

THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN.

BY W. C. WARD.

OUR interest in Japan and its picturesque inhabitants is being greatly stirred by Sir Edwin Arnold's delightful letters, which appear from time to time in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*. Is the Land of the Rising Sun really the paradise which he depicts? Is life there indeed so placid, so full of charm? The stories which we have so often heard, and deplored, of the rapid Europeanization of Japanese ideas and manners, dwindle almost into insignificance when contrasted with these fascinating accounts of daily life in Tokio—a life so simple, so graceful, so totally free from the turmoil and anxiety inseparable from our Western civilization. And yet, is not the accomplished author of the "Light of Asia" hightening his pictures of life in Japan too uniformly with the gay colors of an optimistic imagination? Is he looking too exclusively on the bright side of things, and minimizing, or even studiously avoiding, their sadder aspects? But his own words contradict the assumption. "I feel how utterly indescribable it all is," he writes, "even while trying to describe this unique, unparalleled, unspoiled, astonishing, fascinating, sweet-tempered Japan. After two months spent in their midst, I have to repeat what I ventured to say after two weeks, that nowhere, for the lover of good manners, is there a country so reposeful, so refreshing, so full of antique grace and soft fair courtesies, as this 'Land of the Rising Sun.'"

No! the picture is too pleasing to disbelieve. Japan is certainly, of all countries, that in which life is most surely synonymous with enjoyment—a land of gentle gaiety and light-heartedness, a land of flowers and blossom, of holiday-making and simple pleasures of kites and battledores and "honorable tea." The one serious disturbance to the peace of this favored people appears to be the earthquake, and that one gets used to. Perhaps without it the placid flow of existence would become monotonous.

At this propitious season, when we are hearing and thinking so much of Japan, the Fine Art Society has opened, in its gallery in New Bond Street, an exhibition of pictures of Japanese scenery, by Mr. Alfred East, the well known landscape painter, and member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-Colors. Mr. East resided in Japan from March to September last year, and visited several of the most interesting districts. His impressions of the country and its inhabitants are recorded in more than a hundred paintings and water-color drawings, which are now exhib-

ited to the public. The oil-paintings, with two or three exceptions, I like less than the drawings, they are generally rather opaque and "painty"; but the water-colors, of which the bulk of the exhibition consists, are for the most part, very successful; skillful, if somewhat slight, in execution, and distinguished by fine feeling for color and tone.

Two characteristic features of Japan, and of Japanese art are frequently recurrent in Mr. East's pictures. These are the blossom—plum, cherry and almond—for which the country is famous, and which is often commemorated in the fanciful names of the girls, and the great volcano, Fuji-San, which lifts its snow-clad summit more than twelve thousand feet above the level of the sea. The blossom, which is one of the great sights of Japan, has been treated by Mr. East with much skill, and in a manner which, tho undoubtedly naturalistic, yet suggests in some degree the influence of the essentially decorative art of Japan. On the whole, however, such influence is less apparent than might have been expected in Mr. East's work. From many of his performances it is altogether absent; in others, and, I think, usually in the best of them, it is present in a degree slight indeed, but sufficient to give them a certain distinction and an indubitable charm. His figures are those of a landscape draughtsman; picturesquely grouped, and, singly, suggestive of grace and animation, but without individual character. Perhaps the most satisfactory figure in any of the pictures is that of "Miss Plum Blossom," a pretty, round-faced maiden standing in an orchard of blossoming plum trees. Why should not some first-rate figure draughtsman follow in Mr. East's footsteps, go to Japan, and do for its people what he has done for its scenery? Listen again to the enthusiastic Sir Edwin Arnold:

"Were I a painter or a sculptor, I could at this moment reproduce from the memory of the eye the figure of a Japanese lady, ardently engaged with her battledore, her soft eyes lighted with the joy of exercise and rivalry; her glossy black hair, white teeth, smooth, ivory face and neck, demure silken kimono, dazzling obi, graceful skirts, and bare, faultless feet, making an ensemble quite as classical, quite as graceful, quite as worthy of the highest effort of art to perpetuate, as the Princess Nausicaa playing at ball in the Odyssey, or any antique charm of the Discobolus or the Dancing Faun. Our travelling artists, thus far, have unhappily lost themselves in the picturesqueness of Japan; they have yet to do justice to her grace, her subtle, Asiatic delicacy, her high instinctive culture. They have to try to reproduce you, O Tatsu San! with black hair loose, and blue hood flowing, with lighted eyes and laughing mouth, and small feet winning the prize at the Hane match."

The great mountain, Fuji-San, is seen again and again in Mr. East's pictures, under many varying aspects. Here its snow-peak rises, scarce distinguishable against the pale sky. Here it brightens to a rosy flush in the first beams of the rising sun. Here, again, we get a clearer and fuller view of the vast mountain, its white summit soaring high above a belt of rich verdure; and there the impressive grandeur of its pyramidal form is enhanced, while half obscured, by the floating mists of dawn.

But Mr. East has not neglected to portray such scenes as speak to us of the daily life of the people. That most renowned of Japanese institutions, the tea-house, is illustrated in many of his drawings. Some of these tea-houses peep out, quaint and picturesque, from the midst of gardens, bright with blossom; in one very pleasing little drawing of the tea-house at Chiu-zen ji, the artist has introduced very happily the figures of the attendants, graceful Japanese girls, preparing "rice-dumplings," or bearing on a tray the tiny blue cups of "honorable tea." The rice-fields have afforded another subject for his pencil. One of the illustrations of these is particularly charming. It shows the fields still inundated, on a bright spring day, and in the foreground is introduced a flight of white egrets, in a manner not exactly imitative but pleasantly reminiscent of Japanese art. From the lonely rice-fields we return to "the busy haunts of men," and find in a "Street of Yokohama" a scene of characteristically Japanese gayety. Flags of all colors are displayed on the roofs and before the doorways of the houses, for it is the fifth of May, and the "Feast of Banners" is to be celebrated. In the far distance, as if in contrast with this holiday scene, rises the solemn peak of Fuji-San.

Mr. East gives us many interesting drawings of the Buddhist shrines and temples, some of which, painted a bright vermillion, gleam fiery red, amid the groves of dark pine trees. Several of these temples are of considerable antiquity. The Gi-on temple, at Kiyoto, "the Shrine of Faithfulness and Mercy," which forms the subject of three drawings, is said to have been founded in the year 656. The temple of Mi-i-Dera, near Otsu, by the romantic Lake of Biwa, was founded 675. One of the drawings represents the great Temple of Nikko; another the great staircase leading to the Temple of Kiyomidzu at Kiyoto, with its throng of worshipers ascending and descending. Very interesting also are the drawings of the small Shin-tô shrines, frequent in the country. Of the latter one of the most curious shows a "fox-shrine," erected in honor of Inari San, the rice God, who is universally worshiped in Japan. The shrine is decorated with rudely carved figures of the fox, the special servant and attendant of Inari San. The drawing of the "Lotus Pond near the Temple of Hachiman at Kamakura," is interesting, from its accurate delineation of the plant sacred to Buddha, of which the broad, green leaves and white and pink blossoms fill, with beautiful luxuriance, the little pond.

On the whole, Mr. East may be cordially congratulated on the success with which he has rendered the scenery of this singularly interesting country, its lakes and mountains, its towns and villages, its temples and tea-gardens. The exhibition of his works both satisfies and arouses our curiosity; we are thankful for what he has given us, and we can pay him no better compliment than in declaring that what he has accomplished makes us the more eager for further accomplishments in the same field; makes us wish more particularly, as we already said, that an artist may be found ready to portray for us the people of Japan with the same skill, taste and discrimination, which Mr. East has bestowed upon her landscape.

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