

AN AMERICAN PIONEER IN JAPAN

History is often saved, as Comte suggests, from being an incoherent assemblage of unrelated facts by the felt influence of personality. It is unfortunate, of course, that as we read history the sense of personality is frequently weakened and submerged beneath the presence of economic and other elements. Therefore, whenever and wherever it is possible to catch the touch of personality on the events which have become part of the record of history, it is worth while doing something to preserve the impression of something human and vital. This will be particularly the case when a personality we have known bridges the distance between ourselves and things which have become relatively remote.

In itself it will be allowed that there is no more interesting episode in the history of the past century than the transition of Japan from feudalism to her present high place in international life. The twenty years from 1854 to 1874 saw more changes of a significant and even spectacular sort than are to be found in any similar period of history for many centuries. These changes have been described many times in more or less detail and the story needs no repetition here. My purpose is the simple but no less significant one of asking the reader to see one small segment of this period of change through the eyes of a friend but lately passed away from active life in our own community, one whom many of us knew and esteemed, and who could have said with truth of the epoch to which I refer, had his modesty permitted it, 'pars fui.'

That Edward Mason Shelton ever thought of saying this is, of course, untrue. He was too retiring a nature to assert such a claim. He lived among us for many years with little or no reference to the fact that had been in any way a participant in the changes adventured by the new Japan. Occupied here from season to season with his orchard and his flowers, he gave the impression of one who had never travelled far from the horticultural interests of a comparatively restricted habitat. Nevertheless, just outside the circle of his immediate family, friends there were to whom Mr. Shelton's keen interest in the concerns of many lands and his wide knowledge of world affairs made it ever worth while to penetrate behind the barrier of modesty in order to draw forth, with delightful result, a stock of reminiscence as unusual as it

was discriminating and informative. Once indeed, some years ago, a little group, of which Mr. Shelton was an honored member, succeeded in obtaining from him a paper, something of which is embodied in the following sketch. It described his part in a now all but forgotten Agricultural Commission sent from this country to Japan in 1871, and with humor and insight enabled some of us to see the Nippon of nearly sixty years ago with a freshness and vividness of appreciation we are not likely to forget. More recently, an attempt was made to secure a second installment of this record, or at least a repetition. But, alas, the effort was frustrated by illness and the intervention of death in the spring of 1928. As a poor substitute for the contemplated reminiscences of an octogenarian man of science, I am endeavoring in this paper to put together from Mr. Shelton's notes (kindly passed on to me by his wife and daughters) something regarding the man and his work, chiefly in connection with the visit to Japan in 1871 and 1872.

May I preface this account with the setting forth of a few facts respecting the external aspect of Mr. Shelton's career? Born in England, August 7, 1846, Edward Mason Shelton came with his parents to the United States in 1855, settling first in New York, but removing thence to Michigan in 1860. Here he worked his way through the Michigan Agricultural College (by teaching in country schools during the winter months) and graduated in 1871. It was in this year that he accepted the position of Superintendent of the Governmental Experiment Farm in Tokyo of which I shall have something to say presently. As the first teacher of American agricultural methods in Japan he left a strong impression upon the farming interests of that country. His return, through ill health, was followed by a brief connection with the Greeley colony in Colorado, and a renewal of his work at Michigan, where he took his degree of Master of Science, in 1874. In this same year he was chosen Professor of Agriculture at the Kansas State Agricultural College, where he remained until 1890. In December of that year Mr. Shelton married Miss Elizabeth Sessions, who was his devoted companion and fellow-worker to the end, and survives him. The Kansas Agricultural College had but recently changed its status from a school of instruction in the classics and there was naturally considerable opposition to the new regime. But Mr. Shelton had before many years the happiness of seeing the institution under his fostering care grow in numbers from a student roll of fifty to ten times

that number in 1889. There is a pathetic interest in the fact that in the days when the dying man was no longer able to read or answer letters two letters came from the Kansas Agricultural College. One, dated on March 28, 1928, contained the earnest request that Mr. Shelton should send a letter to be read at a great gathering arranged for May 26. The other, of April 4, 1928, was an intimation that the State Board of Regents, through the President, had been pleased to offer to Mr. Shelton the honorary degree of Doctor of Science "in recognition of your pioneer work in the development of agricultural science." Alas, by this time Edward Mason Shelton was beyond all appreciation of earthly honors.

In 1890 the subject of our sketch was called by the Government of Queensland, Australia, to the responsible position of agricultural adviser and instructor. In this capacity he attained great influence as an agricultural authority, held many important positions and lived to see many of his ideas take form as realities. In particular, he saw in 1897 his dream realized of the establishment of an Agricultural College of which he was appointed the first Principal. It should be said that during the years of Mr. Shelton's residence in Australia Mrs. Shelton was his fellow-worker and is remembered in the Commonwealth as the first popularise the bottling of fruit as a home industry. It would take too long to tell of all that was accomplished by the subject of this paper in the cause of agriculture and stock-raising in Queensland. As this is not the immediate purpose of this paper, it must be sufficient to repeat that many of the schemes then planned and started have emerged from formula to fact. The years that followed never diminished Mr. Shelton's touch with things Australian.

Returning at last to the United States he took up his residence in Seattle, where his favorite horticultural pursuits were followed to the end. All this time, however, by letter and by journals the old contacts were faithfully preserved. His interest in the world of his wide experience continued till death gently released him a few months ago in his 81st. year.

The circumstances under which Mr. Shelton went to Japan in 1871 may be set forth a little more definitely than I have hitherto presented them as follows. We may in this case use his own words:

"Sometime in 1871 General Grant, on the invitation of the Japanese Government nominated a Commission, supposedly of

experts, whose business was to advise the Government in matters pertaining to colonization and agriculture, and the related arts and sciences, including the establishment of an agricultural school in the northern island of Yezo (Hokkaido)". Here let me interpolate, what is hinted at a little later, and what I have on Japanese authority learned to be correct, that the awakened interest in Yezo on the part of the Government was to a large extent due to the fear of Russian aggression in the north. The Colossus of the North had already made its descent upon Sakhalin and had even claimed, together with that island, the group known as Chishima, or the Kuriles, so that Japanese apprehension in respect to Hokkaido was not ill-founded.

To resume: "The American Commission, as it was called, attracted wide attention at the time, both in this country and in Europe, because its appointment was the first distinct acknowledgment on the part of the Japanese of their need of western civilization and of their determination to acquire it.

"Unfortunately the Commission never nearly lived up to the expectations formed concerning it. Having obtained the expensive bauble, the Japanese were from the start at a loss to know what use to make of it, while the Commission had not the remotest idea what to do with itself. From start to finish it was a failure. The make-up of the party precluded any other outcome. The head of the Commission, General Horace Capron, had been President Grant's Commissioner of Agriculture. He knew nothing of agriculture in any practical sense, nor, for that matter, any other art or science, except possibly the military. As I knew him, he was a fussy old man with extravagant notions as to his own importance. The other members of the Commission were Major Warfield, a Civil Engineer and a Kentuckian, Dr. Eldridge, a Washington physician, and Dr. Thomas Antisel, formerly chemist of the Department of Agriculture." To these Mr. Shelton presently adds: "certain subordinates, a gardener, a machinist, a tanner and an agriculturist. This last position was offered the undersigned and by him joyfully accepted."

He proceeds: "That was, on paper, a queer aggregation, especially when it is considered that the Commission had been called into existence to aid the Japanese Government in the work of colonizing, along American lines, the island of Yezo, upon which even then the Russian bear had hungry eyes. I suspect that personal favoritism and the equitable division of spoils were re-

sponsible for bringing together this ill-assorted company. Violent quarrels, wholly personal, chiefly between General Capron and his colleagues, broke out almost before they set foot in Japan. From conversations had with most of the parties to this ignoble strife I gathered that supposed discrepancies in the salaries arranged for was the principal bone of contention. These quarrels quickly brought the Commission to the verge of dissolution.

"General Capron, I believe, stayed out the full term of three years called for in his engagement. Perhaps he made valuable reports to the Kai-taku-shi (*The Opening of the Land*), the Department to which he was attached, but, if so, I never heard of them.

"Major Warfield, as was reported in Tokyo, assaulted a Japanese official in a brawl and was cashiered and sent home. Dr. Eldredge resumed the practice of his profession in Yokohama. Dr. Antisel took up work in the Government laboratories and doubtless proved a useful public servant during the three years of his official connection with the Government.

"Much as was said in America of the Commission at the time of its appointment, it seems quickly to have dropped out of public view. I have never been able to locate a published statement of the work and fate of the Commission, although I have sought it diligently. Professor Griffis, in his work, '*The Mikado's Empire*,' hardly mentions the American Commission, although the author was a Professor in the University of Yedo during the life of the Commission and was, as I know, thoroughly familiar with its work."

I may here again venture an interpolation. Mr. Shelton is wrong in suggesting that no report was furnished to the Japanese Government, since I find that the "*Reports of General Capron and his Foreign Associates*" were as a matter of fact published in Tokyo in 1875. Our author has possibly again overlooked the note of Dr. Griffis to his "*Mikado's Empire*," in which he says: "A number of American gentlemen of experience have been engaged as theoretical and practical farmers and stock-breeders. In Tokyo model and experimental farms, gardens of trial and acclimation, cattle-runs and plantations, and training schools and colleges have been established, in which the upper class of landholders have taken much interest; nearly two hundred acres of many varieties of grass are being cultivated and tested; a large number of foreign works on stock-raising and agriculture have

been translated into Japanese; 2,000 cattle and 10,000 sheep have been introduced from the United States and Australia. . . In the Kai-taku-shi, farms of 215 acres in Tokyo, arranged under General Capron's superintendence, the excellent breeds of horses, sheep, cattle and pigs, in spite of all drawbacks, first felt from inexperienced keepers and disease, are thriving and multiplying. Over 100,000 young apple, pear and other fruit trees, from American grafts, are set out and yielding well. Improved implements are also made on the farm-smithy, from American models, by Japanese skilled hands." On this matter reference may also be made to the 'Japan Mail' of November 23 and December 5, 1874, so that perhaps after all the American Commission was not quite so futile an enterprise as it appeared at the moment and on the surface.

It is not, however, with the Commission, success or failure as it may have been, that this paper is immediately concerned. Mr. Shelton and his fellow-workers probably labored with greater result than they themselves believed, but we are mainly interested in his first impressions of the Japan of nearly sixty years ago.

I may be pardoned a word or two on the Japan of 1871, the more because I have before me a volume of "*The Far East*" for 1871 and 1872 (given me by Mrs. Shelton) from which I am tempted to cull an illustration or two. It was only in August 1871 that the Feudal System (surviving the abdication of the last Tokugawa Shogun by nearly four years) was abolished. It was two years later that the edicts against Christianity were rescinded. Western standards of jurisprudence, such as ultimately led to the dropping of extraterritoriality clauses from treaties with foreign nations, had not yet been adopted. In the issue of "*The Far East*" for July 1871 I find this item: "A ghastly spectacle was recently exhibited at the new Yedo execution ground. Nailed to a cross, with his head hanging downward, was the body of a Japanese, turning black from decomposition. The culprit, whose body was thus exposed, was convicted not long ago of some political offence, the punishment for which was crucifixion. The body was exhibited for three days." In another passage I read of a dozen women, their hands tied behind their backs, marched under a strong guard to the prison where they are to suffer confinement "for the guilt of their sons, husbands and fathers," who themselves had been executed.

New ideas and new things were filtering in by way of the

treaty ports, but the old was giving way less rapidly than we usually have supposed and there were frequent signs of resentment at the changes which the treaties with foreign nations had brought about. On the whole it was a somewhat uncomfortable and even dangerous time for a foreigner to visit Japan, but in spite of this, or perhaps even because of this, we shall most of us agree that Mr. Shelton could have had his first sight of the Island Empire under no more exciting and interesting circumstances. And now let me call upon Mr. Shelton himself, from his own notes, to take up the tale:

"I was instructed" he says, "to assist in the selection and purchase of farm machinery, horses, cattle; sheep and swine of different breeds suitable for the purpose of an agricultural school, to be located on the northern island of Hokkaido, or Yezo, and to deliver the same in Yokohama. Our selections, amounting to five car-loads, were handed over to the Japanese Government, without accident of any kind, after a leisurely journey occupying more than two months. After resting the stock two weeks in Yokohama, we were ordered to proceed to a Government Yashiki known as Ni-banchi (No. 2), located in the confines of Yedo, which had been renamed Tokyo a little while before our arrival. I had greatly counted on this trip of twenty-eight miles, hoping and expecting that it would reveal to me something of the country life of Japan. Great therefore was my disappointment when I found that the entire distance traversed by our party was in fact and name a street with scarcely a break in the closely packed houses occupying either side. Occasionally our route took us over marshy ground which the industry of patient farmers had converted into productive paddy fields. Nevertheless, by leaving the main highway and making little detours, I obtained many delightful views of the natural scenery of this part of Japan. At this season of the year, May, the foliage of Japanese trees surpasses in variety and form and coloring anything of the kind I have ever seen elsewhere. Here we have the light and fleecy bamboo abounding everywhere, the truly magnificent tree-camellia, often occupying a space in ground forty or more feet in diameter, the dark pines with shrubs often in full bloom and in infinite variety.

"Our destination was reached after a very pleasant journey covering three entire days. During this journey I was enabled for the first time to see something of the Japanese people in everyday

life. They crowded upon us in tens of thousands, coming from villages and farms miles distant to see the great foreign procession. I had often witnessed circus parades in Western villages, but was hardly prepared to figure in a show of such magnitude as this proved to be, and as one of the chief attractions. Our party was preceded by a small company of mounted yakunins, who gently made way through the crowd for ourselves and the animals in our charge. But during all this protracted journey I never heard a harsh word, much less an insulting one, although our guards were often obliged to use some force in order to keep clear the right of way.

"In due course, we reached Ni-banchi, which was to be my home during the following summer and autumn. I found here a compound embracing about fifty acres of upland and enclosed by a closely woven bamboo fence two feet in height. Within were extensive barracks for troops, stables and a number of comfortable houses. To the principal one of these, said to have been built five hundred years before, my assistant and my self were assigned. At one time the place had evidently been in a high state of cultivation, but, in recent years, it had been allowed to lapse, becoming, as I found it, a dense bamboo scrub. I found, however, that the ancient barracks, though badly decayed, with repairs here and there made excellent stabling for the American stock.

"The Japanese possessed hardy, but otherwise very inferior races of horses, cattle and swine. They made considerable use of them, the horses for labor and the saddle, the cattle for labor and, to some extent, for food. We found both beef and pork easily obtainable in the shops at Tokyo. We now learned that one of the objects of the Government in importing our improved stock was the improvement of the native breeds by crossing. To this end a great herd of native cows had been assembled at Ni-banchi. These were freely bred to our bulls, with what result I do not know."

After an explanation as to how the large Yashiki, of which Ni-banchi was a specimen, came to be within the boundaries of Yedo, through the desire of the Tokugawa Shoguns to have some of the leading daimyo close at hand as hostages, Mr. Shelton gives us some interesting particulars as to the samurai with whom he himself came into contact. He says:

"Shortly after my arrival at Ni-banchi I discovered that whenever I strayed beyond the boundaries of the Yashiki I was

invariably followed by a certain Japanese. If I took a jin-riki-sha, he took another; were I walking, he travelled on foot. Always during the eight months of my stay in Tokyo this man was not many feet distant from me. He was a well-set-up, soldierly fellow of about fifty, deeply pitted by small-pox, and he always carried a huge, two-handed sword. On enquiry, I learned that this man was a yakunin, or guard, and that he was personally responsible to the Government for my safety. Most Europeans in the Government employ seemed to have an intense dislike for the yakunins, a dislike which I was never able to share. I found my man very helpful, although he knew not one word of English. Besides guiding me here and there and assisting me in my purchases, he prevented jostling in crowds and was helpful in many ways.

"My duties at Ni-banchi were no more than nominal. Some twenty lads, sons of gentlemen I understood, were billeted on the place and to these I gave practical instruction in the care of stock, in tillage operations, and in the growth of some of the common American vegetables and grains. Soon after my arrival I despatched a memo to the Department suggesting that these young men meet me once daily for an hour devoted to oral instruction. This note, I understood, created quite a flurry among the officials of the Department. After about a fortnight the reply came, in the shape of a formidable document, in which it was recited that the Government heard with satisfaction and sympathy of my proposal to meet the students daily in the class-room and that they were heartily in accord with the idea in principle. However, they thought, with all deference to the honorable teacher, that a daily lecture would impose too great a labor upon both teacher and pupils and therefore they would beg to suggest that the meeting be held once a week instead of daily as proposed. . . The weekly meetings were regularly held from that time forth. The class gathered about a long table provided with European chairs, the teacher with an interpreter ('interrupter') on either side occupying one end. There was much tobacco smoke, for all used the harmless Japanese weed, much tapping of pipes on the table to rid them of ashes, and frequent rather wordy, but always polite, disputes between the interpreters as to the Japanese meaning of this or that word of the lecture, so that there was always danger that the agricultural significance of what I had to offer would be lost in the etymological. I trust that good was done, but am not over sanguine.

"It soon became apparent that Ni-banchi was regarded as one of the 'sights' of Tokyo by both Europeans and natives. On Sundays especially the number of visitors was often large, the University of Tokyo furnishing a considerable contingent both of teachers and students. The latter came usually in small groups having a leader, who invariably presented himself with this speech, probably all the English in his possession: 'We are students of the Dai-gaku-nan-ko. Today it is Sunday, therefore we have come to these gardens.' Among the teachers our countryman, Professor Griffis, paid us one or more visits. A German Professor, whose name has escaped me, a pleasant middle-aged man, was a rather frequent caller and was good enough to invite me to his home in Tokyo.

"Some two months after my arrival at Ni-banchi I was notified that Kuroda, the head of the Department to which I was attached, would shortly honor me with a visit. I had heard much, from Europeans and Americans, that was altogether favorable to Governor Kuroda. He was descended from a long line of Japanese clan leaders and was reported to be thoroughly imbued with modern ideas of government and general progress. He afterwards came, if I mistake not, to the Premiership of the Empire. In view of Kuroda's position and reputation I was therefore not a little surprised to encounter him at my door one day simply and unattended. He was of medium height, pock-marked, and his complexion was much lighter than that of the average Japanese. He wore no hat and his hair was cut in European fashion. At his side hung an immense two-handed sword, the handle of which I noticed was thickly set with gems. The American stock, the growing crops, and other improvements were passed in a silent review. Beyond an occasional grunt, apparently of satisfaction, from the Governor, it was 'a quaker meeting' throughout. I had more than one evidence of the Governor's goodwill while in Japan, and, on my return home, he sent me several valuable presents which I did not feel at liberty to decline."

I may here break away from Mr. Shelton's notes to the extent of remarking that the famous Satsuma clansman, Kiyotaka Kuroda, was at this time President of the Board of Colonization and Commerce. In this capacity he had, of course, much to do with the Government's plan for the development of Hokkaido, but several years after he got into serious trouble when it transpired that the property which had cost the Government 14,000,000 yen was

to be sold for 300,000 yen to a corporation with which Kuroda was intimately connected. He weathered the storm, however, and held the post of Minister of Agriculture and Commerce in Ito's pre-Constitutional Ministry of September 1887. In April 1888 he succeeded Ito as Minister President and remained in power till October 1889. He was temporarily Prime-Minister in August 1896, but held no further office from that time.

In addition to Kuroda Mr. Shelton mentions several others, as, for instance, when he writes: "Admiral Enomoto and Captain Ito, two famous naval heroes of the war of 1867, were among our visitors. I remember particularly Captain Ito, his frank, open countenance and his vivacious and even jolly manner, qualities quite unusual among official Japanese."

I have come almost to the limits of my space, but I would like to include one further extract, bearing as it does upon the introduction of railways into Japan and giving an early impression of the great Emperor of the reconstruction period. Meiji Tenno:

"My time in the Mikado's Empire was not altogether one of slippered ease, as it well might have been, for I never received a single intimation from the authorities that any duties or obligations were attached to the pay-roll which I regularly signed. Doubtless the chaotic condition of the Commission under which I was nominally acting had much to do with this. Between teaching the care of the American stock and visiting the numerous places of interest about Tokyo, the eight months of my stay in Japan passed swiftly and not unpleasantly. At that time the position of foreigners in Japan was somewhat precarious. The scope of their business activities was strictly limited to the three or four treaty ports, Tokyo, Yokohama, Kobe and Nagasaki. Residence and even travel were strictly forbidden except within treaty limits. Few foreigners questioned the wisdom of these restrictions upon their freedom, considering the confused state of Japanese society at the time. It should be remembered that, at the time of my visit, there was no completed railway in Japan nor line of steamships or merchant vessels operated by Japanese, nor factory for the manufacture of wares other than purely Japanese, if we except the Government Mint at Osaka and the naval arsenal at Yokusoka. I had the honor in September 1872 of attending the very ceremonial opening by His Majesty in person of the eighteen mile line of railway, the first of its kind in Japan, connecting

Yokohama and Tokyo. On the same day I took passage by train to Yokohama on what was said to have been the first regular through train run in Japan. On this occasion, and at other times, I had an opportunity to see the Emperor at short range. A place was assigned me, with a few other Europeans and Americans, about fifty feet from His Majesty, who sat, or shall I say squatted, upon the matted platform provided. The ceremonies seemed to consist chiefly in the presentation of the customary loyal address and petitions, interspersed with much music by the Emperor's private band. Much of the details of the various ceremonies have long since passed out of my mind, but my recollections of the musical performance are as keen as though I had heard it yesterday. I am in the habit of applying a test of musical values which I heartily commend to you: if the music is quite incomprehensible, and withal rather unpleasant, I set it down as something good and applaud heartily, especially at its conclusion. The Mikado's band measured well up judged by this standard. . . In the person of His Majesty I saw a young man of twenty-four or thereabouts. His countenance was perfectly impassive; during the hour or so in which he was under observation he sat rigid, looking neither to the right nor to the left. He seemed almost inanimate; his complexion was pale and sallow and he had the blank look so frequently seen on the countenance of orientals. After the ceremonies had been concluded, he moved unaided to the carriage in waiting, which I was proud to observe was drawn by the pair of bay geldings which, a few months before, I had purchased at Coldwater, Michigan, afterwards delivering them, with others, at Tokyo."

On this very concrete illustration of the new contacts between Japan and the United States I may well stop, especially as the contact is mediated by the personality of the friend it has been my pleasure thus to introduce. To touch ever so slightly a great historic transition with the influence of one who has lived known and honored among us is to keep history, at least to this extent, from becoming a mere assemblage of dead and unrelated incidents in a dead and vanished world.

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