

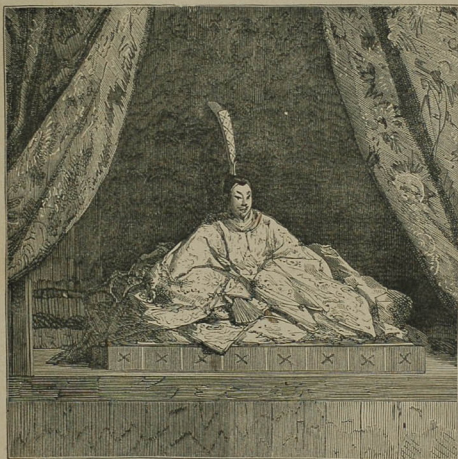
XI.

THE THRONE AND THE NOBLE FAMILIES.

FROM the beginning of the Japanese empire, until the century after the introduction of Buddhism, the mikados were the real rulers of their people, having no hedge of division between them and their subjects. The palace was not secluded from the outer world. No screen hid the face of the monarch from the gaze of his subjects. No bureaucracy rose, like a wall of division, between ruler and ruled. No hedge or net of officialdom hindered free passage of remonstrance or petition. The mikado, active in word and deed, was a real ruler, leading his armies, directing his Government. Those early days of comparative national poverty when the mikado was the warrior-chief of a conquering tribe; and, later, when he ruled a little kingdom in Central Japan, holding the distant portions of his quasi-empire in tribute; and, still later, when he was the head of an undivided empire—mark the era of his personal importance and energy. Then, in the mikado dwelt a manly soul, and a strong mind in a strong body. This era was the golden age of the imperial power. He was the true executive of the nation, initiating and carrying out the enterprises of peace or war. As yet, no military class had arisen to make themselves the arbiters of the throne; as yet, that throne was under no proprietorship; as yet, there was but one capital and centre of authority.

Gradually, however, there arose families of nobility who shared and dictated the power, and developed the two official castes of civilian and military officials, widening the distance between the sovereign and his subjects, and rendering him more and more inaccessible to his people. Then followed in succession the decay of his power, the creation of a dual system of government, with two capitals and centres of authority; the domination of the military classes; the centuries of anarchy; the progress of feudalism; the rending of the empire into hundreds of petty provinces, baronies, and feudal tenures. Within the time of European knowledge of Japan, true national unity has scarcely been known. The political system has been ever in a state

of unstable equilibrium, and the nation but a conglomeration of units, in which the forces of repulsion ever threatened to overcome the forces of cohesion. Two rulers in two capitals gave to foreigners the impression that there were two "emperors" in Japan—an idea that has been incorporated into most of the text-books and cyclopedias of Christendom. Let it be clearly understood, however, that there never was but one emperor in Japan, the mikado, who is and always was



The Mikado on his Throne. Time, from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century.

the only sovereign, though his measure of power has been very different at various times. Until the rise and domination of the military classes, he was in fact, as well as by law, supreme. How the mikado's actual power ebbed away shall form the subject of this and the following chapter.

From the death of Nintoku Tennō, the last of the long-lived mikados, to Kimmei (540-571), in whose time continental civilization was introduced, a period of one hundred and forty-one years, fourteen emperors ruled, averaging a little over ten years each. From Kimmei

to Gotoba (A.D. 1198) fifty-three emperors reigned, averaging eleven years each. (See list of emperors, p. 123.)

In A.D. 603, the first attempt to create orders of nobility for the nobles, already numerous existing, was made by the Empress Suiko. Twelve orders were instituted, with symbolic names, after the Chinese custom—such as Virtue, Humanity, Propriety, etc.—distinguished by the colors of the caps worn. In 649, this system was changed for that having nine ranks, with two divisions. In each of the last six were two subdivisions, thus in reality making thirty grades. The first grade was a posthumous reward, given only to those who in life had held the second. Every officer, from the prime minister to the official clerks, had a rank attached to his office, which was independent of birth or age. All officers were presented, and all questions of precedence were settled, in accordance with this rank.

The court officials, at first, had been very few, as might be imagined in this simple state of society without writing. The Jin Gi Kuan, which had existed from very ancient times, supervised the ceremonies of religion, the positions being chiefly held by members of the Nakatomi family. This was the highest division of the Government. In A.D. 603, with the introduction of orders of nobility, the form of government was changed from simple feudalism to centralized monarchy, with eight ministries, or departments of state, as follows:

1. Nakatsukasa no Shō (Department of the Imperial Palace).
2. Shiki bu Shō (Department of Civil Office and Education).
3. Ji bu Shō (Department of Etiquette and Ceremonies).
4. Mim bu Shō (Department of Revenue and Census).
5. Hiō bu Shō (Department of War).
6. Giō bu Shō (Department of Justice).
7. Ō kura Shō (Department of Treasury).
8. Ku nai Shō (Department of Imperial Household).

The Jin Gi Kuan (Council of Religion; literally, Council of the Gods of Heaven and Earth), though anciently outranking the Dai Jō Kuan (Great Government Council), lost its prestige after the introduction of Buddhism. The Dai Jō Kuan, created A.D. 786, superintended the eight boards and ruled the empire by means of local governors appointed from the capital. In it were four ministers:

1. Dai Jō Dai Jin (Great Minister of the Great Government).
2. Sa Dai Jin (Great Minister of the Left).
3. U Dai Jin (Great Minister of the Right).
4. Nai Dai Jin (Inner Great Minister).

Of the eight departments, that of War ultimately became the most important. A special department was necessary to attend to the public manners and forms of society, etiquette being more than morals, and equal to literary education. The foreign relations of the empire were then of so little importance that they were assigned to a bureau of the above department. The treasury consisted of imperial storehouses and granaries, as money was not then in general use. Rice was the standard of value, and all taxes were paid in this grain.

The introduction of these orders of nobility and departments of state from China brought about the change from the species of feudalism hitherto existing to centralized monarchy, the rise of the noble families, and the fixing of official castes composed, not, as in most ancient countries, of the priestly and warrior classes, but, as in China, of the civilian and military.

The seeds of the mediæval and modern complex feudalism, which lasted until 1872, were planted about this time. A division of all the able-bodied males into three classes was now made, one of which was to consist of regular soldiers permanently in service. This was the "military class," from which the legions kept as garrisons in the remote provinces were recruited. The unit of combination was the *go*, consisting of five men. Two *go* formed a *kua*, five *kua* a *tai*, two *tai* a *riō*, ten *riō* a *dan*. These terms may be translated "file," "squad," "company," "battalion," "regiment." The *dan*, or regiment, could also be regularly divided into four detachments. The generals who commanded the army in the field were in many cases civil officials, who were more or less conversant with the rude military science of the day. In their time, success in war depended more on disciplined numbers and personal valor, and was not so much a problem of weight, mathematics, machinery, and money as in our day. The expeditions were led by a *shōgun*, or general, who, if he commanded three regiments, was called a *tai-shōgun*, or generalissimo. The vice-commanders were called *fuku-shōgun*. Thus it will be seen that the term "*shōgun*" is merely the Japanese word for "general." All generals were *shōguns*, and even the effete figure-head of the great usurpation at Yedo, with whom Commodore Perry and those who followed him made treaties, supposing him to be the "secular emperor," was nothing more.

Muster-rolls were kept of the number of men in the two remaining classes that could be sent in the field on an emergency; and whenever an insurrection broke out, and a military expedition was determined



A Japanese Farmer. (Seed-beds of rice protected from the birds by strings and slips of wood.)*

overmeddlesome officialdom touches his land to transfer, sell, or redivide it: then he rises as a rebel. In time of war, he is a disinterested and a passive spectator, and he does not fight. He changes masters with apparent unconcern. Amidst all the ferment of ideas induced by the contact of Western civilization with Asiatic within the last two decades, the farmer stolidly remains conservative: he knows not, nor cares to hear, of it, and hates it because of the heavier taxes it imposes upon him.

* In the above sketch by Hokusai, the farmer, well advanced in life, bent and bald, is looking dubiously over a piece of newly tilled land, perhaps just reclaimed, which he defends from the birds by the device of strings holding strips of thin wood and bamboo stretched from a pole. With his ever-present bath-towel and headkerchief on his shoulders, his pipe held behind him, he stands in meditative attitude, in his old rice-straw sandals, run down and out at the heels, his well-worn cotton coat, darned crosswise for durability and economy, wondering whether he will see a full crop before he dies, or whether he can pay his taxes, and fill his children's mouths with rice. The writing at side is a proverb which has two meanings: it may be read, "A new field gives a small crop," or "Human life is but fifty years." In either case, it has pregnant significance to the farmer. The pathos and humor are irresistible to one who knows the life of these sons of toil.

To support the military, a certain portion of rice was set apart permanently as revenue, and given as wages to the soldiers. This is the origin of the pensions still enjoyed by the samurai, and the burden of the Government and people, which in 1876, after repeated reductions, amounts to nearly \$18,000,000.

Let us notice how the noble families originated. To this hour these same families, numbering one hundred and fifty-five in all, dwell in Tōkiō or Kiōto, intensely proud of their high descent from the mikados and the heavenly gods, glorying in their pedigree more than the autochthons of Greece gloried in their native soil. The existence of this feeling of superiority to all mankind among some of the highest officials under the present mikado's government has been the cause of bitter quarrels, leading almost to civil war. Under the altered circumstances of the national life since 1868, the officials of ancient lineage, either unable to conceal, or desirous of manifesting their pride of birth, have on various occasions stung to rage the rising young men who have reached power by sheer force of merit. Between these self-made men, whose minds have been expanded by contact with the outer world, and the high nobles nursed in the atmosphere of immemorial antiquity, and claiming descent from the gods, an estrangement that at times seems irreconcilable has grown. As the chasm between the forms and spirit of the past and the present widens, as the modern claims jostle the ancient traditions, as vigorous parvenuism challenges effete antiquity, the difficulty of harmonizing these tendencies becomes apparent, adding another to the catalogue of problems awaiting solution in Japan. I have heard even high officers under the Government make the complaint I have indicated against their superiors; but I doubt not that native patience and patriotism will heal the wound, though the body politic must suffer long.

The *kugé*, or court nobles, sprung from mikados. From the first, polygamy was common among both aborigines and conquerors. The emperor had his harem of many beauties who shared his couch. In very ancient times, as early as Jimmu, it was the custom to choose one woman, called *kōgō*, who was wife or empress in the sense of receiving special honor, and of having her offspring most likely to succeed to the throne. In addition to the wife, the mikado had twelve concubines, whose offspring might fill the throne in case of failure of issue by the wife. To guard still further against desinence, four families of imperial descent were afterward set apart, from which an heir

to the throne or a husband of the mikado's daughter might be sought. In either case the chosen one became mikado. Only those sons, brothers, or grandsons of the sovereign, to whom the title was specially granted by patent, were called princes of the blood. There were five grades of these. Surnames were anciently unknown in Japan; individuals only having distinguishing appellatives. In 415, families were first distinguished by special names, usually after those of places. Younger sons of mikados took surnames and founded cadet families. The most famous in the Japanese peerage are given below. By long custom it came to pass that each particular family held the monopoly of some one high office as its prerogative. The Nakatomi family was formerly charged with the ceremonies of Shintō, and religious offices became hereditary in that family. The Fujiwara (Wistaria meadow) family is the most illustrious in all Japan. It was founded by Kamatari, who was regent of the empire (A.D. 645-649), who was said to have been descended from Amé no ko yané no mikoto, the servant of the grandfather of Jimmu. The influence of this family on the destinies of Japan, and the prominent part it has played in history, will be fully seen. At present ninety-five of the one hundred and fifty-five families of *kugé* are of Fujiwara name and descent. The office of Kuambaku, or Regent, the highest to which a subject could attain, was held by members of this family exclusively. The Sugawara family, of which six families of *kugé* are descendants, is nearly as old as the Fujiwara. Its members have been noted for scholarship and learning, and as teachers and lecturers on religion.

The Taira family was founded by Takamochi, great grandson of the Emperor Kuammu (A.D. 782-805), and became prominent as the great military vassals of the mikado. But five *kugé* families claim descent from the survivors.

The Minamoto family was founded by Tsunémoto, grandson of the Emperor Seiwa (839-880). They were the rivals of the Taira. Seventeen families of *kugé* are descended from this old stock. The office of Sei-i Tai Shōgun, or Barbarian-chastising Great General, was monopolized by the Minamoto, and, later, by other branches of the stock, named Ashikaga and Tokugawa.

Though so many offices were created in the seventh century, the *kugé* were sufficiently numerous to fill them. The members of the Fujiwara family gradually absorbed the majority, until almost all of the important ones at court, and the governorships of many provinces, were filled by them. When vacancies occurred, no question was

raised as to this or that man's fitness for the position: it was simply one of high descent, and a man of Fujiwara blood was sure to get the appointment, whether he had abilities or not. This family, in spite of its illustrious name and deeds, are to be credited with the formation of a "ring" around the mikado, which his people could not break, and with the creation of one of the most accursed systems of nepotism ever seen in any country. Proceeding step by step, with craft and signal ability, they gradually obtained the administration of the government in the mikado's name. Formerly it had been the privilege of every subject to petition the sovereign. The Fujiwara ministers gradually assumed the right to open all such petitions, and decide upon them. They also secured the appointment of younger sons, brothers, nephews, and kinsmen to all the important positions. They based their hold on the throne itself by marrying their daughters to the mikado, whose will was thus bent to their own designs. For centuries the empresses were chiefly of Fujiwara blood. In this way, having completely isolated the sovereign, they became the virtual rulers of the country and the proprietors of the throne, and dictated as to who should be made emperor. Every new office, as fast as created, was filled by them. In the year 888, the title of Kuambaku (literally, "the bolt inside the gate," but meaning "to represent to the mikado") was first used and bestowed on a Fujiwara noble. The Kuambaku was the highest subject in the empire. He was regent during the minority of the emperor, or when an empress filled the throne. The office of Kuambaku, first filled by Fujiwara Mototsuné, became hereditary in the family, thus making them all powerful. In time the Fujiwaras, who had increased to the proportions of a great clan, were divided into five branches called the Sekké, or Regent families, named Konoyé, Kujō, Nijō, Ichijō, and Takadzukasa.

So long as the succession to the throne was so indefinite, and on such a wide basis, it was easy for this powerful family to choose the heir whenever the throne was empty, as it was in their power to make it empty when it so suited them, by compelling the mikado to abdicate.

In A.D. 794 the capital was removed to Kiōto, seven miles from Lake Biwa, and there permanently located. Before that time it was at Kashiwabara, at Nara,* or at some place in the Home Provinces

* The ancient town of Nara, one of the most interesting in all Japan, lies about twenty miles due east of Ōzaka, in Yamato. The town and neighborhood abound with antiquities, mikado's tombs, grand old temples, and colossal images of Buddha. Seven sovereigns, of whom four were females, ruled at Nara from A.D.

(*kinai*) of Yamato, Yamashiro, or Settsu. So long as the course of empire was identified with that of a central military chief, who was the ruler of a few provinces and suzerain of tributaries, requiring him to be often in camp or on the march, government was by the sword rather than by the sceptre, and the permanent location of a capital was unnecessary. As the area of dominion increased and became more settled the government business grew apace, in amount and complexity, and division of labor was imperative, and a permanent capital was of prime importance. The choice was most felicitous. The ancient city of Heianjō, seven miles south-west of the southern end of Lake Biwa, was chosen. The Japanese word meaning capital, or large city, is *miako*, of which *kiō* or *kiōto* is the Chinese equivalent. The name Heianjō soon fell into disuse, the people speaking of the city as the *miako*. Even this term gave way in popular usage to *Kiōto*. *Miako* is now chiefly used in poetry, while the name most generally applied has been and is *Kiōto*, the *miako* by excellence. *Kiōto* remained the capital of Japan until 1868, when the *miako* was removed to Yedo, which city having become the *kiō*, was re-named *Tōkiō*, or Eastern capital. The name Yedo is no longer in use among the Japanese. No more eligible site could have been chosen for the purpose. *Kiōto* lies not mathematically, but geographically and practically in respect of the distribution of population and habitable area, in the centre of Japan. It is nearly in the middle of the narrowest neck of land between the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean. It lies at the foot, and stands like a gate between the great mountain ranges, diverging north and south, or east and west. Its situation at the base of the great central lake of Biwa, or Ōmi, forty miles from whose northern point is the harbor and sea-port of Tsuruga, makes it

708-782. Their reigns were prosperous and glorious, and were distinguished for the cultivation of the arts, literature, and religion. Here, in 711, the *Kojiki* was written, and in 713, by orders of the imperial court, sent to all the governors of provinces; a book, in sixty-six volumes, descriptive of the provinces, cities, mountains, rivers, valleys, and plains, plants, trees, birds, and quadrupeds, was begun, and finished in 1634. Only fragments of this fine work are now extant. In the period 708-715 copper was discovered. In 739, the colossal gilded copper image of Buddha, fifty-three feet high, was cast and set up. Many envoys from China, and Buddhist priests from Siam, India, and China, visited Nara, one of the latter bringing a library of five thousand volumes of Buddhist literature. In 749 it was forbidden by imperial edict to slaughter animals in Japan. A large collection of the personal and household articles in the possession of the mikados of the eighth century was exhibited at Nara in June, 1875, the inventories made at that ancient period being accessible for comparison.

accessible to the ships coming from the entire west coast and from Yezo. On the west and east the natural mountain roads and passes slope down and open toward it. Forty miles to the south are the great harbors lining the bay of Ōzaka, the haven of all ships from northern or southern points of the eastern coast. Easy river communications connect Ōzaka with Kiōto.

The miako is beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole empire of Japan. The tone of reverential tenderness, of exulting joy, the sparkling of the eyes with which Japanese invariably speak of Kiōto, witness to the fact of its natural beauty, its sacred and classic associations, and its place in the affections of the people. The city stands on an elliptical plain walled in on all sides by evergreen hills and mountains, like the floor of a huge flattened crater no longer choked with lava, but mantled with flowers. On the south the river Kamo, and on the north, east, and west, flowing in crystal clearness, the affluents of Kamo curve around the city, nearly encircle it, uniting at the south-west to form the Yodo River. Through the centre and in several of the streets the branches of the river flow, giving a feeling of grateful coolness in the heats of summer, and is the source of the cleanliness characteristic of Kiōto. The streets run parallel and cross at right angles, and the whole plan of the city is excellent. The mikado's palace is situated in the north-eastern quarter. Art and nature are wedded in beauty. The monotony of the clean squares is broken by numerous groves, temples, monasteries, and cemeteries. On the mountain overlooking the city peep out pagodas and shrines. The hill-slopes blossom with gardens. The suburbs are places of delight and loveliness. The blue Lake of Biwa, the tea-plantations of Uji, the thousand chosen resorts of picnic groups in the adjacent shady hills, the resorts for ramblers, the leafy walks for the poet, the groves for the meditative student or the pious monk, the thousand historical and holy associations invest Kiōto with an interest attaching to no other place in Japan. Here, or in its vicinity, have dwelt for seventeen centuries the mikados of Japan.

As the children and descendants of the mikados increased at the capital there was formed the material for classes of nobility. It was to the interest of these nobles to cherish with pride their traditions of divine descent. Their studied exaltation of the mikado as their head was the natural consequence. The respect and deference of distant tributary princes wishing to obtain and preserve favor at court served only to increase the honor of these nobles of the capital. The

fealty of the distant princes was measured not only by their tribute and military assistance, but by their close conformity to the customs of the miako, which naturally became the centre of learning and civilization.

Previous to the era of Sūjin, the observance of the time of beginning the new year, as well as the celebration of the sacred festivals to the gods, was not the same throughout the provinces. The acceptance of a uniform calendar promulgated from the capital was then, as now, a sign of loyalty of far greater significance than would appear to us at first sight. This was forcibly shown in Yokohama, as late as 1872, after the mikado had abolished the lunar, and ordered the use of the solar, or Gregorian, calendar in his dominions. The resident Chinese, in an incendiary document, which was audaciously posted on the gates of the Japanese magistrate's office, denounced the Japanese for having thus signified, by the adoption of the barbarians' time, that they had yielded themselves up to be the slaves of the "foreign devils."

The mikado has no family name. He needs none, because his dynasty never changes. Being above ordinary mortals, no name is necessary to distinguish him from men. He need be personally distinguished only from the gods. When he dies, he will enter the company of the gods. He is deified under some name, with Tennō (son, or king, of heaven) affixed. It was not proper (until 1872, when the custom was abrogated) for ordinary people to pronounce the name of the living mikado aloud, or to write it in full: a stroke should be left out of each of the characters.

Previous to the general use of Chinese writing, the mikados, about fifty in all, had long names ending in "mikoto," a term of respect equivalent to "augustness," and quite similar to those applied to the gods. These extremely long names, now so unmanageable to foreign, and even to modern native, tongues, gave place in popular use to the greatly abbreviated Chinese equivalents. A complete calendar of the names of the gods and goddesses, mikados and empresses and heroes, was made out in Chinese characters. It is so much more convenient to use these, that I have inserted them in the text, even though to do so seems in many an instance an anachronism. The difference in learned length and thundering sound of the Japanese and the Chinese form of some of these names will be easily seen and fully appreciated after a glance, by the Occidental reader who is terrified at the uncouthness of both, or who fears to trust his vocal organs to attempt their pro-

nunciation. Amaterasū ō mikami becomes Ten Shō Dai Jin; Okinaga Tarashi Himé becomes Jingu Kōgō.

After the Chinese writing became fashionable, the term mikoto was dropped. The mikados after death received a different name from that used when living: thus Kan Yamato Iware hiko no mikoto became, posthumously, Jimmu Tennō.

The Golden Age of the mikado's power ceased after the introduction of Buddhism and the Chinese system of officialdom. The decadence of his personal power began, and steadily continued. Many of the high ministers at court became Buddhists, as well as the mikados. It now began to be a custom for the emperors to abdicate after short reigns, shave off their hair in token of renunciation of the world, become monks, and retire from active life, taking the title Hō-ō (*ho*, law of Buddha; *ō*, mikado=cloistered emperor). During the eighth century, while priests were multiplying, and monasteries were everywhere being established, the court was the chief propaganda. The courtiers vied with each other in holy zeal and study of the sacred books of India, while the minds of the empresses and boy-emperors were occupied with schemes for the advancement of Buddhism. In 741, the erection of two great temples, and of a seven-storied pagoda in each province, was ordered. The abdication after short reigns made the mikados mere puppets of the ministers and courtiers. Instead of warriors braving discomforts of the camp, leading armies in battle, or fighting savages, the chief rulers of the empire abdicated, after short reigns, to retire into monasteries, or give themselves up to license. This evil state of affairs continued, until, in later centuries, effeminate men, steeped in sensual delights, or silly boys, who droned away their lives in empty pomp and idle luxury, or became the tools of monks, filled the throne. Meanwhile the administration of the empire from the capital declined, while the influence of the military classes increased. As the mikado's actual power grew weaker, his nominal importance increased. He was surrounded by a hedge of etiquette that secluded him from the outer world. He never appeared in public. His subjects, except his wife and concubines and highest ministers, never saw his face. He sat on a throne of mats behind a curtain. His feet were never allowed to touch the earth. When he went abroad in the city, he rode in a car closely curtained, and drawn by bullocks. The relation of emperor and subject thus grew mythical, and the way was paved for some bold usurper to seize the actuality of power, while the name remained sacred and inviolate.