departed with five, laden with gifts.