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THE Sheepshanks's cook had ideas on the subject of foreign food, derived mostly from a Japanese domestic economy magazine which translated with only moderate accuracy the 'home hints' columns of American periodicals. All foreigners, she argued, must eat the same kind of thing, because their faces all looked the same; and she devoutly believed, blinding herself with the blinkers of faith, that they all had red hair. It would have surprised her to learn that the English frequently breakfast off bacon, eggs, toast and marmalade, the French off rolls and coffee, while the Americans prepare messes of calcined, damaged grain and various hot, flabby and indigestible cakes. It was a plateful of these depressing articles, flaccid waffles with a brown viscous mass pretending to be maple syrup, that she served up on the morning of the Sheepshanks's projected trip to Totsuka.

'Hullo, waffles!' exclaimed Tristram. 'Fresh woods and pastures new; I must say they look rather formidable, but one ought to encourage poor cook—she means well'.

Alba, sick and morose, shuddered as her eye rested on the repulsive-looking discs, and she murmured something about 'To Hell with poor cook!' Having risen for breakfast so as to be in time for the train, she was more than usually peevish. Tristram, like Mr. Pickwick who 'was led by the very warmth of his feelings to give his consent to a proceeding from which his better judgment recoiled', helped himself.

After one or two smashes resultant on attempts to speed up, 'safety first' has been adopted by the Japanese Government as the maxim for running its narrow-gauge railway; and it sends its cars, built in the non-compartmental American style, trundling along at an average rate of twenty-five miles an hour. The distance from Ōsakai to Totsuka, through the lilyed white cliffs and across the steamy plain, is about thirty; so that the traveller has ample time to survey the endless streaming past of rice-fields, interrupted occasionally with a patch of lotus or aubergine and, if he likes, to count the scarcely numberable poles carrying electric wires, of which Japan is fast becoming a lattice, in every direction, through swamps, over hills into the hearts of mountain systems where some torrent rages through a set of turbines. All habitable Japan is heavily wired; were Hiroshige alive to-day, he would no doubt make the most, in a new series of Takaido 'stations', of this delicate geometry multi-secting the air.

Mrs. Sheepshanks observed the posts with unwilling fascination; Mr. Sheepshanks the wires with the appreciative glance of a colporteur of Cubist paintings. At twelve miles' distance from Totsuka began the factories, pools of gamboge chemic water, waste-heaps, garish with rusty iron cuttings, and goods sidings that had prevailed in gradual war on reluctant kitchen gardens. The Teikoku Asbestos Co.; the Niigata Machinery Plant; The Sanshodo Chemical Works, stinking and blasting what had once been a famous cherry avenue, where in springtime under the whirling pink petals, groups of girls, lyrically drunk on a mouthful of saké, had danced, making their flowery kimono skirts spin higher and higher till they were nude to the waist. But now the steam buzzer and the gabbling at fixed periods of factory hands alone roused the echoes of

the leprous countryside. It might have been Enfield or Tottenham, save that it was untidy, and that a marooned Shinto shrine would here and there lift a protesting gable of the inevitable grey tiles.

Mr. Sheepshanks, observing the prospect in dejection, recalled a saying of the Counsellor's : ' The beastliness of all nations is practically equal ; the nationals of one country profess to be incapable, through superiority, of the beastliness of another ; but they are not in fact superior, and detest it, not because it is beastly, but because it is different from their own nastiness '. But in Japan something must surely be added—the effect of the damp, impoverished air, perhaps, on the nerves, which aggravated all sensations of disgust and depression. If these industrial turpitudes could be met with in the more bracing air of Sheffield they would inspire immeasurably less of horror.

On every roof-top the bamboo spars and ' wireless ' antennae increased the aerial confusion ; and all was tinged with the vile neutrality of the sky, thinly overcast with yellowish-grey clouds, like films of serum, through which a watery image of the sun peered faint but malevolent, his poisonous heat striking at one's very marrow.

At Totsuka Central Station the sickly green steel pillars seemed to lean together in a swoon. A tropic breeze, laded with the sours of many a fetid canal, suppurating and effervescent with methane, reminded passengers that the summer typhoid visitation was in full swing, that cholera had already knocked at the harbour gates of the great ports, and that a ' scare ' inspection of the fish markets had been carried out a few days ago. One saw from the high platform the five hundred windows of that Americanesque cube, the Hochi Building, many bearing gilt letters : Sawamura's Dental Parlor ; Dr. Med. Tanaka's Clinic for Secret

Ailments ; The Matsue Trading Co. Between these and the eye ragged grit in vortices along the loosely-gravelled square ; the trams perilously crowded, leaving behind them an ammoniac wake of perspiring humanity, spat blue fire at their trolley-poles, and whirled aloft festoons of waste paper ; taxis and motor-buses mingled their dust with that of rickshaws and the thousand bicycles on which errand-boys in short white drawers and ' zephyrs ' bore incredibly huge burdens strapped on behind. The subways deafened all ears with the scream of wooden *geta* scraped along concrete—an echoing polyphony that is one of the most depressing sounds in the world. To-day both Mr. and Mrs. Sheepshanks felt a profounder melancholy than usual before these sights and sounds, and at the smell of cheap scent and hair-oil, dribbling infants and reeking, pickled, giant radish tied up in blue handkerchiefs, emanating from a group of country-women, dressed and powdered up elaborately but crudely, and in for the day to trudge round the great department stores. Both were relieved when their rickshaws tottered away into quieter but stuffer side-streets.

Dr. Stromdahl was a colossal Scandinavian, whose fine, tawny beard was beginning to grizzle at the edges, while a protuberant paunch detracted somewhat from the Viking effect that had been admired in his youth. He and Dr. Müller had drifted East, no one knew how, or why. Of course the libellers invented some queer operation or fatal mistake at home, but there was absolutely no evidence. He was an ardent exponent of the ' naked culture ', and had received one summer at Osakai a request signed by twenty ladies and gentlemen of the foreign colony, that when he took his daily sun-bath on a prominent rock in the bay, he would at least wear a towel, and so cease to offend the telescopes and bino-

culars which, if he was known to be in residence, eagerly swept the horizon to seek, and often to find, marine curiosities. He retorted by wearing a scarlet loincloth. On another occasion he had encamped on the shore of Lake Yamanaka before he realised that a summer resort of dangerous revivalist tendencies had recently been established there. The Elders of the Bible Fundamentalists at once delivered an ultimatum, requiring him to abstain from bathing and to clothe himself completely, including boots and hat, on the Sabbath. He offered as a compromise to tattoo himself all over with some of the more astounding texts from the Old Testament and, having packed up already, plunged into the lake on a Sunday morning stark naked in view of the open-air service, and departed to the next lake, which was full of beery Yokohama Germans.

He had another pose as well ; that of the gruff, good-natured doctor who mingles in a vaguely Ibsenic manner spiritual with medical advice. What he really was no one knew, but he suited his part admirably. He and Dr. Müller maintained a large practice among foreigners, his particular bent being gynaecology, that of his partner, surgery.

After waiting twenty minutes in the company of a dozen old copies of *Lüstige Blätter* and a fat little Portuguese patient with dying-duck eyes that sloped down at the corners, who sighed heartrendingly at regular intervals, Dr. Stromdahl appeared through the doorway and cried, as though summoning to judgment, 'The Next! You, madam!' She found herself in the presence of a curious apparatus, half-couch, half-chair, looking priggishly aseptic with its white enamel and nickelled fittings.

'Aha!' thundered the doctor ogreishly, 'I know you, madam. What is it, yes? You are ill?'

She intimated that an implacable discomfort troubled her at increasingly short intervals.

'Strrip!' he bellowed, whirling his horned stethoscope in a commanding gesture. 'Your breath', he murmured parenthetically, 'smells of the alcohol'. He listened to and thumped the wincing body with thorough conscientiousness.

'The alcohol, yes'. Then, crescendo from a whisper to a muffled, cavernous roar: 'Poorr lady, you have a fat heart; very soft. We are old friends. So! I say you shall stop the Alcohol!! As a doctor I would say, how interesting to study this case of alcoholic poisoning and its complications; what an interesting post-mortem. As an old friend I say; pretty lady, we do not wish you to die, you are an or-na-ment to the Totsuka foreign colony. It is not nice to die: noo!'

'You know it's not easy for me to stop; it's all very well to talk. . . .'

'Pah! think of the nasty death; if you're lucky your fat heart will kill you; if not, you may have the horrors, the delirium, or woorrse, you may have the CANCER! That is an ugly death'.

Alba flinched and went pale. She had never thought of that; a new and terrifying idea that turned her quite sick.

'Oh Lord! What had I better do then?'

'Be sober. No more alcohol, no more cigarette, no more drôg. All the silly people take these things when they come out East. Here they lose con-trol. They are not supported by national herd-taboos and in-hibitions. So they die. But the wise old birds are careful and apstemious. Do not be a silly and die soon. 'Be a wise old bird'.

'Well, I'll do my best, anyway; but for God's sake give me something to make me *feel* better quickly'.

‘ I give you medicine ’. He sat down pompously at a desk and drew his fountain-pen. ‘ But medicine ! it is nothing, not one eighth of the cure. Rregimen ! Apstemiousness : those you shall have. It would be well if your husband should take you back to Europe when your heart is a little stronger. Japan is a bad place for the convalescent ; it is septic, enervating. Or he could send you alone, if ’, he shook his forefinger theatrically, ‘ you could be trusted. I will also write you a Rregimen ’.

As he scribbled Alba dressed herself, feeling rather cowed and frightened. She believed that she had ‘ done it this time ’, and had gone so far and so fast that to pull up would be practically impossible. ‘ Outside the sphere ’, the journalistic phrase skipped freakishly into her brain, ‘ of practical politics ’.

Dr. Stromdahl towered before her proffering a paper and still flapping his gross admonitory forefinger. It was a situation after his own heart.

‘ Now, go to the Chemist, good Madam Sheepshanks. Make a strong act of vol-ition and do not come to the operating-table, the hospital, the mortuary. You are too young for that nastiness ’.

Terrible old man ! Yet he knew a thing or two about life—and death, and his warnings were not to be treated lightly.

‘ In a fortnight you shall return ! ’

Alba had never, as her husband had, meditated on the shadow and the substance of death. Her whole existence, whether in the flesh or the spirit, was of the hand-to-mouth order, of which the unavoidable close had seemed, every year so far, as remote and unreal as it had in her childhood. The fear of old age, loss of zest, and destruction of her charms had sent her at odd moments of devitalisation to the mirror and the beauty-parlour,

but such apprehensions were as nothing compared with the icy shaft of panic that now seared her very entrails. She saw herself wheeled, paralysed with misery and horror, into the anaesthetising room of the operating theatre ; the skinny, obscene-looking bag with the gas descending on her mouth and nose, to choke away all the joy of life, perhaps for ever, and spin over her eyes roaring, gyrating webs of darkness. Just before she succumbed she would remember vividly her weak heart and the probability of dying of syncöpe while unconscious. A final glimpse of the light, as the ether-vapour, reeking and freezing, surged about her in waves of obscurity and caught at her lungs. The laborious rising, half-drowned and indefinably wretched, from the cold depths of a chemical ocean and the gradual realisation of pain, of rawness red-hot and waxing more furious every second. Her moaning and grunting would become shriller until they culminated in shrieks of complete abandon to her agony. Nurses would flit to and fro, a doctor come hurrying with an hypodermic syringe.

An increasing coldness and failure to control her limbs would warn her of the imminence of death. Unpitiful but efficient members of the staff would witness those vain struggles to keep hold of integration that were for them an every-day occurrence. 'Marked cyanosis set in and the patient showed every sign of collapse'. That was how they put it. A dreadful hygienic death, in an odour of lysol and surgical rubber gloves ; she would gaze desperately at the white enamelled legs and casters of a ward bed ; at bedpans, coils of tubing, ventilators and rounded corners, and would hate the callous people gathered round who were to live on under the warm sun after she was corrupting into adipocere and green-grey leather. The last cloud she was ever to see would, a

faint steely fleece of cirrus, cross the window-pane diagonally. The corpse would lie in the mortuary under a waterproof sheet, on the rubber-tired hand-cart. Perhaps there would be a post-mortem; morbid cells discovered everywhere—her monstrously distorted organs exposed to the scrutiny of medical students, the younger of whom, regarding them with terror, would feel faint, but retain consciousness solely through fear of the ridicule of their seniors.

Automatically she paid the grinning little brown chemist, who sucked in his breath ecstatically as she directed him to post the medicine to Osaka. She passed unseeing the Totsuka Club, crossed the Haranodai Park, where chrysanthemum shows are held in the autumn, and found herself opposite the fantastical portico of the Kiku Hotel. Weariness prompted her to enter and sit a few minutes in the lounge which, during the hottest weather, preserved in its gloomy recesses something of the chill of the sarcophagus. A 'boy' in white livery approached her, murmuring with the usual Japanese disregard for gender, 'Sar, what do you want?' Before she had recovered full possession of her faculties she had ordered and partly consumed a large tumbler of whisky and soda. Who could 'live cleanly and forswear sack' in this exhausting climate? It was clear that she could not resist but must flee from the devil. To start life afresh in some remote and bracing rural district—say, the South of France. Her mind leapt to the problem of suitable clothes. One got all behind the fashions out East. But James presented an obstacle; she could not possibly leave this man whose eyes were full of suffering and (she thought) steadfastness. His life had been unhappy; he deserved and should have comfort. But the trouble was to get him to move, as he had hitherto been very obstinate when she had hinted at the relin-

quishment of his job. But she wanted him, and would not leave him behind. Perhaps he was her soul-mate, and they would stick together—the affinity that Tristram obviously was not. And perhaps he wasn't; anyhow, they would know in a year's time.

