

## II.

NOTES ON FEUDALISM IN JAPAN. By J. G. SINCLAIR COGHILL, M.D.,  
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In the course of two visits of some duration which I paid to Japan in the years 1865 and 1869, I was very much struck with certain political and social relations, presenting conditions almost identical with the feudal institutions once prevailing for so long a period in our own country, and in western Europe generally, the last potential form of which was only abolished by the Heritable Jurisdictions Act of 1747, but remains of which still linger in our laws, more especially in connection with the conveyance and tenure of land. As this feudal system, as hitherto existing in Japan, is rapidly becoming a thing of the past, as a consequence of one of those sweeping revolutions only possible under an Oriental despotism,—but, strange to say, in this instance comparatively bloodless,—I have thought a few notes on such a subject might prove interesting to this Society.

The group of islands forming the Empire of Japan holds a geographical position off the eastern seaboard of the Asiatic continent, corresponding to that of the British Islands off the western coast of Europe, but within latitudes giving a much warmer climate. Japan further resembles our own country in the variety and extent of its coal and other mineral resources, and in the manufacturing skill of its artizans, both in metals and fabrics.

As regards race, the Japanese are of mixed Turanian or Tartar and Malay blood, on an aboriginal stock, which latter still exists pure in considerable numbers, in the most northerly island of the group named Yesso, where they receive the name of “Ainos,” differing remarkably from the modern mixed race, being low in stature, dark in complexion, flat and prognathous in countenance, and the face and body more covered with hair than any other race in the world, the modern Japanese being singularly smooth-skinned. The Aino skull also presents a markedly primitive contour.

The Malay element prevails among the lower orders, and the extent is shown by the close resemblance of the Japanese language to the Malay original. The Turanian element prevails so far among the nobility as to

determine a marked distinction between the two ; but while adopting the language of the majority, they have imported Chinese characters to represent the native sounds, and indeed have brought with them all the influences derived from the literature and religion of their powerful neighbours on the continent adjacent.<sup>1</sup>

The present Royal Family, the ruling member of which is styled Mikado or Emperor, is lineally descended from Zinmu, who founded the dynasty in B.C. 665. This dynasty thus claims authenticated occupation of the throne for 2400 years. Certain it is, however, from undoubted historical evidence, that the usurpation of executive power by the Tycoons of various families lasted some 800 years, and was only terminated by the revolution of 1868 I previously referred to, which restored the line of the Mikados to supreme political power, and relegated the line of the Tycoons by the abdication of Stotzbashi, the last of that dignity, to their original position as Daimios or Princes of Mito or Tokugama, that being their territorial and family designation respectively. Up to the time of this change the Mikado held his court at Miako near Osaka, on the inland sea in the centre of the principal island Nippon, invested with a sort of sacred character, while the executive power was in the hands of an hereditary official called the Shiogoon or Tycoon, literally commander-in-chief, whose principal residence was the fortress in Yedo, the largest city in the empire, situated in the north-east of Nippon on the coast.

The nobility and officials of the Mikado's court were entirely distinct. The former were the descendants of the ancient noblesse, whose ancestors had been stripped of their territories in the struggle that brought the Tycoonate into existence. They still, however, retained their position, and constituted the three highest and first part of the fourth order of the Japanese nobility ; the Daimios, or first of the Tycoon's nobles, only taking rank immediately after them. This nobility consisted, in addition to the four families of the blood-royal called Shi-sin-wo, of a body of nobles termed Koongays, possessing 137 titles in 22 families. From the changed circumstances of the state, few of this old nobility now possess large estates, while a large number of them have been obliged to pursue certain

<sup>1</sup> We have here the same phenomenon as resulted in England when the Normans accepted, with certain modifications, the Anglo-Saxon, expressing its sounds, however, in the Roman characters of their original Latin tongue.

avocations, principally in connection with literature, music, and the fine arts, not deemed servile or beneath their dignity. While the daughters of these decayed houses were largely sought for as governesses or in marriage in the Daimio families, the sons were frequently adopted or connected by marriage with these *parvenus*.

The nobility of the Tycoon's court styled Daimios comprised 266 titles in five ranks, viz.,—1. Sen-Kay (three families literally, and corresponding to the Mikado's Shi-sin-wo); 2. Kokushiu; 3. Kammong; 4. Fudai; and, 5. Tozamma. The Tycoon himself only ranked at the Imperial Court as the premier Daimio, unless titles of distinction, which were personal, not hereditary, were conferred on him by the Mikado, the sole fountain of honour.

The origin of this dual form of power is singularly curious and interesting. In the reign of the Mikado Go-Zira-Kawa, in the latter part of the twelfth century (1189), Yoritomo, a noble of the Minnamoto family, who held the principal military command, and who was both an able general and politician, in consequence of the imperial family being weakened by long internecine strife, seized the reins of government, reduced the holder of the imperial dignity to the position of a mere puppet, while he rendered the supreme executive power hereditary in his own family. His successors, particularly Taikosama, and Jyeyas, who succeeded to the Tycoonate A.D. 1598, by force of arms and confiscations possessed themselves of vast territories, with a portion of which they liberally endowed their own family and those allied to it. They also bestowed extensive estates on those who had distinguished themselves as partizans, while, with good policy, they allowed many of the territorial magnates, too powerful to be disturbed, to retain their possessions on condition of their accepting rank at their court; and to complete the system, numerous official positions and charges were assigned in hereditary possession to the favoured adherents. All the conditions of a purely feudal system thus developed themselves from these strange political circumstances. The rank of the several Daimios was settled by Jyeyas, and their territories carefully surveyed with a view to estimate their revenues and exact military service from the vassals in proportion to their resources. Official lists of the nobility continued to be published annually both at Miaka and Yedo, for the several orders, with their rank, pedigree, alliances, coat of arms, income, and feudal dues,

&c., and gives a strange insight into the history and resources of these feudal magnates. Thus the Daimio or Prince of Owarri, the premier noble of the Tycoon's court, pays feudal duties on an income of 610,500 kokus of rice, or L.610,500 ; while the Prince of Kanga, a Kokushiu, or noble of the second rank, has an annual income of L.1,627,000, while none retain rank under L.10,000 a year. Many of the Daimios have vassals owning large estates under them called Byshings. An inferior order of official gentry are the Hattamoto, largely employed in state duties ; next to them are the Gokenum, and next below them the Yaconins, corresponding to the retainers or men-at-arms of the feudal chiefs, or the Dhuinewassals of the Celtic tribe system. Each Daimio has a following of these gentry, who have the privilege of wearing two swords in their girdle, which no merchant, farmer, or artizan dare do. They travel at a privileged rate, and have an immunity from almost all the burdens, fiscal and otherwise, imposed on the classes below them. They are to be met with at every turn strutting along with all the consciousness of superiority, their chief's crest embroidered on the sleeves, back, and breasts of their overcoat, and on their sword and accoutrements. The relations of the Daimios to the state are strictly feudal. They merely hold the land on tenure from the Tycoon. If they engaged in rebellion or committed any crime warranting confiscation of their feoffs, they could save the principality to their heir by committing suicide or shaving the head and becoming a monk. The feudal service was therefore regarded as strictly personal. Each of the Daimios was obliged to have a palace in Yedo, in which his wives and family had to reside in his absence as hostages, and in which he had to spend six months of every year, paying an annual homage to his liege lords. In the official Book of Honours, the details of the various ceremonies are given, also the presents (fines) to be paid to the superior on marriage, births, coming of age, &c.<sup>1</sup> Many of the Daimios, as well as the Boongays, had palaces in Osaka ; but there the Tycoon had an immense fortress, the Cyclopean masonry of which excited my intense admiration, to overawe them ; while the Mikado lived a few miles off at Miako, in a temple-like residence, in harmony with the sacred character which it suited the hereditary policy of the

<sup>1</sup> The Tycoon retained, and occasionally exercised the power of removing a Daimio from one domain to another of the same or even inferior value.

Tycoons to invest the ancient imperial line. The Daimios, with a view still further to prevent them combining their powerful resources against the ruling power, were not allowed to visit one another, and their summonses to the capital to pay homage were so timed as to prevent neighbouring Daimios either being in the capital, or on their estates at the same time. Nothing struck me more in the East than the imposing extent of the palaces in the Daimio's quarters in Yedo and Osaka, or the magnificent style in which they journey to and fro. On the tokaido or public road the Daimio and his retinue have to draw up to allow one of superior rank to pass, and the ceremonies connected with the intercourse of the various classes with one another are laid down in the official guides with the greatest minuteness, and scrupulously exacted from one another in practice. On their estates the Daimios live in large castles strongly fortified, having lofty granite walls sloping inwards, and always surrounded by a deep moat, with the town adjacent to one side only. They form everywhere a most striking feature in the Japanese landscape, and relieve the eye from the oppressive exuberance of a tropical vegetation. You can always tell in whose territory you are travelling, from the coat of arms and insignia of the local magnate on the guard-houses, police-stations, and shops patronised by his excellency; the latter always have a gigantic lantern on either side of the door, with the crest emblazoned thereon. The crests are either floral or geometrical in design. Most of the nobility have two, one official or titular, the other the family cognisance. The badge, in gold lacquered wood, is always borne on a spear in front of the cortege when travelling, and planted on a stand before the inn where the halt takes place. I have not been able to ascertain whether there is any order of chivalry beyond the distinction of bearing a leopard's skin over the saddle. This honour can only, it is said, be borne by eight of the nobility at one time. The heir of the Daimio had always to be reinvested on the death of his predecessor, and the right of selecting an heir by adoption is enjoyed, and frequently exercised, with the permission of the Tycoon. Whether it is the effect of this long continued system or not, the Japanese present a marked improvement on any other Eastern nation in their extreme courtesy to each other and to strangers, in their treatment of the female sex, in their personal bravery and contempt of death, and a general nobleness of bearing and character which strikes a stranger at every turn.

This political and social condition which I have endeavoured to describe has been very much modified by the revolution of 1868, which was a natural reaction of the feudal barons against the burdens and restrictions which they had borne so long. The possession by each of them of large standing armies, Satsuma alone having 30,000 men, besides a squadron of armed steamers, rendered their success easy. A league of southern Daimios was formed, and declared for the Mikado. They marched on Yedo, gathering forces as they went. The Tycoon after a feeble show of resistance surrendered; but a large body of the Tokugawa clan, the retainers of his family, went off with the fleet to Yesso, where they held out gallantly for nearly eighteen months. The Tycoon now resides in his feudal castle in Mito. The Mikado rules in Yedo. The Daimios have disbanded their armies, and have surrendered *pro rata* a large portion of their revenues for the expenses of the State. While a representative government is in course of formation, the railway and the telegraph will still further change the future of this most interesting of all Eastern states.