

A Queer Guide - Book.

BY LEONARD LARKIN.



SIXTY miles from Tokio, the Japanese capital, lies the village and district of Hakoné, a much-favoured holiday resort, with its mountains, its mineral springs, its great lake, and its magnificent scenery. But though the scenery is magnificent, the mountains magnificent, the lake, the springs, and the rest all equally magnificent, it may be doubted if Hakoné has ever produced anything else quite so magnificent as a certain little "Guide" to the district, which was published a year or two ago. The little manual is in English, in quite correct, grammatical English, almost always, but in such English as you shall see, and shall read without a grin if you can. Come then, let us to Hakoné, under guidance of the accomplished Japanese gentleman who here makes his bow as a man of English letters.

We must climb, it seems, to get to Hakoné. Many difficulties must be endured by travellers, we are told, but then—"the result of toleration is pleasure." Just so. The phrase reads at first like a profound doctrine, needing much thinking out, but it only means that the fun is worth the trouble. The highest of the Hakoné mountains is Komaga-daké, once a flaming volcano; "but lately," says the guide, "its activity became quite absent." And the worst of it is that nobody seems to know where it has gone. But to come to the centre of the beauties of Hakoné, the village itself. "Although the village has not so much population," says Mr. Tsuchiya, the writer, "the degree of livelihood of the inhabitants is comparatively excellent"; and as you read it you are

inwardly delighted to find the population so excellently lively. But that is probably because of the air. "Draught of pure air," the report goes on, "suspends no poisonous mixture, and always cleanses the defilement of our spirit. During the winter days the coldness robs up all pleasures from our hands, but at the summer months they are set free." And here we perceive that gradual gliding into poetic enthusiasm that is to furnish us with the



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purest delights of our little book; and though one may be afflicted with some doubt as to whether it is our hands that are set free in the summer months, or merely the pleasures that have been robbed up from them, or whether it is our hands that have set free the defilement of our coldness because the spirit has been robbed up from all this poisonous mixture—but there, let us pass on to consider the scenery.

"Whenever we visit this place"—I am quoting again—"the first pleasure to be longed is the view of Fuji Mountain, and its summit is covered with permanent undissolving snow, and its regular configuration hanging down the sky like an opened white fan, may be looked long at equal shape from several regions surrounding it. Everyone who saw

it ever has nothing but applause. It casts the shadow in a contrary direction on still glassy face of lake. . . . Buildings of Imperial Solitary Palace, scenery of Gongen, all are spontaneous pictures. Wind proper in quantity, suits to our boat to slip by sail, and moonlight shining on the sky shivers quartzly lustre over ripples of the lake. The cuckoo singing near by our hotel, plays on a harp, and the gulls flying about to and fro seek their food in the waves. All these panorama may be gathered only in this place."

There — isn't it lovely? Delighted as I was with Hakoné when I saw it myself, I confess I didn't gather all these panorama. I fear I missed my opportunities. It never struck me to suspect the moonlight of shivering quartzly lustre—or, indeed, of shivering at all—and not a soul informed me of the accomplished cuckoo that plays on a harp. But I shall ever bitterly regret that I never caught that cuckoo.

A little later in the book we are told of various excursions in the district. Travelling towards Hata we come to Oidaira, the name meaning "Old Man's Plain." And here we get a moral story. "There is a narrative now remained about the name Oidaira which I will tell you a little. At an ancient period, a youth called Urashima Taro ever passed here, and rested himself from his labour. Within his baggages he had a box which he was left from his wife with whom he had lived happily, and which he was strictly decreed never to open whatever be the case and that if it be opposed he will become old. But he forgot of his wife's decreative words. He opened the

box. The lid was cast into front mountain and the box into hind mountain. Suddenly his face wrinkled, his beard became white, his loins bent as shrimp, and all blessings disappeared at once. On that account, mountain to which he cast the box was called Bunko-yama which Japanese means 'Mountain of box' and that of lid was called Futago-yama of which pronunciation is in like sound with 'lid' in Japanese, and this flat place was named Oidaira as I have just spoken." A sad story, of which the chief moral is, no doubt, that you must not forget of your wife's decreative words, especially in the matter of baggages; and that, if you do, you must not be surprised if all blessings disappear at once, including the unshrimplike rectitude of your loins.

But if we leave Hakoné in the opposite direction to that leading to Oidaira we shall be on the road to Settai. "The more we go forward the lower the ground becomes." As to Settai, "in former ages the horses

passing through this place received bestowment of the bean" (clearly a case of "giving 'em beans"); "but at the present time the alms of tea are given to everyone who travels on this mountain instead of giving compassion to horses." So that it would seem that if you chose to travel on this mountain in preference to giving compassion (or beans) to horses, you may legally claim "alms of tea." Though why travelling on the mountains should be incompatible with giving compassion (or even beans) to horses is not made quite clear. "However, Mishima" (a place farther on the



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THE LAKE.

route) "is a small town busy of one's own occupation, and there may be the perfect convenience of all wants desired for."

This latter route was westward; but if we travel south of Hakoné, at about seven miles out we shall come to a high place where "unbounded prospects in every direction of land and sea may be looked down distinctly." On the whole the beautiful views about the neighbourhood are summed up thus: "It was already described that all the mountain sceneries in Hakoné are very agreeable to us, but especially there may be eight sceneries picked out. 1. The snow-crowned view of Koma-ga-daké. 2. The evening twilight of Togashima. 3. The flowing lanterns on the waves of Ashi Lake." (What is a flowing lantern, and how does it get on among the waves?) "4. The wild geese flying down near Sanada-yama. 5. The moonlight shining upon Kurakaké-yama. 6. The wild ducks swimming about Kasumiga-ura in light-hearted manner." (Perhaps they had been reading Mr. Tsuchiya's guide-book.) "7. The blossoms of azalea or tsutsuji flowering upon Byobu-yama. 8. The ship putting fire-woods into when the weather snows." Which last combined feat of nautical gymnastics and meteorological display ought to bring visitors from everywhere, stop the moonlight shivering, and even induce the

cuckoo to drop the harp on which he plays near our hotel.

Hakoné is well provided with religious institutions. In addition to the Shinto temple where, a few years ago, two Royal princesses came "on their amusing excursion," there are four Buddhist temples, while "for the Christian religion, there is a teaching hall to its devout." In the forest near the lake there is another Shinto temple, which has been instituted two thousand years. But, sad to relate, "seven hundred years ago the temples, halls, and other chambers were flamed up totally. After a few years all buildings are rebuilt as previous. Two hundred years had elapsed without an accident, and then the battle of Odawara happened, and the solemn places were placed into fire." But they were built once more, and still stand, and they contain many valuable and rare relics. "If you ask courteously to their keeper, you shall have an honour to look at them."

Speaking of the lake, our guide tells us (or asks us) this: "The old withered cedar-trees about 2ft. or 3ft. in diameter sink vertically or transversely on the bottom of the lake. Why are they immersing to the lake? A slight research will easily give you a reason."

As to the history of Hakoné, we learn most as to what happened at the revolution.

"Frequently the violent wars were battled here in ancient times. I will only describe the latest battle struggled at Hakoné. At May of the first year of Meiji about thirty years ago from the present, two feudal and military chiefs engaged in battle on Hakoné mountain. One of them was Okubo Kagano-Kami the lord of Odawara-han and other

(Poor chap! I have almost missed my own over that sentence.) "He was defeated very badly, and retired to Yumoto. Secondly, he ran back to Hakoné, defeated by enemy. By violent pursuit of Imperial Army he was finally obliged to run to Ajiro about four miles south from Atami, and thence to escape to his own previous dominion.



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was Shonosuké Hayashi, lord of Bōshu; and the former belonged to Imperial Army and the latter was in Shogun's side. One time, Hayashi staid at Numadzu and held a good many soldiers. Leading them, he passed Mishima and came to Hakoné."

Here, it seems, he wished to pass a certain barrier-gate, but Okubo wouldn't hear of it. "He durst to pass through it by military power"; and at once, it would seem, all was gas and gaiters, so to speak. "Then the battle was instigated, and instantly guns were fired." The civil population took to their heels and hid among the hills. The guardians of the gate were outnumbered and retreated to the castle of Odawara, followed by Hayashi. "Taking advantage of victory, he advanced his army to destroy them." But, alas! the destruction failed to come off. "He missed unexpectedly his cogitation."

Thenceforth the construction of perfect Imperial government by the revolution of Meiji placed the nation out of impetuous struggles of Feudalism. And this ruin was remained to endless fancy." Well, well, perhaps it was.

In taking an affectionate leave of Mr. Tsuchiya and his guide-book, let us not seem too censorious. It is a terribly difficult thing for a Japanese to learn to write even moderately good English, and Mr. Tsūchiya (who is properly modest in his preface) has made his meaning very clear through most of his little book, though, as we have seen, there are a few places here and there where he has missed unexpectedly his cogitation. And probably there are not a dozen Englishmen in the world who could have written the thing in Japanese half as well as Mr. Tsuchiya has written it in English.