

ASIA'S FIRST PARLIAMENT

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD DESCRIBES
THE STEP IN JAPAN.

EDUCATION FOR IT EXTENDING OVER A
QUARTER OF A CENTURY—CEREMONY
THAT ATTENDED THE DAY'S PRO-
CEEDINGS—SCENES AND INCIDENTS.

Sir Edwin Arnold, under date of Nov. 29, writes from Tokio to the London *Daily Telegraph* as follows on the birth of the first Parliament on Asiatic soil:

"I have just returned from witnessing the most interesting and important spectacle in the modern history of Japan. I have seen the birth of a new Parliament, the first assembly of the kind known to the continent of Asia, modeled upon European systems, traditions, and precedents, and meeting for its very first visible embodiment, with all constitutional forms and ceremonies, under the imperial patronage and presence of the Mikado, lately a sovereign so removed from mortal sight and spheres as to be almost regarded as a deity, but to-day viewed discharging the duties of a constitutional monarch, with his Peers, his faithful Commons, and his Ministers of State around him. Conceive the prodigious import of such an occurrence!

"The immense event has not come at a bound, for then we might justly regard it as precipitate and doomed to failure. The Government and the nation have been educating themselves up to this high point of progress ever since the opening of the Meiji era, a quarter of a century ago. Then, as you well know, the power of the Shogunate fell; authority was stripped from those proud and despotic lords who had kept the Mikado in seclusion like a gilded idol. The Emperor of Japan resumed the active, as well as sacred, authority descended from a long line of ancestors, but filched from them and him by splendid usurpers of the pattern of those buried like kings in Shiba and Nikko. The last of the Shoguns resigned in 1867, and the first attempt at a General Council was made after the imperial oath of 1868 that Japan should have representative institutions by calling together three Samurai from each clan. * * *

"Even now there is a Parliament but no Houses of Parliament, in the architectural sense, for the ceremony of to-day was held in an entirely provisional building, of no external pretensions, and fitted up, interiorly, to be useful rather than ornamental. Originally, the Government contemplated the erection of somewhat ambitious structures for the Diet. This project, however, was dismissed, lack of time and desire to economize influencing the Government to give the legislators only a temporary home. The sum set aside for the work, \$80,000, necessitated that the structure should be of wood, and explains the inornate nature of the edifice standing on what was the Hibiyu Parade Ground. The estimate was later trebled, this being rendered necessary by repeated changes of plans and additions, the upshot being a plain, substantial edifice, in which a good beginning may be made. The tickets for admission to its gateways on this momentous day were eagerly desired, but very sparsely given. It was a new and last proof of the consideration which I have personally met with from all quarters of Japan, that I should have been allotted, without expecting the favor, a very good seat in the gallery of the central hall.

"Under the clear, pale sky of the Japanese Autumnal day—cool, but brisk and invigorating—Tokio had turned out in its tens of thousands to see the Emperor pass to the Hall of Legislation to declare the first Parliament opened, and so make good the imperial oath taken twenty-one years ago, and since twice renewed. The entire city had been decorated for this great day, after the Japanese manner, with interminable lines of the national banner, (a red sun on a white ground,) and lines as interminable of paper lanterns, also red and white. Dense throngs of citizens, with their wives and children, filled each side of the streets through which the imperial carriages would pass, and blocked even the side thoroughfares to watch the magnates and officials proceed to meet his Imperial Majesty, for every road and alley was gay with nodding plumes and glittering decorations of the Shinnin, Chokunin, and Sonin, dashing along *en grande tenue* to the point of interest.

"Troops in brand-new uniforms kept the passage clear, or marched along to their stations with blasts of bugles to keep time, for the Japanese regiments do not seem to use the drum. The crowds were alert, excited, and sympathetic, but orderly and gentle-tempered, although two rather serious encounters took place with the police, one at the gates of the Russian Legation and one in the field set apart for jinrikishas. Of course, this last-named vehicle was everywhere in requisition, bowling along with two kurumaya—*ni-nim-biki*—and every carriage and horse in the capital had also been brought out. But the immediate precincts of the legislative palace were sternly kept secluded. At certain bridges and approaches the policemen, in blue spectacles and with the sword, rigorously kept back all not provided with the necessary papers and tickets, and for the most part the uplifting of the steel scabbard across the path of any on-rush was quite enough to stay any over-eager sightseers. In one of the very few street brawls occurring in Tokio we saw the other day two *ninsoku* fighting with bale hooks, blood streaming from the terrible wounds inflicted.

"Presently one turned and fled, pursued with murderous intent by his antagonist, but a small policeman intervened, held his sword across the breast of the infuriated cooile, who instantly began to bow and bow and pant out explanatory courtesies, begging permission to annihilate his foe, but instantly cooling down when the little officer, with equal or greater politeness, insisted upon objecting to homicide under any circumstances. This kindly, peaceful, well-behaved crowd has lost the summer color which made the city so gay. It is almost as sombre and sober as a London mob, in the *fyuru no kimono*, the "garments of winter"; but the faces are alight with pleasure and pride—they understand the *Tenshi Sama* does a grand thing for Dai Nippon to-day. They have put a coping stone on the swiftly-raised edifice of their new civilization; they, too, like the Western nations, will possess a Parliament, a Constitution, debates, reports, divisions, Ministries, *tout le tremblement* of high politics. Alas! these things mean trouble as well as progress. I sigh as I reflect that they will come some day to their Reform bills, their compound householder, their lodger franchise, and election addresses and have, perhaps, their Irish question and their all-night sittings!

"My two rikisha men wheel me, with a superb final effort, to the great entrance, which is carpeted with crimson and thronged with gorgeous official personages, dressed, as it seems, principally in cloth of gold and golden chrysanthemums. These, however, are merely the chief attendants of the legislative precincts. It is but to cast the gaze around to observe dignitaries of the State, Shinnin, Chokunin, and Sonin, veteran officers of the army and navy, and court employes, arrayed even more magnificently than these guardians of the halls and passages of Parliament. At the portal I meet my excellent friend, Yamada San, secretary to the Imperial Household, whose companionship removes any difficulties as to the proper staircase and the allotted seat. Amid a throng of gay uniforms and dazzling decorations, settling into their places like butterflies in a flower garden, we reach the Central Hall, and find a kind of opera box immediately to the left of the throne and raised above it.

"The usher mentions that it is a little against etiquette to sit higher than the Emperor—but, *shigata ga nai*, it cannot be helped—and it will be becoming if we keep somewhat in the background and abstain from using opera glasses. The hall is ample and commodious, having a spacious, if plain, interior, painted white, gray, and gold, with a gallery of handsome boxes running round the back, and below an amphitheatre containing six *kusabi gata*, or wedge-shaped sections of seats, each section having forty seats and desks. These confront a raised platform, approached by two stairways on either side of a semicircular rostrum, and behind this rises the throne, a golden chair placed on a dais, carpeted with gray and gold, the throne being canopied with heavy hangings of crimson brocade silk ornamented with chrysanthemums. The members' seats are of dark wood, upholstered in black leather, but for to-day both houses will be present here, the Peers upon the right side of the throne, the Commons on the left. Crowning its gold and crimson canopy is a representation of the ancient headdress of state of the Mikados—something resembling a Phrygian cap—and green silk cords mark off a space on either hand where presently the Ministers and Court officials will respectively take their stand. The central area of the hall is quite empty as yet, but the gallery boxes are filled, or filling, with such a blaze of gold coats, epaulets, burnished swords, and decorations that the glories of the Parliament ushers in embroidered blue coats, red breeches, silk stockings, and gold chrysanthemum badges become paled. Two of these approach the vacant throne with low bows and place on each side of it a pot of lighted *senko*, or incense sticks, that the nose of majesty may be soothed.

"The King of the Loo-Choo Islands enters now and surveys the scene. What one instantly misses is the presence of the fairer sex. Not a woman of high or low degree is to be seen about the premises; the chairs in the box of the Empress are unused even, and an unfortunate American literary lady, who came all the way from New-York to report the event, has been denied so much as an approach to the precincts. In this respect the First Parliament of Japan is sadly uncivilized; in all others there is nothing to be found fault with in the aspect of the hall while his Imperial Majesty is awaited. From its roof hangs an imposing chandelier, gilded and colored, with a galaxy of electric lamps, and the terra-cotta walls, the rich gray and gold carpets, the pure white galleries, panels, and

arches, with the splendid hue of the silk-draped throne, make up a most pictorial scene, enriched by a brilliant audience of diplomats, army and navy officers, courtiers, and great officials eagerly expecting the entrance of the Son of Heaven and his newly-enrolled councillors.

"They come! There 'tis heard outside a fanfare of military music just as the clock strikes 11, and when this is ended the band in the Parliament courtyard strikes up the plaintive strains of the national anthem of Japan. The Emperor has reached the building and reposes awhile in the State apartment—nineteen *tsubo* large—while the Peers and Commons enter and take their places. The Peers of Dai Nippon are led to their seats by Count Ito, all wearing their coats of honor—deep blue, heavily embroidered with gold—and with the imperial *kiku*. It is an effect as of the plumage of pheasants, or a great jeweler's display of gold and diamonds on dark velvet, when these Japanese Marquises, Counts, and Viscounts settle into their side of the amphitheatre. Then follow the faithful Commons, all to a man in evening costume of the strictest propriety, with high silk or opera hats. These are marshaled to their places by Mr. Nakashima, the newly-elected Speaker of the lower house, a gentleman of distinguished appearance and bearing, who takes his stand below the platform in front of the Commons as Count Ito posts himself in front of the Japanese Lords.

"But the Lord High Chamberlain, the Marquis Tokudaiji, has by this time informed his Imperial Majesty that all is ready, and, conducted by that great official and the other Court dignitaries, the Mikado enters through the right door of the elevated platform. At his side, but a little behind, walk the Princes of the blood, (Prince Komatsu wearing his Grand Cross of the Bath,) and immediately before his Majesty paces a grandee carrying a copy of the Constitution wrapped up in green silk powdered with gold chrysanthemums. The Ministers have taken their places on the left of the throne—there is Yamagata the soldierly; Count Saigo, best of kindly hosts and companions; Viscount Aoki, a statesman of the first ability and resource; Mr. Mutsu of the Department of Commerce, with many others whom it is a delight as well as a distinction to number as friends. To the right of his Imperial Majesty stand the great officers of state, and at this juncture, as the Emperor stands before the throne, all in the assembly bow profoundly. Ito and Nakashima keep their places at the head of the two wedge-shaped phalanxes of gold and black—the Ministers, the naval and military officers. Every person present is reverentially attentive—it is the moment of the birth of the First Asiatic Parliament. Count Yamagata hands to the Mikado, with deep obeisance, the speech, written in Hiragana, and, with clear, decisive tones—not free, however, from the half sing-song of all Japanese readers, the sovereign of Dai-Nippon delivers the epoch-making sentences.

"The Emperor is dressed in the uniform of a Generalissimo of the army, and wears the broad red Dai-gusho ribbon of the Order of the Rising Sun as his principal decoration. Tall, in comparison with most of his subjects, having strongly-marked features, watchful dark eyes, a slight beard and mustache, and manners at once gracious yet imperturbably reserved, the Mikado looks as different from the pictures of his imperial ancestors as the spirit governing the proceedings of to-day differs from the ancient Japanese notions. But truly here, if ever anywhere in the world,

"The old order changeth, giving place to new."

"Observe among these gilded peers one near to Count Ito, wearing his black hair tied with a white string into a top-knot, after the antique fashion of the Daimio and Samurais. At the end of the same bench sits his elder brother—bald, or else he, too, would wear the mage, for that is Shimazu Saburo, of the proud Satsuma clan, and it was a retainer of that powerful house who out down Mr. Richardson and his English friends at Kanagawa because they dared to cross the pathway of a Japanese Prince. Now all that is left of those turbulent times is Shimazu's top-knot. It is another Japan you behold, with everything changed except its population and their delightful Old World ways. The hundred and one guns thundering without—as Count Ito receives the speech from the Mikado and retires to his place with it—are fired over the grave of Dai-Nippon. A new Japan is definitely born—constitutional, progressive, energetic, resourceful, sure to become great, and perhaps destined to become almost again as happy as she was of yore. Let the nations of the West receive and welcome as she deserves this immeasurably ancient empire, which thus renews her youth in the fountain of constitutional liberties and institutions. With one slight inclination of his august head, the Mikado saluted the vast assembly bending low before him, and Japan had entered on the list of lands governed by an electoral régime as his Imperial Majesty passed through a guard of Lancers to his equipage!"