

**Our New Allies in the Land of the Rising Sun.**

(By Florence Balgarnie.)  
No. 3.

"See Nikko and die," or, as a popular Japanese proverb puts it, "Do not use the word magnificent until you have seen Nikko." Nikko means "sunny splendour," although rainy weather is its prevailing characteristic, but mud and drizzle are forgotten amidst the beauty of its surroundings. It lies two thousand feet above the sea, embosomed in hills, clad with evergreen trees to their summit. At the upper end of the village there comes a sudden dip into a ravine, through which the Daiza-gawa foams and dashes. Formerly this stream was spanned by the sacred Red Bridge, but this, together with the one used by ordinary mortals, was washed away in the tremendous floods of last year. Crossing by a temporary bridge, one begins the ascent through a paved grove of cryptomerias, and passing by a road which runs between a group of minor temple buildings to the right, and the summer residence of the young Imperial Princesses, and a public park, to the left, one reaches the granite torii, a form of gateway which is the sure index of approach to a Shinto temple. And now by a series of broad stone steps one rises from terrace to terrace, while each moment one is charmed by objects of ever-increasing beauty and splendour. The eye is simply dazzled by this Acropolis of Japan. Nikko has been a sacred place to Shintoists from the earliest days, and to Buddhists ever since the eighth century, when a wise old Buddhist missionary from China visited it, and instead of declaring the Wind God an impostor, quietly annexed him as a "manifestation of Buddha." Hence we find here, as throughout Japan, a "union of the churches," and the usual thing is to practise the rites of one religion during life, and be buried with the rites of the other. But the group of magnificent buildings to be seen at the present day all centre round the tomb of the first great Shogun (the Emperor's rival), Iyeyasu, who extirpated Christianity from Japan, and was buried by his son on the top of the hill above Nikko in the year 1617. The crest of this family is a trefoil, and it is to be seen on almost every beautiful building in Tokio as in Nikko. The Tokugawa seem to have been in art as well as in statecraft the Medici of Japan. Pagodas and holy water cistern, bronze and stone lanterns, temples and shrine for the sacred dance, all cluster several hundred feet below the ultimate goal, the tomb of the founder of the family, which stands high in the mountains, amidst the giant cryptomerias. All that is best in Japanese and Chinese art, form, and colour have been focussed in these buildings, and no poor words of mine can convey a comprehensive idea of the marvellous beauty and great intricacy of workmanship of groups tall carved in wood, of trees, birds, beasts, fishes, flowers, fruit, as well as of children at play, and Chinese and Korean scenes. The lower panels of the outer cloister wall are carved entirely with storks, ducks, geese, and other

waterfowl, in flight, standing on the banks of streams, and lakes, or swimming and diving in the water. The harmony of rich colour, added to the exquisite beauty of form, one must see to comprehend. The only thing in the Western world I can in the least degree compare to it is, strangely enough, to be seen in Wales. Let any New Zealander bent on a Home trip visit the recently renovated Norman Castle of the late Marquis of Bute and he will see coloured carvings on walls and ceilings not unworthy of Nikko. On one white lacquered pillar, the chief gateway, the pattern is upside-down, lest the perfection of the structure should excite the envy of the gods!! It is called "the evil averting pillar."

But glorious although these wonderful structures are, gleaming in purple and gold, against the over-arching green, it is the human beings wandering to and fro who chiefly interest me. We tourists seem quite out of place as we toss our pence to the priestesses of the sacred dance, or go through a monk service, as I observed some English people doing. So low is the church fallen that the priests perform for mere heretics for the sum of tenpence. The congregation was chucking with ill-concealed laughter, and it pained me as I recalled the scene of a few moments before. A lady leading a little girl by the hand, and followed by a train of attendants, had arrived at the principal temple. On seeing her the green-robed priests sprang with great alacrity to their feet, and while some took up positions by the sacred drum, others threw open the door of the Holy of Holies, closed to all but to members of the Imperial family. The lady and the child entered, and with great reverence went through a ceremony not unlike our Communion service, and on bended knee received cakes and cups of sake. Then the priests administered the same sacrament to the attendants, who, with faces touching the floor, were waiting in the outer temple. I noticed one of the women reverently folding up the little earthenware cup in a handkerchief to take home with her.

The majority of the visitors are, however, apparently poor people, who are doing the round of the sacred mountains in pilgrimage, much as I have seen Roman, Greek, and Armenian Christians do in their sacred places. But the glory of the priesthood has departed, and nowadays the sight-seeer brings the largest revenues into the temple coffers. Materialism is professed by those Japanese who wish to be considered up-to-date and in touch, as they fancy, with European culture. Darwin and Haeckel, and principally Nietzsche, are the writers who chiefly influence educated men, although, as I hope to show later, missionary effort is making slow but sure headway amongst the young. Just below the temple enclosure, along the banks of the river, flanked by the sacred mountain of Naigai-san, a long line of many hundred Buddhas stood for centuries in attitudes of severe contemplation. The popular story was that no one could count them. But now the river bank has crumbled away before the force of the persistent stream, and instead of by hundreds the images may now be counted by tens. Let us hope that in the long run this scene will be

typical of the influence of Christian upon Buddhist religion.

In Nikko the tourist hails from many lands, and in my little Japanese European hotel within a week we have had American, Chinese, German, French and English. On pleasure bent, they invariably call for the chief pleasure-makers—the Geisha singing and dancing girls. There are thirty thousand of these girls in the capital, and they are to be met with in every hotel and tea-house in Japan.

I have been fortunate enough not to see them in tourist fashion, but in real Japanese style on an open-air stage, set up in the midst of the quaintest garden attached to the principal Japanese inn of the place. Of course, all the moveable walls of the inn were drawn back, and, much as in the Chaucerian days in the old land, so the guests viewed the performances. In the garden itself the villagers were standing in a dense crowd. Arriving late, I was taken, by special favour, round by the open-air green room to a point of vantage, where I could see both before and behind the scenes. It was very curious to watch the sphinx-like faces of the young girls relax when the curtain was down. Those who only saw them before the scenes lost half the fun. The decorum of the dance, its dissimilarity to the boisterous ballet of the West, the long flowing robes, a pantomime which has been already too often described. I saw a peony, a cherry, a fan, and a scarf dance; but within twenty minutes

the whole thing grew monotonous, and I shall never forget the horror of the music as the playing on the samisen, inter-perced with shrieks and unearthly noises is called. Miss "Chrysanthemum" Miss "Singing Leaf," Miss "First Happy," Miss "Singing Pine Tree," and the rest of the little ladies possess a certain quaint fascination, but decorous in every way as the performance was, I think I understand the young German who, in my hearing, in reply to the enquiry of the waitress as to how he liked the Geisha, exclaimed, with Teutonic force, "I hate them." Much the same feeling possessed me when the other night we travellers were kept awake by the shrill voice of a Geisha who had been sent for by a Chinese tourist to amuse him by turning night into day. Missionaries have often been accused of narrowness because they spoke with disfavour of the Geisha girl, but let English-speaking tourists stay a few nights at a real Japanese inn, where walls have eyes, or, more strictly, where paper screens take the place of walls, and they will be compelled to admit that these young ladies are not under the careful chaperonage travellers are usually made to believe.

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