

THE FIRST JAPANESE MISSION TO AMERICA

Last year (1923), while in Japan under the auspices of the Institute of International Education, I paid a visit to Keio University, Tokyo, in order to deliver a lecture on "American Ideals." In the course of this visit I learned, as never before, to appreciate the work of that great pioneer of western education in Japan, Yukichi Fukuzawa, who, after teaching himself English by first learning Dutch and then English by means of a Dutch-English Dictionary, started the educational institution out of which grew the important University of Keio. It was a great delight to me to discover that the present President, Dr. Ichitaro Fukuzawa, is a son of the "Sage of Mita," and that I was also privileged to meet the representative of a third generation of a famous family in the President's son, Tarokichi Fukuzawa, just returned from his graduation at an American College. The meeting was to me a symbol of the swift transition from the past to the present with its promise of the future. Speaking to a crowd of eager young men, most of whom could follow a lecture in the English language, it seemed hard to realize that just behind the hall in which I was lecturing stood the wooden building where in 1874 the first Public Speaking in all Japan was taught and practiced, much to the misgiving and alarm of the timid conservatism of the early years of Meiji.

Before leaving the College I was presented by the President, for the Library of the University of Washington, with a copy of a very valuable book, autographed by the Fukuzawas, entitled (in translation): "An Illustrated Account of the First Japanese Embassy to the United States, sent in the first year of *Mainen* (1860)." It is a narrative compiled out of the diaries of the envoys and liberally illustrated with pictures drawn by members of the expedition or copied from American papers of the period, such as Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Weekly*.

With the assistance of one of my students, Mr. Kimura, of the University of Washington, the story has now been put into English and I am hopeful that eventually Mr. Kimura may be able to publish an English translation in its entirety. But, in the meantime, there seems sufficient importance attachable to the first recorded impressions of Japanese diplomats as to America and things American to make worth while the presentation of a brief sketch of the record.

A few words explanatory of the occasion of the embassy, may be pardoned in view of the very slight reference made to the event in American history.

The year 1860 was critical in the story of reopened Japan. The Treaty of Kanagawa, obtained from Japan by Commodore Perry in 1854, had created a difficult domestic situation. The chauvinists of Japan had made the signing of the treaty an opportunity for discrediting the Shogunate, and the Imperial party at Kyoto, aided by the clans hostile to the Tokugawas, was only too ready to resent the concessions made to the "barbarians." Moreover, the presence of foreigners in the open ports had given occasion for rather frequent brawlings in which it was clear that the Shogun was unable wholly to control the disorderly element. Nor were the foreigners satisfied, for Mr. Townsend Harris, the able American representative at Yokohama, was insisting upon a commercial treaty to supplement the treaty of 1854 and was pointing to the war being waged by French and English against China as a pressing reason for yielding to the foreign desire voluntarily and at once.

Mr. Harris managed his part with consummate skill and had eventually the satisfaction of procuring the signature of the Japanese rulers to the Treaty of July, 1858. There was much delay in forwarding the treaty to the United States on account of various political complications which concern the domestic history of Japan, but at last it was decided to send a special embassy to Washington bearing the Treaty and the greetings of Nippon to the American Government.

It will be remembered that the early summer of 1860 marks a moment in American history as critical as anything to which we may point in Japan. President Buchanan was in the last year of his term. Secession sentiment was coming to a head in the South. Abraham Lincoln was about to be nominated for the Presidency amid the rejoicings of some and the misgivings of others. Clouds were gathering around the Republic beyond which few even pretended to be able to see. It is not surprising that under the circumstances and in view of subsequent happenings the significance of the first Japanese Embassy failed of recognition.

Of the few writers who have made any allusion to the subject at all the most explicit is Professor Payson J. Treat and his account is at the same time brief enough to permit quotation in its entirety:

"It was about this time that, after several postponements, the first Japanese mission to a foreign country sailed from Yokohama on the U.S.S. *Powhatan* to exchange at Washington the ratified copies of the Treaty of 1858. In command of the Japanese steamer *Kanrin Maru*, was Capt. Katsu, better known as Count Katsu Awa, the organiser of the modern Japanese navy. And in the envoy's suite was Fukuzawa Yukichi, who became one of the great leaders of New Japan, founder of the Jiji Shimpo newspaper and of the Keiogijuku University. The mission was cordially received by President Buchanan at Washington. The ratified texts were exchanged, and, after a tour of the Eastern States, the envoys returned to Japan with all manner of examples of American products and manufactures. The information brought home by the keen observers in this party must have contributed much to a better understanding of the Western world on the part of the Yedo administration."¹

As the purpose of this paper is not to discuss the mission and its results but rather to reflect the impressions made upon its members the above quotation will furnish a sufficient introduction. It is to be noted, however, that two vessels are mentioned, the U.S.S. *Powhatan*, a side-wheel steamer of some 2415 tons, and the Japanese steam corvette *Kanrin Maru*, a training ship under Kimura settsu no kami mori Katsu. The former ship brought the envoys and their suite, eighty-one persons altogether, room being provided for their accommodation by removing four guns from the deck. The Japanese vessel came apparently for the purpose of greeting the envoys on their arrival at San Francisco, though incidentally it brought home Capt. Brook of the wrecked ship *Fenimore Cooper* (nicely disguised in the Japanese syllabary as *Henimocobara*). The Japanese sailors were not over pleased at having an American on board lest it might appear that they had been indebted to the skill of the Yankee on this their first voyage to the United States.

Even the envoys, safe under the hospitable aegis of the American eagle on the *Powhatan*, felt that they were engaged in an epoch-making adventure and the second ambassador Murakami expressed this in a "tanka" of the orthodox five lined, thirty-one syllabled sort, as follows:

¹ *Japan and the United States*, pages 46-47.

“Tama no i wa
Kami to kimi toni
Makase tsutsu
Shiranu kuni nimo
Na o ya no ko san.”

which may be (inadequately) rendered:

“My life
To gods and emperor
An offering,
In an unknown land
I leave my name.”

The names of the three chief envoys, whose portraits are given in the volume, were: Shinmi Buzen no kami Masaoki, first ambassador; Murakami Awaji no kami Norimasa, second ambassador; and Oguri Bungo no kami Tadazumi, censor. The arrival at San Francisco on March 9 of the *Powhatan* with the envoys on board was a memorable event, even as it was to the crew of Count Katsu's *Kanrin Maru*. A picture of San Francisco in 1860 shows the quite undistinguished Californian metropolis of over sixty years ago in which one may count the streets and pick out the individual houses. But it is worth noting that Californian hospitality showed itself warmly appreciative of the interest of the occasion. The address of welcome presented to Kimura settsu no kami ought to be counted to San Francisco for righteousness whatever changes of sentiment the years might bring. It included these words:

“Whereas, San Francisco has thus the honor of being the first city in the United States to extend a welcome to the representatives of the Empire of Japan: be it therefore

“Resolved That we, the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco, in the name and in behalf of the people of said City and County, do hereby extend . . . a cordial welcome to our City, State, and Country; and in so doing, we take pleasure in expressing the earnest wish that the amicable relations happily existing between the Imperial Government of Japan and the United States of America, and their people, may be perpetuated and productive of great and mutual advantages.”

The Japanese were equally appreciative, though, alas, compelled to leave behind several members of the crew, whose tombs in San Francisco are shown in one of the illustrations. They

suffered too somewhat from the unaccustomed food and obtained permission to provide and cook their own meals. All through the experience as related runs a sense of pride. It was only seven years since they saw their first steam-boat and only five since they had begun to study the science of ocean navigation. To cross the Pacific was "something to boast of to the honor of Japan."

The stay in San Francisco was short and the next move of the envoys, still in the *Powhatan*, was to Panama, whence a train was taken across the isthmus to Aspinwall. Here another and larger ship was at their service, the *Roanoke*, with 52 guns and a complement of 540 men. Six guns were removed to afford the necessary accommodation and the visitors were well looked after. "The ship was clean but inconvenient." Of the personnel mentioned Admiral McCluney was "of a dignified manner," Captain Gardner was "an upright, humorous man," while another officer, apparently belonging to the port, is spoken of with some amount of gentle depreciation because of his boastful description of the achievements of the Perry expedition (of which he had been a member), "as if he had known about Japan so well." With subtle irony Murakami says of this individual, "this might be the reason for his still remaining a captain."

The Japanese boarded the *Roanoke* on April 24 and arrived at Sandy Hook on May 9, but on landing the envoys proceeded immediately to Washington at the President's request.

The arrival at the Navy Yard was the signal for great demonstrations of enthusiasm and curiosity, as is shown both by the pictures and by the extracts from Murakami's diary. The people crowded to the roofs to see the newcomers and so many pressed along the way that "it seemed as if the road had disappeared." Among them were some newspaper men hurrying here and there as if they were writing something. Also it appears that a camera was brought into action, a feature of public reception which the Japanese of today have by no means overlooked.

It was indeed a noteworthy occasion. The Treaty was contained in a box placed in a kind of *norimono*, the Japanese equivalent of a sedan-chair. The envoys rode in decorated carriages, each carriage drawn by four horses. There were cavalry and infantry escorts and, of course, a band. Every few yards the procession paused in order to afford the onlookers a good opportunity to view the strangers. "It might be that the spectators were honoring us by ringing their bells. It was all like a festival at Yedo."

Arrived at the Willard Hotel, whose five stories and extensive rooms puzzled the Japanese in their effort to reduce the measurements to "mats," they found themselves still too foreign to American ways to accept all precisely as they found it. So the chairs were removed and their places supplied with cushions on the floor, while the ball-room became the receptacle for the baggage. Of this there were, it is said, eighty tons, almost a ton per head, surely a liberal allowance. Possibly, however, we are betrayed into some misunderstanding of Japanese weights and measures, or, it may be, dealing with a little Oriental hyperbole. The sumptuous feast with which the visit to Washington was inaugurated, "with wine and meat", was the prelude to many more of the kind, all of which are duly recorded.

The first interview with the Secretary of State, Mr. Lewis Cass, took place on May 16 and is described with much detail. The envoys delivered the letter from their own Minister of Foreign Affairs and received from the Secretary the assurance that "the President and all the people of the United States were exceedingly glad to welcome the Japanese envoys on this occasion." Mr. Cass is described as "a tall old gentleman of over seventy," which was an accurate estimate. He was also to the mind of the visitors blunt and direct, though not lacking in dignity. It was probably the Oriental familiarity with the fastidiousness and prolixity of their own etiquette rather than any actual lack of politeness on the part of the Secretary which led Murakami to record: "I thought it hard to avoid the thought of savagery that he (General Cass) showed no courtesy and no refinement on the occasion of meeting foreign envoys for the first time, and offered no tea as if meeting friends." Of course, it was a case of different races, different manners.

The next great event was the interview with President Buchanan, which took place at the White House on the following day. The envoys prepared to go "gloriously dressed up in full costume," with the ambassadors wearing *karaginu* and their long swords, and the subordinate officials attired according to their grade. Each ambassador was accompanied by three foot-soldiers, a spearman, three samurai, and some domestic servants. There was the same escort of American soldiers and a band and the same curious and excited crowd along the road. "I felt so proud of myself" writes Murakami, "to be able to reflect the glory of the fatherland of the Rising Sun in a savage country abroad."

At the White House the ambassadors were somewhat surprised at the democratic ease with which everybody was admitted, including the retainers. The reception room was gorgeous with gay carpets and brilliant with mirrors hung upon the walls, while on the tables the envoys were not a little gratified to behold some of the products of their native land in the lacquer boxes and other curios brought back by Commodore Perry. Then Secretary Cass appeared, a door was thrown open, and the first envoys from distant Nippon found themselves in the presence of the *Daitoryu*, the President of the great Republic of the West. It was a moving moment, the emotions of the occasion only suffering some intrusion from the surprise of finding many ladies around the President, "old and young beautifully dressed up."

The proper salutations having been made, and the formal presentation of the pact accomplished, the envoys passed into another room, whence they were immediately thereafter recalled for an unofficial interview, unembarrassed by etiquette. The President shook hands with everybody and "expressed his gratitude and the gladness of his people" for the happily established relations between the two countries.

Talking over the ceremony on their return to the hotel the Japanese compared notes, found it funny that ladies had appeared, "fully dressed and painted," tried to understand the method of electing a President, concluding that it was by putting in "bids," after the manner of an auction, decided that it had been unnecessary to wear their full costume with the *karaginu* "in a country where there was no class differentiation and no etiquette or politeness," yet consoled themselves by writing the following poem:

"Behold the savageries, glory of the Eastern land, land of the
Rising Sun,

"Forgetting myself, a citizen of the Rising Sun, I feel proud of
to-day's glorious service."

"The President," Murakami reports, "seemed about seventy years old, with a gentle face and dignity, but, like a merchant, he had the tight-sleeved suit and trousers of black woollen cloth, without any ornament or sword."

They found that presents to a President were not permitted, but could be consigned to a museum. Also that "articles could only be personally possessed if presented to a wife."

It would be tedious to describe all the entertainments provided at Washington for the ambassadors, so I select from the

narrative a few scattered notes. The concert at the White House I am afraid bored them and made them feel just a little homesick and lonesome. Possibly they were still unreconciled to the music of the "barbarians." Yet the ladies whose presence at the festivities had appeared to be of dubious propriety were most courteously attentive and (says Murakami) "they like especially our swords." The President's niece made herself particularly agreeable.

Treaties between the two countries were officially exchanged at Secretary Cass' office on May 22 "without any courtesy and etiquette." The fact that a Dutch translation accompanied the Japanese copy of the Treaty reminds us that the English language had not yet obtained more than the tiniest entering wedge at Yedo.

The envoys received many invitations while in Washington but objected to the late nights. So they accepted only those "likely to result in national benefit." A ball to which they were inveigled was interesting chiefly as a novelty, enabling them to see "the group dance of both sexes."

Much more enthusiasm was aroused by a visit to the Navy Yard where the Japanese reveled in a view of "remarkable and splendid works beyond the power of pen and tongue." The photograph of the envoys taken on this occasion, in company with the President and a large group of American ladies and gentlemen, reveals the fact that the dress of the Japanese envoys is hardly more obsolete to us today than have become the American fashions of the time.

The President gave a banquet to his guests on May 25 which was on the grand scale, but Murakami observes: "There seemed to be no porcelain or stained table-ware in this country." The visitors were still shy about dining with the ladies, "because of our unfamiliarity with different manners and customs." The President asked many questions, but some of them were evidently indiscreet and so unanswerable, as, for example, those which concerned the ladies of the Imperial Court. "I answered," says the diarist, "by beating around bushes." The finger bowls, as in other unsophisticated dining rooms, presented difficulties even more embarrassing, and one of the envoys was barely restrained by a pull at his sleeve from drinking therefrom. "It was very hard to restrain our laughter as we looked at one another." The President's nieces (three of them) distinguished themselves by their attention to the visitors.

The last event of the stay in Washington was a trip over every corner of the Willard Hotel, a trip which provided interest of the most varied kind, from a sight of the engine-rooms, laundries and kitchens to a private view of the girls ironing the clothes and using a sewing machine. "Several rooms were provided for a bath," but the bath tubs, lined with tin, seemed small to the visitors. The provision in every room of "strings for the ringing of bells" was both interesting and amusing. The hotel must have been a lively caravansery during these days, since Murakami relates that the other guests "used to swarm out to the halls to see us whenever we happened to appear."

At last, however, the Washington stay was complete and the envoys steamed away on the *Alida* for New York, where they arrived on June 16. The procession through the streets was a repetition of the Washington triumph. "Like a festival, the procession marched slowly, stopping very often and taking a roundabout way."

There was a military review in which two things are singled out for special mention. First the drum major twirling his silver topped stick, the pretty young girls carrying small casks of whiskey on their shoulders "for a stimulant in case of accident"—no doubt tolerably frequent. The girls were gorgeously and thickly painted "as for a festival."

With this reference to "other times and other manners" we may bring our narrative to its conclusion. Indeed but two or three other episodes are reported before the first Japanese envoys left our shores for the crossing of the Atlantic and the journey home around the Cape. The Walton Company gave each of the party a handsome pocket watch and Mr. and Mrs. J. Gordon Bennett gave a reception for the visitors, in a suburban home so wondrously beautiful that Murakami is once again moved to express himself in verse.

With this poem we may conclude:

"So cool the breeze through the leafage green,
I think I hear the cuckoo's song.
However strange the ways and deeds of men,
The summer hills at sunset are everywhere the same."

HERBERT H. GOWEN.