

TO-DAY,

A BOSTON LITERARY JOURNAL.

"—To-day! Why what is that—?"

BETTELHEIM

SHAKESPEARE.

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REDDING & CO., PUBLISHERS, 8 STATE STREET.
BOSTON, SATURDAY, MARCH 1852.

THE LOO-CHOO ISLANDS.

THESE islands lying at a short distance from the coast of China were brought to the notice of the world by occasional descriptions of voyagers, but more especially by a very agreeable account given by Captain Basil Hall of these islands and their inhabitants. Capt. Hall, when on board the brig *Lyra*, in the year 1816, in company with the *Alceste*, having on board the British ambassador, Lord Amherst, visited this group, and gave in his published volumes a very pleasing description of the hospitable manners and patriarchal habits of the inhabitants. He represented that they were the remains of the golden age, a specimen of primitive life which seemed to have survived the age of iron. The Emperor Napoleon when at St. Helena, allowed Basil Hall to pay him a visit, and listened with interest to the recital of the captain of the *Lyra*. All Europe had read it with avidity. The disinterestedness, the goodness, the happiness of the Oukinians, (the principal island of the group is Oukinia,) had almost passed into a proverb. More recent accounts from these islands seem to show that the character of their inhabitants has materially changed since the visit of Captain Hall, or that he must have been mistaken in the impressions he received from what he saw there during his visit. The islands are now under the strict surveillance of the Japanese govern-

ment, who keep up over them the most watchful care to prevent any intercourse with foreign nations; and if the Oukinians have any kind feelings towards strangers they are obliged to conceal them.

A remarkable account has been published of the residence in one of these islands of Dr. Bettelheim, an English physician, who went to Loo Choo some three or four years ago to establish himself there as a Christian missionary. The inhabitants did every thing in their power to prevent him from landing. The authorities waited upon him and represented to him that it was against their laws for foreigners to reside there. They say, in answer to his request to be allowed to remain, "In this miserable region the present year has been one of extraordinary dearth, so that the whole population has been greatly straitened and obliged to feed upon wild pine apples to keep alive; truly I fear that before long the scarcity will become alarming, and we shall be upon the borders of starvation: I am now anxiously awaiting the arrival of the high French commander, when I shall state the circumstances of the case, and again earnestly beg him to take these two men home with him."

"But, sir, if you now persist in stopping here, the distress of rulers and people will become more aggravated, and the country surely will never be able to stand it: I humbly beg you to have some consideration for this distressed worn out country; look down on us with magnanimity, be humane and compassionate. Give up the design of stopping in this land; wait till wind and weather be favorable, then embark in the same ship, and sail back to your country. This is what I anxiously hope and look for you to do."

Dr. Bettelheim, however, with his family, persevered in their intention of staying in the island, and an old disused idol temple was given them for a residence. But the inhabitants refused to hold any communication with them; whenever the Englishman appeared the natives retreated before him and concealed themselves in their houses, and when he purchased meats in their markets, they refused to take money in payment.

The "two men" to whom allusion is made in the address of the authorities to Bettelheim, were two French missionaries who had been landed there two or three years before by Admiral Cecille, the commander of the French fleet on the China station, and whom the Loo-Chooians, while the French frigate lay in their harbor, had promised to take good care of.

A late number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* gives an account of a more recent visit to these islands made by the French frigate *La Bayonnaise*, from which we gather some farther information respecting the state of these islands, the missionary Bettelheim,

and the French missionaries who had been left there by Admiral Cecille. Although the French missionaries were Catholics, and Dr. Bettelheim was a Protestant, they had stood by each other, and Bettelheim had been able to render some essential services to his Catholic brethren on their first landing. For eighteen months the missionaries had maintained their right of moving about at their pleasure on the island, in compliance with a promise made by the authorities to the French Admiral, that they should be allowed to do so; but as the recollection of the visits of the French and English frigates grew more faint in the minds of the mandarins, they showed themselves desirous of reconquering the ground they had been compelled to give up; and on occasion of the funeral of the king, when the missionaries were on their way to the city of Choui, where all the population of the islands were assembled to witness the obsequies of the monarch, they were met at the foot of the hill, on which the city stands, by men armed with bamboos who attempted to prevent them from going forward; they resisted firmly, and were abused. The mandarins who waited at some distance the issue of a contest to which they would not have dared to expose themselves, then came forward. They saw the missionaries thrown upon the ground, struck with the bamboos, pulled by the hair, and dragged over the stones. When they thought they had been sufficiently punished they stopped the uplifted arms of the guards who were about to renew their blows, they protected Dr. Bettelheim whom they were pursuing, and humbly asked pardon of the men who had just before been so abused. It was easy for the missionaries to pardon and forget these outrages, but they saw in the affair such evident symptoms of the Japanese influence, that the French missionaries were entirely discouraged at their prospects of having any influence over the people. They could not doubt that the delegate from Japan, that mysterious proconsul who resides at Nafa, the port of this island, and who was always mentioned with signs of great fear by the Loo-Chooians, was himself to be present at the royal obsequies, and had exacted that the foreigners should not be allowed to be at this ceremony.

Soon after this affair, M. Adnet, one of the French missionaries, died, and was buried with the ceremonies of the Catholic Church in presence of the mandarins of Choui and Nafa. His surviving brother was allowed to place a cross upon his grave. This survivor had resolved to leave the island on the next visit of a French ship, and two months after the death of M. Adnet, the Bayonnaise arrived in the port of Nafa.

On communicating with M. Leturdu, the surviving missionary, the French commander decided to do nothing in the way of reveng-

ing the insults which had been offered to the missionaries. He agreed with them that it was useless to attempt any longer to preach the gospel to those who so strenuously refused to hold any communication with the preachers. "A French priest never revenges himself," was the motto of M. Leturdu, and he prevailed on the French commander to refrain from acts of violence; but the latter resolved to mark his displeasure at their conduct by treating the islanders with all possible harshness, to persist in going ashore and procuring all the stores he wanted for his ship, the departing in peace, taking away M. Leturdu with him. These things he accomplished. He received a visit on board ship from the authorities, who expressed themselves with great humility. The French officer afterwards went on shore. The following is the description as given in the *Revue* of the appearance of the country.

"It was nearly nine o'clock when we proceeded toward the city of Choui. The inhabitants of Toumai arranged themselves on our passage to enjoy a spectacle which was probably novel to them. Squatting on their mats, they followed us with their great eyes with a respectfully timid curiosity. There were old men, children, men of all ages, but there were no women to be seen. The nobles were distinguished by the silver needle which they wore in the hair, from the plebeians, who wore only a copper needle. Passing along the sea shore, all shaded with fine trees, we soon found ourselves on the grand road to Choui. We had not met since we left France a road of so imposing an aspect; at the point where this road ceases to be paved with large volcanic blocks, the heated and macadamized soil presents a surface not less firm. There does not exist in China, that country of narrow roads, any thing at all comparable to this Roman way. The existence of it goes back to the most prosperous times of the Loo-Choo islands, and in truth this magnificent causeway seems almost a useless luxury in a country where there are no vehicles but palanquins borne on men's shoulders. Unfortunately the sides of the hill are not so graded as to make the ascent to the capital easy, especially when an August sun besieges with its almost vertical rays the imprudent pedestrian who dares to brave him at full noon. The aspect of the smiling hills and the fertile country which surrounded us, reanimated our courage and made us forget our lassitude.

"What a ravishing landscape, what a gently undulating country, what freshness under those clumps of trees thrown into the midst of green pastures! At the summit of the hills extended, like the hair on a cascade, plantations of pines and larches; in the valleys sloping like terraces they cultivate the rice and the taro. The higher and drier lands are planted with sugar cane and sweet potatoes.



OKINAWA

toes. Great Okukina is situated between the 26th and 27th degree of north latitude. Thus nature has gathered there, as at Teneriffe, the productions of temperate climates, and those of intertropical regions. The cocoa which does not grow beyond the 20th degree does not balance in this country its aspiring trunk and its green tuft at the top, but the other members of the palm family, all those trees which exist only in the sun's rays, appear at every step, mingled with the coniferous trees which are accustomed to brave the northern frosts. Finally, after having climbed the last height, we entered the city, passing under three triumphal arches, erected towards the middle of the fourteenth century to the glory of three kings who formerly governed Great Okukina. This was the grand era of the Loo-Choo islands, the time when their junks carried on a considerable commerce with China, Japan and the Malay peninsula. The monuments of Chooi all date from this epoch of prosperity, they owe to it that seal of solidity and grandeur so foreign generally to edifices built by the Mongol race.

"An absolute solitude reigned in the city. We went through broad long streets, but which were not animated by those long rows of shops in full sale which fill the streets of Canton with noise and activity. The houses which are almost all built about a court, were entirely hidden from view by an enclosure of greyish walls. The inhabitants seemed to have evacuated this city, which was about to be soiled by the feet of strangers. If sometimes our arrival surprised at the turn of a street some of the common people returning from their work with their little portable canteens in their hands, we saw them turn round and fly, as if they had met on their passage some savage or venomous animal. We had demanded not to be followed by the police, hoping that our promenade would be more free and interesting without them, but the bamboos of the Boonans, invisible to us, nevertheless hung over the shoulders of these poor people, and explained wonderfully that sudden horror which our debonnaire aspect would not certainly have inspired.

"After having wandered for some time in these deserted quarters, we seated ourselves under the shade of an immense banyan fig-tree under the walls of the palace, where the young and trembling monarch of Loo-Choo was shut up for this ill-omened day. This place, which is more than a mile in circumference, is a real citadel. The Pelagic walls which form the first enclosure of it, are a sight which must be seen before one can have any idea of the precision with which the Okukinians have been able to put together, without the aid of any cement those enormous blocks of lava, which are arranged like the stones of the most delicate mosaic. These

imposing walls may be compared to those of Mycene, to those monuments of Greek architecture which follow the Cyclopean constructions of Tyrinth, and precede the rectangular placing of the Messian of Epaminondas.

"As to the palace itself, there was nothing to be seen of it but the roofs. The sad silence which pervaded the city reigned equally in the bow of the regal residence; no sound, no exterior sign betrayed the existence there of living beings; only every half hour an invisible hand raised or lowered a little white flag, which from the top of a flagstaff placed on the walls, announced to the inhabitants of Chooi the monotonous progress of day. The time which passes between the rising and the setting of the sun is divided by the Okukinians into six grand portions. The durations of these long hours varies according to the different seasons of the year. This inequality is less perceptible in the neighborhood of the tropics than it would be under a higher latitude. It suffices, however, to prevent forever the construction of an Okukinian clock, at least the putting into one that complication of wheels proper for keeping an account of the motions of the sun. While Father Leturdu explained these things to us, we reposed, after our painful walk, at the entrance of a wood which shaded the side of the hill, the top of which was crowned like an Acropolis with the royal palace."

After the French party had rested, they proceeded down the hill to the old temple which served the missionary for his head quarters—here they partook of some refreshment, and here they were visited by the mayor and officers of the city. These dignitaries complimented the commander, offered him their best wishes, and endeavored to make themselves agreeable, though they evidently labored under much embarrassment. The French priest acted as the interpreter between the two parties.

The French commander, in replying, took this occasion to complain of the bad manner with which the missionaries had been treated, and the persecution the Loo-Chooians had kept up, without any motive, against honorable and peaceable men, whom the French Admiral had recommended as his friends, a persecution which had at last ended in open outrage and unjustifiable hostility. The mayor seemed considerably embarrassed, and after a great deal of whispering to those about him, he transmitted, through the interpreter, an answer signifying that, "What had happened was a mistake, a sad mistake, the act of rude people, who were too insignificant to deserve to have their persons or their actions noticed. The king and his prime minister had their hearts broken with sorrow at the occurrence, but they hoped the *grand empire* would consider the poverty and weakness of the vile king-

dom, have pity on the *little ones*, and let its compassion descend even to them."

These excuses may have been received as a sufficient satisfaction, but the French officers would not go so far as to seat themselves at the table of the Choui-Kouan and accept the banquet which the islanders desired to offer in consecration of the forgetfulness of the past, and as a seal of reconciliation between the two parties for the future.

Nothing retained the French frigate longer at the Loo-Choo islands—"We quitted," says the narrator, "Choui-Kouan—eager to escape the sad and resigned face of the poor Mandarin, we hastened Father Leturdu in making his preparations for his departure. About five in the evening we summoned the corvette, in less than a quarter of an hour the anchor was raised and the sails hoisted; boats loaded with oxen followed us; we sent them back proudly, but in spite of his protestations we obliged the mandarin who commanded this flotilla to receive twenty-seven Spanish piastres as the price of the provisions which in the morning had been brought on board our ship. This sum amounted to four times the price of the provisions with which we had been furnished, a price which Father Leturdu had established according to the rates in the markets of Choui and Nafa.

Dr. Bettelheim at the last accounts still remained at his post at this island, though apparently, without any increased hope of success; the natives obstinately refusing to have any communication with him. It seems very evident that the islands are now entirely under the dominion of the Japanese government, and that the policy of that people in keeping away strangers is strictly maintained under their authority. The French had understood, says the writer in the *Revue*, from the accounts of an early missionary to the Loo-Chooans, that at the landing place was a cross engraven on the rock. "Was this," he asks, "the pious homage of one of the ancient Christians of Japan, or was it placed there by order of the Japanese government, who wished to oblige strangers as well as the islanders, not to penetrate into the island without treading under foot this emblem of a persecuted religion? Our missionaries could never discover the truth in this matter."

The writer of this entertaining article signs his name to it as E. J. de Langraviere. He is apparently one of the officers of the French frigate *La Bayonnaise*.

